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Deliberative communication in elementary classroom meetings: ground rules, pupils' concerns, and democratic participation

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Abstract

Previous research has identified numerous obstacles that counteract attempts to involve pupils in democratic processes in schools. Drawing from deliberative democratic theory and socio-linguistic research on dialogic teaching we discuss an intervention grounded on the ideas of deliberative communication and decision-making in an elementary classroom in Finland. We show that deliberative communication can provide pupils with opportunities for democratic participation. This process involves altering conventional classroom interactional patterns and the power processes they uphold. The possibilities of expanding deliberative communication from isolated democratic meetings to everyday schooling are considered.

Keywords
Deliberative communication, democratic participation, classroom interaction, dialogic teaching

Introduction

According to Dryzek (2000), theories of democracy have taken a 'deliberative turn' since the 1990s, especially in the Western world. This is to say that theorists have begun to emphasize "communicative processes of opinion and will-formation", arguing for a "more just and democratic way of dealing with pluralism" than posited in the aggregative model with its emphasis on voting as a fair mechanism of calculating fixed preferences, for example (Chambers, 2003, p. 308). Thus, deliberative democracy facilitates the generation and transformation of opinions through communicative processes (Dryzek, 2000), and arguably allows deeper involvement of citizens in decision-making and public will-formation (Dryzek, 2000; Young, 2001).

In recent decades, Western children have become regarded as active members of their communities, possessing rights for participation in issues that concern themselves (e.g., James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; UNCRC, 1989). Similarly, according to the new National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (FNBE, 2014), which Finland started to implement in August 2016, schools should function as democratic arenas from the first grade onwards. The Swedish educational policy is also alike in its emphasis on democratic participation (see Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012). Schools could be seen as ideal sites in which to enact deliberative democracy given that they are supposed to develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge that pupils need to participate as deliberative democratic citizens (Gutmann and Thompson, 1996; Reich, 2007). This often involves including them in school decision-making through various pupil councils, including those conducted in the classrooms (see Lelinge, 2011). Although it has been argued that these councils increase pupil involvement and civic efficacy (Davies & Yamashita, 2007; Lelinge, 2011), there are also critical voices. For example, if pupils see the council as a token gesture they are likely to be sceptical about it: they can discern discrepancies between participatory rhetoric and the reality of school life (Thornberg, 2010). It has been argued that despite the emphasis on discussion and debate, pupils are rarely given opportunities for discussing and deciding upon matters they find problematic (e.g., Roth, 2003). Furthermore, teachers may have a rather limited conception of democratic participation, which given their position of authority and the social practices of school – constituting a hidden curriculum – constrains the practising of democracy in schools and classrooms (Tholander, 2011; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012). Finally, the scope of issues subject to collective decision-making may be narrow, and inclusive practices of negotiation and influence may be missing in schools (Rönnlund, 2014). Unsurprisingly, it has been found that children have more opportunities to participate in out-of-school contexts than in schools and classrooms (e.g., Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009; Bjerke, 2011).

We posit in this article that the structuring of mundane social interactions between teachers and pupils crucially contributes to the alleged failure of schools to engage pupils in democratic participation. Thornberg (2010) showed that the interaction patterns in democratic meetings in a Swedish primary classroom were dominated by a 'control discourse' that effectively prevented pupil deliberation. This is illustrated in the following excerpt cited in Thornberg's study (p. 928):

> "Now we'll leave the first item and go on to the second item. Sports Day - the twenty-fourth of May. We grown-ups have decided that we'll arrange something fun. Do you think that's a good suggestion?"
> All pupils put up their hand.
> "Good, then we'll go ahead with it. Now we'll go on to the next item."

The IRE (teacher Initiation-pupil Response-teacher Evaluation) interaction pattern, which is prevalent in classrooms across the world (Howe and Abedin, 2013), dominated the conversations

during the meetings. The IRE pattern allowed the teacher to control the interaction through limiting the freedom of pupils to pose questions, and evaluating their responses. Consequently, these democratic meetings did not enable the children to voice opinions and suggestions outside a predefined agenda (Thornberg, 2010).

Schools can function as sites of deliberative democracy through the effective promotion of deliberative communication, which in educational settings should not only foster active listening and solution seeking, but should also allow the questioning of authorities and conventional views, for example (Englund, 2006; Dryzek, 2000). With a view to building on these insights we are interested in how schools, and elementary classrooms in particular, can be turned into sites of deliberative democracy through the introduction of deliberative communication. We zoom in on the interactions of one fourth-grade classroom in Finland in which the researcher and the teacher (the authors of this article) had conducted an intervention to foster deliberative communication over three school terms (2008-2009). In the present article, we zoom at the interaction of one deliberative classroom meeting in order to investigate the following research questions:

1. Can deliberative communication be introduced in a fourth-grade elementary classroom?
2. What (if any) opportunities for democratic participation does the introduction of deliberative communication provide for pupils?

