RECOGNISING DEBATE TYPES WITHIN THE CLASSROOM – AN EXPANSION OF PREVAILING CONCEPTUAL DIVISIONS

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Abstract

Although much research has previously addressed elements of classroom discourse and the practices of pupils' debate and discussion, I argue there is a need to expand the framework for analysing the forms of such oral classroom activities, particularly regarding expressions of differences in opinion. Commonly applied analytical tools generally recognise just two forms, adversarial and deliberative. By operationalising a conceptual set of categories defining how differences in opinion are expressed within the classroom, I show that this is too narrow. A third form (agonistic) can be recognised based on Chantal Mouffe's theory of democracy and politics, and another form is what I call the relativistic. Thus, I propose an analytical framework with a set of four forms to address the nature of debate. By providing empirical classroom examples to support each form, this article is intended not only for researchers but also to benefit practising teachers.

Keywords: classroom, differences of opinion, Chantal Mouffe, agonism, analytical tool

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Argumentative activities have long been of interest to educational researchers, particularly those rooted in Anglo-Saxon traditions and contexts. These include, among others, Love (2000), Brice (2002) and Jerome and Algarra (2005), who have studied debates in Australian, American and British contexts, respectively. Also from a practitioner's view, there is strong engagement in the classroom debate and a firm belief in its potential. As indicated in a teacher survey conducted in the research project *The classroom debate in a didactical and sociological perspective*[1], practising teachers seem to regard the classroom debate as a valuable tool for promoting democracy, and when Jerome and Algarra (2005) discuss and define the classroom debate they even use the promising phrase 'pedagogy for democracy' (493). Value is also given the debate in the wordings of societal participation:

> … to listen and respond to the views of others are prerequisites for active participation in all spheres of societal life (Svenkerud, Klette & Hertzberg 2012, 35, my translation).

In a similar way, Baxter (2002) sees the debate as a tool to influence public opinion, not least for the benefit of people who might otherwise experience marginalisation.

Classroom activities where pupils are engaged in debates, discussions and argumentation are often carried out in accordance with one of two distinctive traditions, illustrated in the following quotation:

> It may for example be about drama exercises in which students are assigned roles as protagonists and antagonists in a prepared debate, or discussions in small groups where the intention is to achieve consensus ... (Hertzberg 2006, 303-304, my translation).

First, the quotation alludes to *the rhetorical tradition,* starting from the key notions of 'protagonists' and 'antagonists', and then to *the deliberative tradition*, which aims at the participants reaching consensus. Also in research, twofold conceptual divisions seem to be prevailing. The nature of the classroom debate is the primary focus in Jerome and Agarra's research (2005), where the conceptual division of *adversarial* vs. *deliberative* forms is applied, the first signifying a less open and investigative form than the latter. Durkin (2008) also contributes a descriptive division, positioning *wrestling* against *conciliatory* forms, the first characterised by a polarised and aggressive approach while the latter seeks harmony. Few analyses have considered more than these two forms, although Durkin recognises a third alternative, *the Middle Way,* which is essentially a combination of the adversarial and deliberative forms (and shown to be preferred by East Asian students in British academic contexts).

The rhetorical tradition with key notions of 'protagonists' and 'antagonists', mentioned previously, has its root in ancient times, whereas the deliberative tradition, based on values such as harmony and consensus, is emanating from Jürgen Habermas's theoretical framework (see for instance Habermas, 1998, Habermas, 2001). Both these traditions have undoubtedly influenced the classroom debate, and the twofold conceptual division is undoubtedly the result of these traditions working in parallel. However, in this article, both of these classroom and research traditions are challenged. This is due to empirical and theoretical findings that indicate that current approaches are too narrow, both from a researcher´s point of view and from a teacher's. Thus, I argue, there is a need for further elaboration of the mainstream two-fold conceptual division.

[1] *Performed by the author of this article.*

While the classroom debate is highly valued it is also perceived by teachers as a curriculum content difficult to arrange for. For this assertion I rely both on the survey mentioned above and on Driver and Osborne's (1999) findings from interviews with (science) teachers. That is another reason for further explorations. Given this, the aim of this article is to challenge the narrow, prevailing conceptual division of the classroom debate and to illustrate an alternative set of four representations. The research questions are:

1) What forms of debates can be found in classrooms and what are the characteristics of these forms?
2) How can these forms be understood respectively?
3) What criticism can be directed against these forms?

The definition of 'debate' here includes traditional concepts of debates as well as of discussions, which are commonly used synonymously in research (see Jerome & Algarra 2005; Svenkerud, Klette & Hertzberg 2012).

1. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research in the area often emanates from a philosophical-didactic perspective (see Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick 2007), or examines the phenomena through the lens of citizenship education (see Ruitenberg 2009). Concerning democracy in the broader perspective, within and beyond the educational arena, we find well-developed arguments on the phenomenon of 'differences in opinion' in Chantal Mouffe's *On the political* (2005). Given the strong faith in classroom debates as a tool for *democracy*, it seems logical to turn to Mouffe for a theoretical frame, characterised as the democratic theorist she is. Her theoretical and ideological point of departure is mainly about a division into three different forms of democracy, and to three different forms of differences in opinion. These are the *antagonistic, deliberative* and *agonistic forms*, all of which I will use as analytical categories. I illustrate these in more detail in the result section of this article. However, briefly, the antagonistic form is characterised by confrontation, the deliberative by efforts to reach harmonious unanimity, and the agonistic has neither of these features.

Mouffe (2005) mainly positions herself within a research field of political science. She criticises what she describes as a contemporary prevailing post-political and neo-liberal orientation. This approach is too fixated on consensus and harmony, a fact which in turn jeopardises democracy and causes a populist nationalist-oriented rhetoric. Mouffe suggests that differences of opinion are inevitable (and essential) in society, but how they are expressed can have profound consequences. Therefore, I argue, it is helpful to contrast modes of expressing differences of opinion in relation to their potential ability to shape 'better ways of living together' as described by Todd (2010), a scholar in the Mouffeian tradition. My assertion is that Mouffe's suggested three-fold division of democracy forms can be easily and fruitfully transferred to the educational field. However, previous framework for analysing debates has not been expanded by incorporating agonistic forms or other forms that cannot be readily categorised as adversarial or deliberative.

2. THE PROCEDURE

I base my illustration of representations of the classroom debate on empirically grounded examples from authentic debates. Some of the material was collected as part of the re-

search project *The classroom debate in a didactical and sociological perspective* between November 2011 and June 2012. This consists of the debates that I was invited to observe after an initial teacher survey. The data output includes audio recorded debates and teacher interviews conducted in connection with the debates. The materials from The Daffodil School (see table below) were collected and processed by Delic and Dreven (2012) in an undergraduate study associated with the main project.

All audio recordings were gathered from rural schools in municipalities whose members have historically had industrial jobs, for example in the textile industry. This is because the project was loosely connected to a bigger project covering four rural municipalities. The proportion of pupils of immigrant background was quite low.

Additional material is a classroom extract gathered from a doctoral thesis (Andersson 2012). I fictitiously refer to this school as the Violet school. It is an urban vocationally-oriented upper secondary school attracting mainly boys.

The extracts appearing in this article have been intentionally selected to illustrate both the types of debates that are commonly acknowledged (antagonistic and deliberative) and another type that emerged while processing the material. The data is also used to illustrate a fourth representation with potentially agonistic characteristics.

Table 1. Empirical data and their contexts

School	Year	Subject	Topic	Circumstances	Extract
The Daffodil School	8 and 9 (separately)	Swedish as a first language	Suggestions from the teacher or free choice	In small groups of 3-4, pupil directed, no teacher present	1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8
The Tulip School	9 (2 classes, separately)	Social Science	Ideologies	Whole class, teacher directed	4
The Violet School	Upper secondary	Social Science	Power over what TV-programmes to watch	In groups, pupil directed	5
The Marigold School	9	Science and Social science	Nuclear power	Whole class, pupil directed, 2 teachers present	9

In the following extracts the pupils are given names corresponding to the school to which they belong (e.g. **D**aniel is a pupil at the **D**affodil school), and **T** means **T**eacher.

3. THE RESULTS

In this section I address the variety of expressions of differences of opinions and the characteristics of these forms (research question 1). I consider similar aspects for each form. More precisely, each form encompasses a particular view of conflicts, relations between the participants, and linguistic characteristics. The first two aspects correspond to aspects that Mouffe (2005) treats more or less systematically. Each section will be followed by a commentary accommodating how the forms should be understood (question 2) and the

criticism that has been directed towards the forms, not only as expressed by Mouffe, but also according to educationalists.

3.1 "Let's pronounce sentence"

In one of the debates from the Daffodil school two of the participants initially express their different opinions on the death penalty as follows:

Extract 1. Classroom exchange.

Daniel: I think we should have the death penalty because it is good; prisoners who are dangerous are on the loose again after prison, so having dead ones is better.

