

## Chapter 4: Political Inclusion, Democratic Empowerment and Lifelong Learning

PENNY ENSLIN, SHIRLEY PENDLEBURY AND MARY TJATTAS

Recent trends in social and political philosophy recognise the importance of inclusion in the attention they have paid to community membership and collective deliberation. But there are many “grades” or “gradations” of democratic involvement, demanding more or less inclusiveness and empowerment, and making greater or lesser demands on the capacities of those who are included. At the very least, political inclusion and democratic empowerment require universal franchise.

One of our most vivid memories of South Africa’s first democratic election in 1994 was the image on television and in newspapers of elderly voters, in their Sunday best, waiting patiently in long queues to cast, with a visible pride, their very first vote. The ballot had been organised to be as inclusive as possible. Voters, literate or illiterate, were required to do no more than place a cross next to a picture of the leader of the party they supported. If the name of the party could not be read, all that was required was that they could recognise a visual representation. This is not to deny the role that voter education played in preparing people to participate in the election. But here was an instance of the romantic side of democracy, that is, of political inclusion and democratic empowerment that did not depend on even the most basic formal education.

Inspiring and important though this first democratic election was, democracy surely involves and demands much more than the mere placing of a cross on a ballot paper. The making of a cross is not a genuine act of democratic participation unless it is the result of some prior reasoning with an informed consideration of various possibilities and the context in which they present themselves. Arbitrary and coerced crosses may count in the tally of votes but they surely don’t count as acts of democratic participation. Much more is required to get appreciably beyond this first democratic moment to deeper and ongoing democratic involvement, especially if we are aiming at a rich political and civic life with individual participation in decision-making about matters that fundamentally shape our lives. It requires at least a knowledge and understanding of the economy, political structures and processes, of current debates, controversies and competing policy options. It also requires capacities for independent and critical thought, for public presentation and appropriate motivation and attitudes.

Meeting these requirements could, paradoxically, both promote inclusion and empowerment for those who acquire these capacities, and also, for those who do not, foster exclusion and disempowerment. If this is a real danger, then a democratic state has a duty to provide enabling conditions for every citizen to meet the requirements. Lifelong learning is being touted as the way of fulfilling this duty.

A critical take on lifelong learning by a number of authors has emphasised several problematic features. The first problem is that the programmatic use of lifelong learning as a UNESCO “master concept” (Fauré et al 1972) lacks coherence and has a number of illiberal characteristics. It lacks coherence because it denies a distinction between actual and desirable outcomes, and its illiberal characteristics are that it removes the grounding for both positive and negative rights to education (Bagnall 1990). A second problem is that lifelong learning rests uncritically on what Hughes and Tight (1995) call the myth of the learning society based on the assumptions of the inevitability of change and desirability of increasing productivity.

A more recent and nuanced account of life-long learning as explicated by Chapman (1996) includes a concern with achieving and sustaining a democratic polity and institutions that promote and practice equity, justice, and social inclusiveness. Chapman’s triadic conception, the elements of which are democratic citizenship, economic progress and personal development, improves on conceptions that unduly emphasise economic productivity and hence vocationalism at the expense of individual and social development. However when applied in contexts of new democracies such as South Africa the triadic conception yields a number of worrying tensions (Pendlebury & Enslin forthcoming 2001). In this chapter we will argue that while lifelong learning does indeed have a crucial role in enabling democratic empowerment and political inclusion, the dominant conception of lifelong learning in much current educational policy cannot serve these noble ends. Part of our task in this chapter will be to suggest a rather different conception of lifelong learning. Of course, much depends on what is meant by political inclusion and democratic empowerment. It depends on what model of democracy it is supposed to prepare people to participate in, and on how far democratic participation can be expected to contribute to lifelong learning.