Deliberative communication in classroom interactions

Deliberative communication (in what follows, “deliberative communication” and “deliberation” are used interchangeably) can be defined as a collective process of critical weighing of and balancing between different views and arguments. In short, the participants have time and space to think, present views and find reasons, listen to and criticize others’ viewpoints in a respectful and non-coercive way in order to learn about these views and strive for an agreement concerning the decision (see e.g., Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Young, 2001). Given that deliberation always implies attempting to resolve a disagreement, there is inevitably a confrontation between views (Thompson, 2008), ranging from practical everyday matters to public policies and global issues. Moreover, deliberation also includes meta-level discussion about the procedures and discursive rules that constitute deliberative communication (Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2000).

The very idea of deliberation is controversial. Theorists differ in the extent to which they perceive consensus, compromise or acknowledging differences among participants as sufficient outcomes of deliberation (Englund, 2006; Held, 2006). Furthermore, although many emphasize fact-based reasoning and argumentation as the core criteria, some question them on the grounds that they incorporate a rationalist presupposition that benefits participants trained in this type of argumentation, and emphasize symmetry and inclusivity as the core principles of deliberative communication (Young, 2000; 2001). Internal and external constraints on deliberation have also been recognized (Reich, 2007). We use a broad definition in this paper to better take into account the perspectives of unprivileged groups, such as children: deliberation comprises any kind of communication – including storytelling and humour – provided that it reflects preferences and considers positions of others (Dryzek, 2000; Young, 2000). This also leaves space for negotiating about the nature of deliberation as it is unfolding in a particular context (see also Tammi, 2013).

Despite the abundant theoretical research on deliberation, there has been little empirical investigation into how it is realized in and through genuine educational interactions (Reich, 2007). Existing Swedish research has shown that teacher control of classroom interaction may prevent

pupil deliberation (Thornberg, 2010). Similarly, it was found in a study of class council meetings among 14 classes from different secondary schools in Switzerland that interactional patterns conditioned pupils' opportunities for democratic participation (Wyss & Loetscher, 2012). The Swiss study used two indicators to operationalize deliberation. First, "speaking time" was considered necessary for the pupils to articulate their views and opinions, and second, "facilitation" by the pupils was assumed to weaken the formal hierarchy between teachers and pupils. The interactions in most of the class councils corresponded to either teacher dominance or teacher facilitation. Within the "teacher dominance" pattern the teacher facilitated the talk and activities and spoke most of the time. The "teacher facilitation" pattern differed in that the pupils talked more than the teacher. The pupils facilitated the talk and activities together with the teacher, and also spoke more than the teacher in only two of the class councils under study, and this was named the "teacher participation" pattern. Overall, the study attributed the variance in interaction patterns to teachers' varying instructional styles.

Whereas empirical research on deliberative communication in classrooms has primarily focused on naturally occurring classroom interactions, socio-linguistic research on dialogic teaching provides insights into how teachers and researchers can deliberatively change interactional patterns. It has been shown, for example, that it is possible to teach reasoned and exploratory forms of talk and hence to change predominant patterns of classroom interaction (e.g., Wegerif, Mercer, & Dawes, 1999; Mercer & Howe, 2012). This can be done through "talking about talk", in other words raising pupils' awareness of the interactional patterns at play, of how specific interactional moves contribute to these patterns, and of the social and cognitive consequences (see also Reich, 2007). A specific way of achieving this is to establish and negotiate shared discursive norms for social interaction with pupils that support the justification of statements, the seeking of alternative lines of reasoning and the resolving of disagreements through argumentation, for example (Dawes, Mercer, & Wegerif, 2000).

Accumulating evidence from research on dialogic teaching shows that the restructuring of classroom interactions has a significant impact on students' academic learning and general reasoning (Resnick, Asterhan, & Clarke, 2015; Mercer & Howe, 2012). However, not much empirical research exists on how the promotion of exploratory and reasoned modes of classroom interaction can support students' democratic participation and, thus, negotiation about everyday politics. For example, not a single chapter of a recent influential edited volume on dialogic teaching (Resnick et al., 2015) – which aimed to bring together all the relevant research on the topic – addressed school democracy. Thus, there is a significant but unexplored potential in putting the research on deliberative democratic education into dialogue with the research on dialogic teaching and academically productive talk (see also Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2008; Mercer, 2000). The present study strives to engage in such dialogue.

