

# **PEDAGOGY AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY: INSIGHTS FROM RECENT EXPERIMENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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*A growing body of research and data suggests the existence of a disconnection between citizens, politicians and representative politics in advanced industrial democracies. This has led to a literature on the emergence of post-democratic or post-representative politics that connects to a parallel seam of scholarship on the capacity of deliberative democratic innovations to ‘close the gap’. This latter body of work has delivered major insights in terms of democratic design in ways that traverse ‘politics as theory’ and ‘politics as practice’. And yet the main argument of this article is that this seam of scholarship has generally failed to emphasise or explore the nature of learning, or comprehend the existence of numerous pedagogical relationships that exist within the very fibre of deliberative processes. As such, the core contribution of this article focuses around the explication and application of a ‘pedagogical pyramid’ that applies a micro-political lens to deliberative processes. This theoretical contribution is empirically dissected and assessed with reference to a recent project in the United Kingdom that sought to test different citizen assembly designs in the context of plans for English regional devolution. The proposition being tested is that a better understanding of relational pedagogy within innovations is vital for democratic reconnection, not just to increase levels of knowledge and mutual understanding, but also to build the capacity, confidence and contribution of democratically active citizens.*

## **KEYWORDS**

Pedagogy; Micro-Politics; Democratic Innovations;

Citizen’s Assemblies; Deliberation; Learning Relationships

A key feature of mechanisms of democratic innovation is that they are designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process (Smith, 2009). Such approaches move beyond traditional forms of citizen participation to develop different forms of public engagement within formal institutions and with political decision-making. In this context, ‘different’ relates to deeper, more deliberative, reflective and frequently multi-dimensional modes of engagement. In the United Kingdom, the origins of deliberative approaches are often located in the nineteen nineties with the emergence of deliberative polls (Luskin, Fishkin & Jowell, 2002), which sought to close the gap between popular polling and well-informed public decision-making. The emergence of deliberative mini-publics

(Gronlund, Setala & Herne, 2010), saw a shift to focus deliberative processes around the principles of educating citizens, stimulating public debate and advising government decisions. The drivers behind the shift from traditional representation to more innovative modes of engagement included: a *democratic driver* creating new opportunities for public participation in decision-making processes thereby increasing the legitimacy of the final decision or output and, through this, theoretically closing the gap that appears to have emerged between the governors and the governed (Crick, 1962; Stoker, 2006; Tormey, 2015); an *efficiency or 'epistemic' driver* that seeks to draw upon the expert 'everyday' knowledge held by citizens and local communities about specific plans or issues (Landemore, 2013; Chwalisz, 2015); and a broader and less instrumental *'ethical' or public good driver* that views broad engagement in questions of public policy as an intrinsically positive element of a healthy democracy (Guttman and Thompson, 2004; Fishkin, 2009).

Taken together these have led to a burgeoning seam of scholarship around citizens' assemblies. Reviews of previous citizens' assemblies in Canada, the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland, have reinforced a learning phase to be an important component. However, past reports from citizens' assemblies have tended to focus on the 'who' and 'what', rather than the 'how', of learning and deliberation (Warren & Pearse, 2008; Fournier et al, 2011; Farrell, O'Malley & Suiter, 2013; Renwick, 2014). This has seen a call by some to advance the case of democratic innovation through exploring the role of power, interests and relationships in deliberative events. Anderson *et al* (2007) argue is the need for elaboration of how 'real politics' interacts with deliberation to produce a stronger theoretical understanding of deliberative processes

In response, this article argues that the real politics of deliberative processes must be explicitly considered through *the relationships of learning* (i.e. the pedagogical components) must be explicitly considered within the design, operation and analysis of assembly processes (an argument that dovetails with Barnes *et al*, 2004). As such this article seeks to make a distinctive contribution in relation to both the theory and practice of deliberative democracy.

It therefore contributes to the growing literature on mini-publics, specifically in this case citizens' assemblies, and is concerned with developing a rigorous understanding of *the micro-politics of learning* that occurs within them. To paraphrase the words of Roland Barnes, just creating the opportunity for individuals to meet and discuss politics and policy does not always ensure that learning will occur. A more theorised understanding of the pedagogical relationships and the micro-political inter-relationships that exist within (and underpin) assembly processes, this article argues, may help enhance the learning experience for participants and therefore the overall utility and value of the process itself. In order to make this argument this article is divided into five parts. The main aim of Part I is to locate the focus of this article within the broader existing research base. Put very simply, it suggests that the field of 'learner-centred pedagogy' provides valuable insights that can be carried across into the field of democratic innovation. More specifically it draws upon the scholarship of David Lusted (1986) to craft a 'pedagogical pyramid' that highlights a complex set of intra-assembly learning relationships. In order to test the potential of these insights, Part II provides a brief account of the 'Democracy Matters' assemblies initiative which provides an empirical case study – in this case the data and insights captured from an experiment with two citizens' assemblies in the UK that were focused upon plans for English regional devolution. Part III applies the 'pyramid' to tease out the different pedagogical relationships at work within this empirical case. Then, Part IV offers reflection on four micro-political tensions that were pertinent to these relationships, before the article concludes by highlighting potential implications for future citizens' assembly initiatives.

