DEBATE AS A BET FOR CITIZENSHIP CONSTRUCTION IN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This article synthesizes a whole research experience that was part of a citizenship training macro-project in different urban scenarios, it was developed in 2014 under DHEOS group responsibility and its differential elements were the university scenario and its different practices, especially those that have to do with alternative discursive methodologies, related with new forms of citizenship construction and understanding in formal educational spaces. In the research project, conceptual and methodological aspects that clarify the practice of debate and its epistemological imprints in university context are put in evidence, and its direct

relationship with specific categories of emerging citizenships is also established. For this, a group of students enrolled in three Latin American universities was summoned, who gave an account of their experience as debaters during a five-month period that included debates in psychology training and practical experience; it was promoted by the Department of Psychology of Universidad Piloto de Colombia.

Key Words: university, debate, citizenship, politics, youth.

Some Historical Considerations

To begin this discussion on debate and its approach to citizenship construction in university contexts, it is important to refer to some historical and contextual elements that provide sense to its practice and to its more contemporary intentions, which (although extensive and even divergent in literature and discursive pragmatics) are extremely pertinent for the investigative exercise.

In this historical and contextual sense, it is indispensable to mention the contribution of Aristotle and his bet on rhetoric, which he referred to as a theoretical-practical discipline directly related to the art of orality eloquence, in which persuasion and argument presentation are considered undeniable protagonists. This discipline seemed to thoroughly integrate (in moments in which there was an evident crisis regarding absolute truth) philosophical, linguistic, aesthetic and psychological elements, critical for ethical and political analysis of literary texts alike (Lopez, 1995), and for public persuasive expression that included oral composition rules and patterns.

This bet made its way to the conventional dynamics of public dialog, resisting until the beginning of the 19th century, and its structure included supporting components such as **invention**, understood as the finding or argumentative scheme in which

the speaker will be found; **disposition**, understood as the organization and structure of oratory exercise development; **elocution and pronunciation**, which refer mainly to the style used in an auditorium; and **memory**, consisting of the application of certain rules to connect the discourse text without disregarding the conditions or the sense of the conversation. This is how discourse and oratory, developed in ancient rhetoric, may be considered an active art to the extent in which they directly integrate typical elements of the context with distinct elaborations of the scientific discourse (Lopez, 1995).

Thus, it is worth saying that talking about discourse and argumentative practices is to simultaneously talk about what is human and social, as mentioned by Aristotle in *Zoon Politikon*, human and its social and political conditions are established based on language and words (Ramirez, 2008). In this sense, each association with what is human (mostly coming from sciences) contains the expressive suffix *logos*, which substantially indicates a harmonization between thought and language, and which finally translates into discourse and text. This clearly becomes one of the fundamental bets of current society and citizenship in general, precisely because acquiring proficiency over the language allows, firstly to recognize the structural mandate and definition determined by the establishment, and secondly, to develop and organize alternative counter-institutional (if you will) argumentative bets.

Bacon explained it in the 16th century when he referred to language as the foundation of reason and knowledge. He established that to master nature, a practical utility of the self had to exist, meaning, a direct contact between knowledge and context in every way; eventually, said idea became the core of one of his theses: "knowledge is power", a notion that is part of the contemporary scientific debate and that evidences a direct relation between scientific activity and the laws of nature, which explicitly includes exposition and argumentation as bases of every effort to understand the universe (Ramirez, 2008). Likewise, George W. Hegel, in the 19th century, established that in order to achieve the human

purposes, it is necessary to use the laws of nature, even to contradict or further develop science in all its magnitude. In this sense, science itself is catalogued as the perfect stage for argumentative, propositional and transforming activity, always aimed at obtaining a "true" and "convenient" answer (Ramírez, 2008).

The foregoing exposes the continuous debate between modernism and postmodernism, which also seems to be part of a discussion on linguistics and argumentation, in that this formal logic that is mostly associated with positivist mathematical thinking is considered hegemonic in the modern stage due to its structure and its revolution (Ramirez, 2008). This is where exogenous traditions, typical of the empiricist philosophies of knowledge, and endogenous traditions, typical of rationalism come in naturally (Gergen, 1983), seemingly, these fail to answer the question of how knowledge is acquired and how knowledge is linguistically remembered, especially if a distinction between the exterior and the interior world is accentuated (Rorty, 1979).

However, as an answer to these tensions, linguistic bets have a series of considerations that seem to place the subject in contexts that are correctly related to the ways of life in which meaning is built, and in social relationships that are mediated by language (Wittgenstein, 1953). In turn, these scientific and social bets (if you will) constitute new epistemological ways to put social language in service of what is human, and thus, establish new comprehension frameworks of social reality, a matter that ends up being decisive in the discourse and argumentative bet in the contemporary world.

