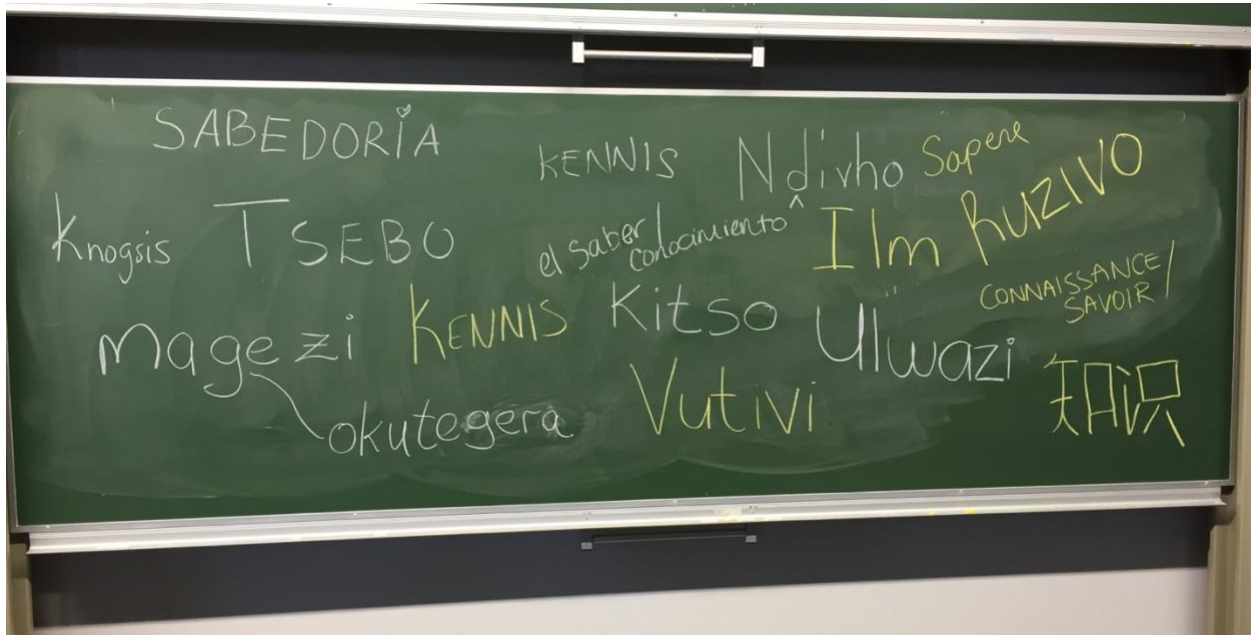


## **Knowledge Exists in Many Spaces: Civic Possibilities through Deliberative Pedagogy**

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&  
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The classroom was abuzz with energy at the start of the early morning session. The *Social Infrastructures* class was nearing the end of its first week of an intensive winter-term at the University of Cape Town (UCT) led by UCT faculty member (and co-author) Janice McMillan, along with Justice Chihota and a team of teaching assistants who had taken the course in previous semesters. A group of students from Providence College (led by co-author Longo) were embedded in the class of more than 100 South African students. The theme of this session, *community engagement*, was of particular interest to us. We have written elsewhere about the importance of “learning service” (McMillan & Stanton, 2014) and connecting civic life with community engagement (Longo, 2019). Yet, the framing of the underlying question for the class session dealt with foundational, but complex challenges which didn’t involve easy answers: “*How do we understand knowledge and power relations in collaborating with under-resourced communities?*”

As a living demonstration of the core issues of knowledge, power, and equity, students in the classroom were invited to come forward to translate the word *knowledge* on the front chalkboard into a second, third, or even fourth language they spoke. One-by-one, students shared the words with the group based on their own *knowledge* of languages (literally and metaphorically): *tsebo*, *kennis*, *ulwazi*, *vutivi*, and *kitso* were scribed on the board. *Conocimiento*, *sabedoria*, *ruzivo*, and other translations were added. Soon after the words were written, authors were invited to share their translations aloud into a microphone to the rest of the class. The room was now quiet as more than twenty students noted with pride their language contributions.