## **PART I. THEORY**

Analysis of the origin of democratic innovations has identified a range of theoretical perspectives (Smith, 2009). These include participatory democracy, with its emphasis on the educational and instrumental benefits of participation (Pateman, 1970, Baiocchi 2001, Wampler 2010, and Montambeault 2012), deliberative democracy, with a focus on the process by which decisions are made (Cohen 1989, Bohman, 1998, Elster 1998, Gutmann and Thompson 2009), and direct democracy, which advocates citizens having equal direct impact

on policies via referendum (Frey 1994, Saward, 1998, and Altman 2010). This paper focuses on the second and specifically on the learning phase within citizens' assemblies. Two bodies of theory have been influential across the range of perspectives mentioned and provide useful antecedents to understanding the pedagogical relationships within citizens' assemblies. The first examines the ideal conditions under which people come to learn, while the second articulates a fundamental shift away from the traditional focus of educating.

Inspired by Habermas' (1990) work on communicative action, advocates of democratic innovation sought to identify the ideal conditions for reasoned communication, will-formation and consensus. For some, the goal is to move beyond the simple aggregation of preferences toward those that are more reasoned and align with more complete theories of democracy (Bohman, 1998; Parkinson & Mainsbridge, 2012). A tangible outcome of this work has been the identification of deliberative qualities (Fishkin, 2009), systemic conditions (Dryzek, 2010) and foundations for equity of voice (Young, 2000). It has also led others from outside the community of deliberative scholars to identify the key ingredients (Saward, 2003) and democratic goods (Smith, 2009) for democratic innovations. However, while ideal communication conditions may ensure everyone can speak, question and contribute, the sharing of dialogue does not result inevitably in learning and knowledge construction (Englund, 2000; Barnes et al, 2004). Here we must be careful not to focus on inputs, processes and outputs alone lest we risk confusing memorisation of information and negotiation of consensus with education and learning. If one only identifies the pre-conditions and measures the quality of outcomes for democratic innovations, then the learning within is like an aeroplane's black box. Hence, we identify a need for empirical work that seeks a better balance between the procedural and pedagogical aspects as an important contribution to the existing literature.

The foundations of such a contribution can be found in a second body of influential work, that of 'learner-centred' pedagogy. Educational theory includes a long tradition that advocates student-centred, experiential and inquiry-based approaches to learning. American educationalist, John Dewey, is often cited as the forefather of such approaches. In his book *Child and Curriculum* (1902), Dewey argued that, in contrast to the inactive and abstract learning

processes of traditional education institutions, people learn best through interactive and experiential learning. In this approach, learners are producers and providers of knowledge, while educators need to construct democratic opportunities where collaborative learning can develop. Following Dewey, Jerome Bruner added that education should be more than the mere memorisation of content. In his book, the *Process of Education* (1960), he argued that Dewey's work reminds us that in a rapidly changing world, it is not enough to be told what to know: we need to be able to imagine, learn, apply and prepare for the future. Such interpretations of Dewey's work are a call for education to be about learning to participate in communities of democratic inquiry (see Englund, 2000). However, in practice there has been an emphasis on design and the procedural within democratic innovation, while what is often lacking is detail on the pedagogy of learning.

Our argument is not that past theoretical perspectives have completely overlooked the importance of learning; our argument is more subtle: the framing of theoretical perspectives has tended toward macro and meso levels of politics rather than explicating the myriad of micro-political relationships – the human fibres and emotional layers – that exist within a deliberative project. Macro approaches have emphasised the value of democratic innovation in terms of responding to the rise in disaffected democrats (Flinders et al, 2016), addressing anti-politics in western societies (Spada et al, 2016) or understanding how citizens' participation can be institutionalised at the national or global level (Owen & Smith, 2015; Dryzek, 2009). Meanwhile at the meso-level, citizens' assemblies have been examined as a template for national constitutional conventions (Renwick, 2014) and mechanisms to bring together deliberation and devolution agendas (Blunkett et al, 2016). In practice, this has meant is that democratic innovations have focussed on processes to protect sources of information from imbalance or domination within learning activities. Whereas the argument of this article is that there is a need to drill-down beneath this level and into the multiple pedagogical relationships that inevitably occur and constitute juries, assemblies or other mini-publics; or, put slightly differently, where previous scholars have sought to place clear lines around the learning phase, there is also a need to stop and colour in the detail.

These linkages matter, particularly in the context of citizens' assemblies. Indeed, from within critical education theory, Lusted (1986) argues that it is this failure to understand the theoretical aspects of pedagogy that undermines education as a foundation for democratic activity.

To insist on pedagogy as theory is to recognise a more transactional model, whereby knowledge is produced not just at the researcher's desk nor at the lectern, but in the consciousness; through the process of thought, discussion, writing, debate, exchange; in the social and internal, collective and isolated struggle for understanding; from engagement in the unfamiliar idea and the difficult formulation process at the limit of comprehension or energy; in the meeting of the deeply held with the casually dismissed; in the dramatic moment of realisation that a scarcely recognised concern, an unarticulated desire, the barely assimilated can come alive, make for a new sense of self, change commitments and activity. And these are transformations can take place across all agents in the education process, regardless of their title as academic, critic, teacher or learner (Lusted, 1986, 4).