Douglas: I can … although I understand what you mean … but I think it is better to extend the term of imprisonment to life imprisonment instead.

In this excerpt Daniel and Douglas's adversarial opinions are cautiously expressed, but other parts of the debate are more dramatic and intense in line with *antagonism*:

Diana: What should I say? No attacks.

Daniel: Can you explain that a little more?

Douglas: I am explaining a lot.

[laughter]

Daniel: I don't understand, you have to explain.

Douglas: You're the one that is stupid if you don't get it.

Daniel: You are stupid.

Douglas: Shut up!

Daniel: You shouldn't say anything, it is the judge …

Diana: I said, no attacks.

[mumble]

Diana: Break.

A debate with participants who view each other as enemies and do not share a common basis, as seems to be the case in the above excerpt, shows similarities with the *antagonistic form* of expressing differences of opinion, which seeks conflict rather than to avoid it (Mouffe 2005). Clearly, the pupils speak to each other in a hostile tone and laugh slightly scornfully, a common feature of such oral classroom activities (Norlund, submitted).

Phrases emphasising a dramatic character and battlefield rhetoric are clearly evident in several of the debates recorded in the Daffodil School (cf. Durkin 2008, 48):

Extract 2. Classroom exchange.

Diana: No *attacks.*

…

Dennis: … but if you want to (change topic) we can agree, that we won

Dante: No…

Diana: … or, that we won over you. (my italics)

The vocabulary characteristic of a trial is similarly dramatic:

Diana: Let's *pronounce sentence*.

…

Dennis: … but you wished to be a judge. (my italics)

The close relationship between an antagonistically oriented debate and the kind of discussion that has previously been termed 'adversarial' by educational researchers such as Jerome and Algarra (2005) and 'wrestling' by Durkin (2008) is evident in the previous exchange. Characteristic of a wrestling debate is not only its '"battlefield" mentality', but also its 'aggressive search for truth' and 'polarized critique' (41).

The following excerpt, also collected from the Daffodil School, focuses on whether or not drivers should be allowed to travel at whatever speed they choose on the roads:

Extract 3. Classroom exchange.

Dennis: And I do not think people … /…/you said that you should get to decide for yourself how fast to drive, there are those who do not have quite so good …

Doris: Like old ladies and old men.

Dennis: Yes, but they …

Dante: Some are not allowed to drive.

Didrik: For example sixty-year-olds, they should not be driving a car really.

Doris: Why not?

Didrik: /…/because, they don't know themselves that they don't have, like …

Dennis: They ought to drive on roads with a speed limit of 50 km/h. Then it's okay.

The debate illustrated above raises a clear 'us' and 'them' division, evident in the constructed group divisions of sixty-year-old people and others. This, according to Mouffe (2005), is typical of an antagonistic approach.

To summarise, we find dramatic practices including participants who see each other as enemies and do not share a common foundation. This illustrates the associations to antagonism, a form that favours conflicts and bipolarity.

Table 2. Empirical data and their contexts

Type of debate	View of conflicts	Relations between participants	Linguistic characteristics
Antagonism	Favouring conflicts, bipolarity	Enemies	Battlefield rhetoric Vocabulary of a trial

3.1.1.Understanding and criticism of antagonistic forms of debates

In relation to the above authentic classroom debates, it is important to consider how the characteristics of the activities should be understood. Part of the answer may be found in

the didactical orientations surrounding the debates. In the Daffodil School the pupils participate in pupil-directed group debates without a teacher continuously present, although the teacher is walking around between the small discussion rooms. The antagonistic and competitive features of concern seem to be reinforced by the teacher who, while monitoring the discussions, interjects by asking who has 'won' and by emphasising that the pupils ought to let someone be 'for' and others 'against', which were also the teacher's initial instructions. This is an understandable strategy from the teacher's perspective since a pro et contra-arrangement has deep pedagogical roots (cf. Hertzberg 2006).

Also easily understood is the competitive nature, which seems to appeal to the pupils. Jerome and Algarra (2005) confirmed that young people are attracted to adversarial (in my interpretation, antagonistic) debate. According to Dyson (1997), an *attack-defend* construction has a vernacular and popular trait, which may be indicative of its strong attractive power. Pupils' familiarity with contemporary televised debates might be another reason for their attraction to antagonistic debates. Bourne (2003) made comparable observations in her study:

> The students, similarly, draw on other discourses. The debate is animated, taking on aspects of the emotional audience interaction in an Oprah Winfrey or Jerry Springer televised debate (514).