The intervention

The school in which the intervention was developed was a culturally and socioeconomically heterogeneous elementary classroom community in the metropolitan area of Helsinki, Finland, with eighteen fourth graders (9 girls, 9 boys) aged 10 to 11 years, and their teacher. A student council operated in the school and the teacher involved in this study was responsible for organizing it. However, there were no sustained attempts to foster deliberative democracy in the classrooms of the school. In the classroom community taking part in this study, the teacher's pedagogical approach was informed by principles of dialogic teaching (see Rajala, 2016; Rajala et al. 2016; Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2008; Mercer, 2000). However, he only used this approach in connection to studying academic subjects. Before the intervention reported in this study, the students were not involved in

the democratic decision making regarding the everyday classroom practices and no organized way of recognizing and deliberating about students' concerns and initiatives was practiced. Beside the pupils, the principal as well as the parents were also supportive of the intervention.

The intervention was based on the teacher's dilemma: the pupils often voiced concerns and initiatives especially related to the everyday life of the class but responding to them took too much lesson time. The intervention was designed to arrange space and time for dealing with these initiatives; the teacher and the researcher (authors of this paper) codesigned the intervention, and it was implemented by the teacher.

The intervention was inspired by action-research methodology (e.g., Stringer, 1999; for more details of the intervention, see Tammi, 2013), and consisted of four basic elements through which material artefacts and rules for social interaction were introduced and negotiated with the class. First, the pupils could write their suggestions and initiatives on slips of paper, which they put into the "chat-box" – a simple cardboard box located at the front of the class. Second, to make the class decision-making more transparent, space and time were allotted in the weekly timetable to discuss and decide on the issues to be dealt with in whole-class sessions. Third, *ground rules for deliberative communication* were formulated and negotiated by the teacher and pupils; in guiding the negotiation of the ground rules, the teacher drew upon insights from the research literature (e.g, Englund, 2006; Wegerif et al., 1999). The researcher also took part in these negotiations and made suggestions about the ground rules. The following ground rules were thus set for the deliberations: everyone is listened to and noticed, anyone in need is helped, there is no fooling around in class, arguments are acceptable and can be asked for, and the focus is on the on-going discussion. The procedures for establishing and negotiating these ground rules were based on the Thinking Together programme (Dawes et al., 2000), which is a method for fostering academically productive talk. Fourth, the chosen issues were dealt with in the chosen format. In all, in the intervention we put primacy on advancing trust, mutual respect, inclusive participation, reasoned argumentation, as well as attentive listening on others. In particular, during the meetings the teacher often emphasized respectful ways of expressing disagreement and the creation of safe interactional spaces for voicing opinions.

The intervention design was open-ended: the deliberative tools created in the intervention were transformed in the classroom interactions. These tools were also developed on a continuous basis while engaging in the action-research cycles of looking, thinking and acting (Stringer, 1999). For example, our previous analysis showed that the pupils tended to address the teacher while speaking (Tammi, 2013). Thus, one attempt through which the teacher sought to widen and deepen the deliberations was that of giving the pupils opportunities to co-chair the sessions together with the teacher. Pupil chairing has been argued to diversify the ways in which pupils may take responsibility during democratic meetings (Lelinge, 2011). In addition, when shifting from normal lessons to democratic meetings we changed the seating arrangements, from groups of four to a circular form. This meant that the pupils could see each other, and could engage in non-verbal communication (see Wyss & Loetscher, 2012).

Data production and analysis

This study zooms into the interactions of one deliberative meeting and is thus situated within the abovementioned intervention aiming at enhancing democratic classroom culture. The overall data on the intervention were produced ethnographically, involving discussions with pupils and the teacher, observations and video recordings of whole-class deliberations during the period of the intervention (2008-2009). The data for this study comprise the video recording of one deliberative

meeting in which the class was negotiating and deciding on what to do for a field trip. The students were used to being video-recorded since they had been taking part in a research project involving almost daily recording of videos. We decided on the basis of our preview of the videos and earlier analysis of the data (Tammi, 2013) that this particular discussion, which occurred in the last meeting recorded in the data set, constituted a rich case (Mitchell, 1984) illustrating the enactment of deliberative communication in this classroom's interactions.