Meanwhile, he defines pedagogy as an inherently relational process:

What pedagogy addresses is the processes of production and exchange in the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the interchange of the three agencies – the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce (Lusted, 1986, 3).

Clearly, this is a richer approach to understanding learning than facilitating ideal conditions for information transmission or focussing on procedures and aggregating outcomes. On the other hand, put more colourfully, the metaphor that we wish to invoke is one of replacing the pulpit (where reified knowledge is held static by a few and expressed in language that the catholic masses do not understand) with the maypole (where social knowledge is constructed and reconstructed by the ongoing interaction in mini-publics). What this relational pedagogy perspective highlights is that while learning may include a component of acquiring formal information or institutionalised knowledge, engaged and rigorous learning is dynamic because it is relative and applied. Hence, we contend that successful citizens' assemblies should, by the

nature of democratic learning required, tend toward 'weaving not preaching' and 'relating not teaching'.

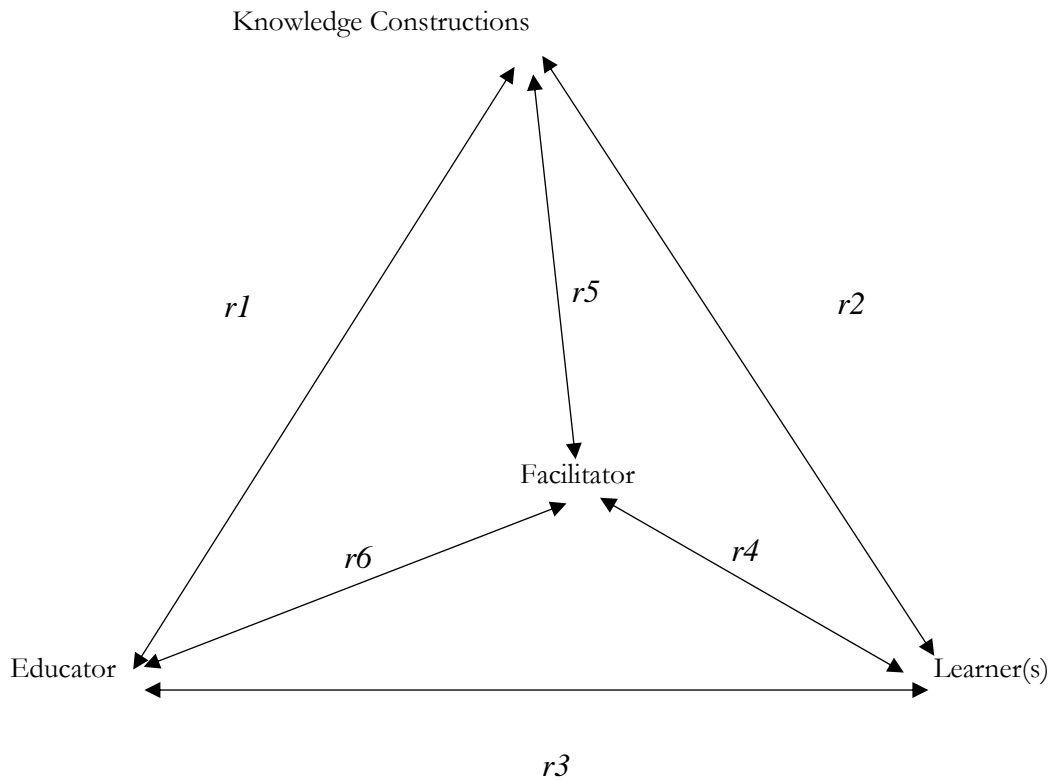
Lusted (1986) describes a relational pedagogy 'triangle' with teacher, learner and knowledge situated at its three points. The focus of this model is not on the points as objective entities, rather learning occurs through the dynamic inter-relations between the three, while an examination of each offers a richer understanding of the nature of learning. In the view of Lusted, any one or set of these dynamics is not enough, all three must be interacting dynamically for genuine democratic knowledge to be produced. In the past this model has been used to examine strategies to re-engage students experiencing poverty (Prosser, Reid & Lucas, 2010) or linking learning and behavioural disorders (Prosser, 2008). It has also been applied to connect young learners more strongly to their communities (Sellar, 2009), as well as incorporate 'place' in a sense of mutual responsibility with others and the non-human world (Somerville, 2011). Lusted's 'relational pedagogy' approach has also been influential in literacy education as part of expanding civic and political empowerment of citizens (Giroux, 1988). Recent examples of this include work in the arts around performing dance as a mode of youth civic participation (Hickey-Moody, 2014) or creating protest music as a means of adult public pedagogy (Haycock, 2015).

The significance of this relational pedagogy model for educators and democratic innovators is that it provides a different lens through which to understand the dynamics and micro-politics of exchange, learning and deliberation (Barnes *et al*, 2004). However, for our analysis of citizens' assemblies, we refine Lusted's model into a pedagogical 'pyramid' in recognition that a citizens' assembly is a very different space from a classroom. This change is needed in order to accommodate the vital role played within citizens' assemblies by an additional type of actor: the discussion facilitator. Facilitators, who support dialogue among small groups of assembly members, make a qualitatively different contribution to those of both educators and learners, in that as they aid the process they also make an addition to knowledge and learning. Hence, we propose four points (those of educator, facilitator, learner and knowledge constructions) to make a pyramid, while we maintain the same emphasis on the dynamic inter-relations between each of these points.