This powerful act took place in the context of a South African classroom in the midst of ongoing campus disruptions around issues of colonialism, racism, and institutional change. As a result, student leaders have called for decolonization of the curriculum and institutional transformation. These movements for social change through education are about more than introducing new content into the curriculum. Rather, transformation in education has to be about building new models of teaching and learning that position educators and learners in new relationships—to each other, to knowledge, and to the world beyond the classroom (McMillan, 2017). The language translation exercise helped illuminate this insight by making visible the many assets diverse learners bring through their own backgrounds, experiences, and, yes, knowledge. In this tangible act of empowerment, we also witnessed the creative possibilities of deliberative pedagogy.

### **A Deliberative Turn in Teaching and Learning**

Young people are not born knowing how to be democratic citizens. And our institutions of education are failing to prepare the next generation of engaged democratic citizens. We are in the midst of what has been

termed a “global democratic recession,” (Diamond 2015) in which while we live in an era when more than half of the world’s countries qualify as democratic, “more democracies than ever before are in decline,” (p. 144) according to researchers at the Varieties of Democracy Institute. As it becomes increasingly apparent that democracy is in crisis, it also becomes clear that the response to this challenge requires deeper and more robust public participation. We can’t leave the work of democracy to politicians or to specialized experts. To thrive, democracy must involve the full participation all of us. Catalyzing this engagement requires new tools.

Public deliberation is one such tool. It is a process through which a range of constituencies come together to share ideas and perspectives and then make collective decisions that form the basis for public action. The efficacy of this process in resolving complex issues has led to its replication in domains beyond the public policy or political sphere. One of the most prominent of these areas is education—specifically, deliberation as an integral part of pedagogy. The difference between deliberative politics and deliberative pedagogy is that the former integrates deliberative decision making with public action, and the latter integrates deliberative decision-making with teaching and learning.

And yet, so much of our educational paradigm is still dominated by some version of what Paulo Freire termed the “banking” concept of education. The instructor has knowledge, which is transferred to empty vessels—students. In the banking concept of education, Freire (1970) writes that knowledge is a gift “bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72). While this passive, customer service method still permeates the underlying assumptions, the content, and the teaching that many students experience, a more co-creative paradigm of education continues to emerge as Freire’s ideas have found a subterranean in education.

For instance, this type of liberatory education has been an important source of inspiration in civil society in South Africa—both during Apartheid as well as in the years post-Apartheid. The Popular Education Network (PEN), a global network of adult educators with a strong presence in Cape Town, has framed their work for decades with the work of Freire and other radical educators. School students during the student protests of the 1970s and 1980s unapologetically used much of Freire’s analysis to bring critical

awareness about inequities in schooling. Likewise, the 2015 student-led movements of RhodesMustFall and FeesMustFall were a turning point in higher education in South Africa, from which students and staff drew on Freire's teachings to frame the calls for decolonisation of the curriculum and implement democratic pedagogical practices.

In the U.S., these ideas have been manifested at community-based educational centers, such as the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. Highlander grounded learning in the experiences of students, and used dialogue-based methods to help learners problem-solve and plan social action during the Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Movements, as well as the social movements of today. Highlander launched "citizenship schools" to link literacy with voting rights in the segregated South, and helped empower leaders such as Rosa Parks to connect learning with social change. Myles Horton (1998), cofounder of Highlander, observed that "When you believe in a democratic society, you create spaces for education that are democratic" (p. 68).