The analysis proceeded as follows. First, the video recording was transcribed verbatim and standard punctuation was added for readability. We also added line numbers (in total, 232 turns) that indicate the temporal order of the speaking turns during the meeting. Second, to create an overview of the nature of the classroom interactions during the meeting we coded each speaking turn with respect to who was the speaker (teacher/student) and what was its interactional function: (a) topic-related speaking turns involved negotiations about the field trip; (b) process-related speaking turns concerned the organization of the process of deliberation.

Third, we conducted a qualitative interaction analysis (Jordan & Henderson, 1995) of the classroom interaction by comparing its features with the criteria for deliberative communication that emerged from our review of the theoretical literature on the topic (see Table 1). In particular, we paid attention to references to the ground rules for deliberative communication negotiated with the students as part of the intervention. Fourth, we carried out a thematic analysis of the contents of the classroom talk to identify any connections with the pupils' opportunities for democratic participation. We noted the following themes: relations between the pupils and the teacher and among the pupils, connecting views to social issues (e.g., the different socioeconomic positions of the families), reflecting on the process at hand, and the participation of the less talkative pupils. Overall, the data were analyzed by the teacher and the researcher, first independently and then together, to establish joint agreement. The involvement of the teacher and the researcher enriched the analysis through the dialogue between perspectives. Analytical categories and the interpretations of excerpts were iteratively created, revised and refined in repeated critical discussions between the two authors.

Table 1 HERE.

4 Findings

In the following we analyse three excerpts that illuminate the ways in which deliberative communication was enacted in the classroom and fostered the pupils' opportunities for democratic participation.

4.1 Enacting deliberative communication in the classroom interaction

The first excerpt illustrates a typical interaction pattern during the meeting. The class was examining one of the alternatives that had been suggested for the field trip, namely a visit to the World Heritage Site on the Suomenlinna islands. The participants have been given fictitious names.

Excerpt 1

5 Benjamin: Saara.
6 Saara: In my opinion, maybe Suomenlinna because … (noise in the classroom)
7 Teacher: Hush.
8 Saara: Suomenlinna is like …

9 Teacher: Hey, let's listen to Saara, constructive listening… Hey! (clapping hands), constructive listening, Saara has the turn.
10 Saara: Because Suomenlinna is at least outside, and there is fun (noise), and there are tunnels and everything.
11 Riina: Long tunnels
12 Teacher: Now I assign. Saara is the chair.
13 Saara: Riina.
14 Benjamin: I had already given the next turn.
15 Teacher: Sorry.
16 Riina: Because, there are terribly long and pitch-dark tunnels where you need a torch.
17 Ilmo: And then you only walk in there.
18 Riina: In that way it would be nice, that the pupils would get a lot of physical exercise without even noticing it as they would just walk there.
19 Ella: What would they get?
20 Teacher: Try to convince each other, because you make the decision.
21 Ella: What would they get? I didn't understand.
22 Riina: The pupils would get good physical exercise just by walking there. It isn't a real physical-education lesson, but at least they would walk enough to get some exercise.
24 Saara: Felix.
25 Felix: But on the other hand, as the place is on the shore it would be very windy.
26 Benjamin: It's cold.
27 Lauri: That's right.
28 Lauri: Exactly. Here is (holding Ilmo's hand up).
29 Saara: Ilmo.
30 Ilmo: Felix expressed my arguments.

The excerpt begins with Benjamin, acting as the chair, giving the floor to another pupil, Saara. Saara argues in favour of the Suomenlinna trip, saying that the class would be given an opportunity to be outside, to have fun and to explore exciting tunnels. The teacher assigns Saara to chair the discussion in which the pupils argue for and against the Suomenlinna trip.

The excerpt evidences interactional features that were promoted in the intervention to foster deliberative communication. Most saliently, a pupil rather than the teacher managed the speaking turns, with the exception of the teacher assigning the chair. This practice facilitated multilateral exchange among the pupils in which they had the opportunity – and were expected – to address each other in their contributions without the teacher's continuous verbal evaluation. The teacher was, in fact, explicit about this expectation (line 20). Thus, the pupils were responsible for convincing not only the teacher, as is usual in classroom interactions, but also each other (see also Michaels et al., 2008).

The ground rules for deliberative communication created as part of the intervention appeared to mediate the interactions among the pupils and between them and the teacher, thus suggesting that pupils had become acquainted with the deliberative discursive norms. One indication of this is that many of the basic elements of deliberative communication are observable in the excerpt: pupils presented views and supported them with arguments, listened to and built upon others' turns, and showed support for and disagreed with each other's views. Another indication is that the class used specific terminology to distinguish and describe features of deliberative communication. The teacher, for example, used the term "constructive listening" (line 9) to orient the pupils to the ground rule of listening to other pupils' comments. Similarly, Ilmo made a descriptive meta-statement about the features of talk relevant to deliberative communication when he said that Felix

had expressed "his arguments" (line 30). Although the teacher remained in the background, with regard to the deliberation about the topic he was nevertheless active in orienting the pupils to the ground rules.