**Figure 1: The Relational Pedagogy Pyramid**



The core argument of this article is that scholars and practitioners of democratic innovations would benefit from an expanded focus on the theory of the learning phase of such endeavours. In order to underpin this argument, we propose an innovative ‘pedagogical pyramid’ to facilitate a greater level of intellectual interrogation of this phase than has generally been produced. The next two sections seek to test this line of contention. By situating this learning in the context of pedagogical relationships and micro-political tensions, we provide insights for those who would seek to understand the pragmatic challenges of conducting deliberative mini-publics. In doing so, our analysis not only complements existing work on democratic innovations, it also offers insight for broader debates about democratic reconnection.

## **PART II. EMPIRICS**

The ‘Democracy Matters’ project was a major ESRC-funded research programme that was designed to pilot and test the capacity of citizens’ assemblies to facilitate a role for the public in complex constitutional policy making. A comparative case design approach was utilised whereby one ‘pure’ assembly model was operationalized (Assembly North) and one ‘mixed’ assembly model brought politicians and members of the public together in the deliberation process (Assembly South). Table 1 (below) provides an outline of each assembly and the research team was supported by an International Advisory Panel consisting of the research directors from similar projects that had run in Ireland, Canada and the Netherlands.

**Table 1. ‘Democracy Matters’: Comparing Assembly Design and Composition**

	Assembly North	Assembly South
Target membership	45 members of the public	30 members of the public + 15 local politicians
Actual membership	32 members of the public	23 members of the public + 6 local politicians
Area from which members drawn	South Yorkshire (Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield council areas)	Solent region (Southampton, Test Valley, New Forest, Winchester, Eastleigh, Fareham, Gosport, Portsmouth, Havant, East Hampshire, and Isle of Wight)
Meeting location	Sheffield	Southampton
Meeting dates	17–18 October and 7–8 November 2015	24–25 October and 14–15 November 2015
Topic	Future of local/regional governance in the area	Future of local/regional governance in the area
Key assembly recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directly elected assembly for Yorkshire &amp; the Humber with substantial powers</li> <li>Measures to enhance public participation in local and regional decision-making</li> <li>Reject proposed Sheffield City Region devolution deal, but continue to work for a better deal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directly elected assembly for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight</li> <li>Priority given to powers over the integration of health and social care</li> <li>Members evenly split on support for current devolution proposals in the area</li> </ul>

This variation in design provided scope for comparison of the influence of politician participation on the working of the assemblies and on post-assembly political impact (Farrell, O’Malley & Suiter, 2013). The project was stimulated by the commitment by the UK Conservative Party to new ‘devolution deals’ and ‘metro mayors’ as a response to the territorial tensions that had emerged since devolution to Scotland and Wales in 1998, and to a lesser extent as a result of the September 2014 Scottish independence referendum. What had become known as ‘the English question’ was perceived to be in urgent need of an answer and the government viewed devolution to English combined authorities and mayors as the solution

(see Ayres *et al*, 2017). Ironically, however, this ‘answer’ had not been devised through a process of public consultation and a succession of ‘devo deals’ were announced by the government in a rather *ad hoc* and sporadic manner (see Table 2, below). A number of parliamentary, academic and think-tank reports highlighted the issue of public engagement as a critical issue and by the 2015 General Election all of the main political parties (apart from the Conservative Party) had pledged to create a Citizens Assembly on devolution if they won office. Drawing on international best practice, a competitive tender process was undertaken to commission an online polling company to recruit a representative cross-section of members of the public through a survey (for a detailed break-down and discussion of recruitment challenges see Crick Centre, 2016). The assembly process was spread over four or five weeks and included two full residential weekends.

**Table 2. Timeline on English Regional Devolution, May 2012-March 2016.**

Date	Event
May 2012	Referendums on elected mayors in ten major cities
July 2012	City Deals approved in the eight Core Cities
31 October 2012	Publication of the Heseltine Report (No Stone Unturned), including proposals for ‘metro mayors’
18 March 2013	Publication of Government response to Heseltine Report
June 2013	Announcement of Growth Deals to be managed by Local Enterprise Partnerships
September 2013 – July 2014	City deals approved with twenty second-tier cities
March 2014	LEPs submit Strategic Economic Plans to access Growth Deal funding
23 June 2014	George Osborne speech proposing conurbation mayors in context of ‘Northern Powerhouse’
7 July 2014	Agreement of Growth Deals with all LEPs
18 September 2014	Scottish independence referendum
22 October 2014	Publication of final report from RSA’s City Growth Commission
3 November 2014	Greater Manchester Agreement (1)
12 December 2014	Sheffield City Region Devolution Agreement (1)
27 February 2015	Greater Manchester health and social care agreement
18 March 2015	West Yorkshire Devolution Deal
28 May 2015	<i>Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill</i> published
8 July 2015	Greater Manchester devolution agreement (2)
21 July 2015	<i>Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill</i> passes through House of Lords
27 July 2015	Cornwall Devolution Deal published
4 September 2015	Deadline for ‘devolution bids’ for Spending Review 2015
5 October 2015	Sheffield City Region Devolution Agreement (2)
23 October 2015	North-East and Tees Valley devolution deals published
17 November 2015	West Midlands and Liverpool devolution deals published
28 January 2016	<i>Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill</i> receives Royal Assent
23 March 2016	New devolution deals announced in the Budget for East Anglia, Greater Lincolnshire and the West of England with further powers announced for Greater Manchester and Liverpool

The assemblies consisted of phases focused upon *learning*, *deliberation* and *decision-making*.