Although an antagonistic pupil approach may be easily understood, it is not unproblematic, as an antagonistic approach could potentially strengthen social divisions. Jerome and Agarra (2005) claim:

> In short, it seems that the adversarial system of debate in schools might reproduce some of the more general criticisms aimed at adversarial democracy at a societal level /…/. There is certainly a danger that young people may be limited in their understanding if they are introduced to controversial public issues through a process of debate which requires them to pick or be assigned to one of two positions and to argue for or against a motion. In this respect the approach can be criticized for limiting young people's understanding of the issue under consideration as well as their understanding of the process of debate in a democratic society (499).

Harwood (1998, 164-165) notes that it might be unsupportive to assign roles, and that pupils' relations with their peers may be jeopardised by selecting a leader or moderator. Further, according to Harwood, arrangements like those at the Daffodil school, despite being common, risk turning the floor into a product that pupils compete to 'sell'.

Being too confrontational, Mouffe suggests, restrains participants from seeing each other as legitimate, worthy opponents. It should be noted that dividing pupils into 'for or against' groups also seems to promote provocative statements, such as that 60-year-olds should not be allowed to drive at more than 50 km per hour. This is similar to cynical positions mentioned by Durkin (2008) as a feature of a wrestling attitude.

The Daffodil pupils were given a list of possible topics to choose from, but they were also free to discuss other topics. Mostly they selected topics from the list, and 'the death penalty' was a popular topic among the pupils (and a common classroom topic in general, see Norlund 2013). However, it seems to be a difficult topic, placing high demands on both the teacher and pupils. As illustrated by the excerpts from the Daffodil debates, the arrangements seemingly urge the pupils to circulate views that do not support the notion of using debate as a tool to find better ways of living together neither for the pupils themselves nor between groups in society.

The Daffodil pupils seem to be invited (with the encouragement of their teacher) to take part in a fictive game by 'swapping roles' so that 'somebody else acts as the judge'. The fictive nature of the discussion risks decreasing the potential of promoting better ways of living together (Norlund 2014). In summary, the expression of antagonistic views risk reinforcing inequalities and reducing social justice (Levinson 2003).

3.2 "Compromising is important"

According to Mouffe (2005), the second form, *the deliberative*, differs from the antagonistic by implicitly suggesting that conflicts and problems should be minimised. Thus it promotes unipolarity in contrast to the bipolar antagonistic form.

Authentic deliberative debates seem to be rare; Roth (2003) observed no deliberatively oriented examples in his study of Swedish schools and my own data collection did not include any clear examples of a deliberative form. Nevertheless, since it is firstly a common approach in research and secondly considered useful in educational settings and recommended, in Sweden for example by the Swedish National Agency for Education, I have chosen to add an excerpt from outside my own empirical data.

We find classroom examples in Andersson's thesis (2012). In the excerpt below, the focal topic is an expressed dilemma where a family is supposed to come to an agreement on which TV programmes to watch. After a relatively light-hearted start, the students' exchange of words becomes more solution-oriented as in the following excerpt:

Extract 4. Classroom exchange.

Vincent: You can find cheap tellies, too, at places like Renova [Renova is an environmental company and the pupil is probably referring to their recycling centre]

Ville: Or the children can go to the movies. Give them a thousand bucks and leave them at Siba's. Or, if we sort of own a DVD.

Victor: We have no DVD, nor another telly.

Valter: We had an idea here, that everyone has one … but okey, that's not possible here.

Victor: We need to vote.

Ville: We can draw up a schedule for TV watching. Like every other day, allocate...

The teacher passes by:

T: Equality seems important to you.

Ville: Yes, it is.

Valter: Yeah, but I think the strongest one should win.

Silence, while some of the pupils read the text once again.

/…/

Valter: I think the strongest one should win. Let the old man/dad decide.

Ville: Smart... (ironically)

Valentin: I think the first option (to let the majority decide) is best.

Ville: No.

Victor: Why not?

Ville: What are you referring to? The majority?

Valentin: Yes, rather three satisfied than none satisfied.

Valter: But that's rotten! It might be possible to get more who are satisfied.

Victor: Yeah … (others agree, nodding).

Ville: Never mind how many people are pleased, it has to be fair, every other week, I think, even if there is three in one group and two in the other.

Valentin: No, I do not agree. The majority is better, so it is.

Valter: No, justice applies. That's the best way.

Ville: The tiny ones need to stand up a little, 'little people', what the hell, no matter how small or few they are, they have to stand up.

Silence

/…/

Victor: But does everyone really want to see all programmes?