Table 2 shows further evidence of the deliberative nature of the communication. The pupils dominated the floor, taking 76 per cent of the speaking turns, whereas the teacher took only 24 per cent. Moreover, the teacher seldom took part in the negotiations about the issue in question (7%), instead contributing mainly to the organization of the deliberative process (e.g., discussing communicative ground rules, cutting down alternatives, voting, chairing, disciplining). The pupils also took a considerable role (48%) in organizing the deliberative process. Thus, neither the teacher nor the pupils fully controlled the unfolding of the deliberative process. Instead, they shared the responsibility for organizing the classroom interactions. Overall, the pattern of interaction indicated in the distribution of speaking turns resembles the pattern of "teacher participation", which Wyss and Loetscher (2012) argued best corresponded to deliberative communication among the patterns of interactions they identified in their study.

Table 2 HERE.

4.2 Opportunities and challenges for democratic participation

Other power processes in addition to the IRE interaction pattern may contribute to the "pupil control discourse" (Thornberg, 2010). For example, the conventional power asymmetry may be reproduced through upholding the roles of the teacher as a knower or expert, and the pupil as a learner or novice. In concrete terms these processes may operate through hidden expectations that put more weight on the teacher's than on the pupils' arguments. In the following excerpt, we illuminate how the pupils could contest the teacher's expert role and to contribute to what deliberative communication meant in the classroom. The excerpt begins when Saara was still acting as the chair and the pupils were comparing two alternatives for the trip: Suomenlinna and a cinema trip.

Excerpt 2

35 Saara: Benjamin.
36 Benjamin: "Going to the movies" is, Ilmo, at least a warm alternative, that is true.
37 Ilmo: Yes.
38 Benjamin: But it can become very …
39 Lauri: So is the teacher's home.
40 Benjamin: I draw from my previous comment, there might be some disagreement in choosing the film we're going to watch… and in school time there are not so many showings, and I don't go to the movies with the class outside of school time.
41 Saara: Maija.
42 Maija: Well, I think Suomenlinna would also be a good choice, because as Riina said, we would get exercise and when you move you don't get cold.
43 Saara: Teacher.
44 Teacher: With regard to Benjamin's comment. If the film started at three o'clock, for example, from three to five, we could begin that school day later or then make the previous school day a little shorter.
45 Lauri: (talking to Ilmo) No deal… from ten to two. (laughs)
46 Teacher: Anyway we can make the trip during school time.
47 Lauri: So what, it fits well, and then...

48 Teacher: Lauri hush.
49 Benjamin: But again it would go beyond school time… the same time would be lost.
50 Ella: Beyond school time…
51 Saara: Liina
52 Liina: In my opinion “the film”, if you’re thinking it would be from three to five, I at least have hobbies every day.
53 Janne: So do I.
54 Liina: It would be a bit difficult. If some couldn’t come, it would mess up the whole class.
55 Benjamin: Exactly, it would mess it up.
56 Liina: Yes.
57 Saara: And then at least going swimming wouldn’t be good because Jenni couldn’t come (Janne: Oh, damn). It would be best if everyone could come.

In the excerpt, Benjamin voices a concern related to going to the cinema. The teacher responds to this and suggests adjusting the beginning and finishing times of the school day in order to enable this to happen (line 44). The pupils oppose the teacher’s suggestion (lines 49-50). Liina refers to her out-of-school hobbies and argues that all members of the class should be included to make the trip successful. This idea gets support from Saara and Benjamin but there is also a dismissive comment from Janne suggesting a slight feeling of frustration.

The excerpt illustrates two aspects of deliberative communication as it was unfolding in the classroom that support a rethink about the classroom as a site of deliberative democracy. First, the discussion allowed the pupils to explore, negotiate and criticize not only each other’s suggestions and opinions but also those of the teacher (lines 49-57). Significantly, it seems that the alteration of the interactional patterns also gave the pupils the opportunity to exert more influence within the power processes of the classroom. They refuted the teacher’s power to re-schedule the school day by referring to the activities they had outside of school, thus pointing out their everyday existence as members of communities outside the classroom. Second, the pupils not only adhered to the given communicative ground rules but also helped to create criteria and guiding principles for communicating and decision-making. They referred to what could be called the principle of inclusivity (lines 54-57), for example, in arguing for a solution that made it possible for everyone to participate. This extended the previous arguments related to individual desires (see e.g., excerpt 1, line 10), adding a more political dimension to it.