During the learning phase, assembly members learnt about the various options that might be considered, the criteria that might be used to evaluate them and how to go about evaluating them. Central to the learning phase were the roles of: the academic leadership team as providers of information; student volunteers as facilitators of small-group discussion; and, of course, the assembly members themselves. In the deliberation phase, the assemblies thought through all that they had heard, considered the values that they wanted to pursue and gradually worked towards a view that would best advance those values. This focus on opportunities for deliberation and extended learning is a fundamental component that delineates this approach from other democratic innovations, such as citizens' juries (Flinders et al, 2016). Meanwhile, the decision-making phase involved a series of votes based on key themes developed by the assemblies to present aggregated majority views.

The empirical data for this case study are drawn from materials produced by discussion groups, notes taken for groups by facilitators, first-hand observation notes, daily research team reflections and a subsequent collation of 'lessons learned' by research team leaders. Together, these sources provide insight into the learning that occurred within these assemblies, including the pedagogical relationships that were present, the knowledge that was provided and produced by assembly participants, as well as the micro-political tensions that ensued. The final reports, academic publications and other documents relating to these pilots can be accessed through the project website.<sup>1</sup>

### **PART III. APPLYING THE 'PEDAGOGICAL PYRAMID'**

The details of the two assembly pilots implemented by the 'Democracy Matters' project are documented elsewhere (Flinders et al, 2016). The positive outcomes of the two pilots in relation to quantitative measures of quality of deliberation have also been reported (Spada et al, 2016). This article does not retrace this ground, other than to state that the overall findings of the quantitative data in relation to learning were strikingly positive (see Table 4, below). With this in mind, this section describes key conditions and actions that underpinned learning

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://citizensassembly.co.uk/home-page/about/academic-papers/>

outcomes, paying particular attention to the nature of pedagogical relationships. In doing so, we suggest that while the focus on pre-conditions, event schedules and planned procedures within the democratic innovations literature are all important elements of successful citizens' assemblies, so too is applying a complementary 'pedagogical pyramid' (Figure 1, above) in order to tease-out sub-strands of the internal learning process. Our pedagogical approach to this unfolded

according to 'educator-knowledge', 'learners-knowledge', 'educators-learners', 'facilitator-learners', 'facilitator-knowledge' and 'educator-facilitator' relationships.

### *Educator-knowledge relationships (r1)*

A key feature of citizens' assemblies is that they go beyond collating popular views by introducing new information over which members can deliberate (Renwick, 2014). The nature of this information is vital as it contributes directly to the rigour of the learning that can result (Warren & Pearse, 2008; Farrell, O'Malley & Suiter, 2013). In the case of the two assembly pilots, a wide range of expertise was accessed. Members of the research team brought expertise in anti-politics, democratic innovation, constitutional change, territorial decentralisation and local governance. In addition, research support was secured from the House of Commons Library on the topics of devolution and the unfolding 'city deals' between government and local authorities, while a range of academics were commissioned to act as external advisors to verify the content and quality of materials presented to the assemblies. At the end of the first assembly, members were also asked to identify areas where additional information was required and a further process of research collection and verification was undertaken. All materials were prepared in the most accessible format possible and made available online. This included information on current local government arrangements (e.g., decision-making, funding, scope), options for governance (status quo, devolution deals, regional assemblies and hyperlocalism), and relevant maps (e.g., geographical boundaries, traditional districts, economic regions, and travel to work areas). It also included information on contemporary political conditions and policy proposals. It is important to note here the previous literature that discusses the relative role of providing information through materials versus participating in deliberation (Gronlund, Setala & Herne, 2010). This literature often considers the increase

in knowledge and mutual understanding to be indicators of learning. While this is arguably the case, what a 'pedagogical pyramid' provides is a theoretical understanding of the relationships that underpin *rigorous* learning through integration with experience or capacity to apply it to action.

The research team also provided materials on the values adopted by previous assemblies and a list of potential criteria for assessing devolution options (i.e., citizen participation, quality, efficiency, funding, accountability, wellbeing, democracy). Importantly, these assembly pilots also included the opportunity to cross-examine witnesses (Farrell, O'Malley & Suiter, 2013) - such as local leaders, local politicians, policy officers, academics and community advocates - who provided first-hand and expert knowledge of the devolution options and latest developments. Similar amounts of time were dedicated to external and internal inputs, while assembly sessions included group presentations, panels and 'Q+A' sessions. One innovation was that of 'speed dating' which saw witnesses provide a brief summary of their area of expertise in plenary and then circulate around the small-group tables, spending eight minutes at each, allowing members to question them in depth. It is important to note that the tendency within democratic innovations is to assume that all members have the same learning experience (i.e., same information input), however, this overlooks that whenever small groups are used it means that there will be differential learning from educators, between learners and across the mini-public (e.g., different perspectives at tables). Hence, we believe that innovations such as the speed dating approach to connect learners to educators' knowledge enhanced the potential learning in small groups because it both gave more control to members and scope for relationship development. That said, all of the above were supported by whole group presentations from the educators, reporting back from the small groups and collective whole-group discussions and learning.