Vincent: Come on, let's go for every second …, write that on the note.

Valter: None of the options is really good, none of them will really do.

Valentin: No, compromising is important. I think compromising is important. (my translation and slight adaptation).

As can be seen, the pupils aim to keep conflicts down, in line with Andersson's deliberative approach:

> Deliberative education creates a form of co-play among the students, rather than a counter-play. (Andersson 2012, 137, my translation)

Andersson characterises the pupils' conversation as solution-oriented, indicating their eagerness to contribute arguments. He pays attention to the fact that the pupils orient their responses to the dilemma towards both compromises and majority decisions, in accordance with a typical deliberative approach but in contrast to an antagonistic us/them division. Englund (2000) comments on the nature of a deliberative form by emphasising its element of 'collective will-formation, that is, efforts to agree or at least establish temporary arrangements' (6, my translation).

The above discussion about a dilemma identifies a key characteristic of deliberatively expressed differences of opinion. Whereas the antagonistic form is polarised in two bipolar factions, deliberative participants typically treat each other in a unipolar, supportive, cooperative and friendly manner. Such an approach is shown in the rejection of Valter's suggestion of letting someone 'win'. This deliberative attitude can also be perceived in the pupils' use of language and how they ask each other probing questions (cf. Brice 2002, 69). They frequently use the careful verb 'can' (or 'may' which could have been my alternative translation) and the vocabulary they use includes strongly democratic terminology, such as words like 'vote', 'justice', 'compromise' etc.'

In summation, harmony and dialogism are prevailing characteristics of deliberatively expressed differences of opinion. The opinion of the majority is validated, and Durkin's (2008) 'conciliatory' approach is evident in the search for harmony throughout the process. Through deliberative discussion participants act as friends, the utilised language is

affected, and discussion focuses more often on moral rather than political issues. Even if the debated topic relates to power as in the previous discussion, the context is familial rather than politically controversial.

Table 3. Characteristics of antagonistic and deliberative forms of debates

Type of debate	**View of conflicts**	**Relations between participants**	**Linguistic characteristics**
Antagonistic	Favouring conflicts, bipolarity	Enemies	Battlefield rhetoric Vocabulary of a trial
Deliberative	Favouring harmony, unipolarity	Friends	Low modality verbs Democratic terminology

3.2.1. Understanding and criticism of the deliberative form

As already noted, there seem to be few examples of realised and documented, deliberatively oriented discussions in previous research. The excerpt above from Andersson (2012) originates from *staged* deliberative teaching, and takes place *after* the teacher has given instructions encouraging the pupils explicitly to implement deliberative conversations. That may also be the reason for some signs of slight irony among the participants; the pupils are not really comfortable with the expected approach.

Deliberative discussion has gained prominence in educational research since Dewey's and Habermas' work, frequently being utilised as a template for promoting democratic values in schools (see Englund 2000). In recent decades the deliberative approach has gained renewed acceptance, especially for its relevance to value-system work. However, it is important to understand the context of this acceptance. According to Colnerud (2004), value-system work gained acceptance in Sweden when decentralisation reforms paved the way for schools to implement curricular changes locally. It may also be seen as a consequence of a secularised society, with religion diminishing its importance in issues of right versus wrong. Nevertheless, negative aspects of such implementation to consider include infringements among students that may be erroneously assumed to strengthen the need for harmony.

The concept of deliberative democracy is not without its criticisms, nor difficulty in realisation. Just as the antagonistic form may endanger people's chances of living together better, the deliberative may prove a hindrance, with the dialogic approach and harmonious character raising several apparent problems. Firstly, Mouffe (2005) argues that it disqualifies people from defining opponents, and may foster expectations that problems can always be solved harmoniously. Mouffe also contends that the concept neglects the fact that differences of opinion are necessary in society, and that incompatible interests will always be present. Secondly, the opinion of the majority, a foundational concept of deliberative democracy, is not necessarily always the wisest opinion. Because an unfortunate moralistic discourse is playing an increasingly large role in our society, Mouffe advocates a

replacement of the right and wrong dichotomy with a more political orientation of left versus right.

Although the emphasis on dialogue that follows from the deliberative approach and its depiction of people's opinions as important, this attitude according to Mouffe merely masks conflicts. Fairclough (2003) seems to agree with this criticism by emphasising that a dialogical trait risks appearing more democratic than it really is. His argument is supported by a typical, current case from an English TV debate on the future of monarchy. In this example, the broadcasters initially indicate that the viewers may vote by phone after having listened to, and considered, utterances. In actuality, it is only possible to vote during transmission and the time for consideration is limited.