These exchanges emerged within the deliberative process, and thus were not controlled or planned by the teacher. The pupils were therefore able to participate in formulating the agenda as the discussion was unfolding. There is further evidence in other parts of the discussion of the pupils’ opportunities to contribute to the course of deliberation. The pupils also took a stand on the proper procedures for classroom decision-making, for example. They frequently suggested ways in which to proceed, such as ruling out alternatives and moving on to voting (e.g., Saara, line 158: *Could we vote now?*; Janne, line 159: *Nobody accepts that we rule out alternatives, we should rather vote*). Finally, they occasionally checked whether or not the teacher had acted according to the communicative ground rules (e.g., Lauri, line 152: *(Speaking to the teacher) You ordered the chair to give you the turn*).

The following excerpt further illustrates the potential of deliberative communication to facilitate pupils’ democratic participation. It also foregrounds the challenges and tensions that can emerge when deliberative communication is introduced in classrooms. The excerpt relates to an occasion

when Kristiina indicated that she wanted to contribute: before being designated as the chair a few turns earlier she had not verbally contributed to the discussion.

Excerpt 3

> 172 Kristiina: Hey teacher, can I say something?
> 173 Teacher: You can speak freely.
> 174 Kristiina: I am not allowed to go to other people's homes, because my religion forbids it. It is a bad alternative for me.
> 175 Teacher: Can you come to my home?
> 176 Kristiina: (Kristiina shakes her head) My religion forbids it. I cannot go anywhere.
> 177 Ella: Kristiina, I have one thing.
> 177 Saara: But (Ella: But) we have been at least at Janne's and Maija's homes.
> 178 Janne: Kristiina has not been there.
> 179 Kristiina: I have not been.
> 180 Janne: She has never participated in these trips.
> 181 Lauri: She has always stayed at home.
> 182 (Kristiina gives the turn to Ella by pointing with her finger.)
> 183 Ella: You also have that kind of religion, that if you are at school, you can go anywhere.
> 184 Kristiina: But it's only to do with the arts, it's not this kind of thing.
> 185 Teacher: Kristiina, we can vote and then I can talk to your parents.
> 186 Kristiina: (Shrugs her shoulders.)
> 187 Teacher: Then if it doesn't work for Kristiina, we'll choose the second best alternative.

Kristiina tells the class about a constraint she has regarding visiting the teacher's home. The teacher and the other pupils began to discuss this constraint, asking for clarification and drawing on their experiences of earlier field trips to pupils' homes. Finally, the teacher proposes a modification to the process of decision-making by including Kristiina's parents as relevant (absent) participants in the deliberation.

Through the deliberative communication the class could explore and problematize their relationships to social practices in and out of school. In the excerpt, Kristiina extends the deliberation beyond the immediacy of the classroom through explicating how her religion posed constraints for the decision-making regarding the emergent criterion of inclusivity. Similarly, in other parts of the discussion the class talked about the division between school and leisure time (excerpt 2), and the different socioeconomic positions of families (Teacher, line 7: *I wouldn't favour "going shopping", because you can't use the class's money to buy things, you have to use your own money – which some have and some don't. Going shopping is not nice for those who don't have much money.* Pupil, line 8: *Who doesn't have ten euros?*). In and through these arguments and dilemmas the pupils were learning how their accountability extended to communities beyond the immediate context of the classroom. Moreover, in the Excerpt 3, the class members are not only talking about current conditions and their connections with out-of-school environments, they are also critically looking back at the "history of inclusivity" in the class. The problem Kristiina posed was apparently an enduring one; she had been excluded from some of the previous trips (lines 177-181).

Excerpt 3 also illuminates how deliberative decision-making is constrained by social practices that extend beyond the classroom: after a vigorous exploration of Kristiina's argument by the other pupils, the teacher had to conclude that Kristiina's parents had the final authority in terms of the

application of religious norms. Realization of these conditioning boundaries modified the unfolding process of decision-making.

Finally, the excerpt also makes visible the potential implicit tensions in the evolving understanding of participation in deliberative communication in the classroom. While deliberative frameworks typically conceptualize participation as explicit argumentation (e.g. Dryzek, 2000), silent pupils can easily become considered as non-participants. Indeed, in designating Kristiina as the chair, the teacher implied that her participation was problematic (Teacher, line 167: *Kristiina, you have not yet participated much. Would you be the chair?*). However, although Kristiina had not spoken much, the excerpt shows that she had been listening to and could constructively build on the preceding discussion (line 174). It also appears that the issue at hand mattered to her. In this sense, if participation is regarded merely as verbal argumentation, we might miss considering the processes through which these arguments become formulated (as a consequence of the unfolding deliberation itself).