#### *Learner(s)-knowledge relationships (r2)*

One of the fundamental principles of the approach taken by the assembly pilots was to be learner-centred. In terms of the pedagogical pyramid, engagement with the knowledge of

learners is vital to the future relevance of learning and its application outside of the assembly context. Importantly, this learner knowledge included the growing body of knowledge created and shared between learners throughout the assembly process. The knowledge provided by the members throughout these assemblies was included individual insights into local government, local politics, service delivery, past reform of governance, community needs, cultural diversity and practical challenges for devolution options. Some members had been involved either as local councillors or as political party members in the past and so brought this knowledge and experience. Others were simply local residents, service-consumers, and taxpayers. The different knowledge, experiences and perceptions they contributed were equally important in the learning that resulted. The above range of learner knowledge resulted in a rich, diverse and living vein of insight into the strengths and weaknesses of current local government, the hopes and fears around devolution, the priority areas for negotiation with central government, and the local practical challenges for reform. As with many mini-publics (Ryan & Smith, 2014), for some members this was a rare opportunity to engage deeply with complex political and policy issues, as well as create new political knowledge and civic skills with others. As one member observed:

I've always had an interest in politics, but not the opportunity to contribute. So while I found coming to grips with the large body of information both consuming and demanding, I'm not the sort of person who gives up. But when I came back for the second weekend I felt I knew enough to contribute and deliberate constructively (paraphrase of personal communication).

This leads to considerations of the potential body of learning that can occur within assemblies that is not necessarily reflected in the final votes and aggregated outcomes. If we look to the example of Assembly North, a significant component of the 'devolution deals' debate has been orientated around the north/south divide and the need to forge a northern powerhouse to address the economic gap between the two (Blunkett et al, 2016; Prosser and Flinders, 2016). Meanwhile, 'the continued emphasis on the North as the obvious recipient of regional devolution seems to have gradually triggered a process of self-discovery' (Giovannini, 2016, 4) and points to evidence of a growth in political activity around a 'new regionalism' with 'a particularly northern flavour' (ibid, 2). From this, one might have predicted that learners would draw heavily on their knowledge of northern identities, however, the influence of such identities were by no means dominant in learning activity. According to the topic of

conversation, varied and sometimes competing identities were mobilised in discussion. Further, learners shifted between contested and contradictory identities without an apparent sense of dissonance. However, what was most pertinent given the focus of the assemblies was the growth in learner identities as democratically active citizens (Stoker et al, 2010). This was confirmed by the exit survey, which identified an increase in perceptions of having the knowledge to make recommendations to government and a decrease in perceptions of capacity to influence political decisions. This was reinforced anecdotally through the online forums, with members reporting meetings with and/or lobbying their politicians after the assemblies. One year after the event we implemented a final digital survey and asked participants their final assessment of the experience.

It is usual for one-year post-event review surveys to receive a very low response rate (generally around 20 per cent) but in the case of this project the response rate was over 80 per cent which suggests a sense of lasting commitment, or at the very least a continued willingness to engage. Moreover, the data collected in this post-event review survey suggested that not only had participants recognised and valued the learning process they had experienced but that they were also able to situate and acknowledge the limitations of the process as an experimental pilot project. More specifically, respondents recognised the limits imposed by the fact that this was not a government-commissioned initiative and therefore the results and findings would not be formally fed back into the policy-making process. The following comments are representative of the thrust of the feedback.

I thought the whole idea was excellent and I would like to see it rolled out nationally for major political decisions.

I think it had a tremendous personal impact on all the participants as well as the academic organisers and recipients of the final reports, from the media to politicians. I also think that that it has probably had a lasting effect on the thinking of the participants with regards to their own evaluation of themselves and the public in general as political actors. As for the medium to long term, any effect on the political system would depend on some form of continuing attempts to engender real participation of the same nature. The exercise was a brilliant starting point but as with any attempt to change a political system there needs to be active forums in many places which maintain pressures on the system for such changes.

Some of the participants also reported that they self-organized local initiatives (meetings, campaigns, orchestrated letters to MPs, etc.) inspired by the energy of the assembly. This



demonstrates that the civic learning that emerged through these assemblies contributed to lasting political knowledge and civic engagement, but at the same time also shows the disappointment that some participants experienced when their recommendation did not generate the impact they were expecting. The following quote summarizes such feeling:

It has clarified how government works and my role in it. Unfortunately I feel more dissatisfied now as I want my voice to be heard even more, as I gain understanding of political issues and I know that it is ignored by those in power.