Words, Argumentation and Debate in Citizenship Construction

Although the aforementioned allows to recognize a historic perspective in terms of the typical sense of language and argumentation, the core reflection of this article deals with the relation between debate and citizenship construction, mostly in university contexts; in principle, this relationship appears to have complex and

interdependent input or categories, which end up being significant both for understanding what is educational and what is political, public and youth-related.

In order to develop this relational framework and to put in perspective the academic debate beyond a methodological or didactic expression that focuses on skill training, it is important to begin with the fact that by definition, rhetoric is considered the art of argumentation, in which influence or persuasion act as strategies to convince and lure interlocutors with the aim of achieving behavioral and emotional changes (Montero, 2002). In all fairness with the complexity of the argumentative scenario, it is important to mention that it is possible to systematically use hostile or problematic communication in the argumentative process with the aim of interrupting or avoiding any possibility of dialog (McDermott, Cowden and Koopman, 2002).

This evidences how wide the perspective around the argumentative scenario really is, it exposes the relational and political world (including the ethical dimension) based on the practical activity of arguing. Accordingly, the scenario of debate discussion and initiation may be considered socialization, to the extent it allows a representation of the world and a construction of subjectivity in itself based on an active interlocution between socializing and socialized parties. In that regard, debate (understood as a typical stage of socialization) is a process of identification and pertinence as well as of identity construction which is affected by relational input, that to a new citizenship determines thinking for and with others, in other words, to strengthen critical self-thinking, in terms of reality and relationships (Ramirez, 2005).

This relational dimension that clearly follows argumentative practices in citizenship construction leaves room for the intention of the discussion, which (as stated earlier) has the power to create bonds, communities and processes, but also has diverse horizons spanning from cooperation or fair solution on common situations,

including dialog rules that are used to democratize, to an imposing controversy intended to persuade interlocutors with opposing positions through arguments (Cattani, 2003). Hence, linguistics and each of its interdependent components, such as meaning, emotion, and even history, constitute the framework of sense to the construction of social realities (Bruner, 1988), in which the construction of what is political and public evidently meet; these categories are considered part of contemporary citizenship, and ultimately, identify the importance of argumentative training and its presentation on debate practices.

Tensions and Perspectives. The Debating Citizenship

It is important to explain that the discussion on citizenship and its relationship with discourse and argumentative practices does not just imply a contemporary approach. On the contrary, the citizenship category is part of the more explained and contended spectrum in most of the civilizing history from diverse disciplines. As reported by Horrach (2009), said concept changes and is current in function of contextual changes and demands to which human societies are exposed overall.

However, there are more perspectives that relate or implicate citizenship in particular with the state's formal structure and traditional (instrumental even) forms of comprehending the social and political dimensions. It seems as though that focus on the relationship between the citizen and the establishment evinces some paradoxes that are more pertinent for the analysis, said stance directly establishes bonds with the formalities of the state's dynamics and allows to express dissatisfaction or resistance to a political system that fails to represent the needs of the population. The paradoxes produce and reproduce natural tensions mostly for a sector of the population that has been historically invisible and distant from power, which appears detached and devoid of opportunities to exercise citizenship in different levels (Gonzalez, 2007).

This unlocks the discussion regarding the relationship between the citizen and the institutions defined in his/her surroundings, what is instituted is determined by regulations established by the structure and execution proposed by the state, the stance, citizenship practices and ways of participation; in opposition, what institutes deals with a resistant, on the periphery and opposing said structure and its merging dynamics (Castoriadis, 1997). This dilemma about citizenship and its cohesion with the state and its structure seemingly defines an instrumental and deterministic relationship in which people regard politics as a distant dimension, both reading the context and defining decisive actions and determinations.

However, there are other ways to distinguish and re-signify the role of subjects within the citizen dimension, for instance the case of political citizenships, which are constituted outside "institutionalized politics", and enable a reformulation of institution capacity based in the constructed social capital. Social capital must be understood as the group of characteristic traits of social organization, including trust, reciprocity practices and civic cooperation networks (Putnam, 1996). It is worth establishing that this alternative focus on citizenship is interesting precisely because it strengthens social life and articulates citizen action to reestablish and lead betterment for communities.

The appeal of the aforementioned is considering that the citizenship category is tightly bonded with culture and its own transformations, thus defining the indisputable connection between culture and politics. This is to say that the spectrum of what is political is amplified due to the integration of new meanings and relationships in emerging discussion and participative action projects. It could be said that this new outlook that puts citizenship in the cultural perspective permits the emergence of a political and public outlook that seems to transcend towards the implementation of a democratic construction and social transformation project based on difference and fairness (Dagnino, 2005).