Someone unfamiliar with current educational policy agendas in Europe might take ‘lifelong learning’ to refer to learning across the human life span from cradle to grave. But this is not what is meant by the dominant current use of the term, which appears to exclude primary and secondary schooling as well as the education of adults who have either had no schooling or who have dropped out. It also appears to exclude such informal learning as might occur through watching television, doing a job with a more experienced fellow worker, or participating in the institutions of civil society. In its dominant current usage ‘lifelong learning’ refers to post-compulsory education, which in developed countries means accredited post-secondary or higher education. Pride of place has been given to lifelong learning in recent education policy in the United Kingdom and in the new agenda for higher education in the so-called learning society. The assumption here is that lifelong learning will meet the needs “of an increasingly sophisticated economy for a skilled and educated workforce” and fulfil the desire for “wider participation” (Taylor 1998, p.301). From an educational perspective, such policies have been controversial notwithstanding their wide support. While intended to broaden participation in education they have tended instead to emphasize economic competitiveness and to focus fairly narrowly on vocational skills and certification.

Beyond the confines of the developed western world, there is an additional problem with the dominant conception of lifelong learning – a problem not of focus but of

scope. In much of the developing world, post-compulsory education is more likely to be post-primary than post-secondary and, whatever the formal commitment to compulsory primary education, a substantial proportion of the adult population will not have completed primary school. South Africa is a case in point, despite being one of the more developed countries in Africa, if not the most developed. Under such circumstances lifelong learning can be limited neither to post-secondary and higher education nor to a narrow programme of vocational skills enhancement if it is to promote democratic participatory practice through political inclusion and democratic empowerment.

The relationships between inclusion and empowerment are complex and variable. Empowerment for some, even in democracies, may be exercised at the expense of inclusion and empowerment of others. Being included for the wrong reasons can be disempowering. Tokenism is an obvious example. But there are others – such as being included as an object of policy without being sufficiently empowered to influence that policy. Various rituals, such as consultative conferences, may be no more than pretences at inclusion and may in spite of good intentions further disempower the already disempowered.

If, in spite of this, inclusion and empowerment are what we are after, an interest-based conception of democracy won't do. Deliberative democracy seems to promise most by way of inclusion and empowerment in that it allows for the fullest expression of the principle of popular sovereignty, by providing for expressions and tests of consent that are not merely formal. Participation is the feature most often appealed to by those who argue for deliberative democracy over an interest-based conception in which collective decisions consist of little more than simple interest aggregation. Proponents of participatory democracy all seem to be committed to the view that public deliberative processes, allowing opportunities for participation, are essential to the rationality of collective decision-making processes, and for some, to the articulation of a "general will" and the public good.

Through an analysis of three recent conceptions of deliberative democracy, we will explore the role of lifelong learning in providing the conditions and capacities for genuine inclusion, particularly under conditions of diversity and inequality and where democratic traditions, institutions and procedures are nascent. What are the educational demands of each model of deliberation? What conception of lifelong learning might best meet these demands? And can the provision of lifelong learning and its associated costs, material and other, be justified with respect to promoting the goods of democratic empowerment and political inclusion?

The conceptions of deliberative democracy through which our argument proceeds we will call public reason (as exemplified by John Rawls), discursive democracy (as exemplified by Seyla Benhabib) and communicative democracy (as exemplified by Iris Young). We begin by considering each of the three models, examining their conceptions of and implications for inclusion and empowerment. We then examine the demands and promises of deliberative democracy and answer some common objections to it. Finally we consider the educational prerequisites of deliberative democracy and its possible educational consequences, with particular reference to lifelong learning.

## THREE MODELS OF DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

*Public Reason*

For political liberalism, the superiority of deliberative democracy is attributable to the centrality of reasoning and justification in establishing political legitimacy. Under conditions of pluralism, much attention must be paid to the question of what a “political reason” might be, what criteria a reason should meet to qualify as a public reason, and what guidelines of inquiry should be adhered to, while displaying a commitment to “substantive principles of justice.” It is a vain hope to suppose that any method of reasoning, allowed free reign, will yield sufficient convergence for theory construction on the basis of shared premises since, as Weinstock says: “Practical reason, according to the fact of pluralism, speaks with many voices.” (Weinstock 1994, p.174).