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed analysis of all the ‘learner-learner’ informal learning beyond that caught on the digital recorders. However, this dynamic was not lost on the research team and one of the assemblies included an ‘open space’ forum to try to capture some of this knowledge. This allowed the members to explore knowledge that they felt had not been brought to bear on learning. Members were asked in small groups which issues they would like to discuss and these were collated and split over two sessions. They were able to promote their ideas while the other members chose which discussion group they would like to join. Two rounds of small-table discussions were led by members who had suggested the issues. Notably, many of the topics that were discussed were contrary to government policy at the time (Flinders et al, 2016).<sup>2</sup> This again illustrates to researchers, policy officers and elected representatives that there is a rich resource of additional information that is available through citizens' assemblies.

What this awareness points to - and which was clearly borne out in the ‘Democracy Matters’ project in the UK – is the need to adopt a reflexive and reflective approach to assembly design, and one that is acutely sensitive at the micro-political level (discussed further below). Meanwhile, what the above examples point to is that awareness of the dynamics of pedagogical relationships can result in innovations that not only broaden knowledge about the conditions of governance, but can also contribute to building a democratically active community where the learners mutually reinforce and sustain their own capacity, confidence and contribution.

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<sup>2</sup> For a full list of topics, see Flinders et al (2016), p. 34.

### *Learner–educator relationships (r3)*

An emphasis on positive and equitable relationships between the research team and the assembly members was another fundamental principle that underpinned the pilots. Such relationships cannot be assumed to exist automatically as there were power dynamics around who shaped the agenda and the social status of academic educators to be considered. Within the pilots' broader strategy to build a learning community that enabled safe space for democratic exchange (Renwick, 2014), the team sought to reinforce principles of equity, mutual esteem and interaction (Flinders et al, 2016) through informal community building. The communication and learning modes therefore went well beyond traditional demarcations between 'gentlemanly conversation' or 'vigorous contestation' (for a discussion see Bächtiger and Gerber, 2014). This evolved in a range of forms such as sharing meals as a whole group, taking time away from proceedings to talk casually, sharing on a personal level and even celebrating birthdays and other personal events. However, as more than one research team member reflected, it was surprising how physically and mentally demanding it was for assembly participants to consistently engage in new relationships across two weekends.

The research team brought both formal and informal knowledge about how to build learner–educator relationships. This included noting the values of engagement from previous citizens' assemblies and practical experience working on democratic innovations in the past. They also drew on a range of professional experience as tutors, mentors and community educators. As might be expected, experience and confidence varied, but this was assisted by the academic team being given specific role descriptions, such as 'interested professor', 'floating charmer' and 'listening ear'. These roles aimed to reduce perceptions of authority or higher status amongst the academics, while encouraging avenues of personal connection with members. The development of these relationships was supported by 'ice-breaker' introductions, interactive presentations and simulation activities.

From the range of knowledge that was created through the educator–learner relationship, two aspects are noted here. Firstly, was the power of the educators *explicitly* recognising and valuing

the contribution of learners. For instance, during the opening weekend of Assembly North one of the educators commented to the full assembly how they had found the weekend incredibly draining and inspiring. Indeed, they suggested that ‘I think I have learnt more about politics in the last twenty-four hours than I have from many years service as a university professor!’ The impact of this statement on the full pedagogical pyramid within that specific context or, more specifically, on the educator-learner relationship (*r3*) is clearly incredibly hard to specify in a tangible or formal manner. And yet it is possible to argue (and substantiate through the number of occasions assembly members referred to the comment subsequently – both on-line and off-line) that the comment had a very clear and significant affect on the dynamics of the assembly and particularly on the self-belief of certain members that their opinions and viewpoints were not only recognised as valid but were also respected. A second noteworthy aspect was the repeated interaction between educators and learners around developing knowledge. What was vital here was that the educators sought out information that was requested by the learners (and did not just provide pre-scripted materials). For instance, when facilitating presentations from external experts to members, the assembly team sourced a diverse range of people and perspectives (some of which were at the direct request of members). The educators also emphasised the words and thoughts of learners as central to the progress of assemblies, up to and including the final votes. This was achieved by both weaving member views into verbal presentations and by recording member-produced knowledge and displaying it in the room. The point being made here, which is important for those immersed in the design and development of assembly processes, is that it was precisely because there was a conscious and strategic resetting of the educator–learner relationship that high levels of engagement, learning and deliberation could occur.

*Learner–facilitator (r4) / facilitator–knowledge relationships (r5)*

A key feature of the assembly pilots was the involvement of postgraduate students (many at doctoral level) as small-group facilitators. The role of facilitators is recognised within the existing research base as being vital to the mediation of relationships and particularly to the ‘flattening’ of politics in the sense of cultivating a commitment to the value of different forms

of knowledge or experience (see Esterling, Lee & Fung, 2016; Spada & Vreeland, 2016). While some of these facilitators were students of politics, they were not experts in politics, policy or devolution; but what is important from a micro-political and pedagogical perspective is how crucial the facilitators were to the success of the project and how their role evolved, notably in relation to Assembly North. Crucially, these facilitators shared a desire to serve their groups, they exhibited a clear commitment to ‘flatten’ politics, which made a positive impression on the members and in many ways provided the glue for solidarity within the assemblies and a foundation for deliberation. At various times in both assemblies, it was necessary to respond to the perennial tension between an individual’s right to express their personal views and the offence that some views may cause to others within the community. Each of these challenges were addressed primarily through the facilitator–learner relationship where the student facilitators adopted an inclusive style (see Davies *et al*, 2006) to support equitable contributions, reinforce positive interactions and maintain a focus on the learning of their group.