The need to make this connection—between educational and democratic spaces—is essential to the work of educating civically engaged citizens and democratic professionals. That is, education must locate and make relevant the technical knowledge of the professions to a particular context, in areas ranging from engineering and urban planning, to health care and criminal justice. At the same time, education must empower student voices and experiences in the classroom space as important parts of the decolonial project (Chihota et al 2011). In this process, we might ask ourselves as educators a question Albert Dzur promotes in recognizing democratically-minded professionals: "How can professional actors help mobilize rather than immobilize, expand rather than shrink democratic authority?" (Dzur, 2018, p. 13). As educators, we should similarly be asked to mobilize the backgrounds, experiences, and assets in our students and broader communities—the social—through democratically oriented practices, assignments, and relationships. This enables us to develop democratic capacity (and model this approach) with emerging professionals.

Research on the civic education of young people has been the focus of a diverse and multinational group of scholars collaborating with the Kettering Foundation since 2011. Our research honed the potential for

public deliberation to be part of teaching and learning for educational institutions to realize their public purposes. With a growing number of engaged pedagogical tools being developed, such as story circles, sustained dialogues, intergroup dialogues, and national issues forums; schools and campuses are more engaged in promoting public talk about divisive issues, even though it's often under the radar (see Longo & Shaffer, 2019).

In the process, we unearthed a method of civic education which we termed “deliberative pedagogy” (Shaffer, Longo, Manosovich, & Thomas, 2017). As a method of civic education, deliberative pedagogy integrates deliberative processes with teaching, learning, and engagement—in both classroom and community settings. The work of deliberative pedagogy is ultimately about space-making: by creating and holding space for authentic and productive dialogue, conversations that can ultimately be not only educational, but also transformative.

Simply, this pedagogical approach is an attempt to be more intentional about developing processes that put democratic outcomes into educative practice. As a pedagogy of empowerment, deliberative pedagogy moves educational institutions from the more traditional “teaching-to-learning” dynamic toward a model in which knowledge is generated collaboratively through a co-creative process. Deliberative pedagogy involves conversations about real-world issues with a wide range of actors. It is a dialogue between more than just a teacher and students; it includes a broader public affected by an issue beyond the classroom. In our teaching and learning practice, we need to create environments that can facilitate an explicit link between the knowledge and theory students acquire in schools on the one hand, and learning how to “be” and “act” in new ways in world: in our case, to be and act in the world as civic professionals.

### **Practices of Creating Democratic Spaces**

In our current networked global context, information is no longer proprietary or the exclusive purview of experts and gatekeepers; as a result, the most robust forms of knowledge are co-created by a wide range of actors. Thinking deliberatively not only applies to teaching and learning. It also applies to the broader culture which need to integrate co-creative, participatory engagement practices. Such engagements include collaboration *with community*, the recognition that learners are *cocreators*

of knowledge, and the involvement of a *diverse range of participants* to address real-world problems.

Sturm et al (2011) have conceptualized what they call a need for “building the architecture of full participation” which is an “affirmative value focused on creating institutions that enable people, whatever their identity, background, or institutional position, to thrive, realize their capabilities, engage meaningfully in institutional life, and contribute to the flourishing of others” (p. 3). This includes making voices and experiences of first generation faculty and students central to understanding the need for transformation of the knowledge project in higher education going forward.

In design terms, it involves recognizing the importance of understanding the intersections of student and faculty diversity, community engagement, and academic success as “the nexus for the transformation of communities on and off campus” (p.3). They argue that first generation students and young scholars of color, in particular, bring new and diverse epistemologies into the academy. Given that at the heart of engaged scholarship is the valuing of knowledge both inside and outside the academy, engaged scholarship is thus positioned to play a fundamental role in transformation of the broader academic project.

An architecture that promotes collaborative engagement invites sharing across college and university domains. And while college campuses most often mirror the polarization of the broader culture, colleges and universities are also uniquely situated for this type of participatory democratic civic engaged. Our campuses are anchored in communities with an abundance of learning assets. This rich ecosystem of local resources can contribute to public problem-solving. At the same time, a core mission of higher education is educating the next generation to become democratic practitioners. We need what might be termed *next-gen collaboratories*, incubators for innovation in advancing innovative research and practice.