3.3 "That is up to each person"

At this stage I will present a form ignored by Mouffe but identified in the empirical material (also see Norlund 2014), *the relativistic,* for reasons I address later. In doing so, I have started the expansion of the prevailing division.

This form has a character where common decisions or any notion that collective responsibility should outweigh individuals' desires is rejected. The exchanges below include such expressions as in the debate from the Daffodil School on whether or not to eat meat:

Extract 5. Classroom exchange.

Disa: Still, one should cut down on meat, er, eating meat …

Dagmar: But you *decide for yourself* so … (my italics)

Disa: I still think it is unnecessary to kill that many animals, after all they are living creatures

My italics in the exchanges mark the relativistic approach. Similarly, in the debate on freedom to choose driving speeds:

Extract 6. Classroom exchange.

Damian: Okey, we are supposed to talk about speed and you start

Dante: Yeah, one ought to be allowed to take one's own responsibility and *decide for oneself* how fast one can or, er, not to sacrifice oneself for, but (laughter) but sort of … (my italics)

Facebook as a phenomenon is treated likewise and the pupils discuss whether or not to have Facebook friends that they do not know.

Extract 7. Classroom exchange.

David: …if I, yes I have like hundred friends on Facebook and, yes, I do know them, I couldn't imagine being a friend with someone I don't know, I don't want that person to know what I'm up to

Daisy: But you don't have to accept that person

David: No, I don't but there are people who accept those they don't know, for example those who have a thousand friends

Desiree: But that is up to each person, if one wants to have one person on Facebook or if one wants to have one just to see what people are up to in their spare time (my italics)

Another example is from a debate on energy, focusing specifically here on nuclear sources, at the Marigold School. Whereas Molly is worried about a nuclear accident, Maria takes a more relativistic attitude:

Extract 8. Classroom exchange.

Molly: … and it is not only ourselves that will be hurt, the environment will also be affected, and we damage earth just because of such an unnecessary thing …

Maria: But I feel that we are living now so …

In her expressions Maria seems to distance herself from thinking about the future, and to prefer living in the present.

In the recorded material collected for this study there are examples of pupils taking an approach that is not consistent with an antagonistic, deliberative or agonistic (discussed below) form. These examples are of a kind that Mouffe pays less attention to; one could argue that they are based on a kind of relativism that is connected to these examples are connected to the deliberative. However, here I treat it as a distinct *relativistic* form, because it does not aim to promote 'collective will-formation', in marked contrast to the deliberative form recognised in educational research.

It can be noted that some pupils emphasise the importance of people's differences and personal preferences, hence the justifications for their opinions are based on an individual perspective, pointing toward a subjective relativism. Jerome and Algarra (in reference to Warnock, 2001) formulate their insights as follows:

> If students could understand and work with a concept of public morality rather than simply and simplistically trying to apply their own personal morality to social group or society-wide problems, they could be given an insight into how such issues are likely to be brought to resolution (502).

The individualist attitude is accompanied by language that includes phrases such as 'up to each person', and 'I feel', which are also indicative of an individualistic attitude. Accordingly, the participants do not treat each other as enemies or friends, but rather with an air of indifference.

In summary, the relativist oriented examples of expressing differences of opinion has a non-dramatic (and non-debate) character, which shows to affect both the language used and the relations between the participants who reject social and collective issues.

Table 4. Characteristics of antagonistic, deliberative and relativistic forms of debates

Type of debate	**View of conflicts**	**Relations between participants**	**Linguistic characteristics**
Antagonistic	Favouring conflicts, bipolarity	Enemies	Battlefield rhetoric Vocabulary of a trial
Deliberative	Favouring harmony, unipolarity	Friends	Low modality verbs Democratic terminology
Relativistic	Indifference	Individual desires are important	Pronouns in the singular Subjective language

3.3.1 Understanding and criticism of the relativistic form

The previously noted exchanges from the Daffodil School are excerpts from discussions (following instructions from the teacher) with a 'for or against' approach to the focal subject. In contrast, the pupils at the Marigold School received instructions from their teachers to represent *different* perspectives on energy-related issues, for instance economic or environmental. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the Marigold debate do not seem to be an effect of the didactical arrangements, which explicitly encouraged a multi-perspectively oriented debate.