In the face of the ‘fact of pluralism’, political liberalism is concerned with delimiting and guaranteeing an area of agreement. If the outcomes of collective deliberation are to be legitimate, collective decision-making must meet certain constraints. These include not only the familiar ones that derive from ensuring that citizens be treated as equals, but also restrictions imposed by pluralism in the interests of inclusion (Cohen 1996, p.96).

In an idealized deliberative setting, it will not do simply to advance reasons that one takes to be true or compelling: such considerations may be rejected by others who are themselves reasonable. One must find instead reasons that are compelling to others, acknowledging those others as equals, aware that they have alternative reasonable commitments, and knowing something about the kinds of commitments that they are likely to have. If a consideration does not meet these tests, that will suffice for rejecting it as a reason. If it does, then it counts as an acceptable political reason. (Cohen 1996, p.100)

The model of public reason provides an account of the matter and manner for deliberation, as well as the underlying institutional conditions for viable and legitimate procedures. For Rawls, viability and legitimacy are crucial if there is “...to exist over time a just and stable society of free and equal citizens, who remain profoundly divided by reasonable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines.” (Rawls 1993, p.4) The challenge to political philosophy, he continues, is to find a shared basis for settling the question about what institutions are most likely to secure democratic liberty and equality.

Given pluralism, Rawls’s task is to find a publicly acceptable “political conception” of justice, which would permit a publicly recognised point of view from which citizens can examine before one another whether their institutions are just, and that would allow them to cite what are publicly recognised and shared reasons. This rests on the conception of a person as someone who can take part in social and political life, exercise its rights and respect its duties, i.e. a person as citizen.

Public reason – citizens’ reasoning in the public forum about constitutional essentials and basic questions of justice – is now best guided by a political

conception the principles and values of which all citizens can endorse. (Rawls 1993, p.10)

Rawls's conception of public reason then is part and parcel of a larger view that necessitates delimiting the political domain. Three features are crucial to this delimitation. First, the political conception is restricted to a specific range of subjects, namely, the basic structure – political, social, economic institutions. Second, it is independent and non-comprehensive. Third, it draws on fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society, that is, in the political institutions of a constitutional regime and public traditions of their interpretation. The imperative to delimit the political domain is driven in large measure by the idea that a conception of justice that cannot “well order” a constitutional democracy is inadequate as a democratic conception. To do this, it must enjoy the conscious and willing allegiance of the citizens.

By articulating this political conception explicitly, citizens can, while affirming opposing reasonable comprehensive doctrines, endorse the conception of justice that well orders their society. Such activities of endorsing and affirming turn out to require specific discursive and argumentative procedures, collectively called “public reason.” Rawls (1993) flatly states that the ideal of democratic politics requires that we try to meet the condition of explaining to one another the basis of our actions in terms each could reasonably expect that others might endorse as consistent with their freedom and equality. “Understanding how to conduct oneself as a democratic citizen includes understanding an idea of public reason” (Rawls 1993, p.218).

Rawls sees “public reason” as mandated by both the liberal principle of legitimacy and the ideal of democratic politics. The former requires that political issues be settled on the basis of reasoned agreement, the latter that we try to meet the condition of explaining to one another the basis of our actions in terms each could reasonably expect that others might endorse as consistent with their freedom and equality.

From the liberal principle of legitimacy and the ideal of democratic politics, Rawls derives the moral duty of civility. The duty of civility is to be able to explain to one another, in terms acceptable to all, how the principles and policies they advocate with respect to common interests and concerns can be supported by the political values of public reason. What are the implications of this democratic ideal for political inclusion and democratic empowerment? To answer this question we need to say more about the manner of deliberation in public reason – a manner requiring commitment to the rational norms of conversation.

This commitment explains political liberalism's emphasis on “conversational constraint” or “selective repression”. The constraint is meant to apply to reasons that can be invoked to justify public policy, power relations, political structures and institutions, and the distribution of goods. Legitimacy for political liberalism is established through dialogue, but not just any dialogue will do. The moral component of public dialogue should be constrained, neutral, confined to those propositions on which all groups happen to agree, and should shun issues that provoke disagreement. These conventions are in effect in public political discourse at its best (as exemplified in constitutional reasoning). Ultimately the limitations imposed on reason are justified

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