At Providence College, a team of faculty, staff, and students are trying to implement this idea through a new kind of collaborative research and action space for democracy using deliberative pedagogy. The Dialogue, Inclusion, and Democracy (DID) Lab is pursuing engaged scholarship on dialogue, inclusion, and reflective civic practice. With a core leadership team, the DID Lab is developing a practical philosophy of “what works” to

critically engage adaptive challenges through real world experiences using deliberative, equity, and community-based pedagogies.

Our current flagship project is a series of “democracy walls” on campus which aim to “create a safe space that supports the development of well-informed and engaged citizens through civil discourse.” The first question posed last fall semester by student leaders went at the heart of a fundamental challenge facing college campuses: “What differentiates hate speech and free speech?”



While conversations on topics like free speech are often paralyzing, when facilitated with thoughtfulness and respect, they can also be liberating. As a way to celebrate Black History Month, for instance, the question on the DID Wall quoted Frederick Douglass that, “Education is emancipation, light, and liberty” and then asked the community to reflect upon their own personal experiences with education by asking, “How education is YOUR liberty?” One written response helps see why these spaces are so valuable, with someone writing “Education allows me to empathize with those I thought I could not.”

At the University of Cape Town, the Global Citizenship Programme<sup>1</sup>, set up in 2010 has served in a similar way as an intergenerational incubator or collaboratory for programme and course development with the explicit purpose of challenging students' thinking about a range of local and global issues. A range of short courses have been offered which have had the intention of providing a link between students' ability to think more critically but also the act on these thoughts in an engaged and connected way. Over the 10 years, several courses – both co-curricular and curricular – have been developed which have provided the opportunity to be explicit and intentional about issues such as co-creation of knowledge; creating horizontal learning opportunities; and enrolling community partners as educators across the courses.



In addition, opportunities for students to work as educators in the classroom and off campus classes has opened up the opportunity to learn firsthand about some of their experiences, and ways of understanding the world. The language exercise which frames the essay is one example of a practice which opens up civic learning spaces. Other examples include an emphasis on storytelling, value-based, active listening, and asset-based community development activities which are utilized throughout the

<sup>1</sup> [www.globalcitizenship.uct.ac.za](http://www.globalcitizenship.uct.ac.za)



projects. With these practices, community-based and experiential knowledge becomes central - a practice that can serve to disrupt more traditional ways of thinking about knowledge and knowledge producers.

## **Conclusion**

Teaching as a social process invites us to interrogate the context in which learning occurs, power dynamics and how we are all positioned, along with experiences that have shaped prior learning (McMillan, 2017). As educators we are given the space to reflect on our practices, but more importantly, our positionality in educative spaces. Through adopting this practice in our teaching, we hope to help students see the value of engaging with diverse stakeholders, especially the people most affected by an issue in order to consider issues of social and epistemic justice, and in the process further understand their intersecting identities of student, citizen and future professional.

By itself, these methods of deliberative pedagogy won't solve the "wicked problems" we are facing in society. This new model does invite us to think about issues like polarization, massive inequality, and climate change with intentionality, commitment and the belief that alternative paradigms of teaching, learning and engagement that address these complex problems are possible. It also asks us to see ourselves as more than individual actors in our own classrooms on isolated journeys. Democratic-minded educators need to ask new and different questions about the relationship between schools, universities, and the broader ecology of education. We must be willing to step back from preconceived ideas of the academic project and acknowledge our own power in the decisions that are made that shape the learning of our students. This entails, in other words, a change from within: this in turn means challenging the structures where decisions are made that too often reinforce the education of technically proficient but socially and civically isolated and disinterested student-citizens.

The health of democracy across the globe requires educational institutions to take this work seriously. Ultimately, if we want to do transformational teaching and learning, we must honor and recognize the talents, capacities, and co-creative capacities of our students and our community partners. As evidenced by the educational approach in the

Global Citizenship Programme at University of Cape Town and more recently with the DID Lab at Providence College, knowledge exists in many spaces. Our role as educators is to unearth this knowledge and make visible its potential in educating the next generation of civic professionals.

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