Discussion

Previous research has foregrounded the difficulties of enabling deliberative communication in classroom interactions (e.g., Rönnlund, 2014; Tholander, 2011; Thornberg, 2010; Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012; Wyss & Loetscher, 2012). In this study we tested an approach to overcoming these difficulties that extends the research on deliberative communication by drawing on insights developed in research on dialogic teaching (Dawes et al., 2000). Our detailed analysis of classroom interaction focused on a democratic meeting while the pupils and the teacher were making a decision about where to go on a class field trip.

Our analysis of the classroom interactions indicated that the pupils had become acquainted with the ground rules of deliberative communication, and these norms were put into practice to explore personal experiences and interests and to draft collectively acceptable conclusions. The pupils built on each other's views either by supporting them or constructively refuting them. Disagreements were resolved through argumentation. Our findings also indicate that the introduction of deliberative communication provided the pupils with opportunities for democratic participation. First, they evaluated, supported and questioned each other's views as well as those of the teacher. Similarly, the teacher was also made accountable to the ground rules. Second, through deliberation the class explored how they related to social practices in and out of school, and made visible the ways in which the broader social conditions posed constraints on them and on the decision-making. They also made critical observations regarding their common history. Third, the pupils debated not only the topic but also the way the communication and decision-making were unfolding. Consequently, the process was made transparent instead of being treated as given by the authorities or as lacking in alternatives (cf., Thornberg, 2010).

Our research thus identifies the potential of deliberative communication in elementary classrooms through altering the interactional patterns and the power processes they uphold. The results reveal how something seemingly trivial, such as deliberating about a field trip, provided the pupils with positions as democratic participants allowing them to point out issues that mattered to them and to seek for a common resolution (see also Lelinge, 2011). We hold that the successful introduction of deliberative communication potentially enculturates pupils into adopting more positive attitudes towards democratic forms of living in showing them that their ideas, concerns and relationships matter. As our analysis showed, for example, the classroom deliberation provided them with an opportunity to discuss the complex issue of inclusivity on an everyday level, and thus to make visible their engagements and relationships in and outside the classroom. In other words, the

deliberative communication allowed them to scratch the issues of difference and disagreement, inclusion and exclusion, thus connecting to the very substance of democratic politics. In this sense, the classroom functioned as a site of deliberative democracy.

With a view to adding substance to such everyday citizenship of pupils, we contend that deliberative forms of communication in schools should not be confined to democratic meetings but should extend to the study of school subjects. It is not realistic to expect a profound change in patterns of classroom interaction to take place during single, isolated democratic meetings if the interaction in other lessons is structured in more conventional ways (Thornberg, 2010; Wyss & Loetscher, 2012; Howe & Abedin, 2013). In fact, what is arguably at stake is a broader cultural shift in schools that involves integrating children into the organizational culture and structures of decision-making that constitute the core of schooling (Sinclair, 2004). A promising avenue for promoting such a vision would be to establish contact and dialogue between the research tradition and practice of deliberative democratic education, the research and practice of academic learning and instruction (see also Michaels et al., 2008) and that of philosophy for children (e.g., Lipman, 1991). However, children's politics have been argued to be heterogeneous and not confined to verbal argumentation often expected in formal participatory arenas (see Wood, 2015, for an overview on children's everyday politics). Thus, further research should consider also other means of communication in mapping issues of importance for pupils (Wood, 2015; see also Rajala, Hilppö, Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2013).

As noted earlier, the idea of deliberation is nonetheless controversial. In the following we will consider some of these controversies in order to inform future research. First, it is important to emphasize that pupils are not one homogeneous group. It is argued in both deliberative theory and socio-linguistic research on dialogic teaching that deliberative communication benefits participants from academically oriented backgrounds in particular (e.g., Michaels et al., 2008; Reich, 2007; Young, 2001). Indeed, participation in deliberation was not symmetrical in our study: throughout the intervention, some pupils used more speaking time than others, thus controlling the range of issues being dealt with (see also Tammi, 2013). However, it is also important to acknowledge situations where more reserved pupils take floor, and to study what do these interruptions accomplish. In this study, Kristiina's argument regarding her religious identity was taken as a relevant constraint for decision-making by others. We propose that such discussions of difference and exclusionary classroom practices requires an amount of mutual trust among the participants – taking up one's religious identity could be seen as risky. Further, Kristiina's interruption allowed us to consider argumentation as a situated and emergent capacity and participation as being more than argumentation; that is, also including listening and connecting, for example.