Methodology

The project was developed in the qualitative research framework, organization, collection and analysis of information, with a descriptive and interpretative emphasis; this allowed understanding the discourse of the young reported in contemporary urban stages about citizenship. Debate was the core axis of the methodological strategy, and semi-structured interviews were used as complementary strategies to capture their accounts.

The methodological perspective undertaken for the project allowed integrating information and its respective analysis using matrixes of sense, which directly cross-referenced the categories with the text fragments resulting from the debate and the interviews. Taking into account the epistemological stance that gives sense and explains the process, it is important to mention that the evoked narrative expressions were articulated using discourse analysis, with each of the strategies determined for the exercise.

Contextualization of Debate as Strategy

Although there are many ways to conduct a debate, the following illustrates the technique used in the research process, which is part of the format used by the Psychology program's Debate Table.

Firstly, the debate in itself is defined as a stage that intends to contrast relevant and decisive propositions about a topic that has been previously selected by a technical team. This process emphasizes the development of communication and argumentation skills, justified by critical thinking, and by the acknowledgement of difference and tolerance. Therefore, it is necessary to confront argumentative theses that include an affirmative and negative stance in two groups, which means incorporating senses of collaborative work to present and design the strategy.

The debate's design takes into account certain technical aspects that allow mobilizing and developing the discussion, and that let process evaluators or companions to have an evaluative appreciation. The following is the route designed for the debate.

	Group 1	Group 2
Time management		
Pertinence of the proposition		
Arguments provided		
Group work		
Management of data and figures		
Fluency		
Use of language		
Strategy		
Auditorium management		
Structure coherence		

Source: debate script produced by the researcher.

Procedure

Phase I: document revision. Collection of the state of knowledge.

Phase II: selection of the debaters and organization of the debate format. This process defines debate topics and criteria, as well as the respective propositions.

Phase III: debate development in three sessions (topic: post-conflict and peace), and semi-structured interviews.

Phase IV: organization and analysis of information: in order to sort the information collected using the research methods, a transcription of the debates and the semi-structured interviews was produced. Afterwards, a two-way matrix analysis took place.

Phase V: final discussion, conclusions and suggestions of the exercise.

Participants

A convenient sample of 4 university students (two Colombian, one Peruvian, one Mexican) was defined for the research process, the students were trained on debate in Universidad Piloto de Colombia during the first term of 2014, in the framework of "Debates in Psychology", promoted by the Psychology program's LA MESA de debate.

Analysis of Results

The following are the results of the process, which cross-referenced the analysis categories with an analysis of the text fragments selected from the interviews.

Argumentation and Critical Opinion

This category clearly showed very particular stances by the four participants regarding how practicing debate enables the construction of argumentative and critical opinion skills (which are considered constitutive to the perspective of new citizenships). The following text fragments illustrate said reflection:

 "*Truly, the debate thing has been a wonderful opportunity to develop the words, but it is not just about talking, it is about taking a stance and expressing it with level, with robustness and rigor… Young people have lost the possibility of talking, even more so about what is happening in the city or the country. Debate has helped me understand that.*"

"*When I decided to participate in the debate, I never imagined what it would mean to me… Especially, in expressing my ideas without fear and understanding the process of defending an idea… Today, I can say that debate is very useful in university's classes, but most of all, it*

is useful to bring discussion into daily life. Not how I did it before but thinking about what is happening and saying it."

"What I like about debate is getting to know people and that others may get to know me as well. I am here as an Exchange student and I didn't know a lot about the country, but debating is a preparation on topics from a critical point of view. It is not possible to have a discussion if you are not totally involved and if you fail to build a serious and argued stance… The best part is to know that as much as you may elaborate your stance, the technique forces you to get to know the other stance."

It is possible to identify some distinctive elements regarding argumentation and critical opinion in these fragments, which allow making sense, explaining and supporting the debate practice in citizenship construction; precisely those argumentative and critical opinion processes (in the debate's preparation, development and evaluation) put the debater in perspective in terms of diverse horizons and scenarios with which he/she directly develops and relates. In that sense, it is important that participants comprehended the role of debate training and practice in solidifying argumentative skills directly in the development of different everyday scenarios, allowing them to be able to propose and have critical thinking, to know but also to express themselves with argumentative sense (Ramirez, 2008).

Political Sense

This category is critical to understand the process due to the constitutive characteristics of the citizens' category from a contemporary or critical perspective. This is the way in which new citizenships are denominated, directly, new subjects and political relations are being denominated and these end up being expressed in the fragments of the participants, who relate them directly to the debate exercise:

"It is thinking about who we are as citizens, not Colombians or Peruvians, but Latin American citizens, who share problems but ideas, traditions and other things that are very important for young people, for everybody… I insist on the fact that debate allows getting to know these criteria and these ways of finding a topic and discussing it further."

