

Cover sheet

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Abstract

This contribution presents a theoretical argument as well as an empirical investigation about teaching quality in Nordic social studies classrooms. The theoretical argument ponders how deliberative democracy can be used as a framework for understanding and studying teaching quality in social studies. It suggests that the idea of political classroom deliberation is well suited for understanding quality in social studies, because it resonates well with at least two differing construals of the social studies subject: (1) social studies as a discursively constructed subject (a continuous conversation) that can be qualified by the deliberative criteria for political discourse; and (2) social studies as a core subject whose central purpose methods, contents and outcomes may become more congruent through the enactment of classroom deliberation.. Yet, it acknowledges that not all versions of deliberative democracy are suitable for understanding quality in social studies. Deliberation can be tentatively defined as “discussion that involves judicious argument, critical listening, and earnest decision making” (Gastil, 2000:22). Moreover, it should be emphasized that deliberation is an ideal which can be fulfilled to a greater or lesser extent in a concrete teaching situation, and the ideal-typical character of deliberation implies that it can never be fully realized in real-world teaching. In the real world, aspects of deliberation will always coexist with aspects of power and coercion (Rostbøll, 2009). The empirical argument investigates to what extent classroom discourse – as operationalized by the Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observations (PLATO) – is empirically incompatible with other desirable attributes of teaching, such as complete and detailed conceptual explanations, high quality feedback, and independent intellectually challenging student work. Preliminary results based on all available Danish QUINT data suggest that such incompatibilities are virtually non-existent.

Extended summary

Deliberative democracy as framework for understanding quality in social studies

The question about quality in teaching is complex. This is partly because quality in teaching (1) cannot be reduced to the effectiveness of teaching, i.e. whether students learn the material that is taught (Biesta, 2009; Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005), and (2) often varies depending on which stakeholder group (e.g. teachers, students, researchers or parents) one asks (Elf, 2019; Harvey & Green, 1993). In order to assess quality in teaching, one must consider whether the content, form, and rationale of teaching serves a worthy purpose (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005; Nielsen, 2007). Examples of worthy purposes which are often mentioned in the literature include e.g. technical qualification, socialization (teaching students the norms of a particular social order), and subjectification (empowering students to act autonomously) (Biesta, 2009), as well as Klafki's categorical Bildung (making objective knowledge existentially relevant for the subject) (Nordenbo, 2002; A. S. Christensen & T. S. Christensen, 2015).

Below, I will argue that the idea of political classroom deliberation is well suited for understanding quality in social studies, because it resonates well with at least two widely differing construals of the social studies subject: (1) social studies as a discursively constructed subject (a continuous conversation) that can be qualified by the deliberative criteria for political discourse; and (2) social studies as a core subject whose central purpose methods, contents and outcomes may become more congruent through the enactment of classroom deliberation.

The first construal of social studies as discourse follows T. S. Christensen (2015)'s view of social studies as a continuously and discursively constructed subject that depends in part on processes of *didactization* – the process whereby subjects legitimize themselves and become self-aware (Christensen, Elf, Hobel, Qvortrup, 2018; Ongstad, 2018). Its point of departure is the communicative turn taken by subject didactics at the beginning of the 21st century (Krogh, 2011). On this view, quality in social studies is the qualification of students' conversation about society. Qualification implies that students' lifeworld conversation about society should be infused with social scientific facts, concepts, and methods of inquiry (T. S. Christensen, 2015). One might argue that when social studies is understood as communication in and about social studies (Christensen, 2015), quality criteria for social studies should pertain to the communicative process. Criteria for high-quality communicative processes about societal and political facts, values, and opinions are found in the works of Jürgen Habermas and Joshua Cohen who has made major contributions to a deliberative theory of democracy (Habermas, 1996:305-306).

The second construal of social studies as a core subject maintains that the social studies subject has an identifiable and more or less stable set of core purposes despite temporal and cultural variations in its discursive construction (T. S. Christensen, 2015). On this view, a functional argument for quality can be made when there is a congruent and supporting relationship between the subjects' core purposes, contents, methods, and outcomes. This view is to some extent compatible with Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005)'s view of quality teaching. According to Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005), judgements of quality teaching should pertain to the process of teaching (teaching in its task sense) as well as the outcome of teaching (teaching in its achievement sense). They argue that *teaching in its task sense is good* if (1) the content of teaching is appropriate, proper, and aimed at some worthy purpose, and (2) the methods employed are morally defensible and grounded in shared conceptions of reasonableness. These methods must fulfill logical, psychological, and moral criteria related to the process of teaching. Fenstermacher & Richardson (2005) argue that *teaching in its achievement sense is successful* if students learn what is taught and hence achieves its intended goal. Empirical studies have shown that face-to-face political discussion between individuals with diverse backgrounds can reduce prejudice, promote reflection upon opinions, and increase learning of facts about politics (Crisp & Turner, 2010:187-211; Hansen, 2004:155-164; Luskin, Fishkin & Jowell, 2002). In other words, classroom deliberation might be an instructive example of how social studies teaching can be simultaneously good and effective.

Are opportunities for deliberation compatible with other desirable attributes of teaching?

The question of whether opportunities for classroom deliberation co-exist with other desirable attributes of teaching was preliminarily investigated by use of the Danish QUINT data which consists of 314 observed teaching segments of 15 minutes duration each (80 lessons) from both Social Studies, Language Arts and Mathematics. Opportunities for classroom deliberation were tentatively operationalized as the Classroom Discourse element in the PLATO manual (Klette & Blikstad-Balas, 2017). A linear regression with lesson-level fixed effects and standard errors adjusted for clustering as well as rater reliability issues was performed. The analysis exploits the variation within lessons and holds all other factors (characteristics related to teacher, class, school etc.) constant, so as to minimize the risk of unobserved variable bias. As recommended by Mark White post-estimation standard errors were adjusted upward by 50% in an attempt to account for some of the potential issues pertaining to rater reliability. The results suggests that opportunities for

classroom deliberation very often co-exist with other desirable aspects of teaching such as complete and detailed conceptual explanations, high quality feedback, and independent intellectually challenging student work. The analysis needs to be replicated with the Nordic social studies data and might fruitfully be supplemented with qualitative analyses to get a better grasp of why there seems to be no trade-off between opportunities for classroom deliberation and the other desirable attributes of teaching coded by the PLATO manual. Table 1 only displays all the significant results from the analysis. However, all coefficients were positive except for the PLATO element of Purpose which was weakly negative, yet completely insignificant ($B = - 0,1118723$; $P = 0,881$).

Table 1. Significant results based on the Danish data (preliminary)

	B	P-value
Intellectual Challenge	2,670508	0,000183
Quality of instruction exp. (ROC1)	1,557691	0,055046
Conceptual richness of instructional exp. (ROC2)	2,004825	0,031121
Feedback	1,8418950	0,015063
Use of authentic texts (TBI1)	1,6391370	0,087312
Use of academic language (ALL2)	1,1471800	0,07597

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