The desirability of deliberation can be called into question. As Young (2001, p. 675) claims, from an activist perspective the "deliberative democrat who thinks that power can be bracketed by the soft tones of the seminar room is naive". This insight also has significance in micro-political level of classrooms in which power processes operate through various means (including physical settings, textbooks, lesson plans and access to curricula) and are situated within broader struggles about what school is and whose interests it should serve (Biesta, 2009). Practicing deliberative communication should not be considered as a neutral take on political life either. Even though the pupils were negotiating about the criterion for decision-making, thus contributing to the way the deliberation was unfolding, the deliberation did not seem to engage participants in questioning the ideology of deliberative democracy itself. For instance, acts calling the ground rules into question seemed to be absent from the data. In this way, our classroom practice could be regarded primarily as education for a specific model of democracy, that is, a deliberative model. Other forms also exist that might have been precluded through the introduction of deliberative communication in this classroom. This

can be problematic, if we become too deeply entangled with the (academically sound) presuppositions and promises of deliberation (e.g., the rationalization of argumentation, consensus, non-coerciveness) that often bypass difficult questions regarding the role of affects and emotions in formulation and circulation of arguments, the histories of silence and silencing that are developing, and the (dis)abilities of bodies, for example.

However, an educational dilemma remains: although deliberative democratic education has its limitations, not introducing it in schools can also uphold the status-quo. It is reasonable to suggest that the argumentative capacities are becoming more and more relevant in contemporary pluralist societies where populist and xenophobic rhetoric (and thus not the affirmative uses of rhetoric advocated by Young (2000), for example) are nevertheless gaining stage. Deliberation is not only important for critical evaluation of arguments, but also for the development of an understanding that we are differently connected to the same world we are inhabiting. We engage with the "developmental" versions of democracy (Held, 2006) in advocating that practicing deliberation in schools, besides influencing classroom (or school) governance, could in their part develop understanding of difference that is vital for our democratic communities at large.

In a radical version of democratic education, the various power processes should be subjected to the collective scrutiny of school staff and pupils, and beyond. However, questioning taken-for-granted assumptions of educational practice requires a capability to deal with the conflicts and contradictions that may arise with powerful stakeholders in and outside of school (Rajala et. al., 2013). Expanding pupils' participatory opportunities can quickly "pass its limits", being perceived as a threat by certain political discourses and a recruiting opportunity by others, thereby risking to reduce school democracy to a party-political question. This is by no means desirable, as in the worst case this could result in the systematic avoidance of school democracy for decades to come, as the history of school democracy in Finland indicates (e.g., Suutarinen, 2008).

In this study, we have explored deliberative communication in the context of a classroom. However, grounding on our findings, we see no reason why deliberative communication could not be introduced in school governance and social interaction at large, from an early age on. It is now widely acknowledged that children and young people are "differently equal" citizens (e.g., Moosa-Mitha, 2005), and thus serious consideration of what is significant for them could be understood as pertaining to their human rights. Deliberative school democracy could benefit from taking pupils' political experiences in their everyday contexts as a starting point, besides beginning with predefined presuppositions regarding what particular issues (e.g., climate change, migration, racism) political education should touch upon.

Further research is needed to address the limitations of the present study. For example, investigating how deliberative communication could be implemented on the scale of the whole school (also including parents) remains a crucial task for future experimentations. Likewise, the research and practice of democratic education would benefit from longitudinal studies that cover longer timescales than was the case in this study. Finally, analyzing teacher, student and/or parent interviews could further illuminate their perspectives on aspects and issues related to practicing deliberative communication.

Nevertheless, we hope to have shown the potential in democratic classroom meetings to create space and time for pupils to explore, debate and take action on issues they consider important. The relevance of these discussions illuminates the fact that they may help pupils and teachers to reflect upon the complexity inherent in the lives of different people regarding common issues (see also Gutmann & Thompson, 1996), as well as to question and redefine how they relate to social

practices in and out of school (see Tammi, 2013, for a discussion regarding the diverse demands the teacher experienced). From this perspective, democratic education is not reduced to the provision of knowledge, skills and dispositions (see also Biesta, 2009), but is a site for the development of political ways of being, doing and seeing that transcend predefined and reproductive categories of what it means to be a pupil, a teacher or a citizen.

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