In the excerpt when Maria suggests that the energy dilemma is not a serious issue, since 'we are living now', it does not necessarily mean that it is her conviction; parts of the energy debate at the Marigold School seem to have fictive elements. However, her statement shows what might be her understanding of stances that could be taken. I argue that rather than being an effect of the didactical arrangements, this may be an effect of arguments commonly made in public debates, where relativistic arguments seem to occur frequently (see Norlund 2014). Such relativistic tendencies seem to create a logical alliance with current and contemporary ideas, where 1990s rhetoric is recognised by the prominence of terms like 'individualisation' and 'freedom of choice', prompting expressions that favour individual freedoms over collective concerns. We might also find a complication in the didactic tradition that encourages pupils to 'think for themselves' (see Cossentino 2004; Norlund 2009).

Bordo (1993) is primarily occupied with postmodern tendencies, often seen as related to relativistic tendencies, and provides insights regarding possible problematic aspects. According to her analysis, excessive extraction of people's differences makes it difficult to advance criticism, and leads to life being portrayed as nothing but an entertaining game. This may make it difficult for debaters to tackle serious public issues and collective decision-making. By emphasising the individual and failing to address structural conflicts from the collective perspective, it simply becomes meaningless to discuss issues of common concern. I argue this most likely has a negative impact on prospects for political understanding and for improving social justice, simplifying or masking inevitable conflicts and interests among people.

Finally, one could argue that the relativistic form is related to Anthony Giddens' renewed definition of social democracy, i. e. the idea of *The Third Way*. Mouffe's (2005) criticism of this idea refers to its 'non-conflictual' character and its transformation of political issues into 'questions of 'lifestyle' (59).

3.4 The agonistic form of expressing differences of opinion

As already stated, Mouffe (2005) proposes another form of democracy (a fourth form of expressing differences in opinion in the framework presented here), *agonism*, based on multi-polarity (signifying a multitude of *group* interests, not *individual* interests as in the relativistic form). Her description is summarised in the following quotation:

> While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies. This means that, while in conflict,

> they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. We could say that the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism (20).

The quotation describes cases where conflicts are not denied (nor an us/them division), participants treat each other as legitimate opponents and topics dealt with are of common, political concern. At this point, the reader may wonder if the agonistic form of expressing differences of opinion should be regarded as similar to Durkin's suggestion (2008) of a Middle way. However, although there are undoubtedly some corresponding elements, I argue that there are also crucial differences since Durkin addresses academic proficiencies rather than societal issues.

Here, I will try to contribute with an example from my own data. For this I turn to the Tulip School and a debate that both supports and goes against an agonistic form, a matter of which I will get back to below.

The Tulip debate has a teacher that directs the whole class debate. The extract below follows the teacher-initiated topic on venues for Christmas speeches:

Extract 9. Classroom exchange.

> Teacher: [How would it] be if we had our Christmas speeches in the church once every two years, and in a mosque every other year?

After the class seems to fairly unanimously reject the teacher's suggestion, he revises his idea by proposing that perhaps the church could remain the venue for Christmas speeches, but the summer graduation ceremony could alternate between a mosque and the assembly hall. Two of the pupils express their negative reactions:

> Therese: Nearly everyone in Sweden is a Christian, but … here in this school there are a few … I do not think that such a fact should make us have to go to the mosque because only a few are Muslims

> Tanja: If they want to celebrate Christmas in the mosque they can go home and do so in their country

The teacher continues by asking questions relating to the same subject:

> Teacher: How would you like it if Swedish television [The Swedish public service broadcast] started broadcasting Jewish worship services, or Muslim services on Sunday? Would it matter to you, or does it make any difference at all to you?

> Therese: We should not have a lot of mosques here, it has nothing to do with our culture, or our religion, it is those countries that have mosques, those who should broadcast, we are not broadcasting from a lot of churches in their countries

As we can see, although the debate in the Tulip School is characterised by a completely different didactical approach it is not problem-free. It should be noted that, unsupportive of the agonistic form, there is an evident division between 'us' and 'them', and nationalistically and religiously oriented conflict appears. This proposes a kinship with an antagonistic form, which often deals with topics such as fundamentalism. Important to say, only the ethnically Swedish pupils take part in the debate whereas the others remain silent. In this way it does not fulfil Baxter's (2002) expectations that debates might support marginalised groups. It should also be noted that Therese's final comment possibly refers kinds of majority decisions, typical of deliberative forms.