"Debate has given me recognition in other universities where core topics on the country's education are being discussed; debate has allowed me to participate; but I can also acknowledge discussions clarify things for me, I can use that information to improve and for many other things."

"I am thinking about many things after having participated in the debates in Universidad Piloto… My country is in the middle of a great political crisis and it is partly because there is a lot of misinformation in topics such as drug trafficking and armed groups. The challenge is to get to know and do, in order to have a better country and better relationships for all… It all depends on what we jointly think."

These fragments concretely determine how different elements of the Political Sense category explicitly manifest in the participants' accounts. The first element is the appropriation of the ideological spectrum as political subjects, which appears to be cross-sectional in young people sharing the same territory, such as Latin America; plus, a concrete idea of actively participating in scenarios of propositional and contextual discussion, which turns their political sense into something that is more deliberate and critical. The second element is the place of the critical reflection proposed by the debate, meaning the possibility of making an incursion in political reality through systematic discussion and argumentation, enabling

participants to understand themselves based on new collective relationships of trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 1996).

Linguistic Relationships

The last category of the study, Linguistic Relations, is considered substantial in the debate practice precisely because of the linguistic and argumentative frameworks surrounding the experience, which allow the construction of alternative spaces to exercise new relationships and policies in the university context based on words. This category is expressed by participants in the following representative fragments:

> "Debating is learning to understand and pay attention to opposing stances… It is not about arguing as if you were alone, you debate with another person (a partner or friend) but in the debate we meet and discuss not to know who wins, but to prove we can look into each other's eyes and talk about a topic without problems… What is said is very important for the other… This should also be understood in the streets."

> "I say what I think not for myself, but for the other debater as well… We all play debate all the time, but words make people listen or ignore me… It is necessary to learn how to talk in order to learn how to listen… It is critical to understand each other as young people and citizens."

> "The group of Mesa de debate, including us exchange students, has been very enriching… it's like talking to get to know things… I can say that this has been an opportunity to feel as a Colombian, to understand their problems (which are similar to my country's) and to

get to know different topics and people that are very important to me now."

Based on these, it can be said that in the discursive practice inherent to the debate stage, Linguistic Relationships are cross-sectional in understanding university's young citizenships. Whereas the categories of the study consider elements that constitute citizenship, the Linguistic Relationships category is the direct relation with the conversational aspect of the debate as a technique. This is very clear in the discourses presented by the participants, highlighting how the possibility of interlocution assumes the definition of a collective action field, which emphasizes the acknowledgement of the other, beyond a simple communicational partner. This is how debate configures a space to build subjects based on argumentative and critical opinion language, which for young people implies a configuration of other daily spaces, even those that demand participation and bets related with propositions (Ramirez, 2008).

Conclusions

Given its particular elements, the process allows for an extensive range of conclusions deriving from concrete findings or procedural elements alike, and also arising from the same conceptual and epistemological reflection supported by the importance of young university students on citizenship construction. Therefore, it is necessary to put in perspective each dimension on which said construction is supported, aimed at understanding the contribution of debate practice in the emergence of new young citizenships.

- Debate as pedagogical strategy, used to address social and political topics of interest, becomes a practice that (aside from strengthening argumentative skills) provides new stages of reflection for young people as

reflecting and critical subjects, it also recreates the need to build new socialization practices and realities for propositional capabilities.

- Discursive and argumentative bets (as elements of academic debate practice) are directly connected with the practice of critical and emerging bets by new citizenships, which emphasize on articulating new social and collective acknowledgement practices.

- The political sense that is reproduced and dynamized in conversational encounters is an evidence of how relevant public, identity, collective, democratic and participative discussions are; for the young people's context, it becomes an opportunity to take part in decisive contexts that are not necessarily within the university.

- Cultural integration (with participants of different Latin American nationalities included in this research) played a critical role in the definition, sense and development of the debate and its associated practices, incorporating common categories that resulted familiar and were collectively interpreted in the discussion.

- In terms of the research process, it can be said that the structure of the "Debates in Psychology" project permanently incorporated training, research and argumentative spaces, enabling a constant and active approach between participants and methodology, which in turn impacted the quality and appropriation of the process and their discourse.

- In the Colombian context (even in the Latin American context) it is indispensable to highlight the importance of appropriation of social and political processes, which end up becoming axes of discourse and declaration to re-signify and re-think the participants' position in plural frameworks and stages.

- Debate as pedagogy constitutes a differentiating element to acknowledge context as the essential foundation of all propositional and transforming citizen bets, in which it is clear that words visualize and foster participants'

political, identity and relationship senses (from an inter-disciplinary and inter-place construction)

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