Nevertheless, the arrangement has a possible agonistic orientation. The pupils have prepared by selecting an ideology with which they sympathise and as groundwork for their debate they have searched the Internet for political blogs to confirm, or maybe falsify, their possible sympathies. Thus, the arrangement has a pronounced political location. It does not, as in the Daffodil example, encourage a fictive approach; this teacher has implicitly told the pupils to participate in the debate by 'representing *themselves*' and '*not* to pretend to be someone else'. In other words, the political orientation is real, or at least as real it can get in a school context. Moreover, the Tulip teacher, in contrast to the Daffodil teacher, has a clear ambition to promote a multi-perspective rather than an adversarial tone. To sum up, the arrangement has *the potential* of facilitating an agonistic debate.

In an extension of Mouffe's themes Todd (2010) maintains that education might facilitate people's possibilities of living together in better ways. In studies of political debates in Sweden, Great Britain and France she notes that the current and controversial topic of Muslim dress in school has attracted attention. She imagines that Muslim women, in line with an agonistic approach, should be given the chance to express their own (heterogeneous) views of freedom and equality. In addition, they should be given the chance to participate in the struggle over how freedom and equality should be understood from the traditions that affect them, both political and religious. They should also have opportunities to define, themselves, whether wearing the burka or niqab is an obstacle to integration or whether (quite possibly), it provides a way for them to participate in a public sphere, from which they would otherwise be excluded. According to Todd, both politicians and educational actors should be more careful in telling Muslim women and girls what is morally correct. Todd's example suggests a change in the Tulip debate, where all pupils regardless of ethnicity and religion should be encouraged to take part.

The point is that Muslim women should not be treated in a 'we' and 'them' division (as in the antagonistic form). Since they are a heterogeneous group, neither consensus-oriented debates nor majority votes (as in the deliberative form) are supportive. And, finally, this is not an issue of private moralism (as in the relativistic form).

Table 5. Characteristics of antagonistic, deliberative, relativistic and agonistic forms of debates

Type of debate	**View of conflicts**	**Relations between participants**	**Linguistic characteristics**
Antagonistic	Favouring conflicts, bipolarity	Enemies	Battlefield rhetoric Vocabulary of a trial
Deliberative	Favouring harmony, unipolarity	Friends	Low modality verbs Democratic terminology
Relativistic	Favouring indifference	Individuals rather than collective	Pronouns in the singular Subjective language
Agonistic	Favouring multi-polarity	Worthy opponents	

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Throughout this article I have attempted to challenge the narrow prevailing conceptual division of the classroom debate and illustrated an alternative set of four representations. It is important to note that although classroom debates may have a multitude of purposes, I have only looked upon them through the lens of 'better ways of living together', without fictive elements.

Clearly, the characteristics assigned to each form could be contentious. For example, even some advocates of a deliberative approach may not agree that reaching a harmonious consensus is essential. Notably, Brice (2002) would probably hold that the deliberative perspective is comfortable also with uncertain outcomes. However, Mouffe applies the three category definitions consistently and they have been utilised as a lens for the purpose of this article. It is also important to note that none of the examples presented has been depicted as full illustrations of a category. However, together they expose phenomena worth considering from political and didactical perspectives.

As mentioned previously, teachers seem to have high goal expectations for debates. This article has possible important implications for teachers' work and classroom practice. A Mouffe-inspired lens has identified what popular didactic traditions (and policy texts) risk marginalising and adding the *relativistic* form to the typology helps to identify a (non-interactive) tradition previously not given much attention. Moreover, bringing an agonistic approach into the classroom would acknowledge the fact that discussions on values need not be neither rational nor a game. It would also acknowledge societal tensions and the circumstance that there are inevitably differing interests needed to take into consideration.

I argue that the common and historically anchored recognition of just two approaches (antagonistic and deliberative) to expressing differences of opinion in classroom debates is too limited and needs to be reconsidered by researchers, policymakers and teachers. This article offers new perspectives for such reconsideration and a theoretical approach for addressing oral classroom practices by extending the spectrum of recognised forms to four and identifying the characteristics of each form. Since the presentation takes into consideration a couple of new forms that previously seem to have been overlooked by educators as well as researchers, it hopefully offers a starting point for reconsideration of how to arrange for debates that meet the great hopes of the classroom debate as a pedagogic tool for democracy. Facilitating an orientation to agonistic forms demands a lot from a teacher and will not easily be accomplished. At this point an important first step would be to leave a naïve view on the potential of the classroom debate as well as a narrow view on possible arrangements.

Given its complexity, transferring Mouffe's discussion is risky, (for a full understanding of her work I refer to her own publications). However, I argue that this undertaking is both necessary and fruitful. For future research, it would be informative to learn more about how to encourage agonistically oriented debates in practice. In the interim, I also anticipate elaborations and applications of the conceptual set illustrated in this article.

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