Within the parameters of the schedule, student facilitators were given freedom to try creative ideas and activities to support the learning needs of their group, and while confidence and experience to do this varied, some valuable pedagogical strategies were employed. In one case, the facilitator used cartoons and visual representations to translate abstract concepts and link together group learning, while in another, the facilitator encouraged members to apply 'post it' notes on a flip chart 'thermometer' to help identify, prioritise and negotiate ideas. The success of the student facilitators in developing a protected space for democratic exchange and building a learning community was one of the biggest successes of the pilots, which was indicated by the overwhelmingly positive assessments of their role offered by members through survey and written feedback. It also aligns with the literature that identifies the importance of quality facilitation for the emotional dynamics and success of ‘mini-publics’ (see, for example, Farrar *et al*, 2010; Humphreys *et al*, 2006; Moore, 2012; Thompson and Hoggett, 2001). Meanwhile, what was also evident at each of the end-of-day debriefs (which included the educators and that facilitators) was that these volunteer facilitators, while totally exhausted - physically and mentally - were keen to come back the next day and do it all again.

Across the two pilot assemblies, there were twelve small groups of six to eight members selected according to diversity, which makes generalisations across small groups difficult. However, two points can be made based on the feedback from facilitators and learners. First, while it is important to establish shared positions on the underlying values of deliberation and the main criteria for assessing policy options early in assemblies, these can tend toward abstract discussions that can disengage members. In one assembly, members were engaged in detailed critique and found it difficult to reach consensus, while in the other, the members wanted to take them as given and move on. In both cases, it was vital that the facilitators understood the values and criteria thoroughly so they could model, reinforce and remind the members of them consistently. This worked well, addressed any gaps in member understanding, and contributed to the success of small-group learning. Second, it was important that the small-group facilitators were not experts in the topic under consideration by the assemblies. It was thought by the team that not having knowledge expertise would reduce the capacity for facilitators to impose their views on discussions, learning and outcomes, while educators could be called in support when groups required expert information. From this it might be assumed that small-group facilitators were functionaries of the educators, but a pedagogical perspective suggests that this was not the case as they took on roles of independent advocates and contributors to their small-groups. Hence, what emerged was another value, namely that the student facilitators were seen as co-learners with the members, which we suggest changed the nature of the pedagogical relationship and contributed to a stronger culture of collaborative learning in the assemblies. Thus, a key point to note from analysing the relationship between learners and facilitators was that the youth and relative inexperience of the latter, far from being a liability, became a feature of successful learning and deliberation across the two assembly pilots.

#### *Educator–facilitator relationships (r6)*

As might be imagined from above, the relationship between the educators and the student facilitators was vital. This relationship involved both formal training and informal mentorship. The student facilitation team was led by a main facilitator who was highly experienced in

community education and provided the small-group facilitators with constant support throughout the assemblies. The research team also provided training for the student volunteers in areas such as facilitating discussions and conflict resolution. In addition, at the end of each day, the student facilitators were encouraged to attend and contribute to the formal debrief where all research team members were present. Such training and recognition, along with the opportunity to work in the field with leading researchers in political science, were important foundations to the facilitator–educator relationship.

The student facilitators also constantly provided feedback on the ‘educator-learner’ relationship and highlighted potential challenges for learning and deliberation to the research team. For instance, in one assembly, the facilitators bore the brunt of member perceptions of a lack of representative recruitment and through their forewarning a specific ‘on the spot’ briefing was prepared so that, when the discontent bubbled to the surface, the team was ready to respond in support. In the other assembly, an international student facilitator was faced with a small group of members with anti-immigration views and a dominating member who tried to control a small group. But the team was again forewarned, allowing them to develop a strategy to integrate a more experienced facilitator to manage this challenge to learning and deliberation. As can be seen from these examples, in many ways, the facilitators were the eyes and ears of the educators. The knowledge that was produced by the facilitator–educator relationship, while more pragmatic in nature, was no less valuable to the successful running and deliberation of the assemblies than that produced by the other pedagogical relationships.

#### **IV. REFLECTION**

The previous section demonstrated the importance of understanding the multiplicity of pedagogical exchanges and learning relationships that take place *within* citizens’ assemblies to develop a better sense of the learning that occurs (or that may not occur). Importantly, we also traced design features of these assemblies that moved toward collective problem solving and deliberative learning. These features included:

- A common sense of significance of the assemblies and desire to participate (fostered through recruitment processes);
- Shared values around participation (formed through dedicated sessions at the start of assemblies to build learning community values);
- A focus on genuine relationships (facilitated through planned social and collective activities);
- Strong engagement of all learners (maintained through creative and inclusive group and small group activities);
- Connection to the collective (assisted through clear links to the local context and regional identities);
- Cumulating collective learning within, between and across assemblies (underpinned through group feedback, small group learning requests and social media).

However, what we also learned was because learning exchanges in groups can be deeply personal they may also result in discord, strain or emotional demands (for a discussion see Thompson and Hoggett, 2001), which here we refer to as micro-political tensions. Such tensions emerge from power relations between individuals and groups that are expressed through competing priorities, each of which may be equally valid, but for which there is no easy resolution. This is arguably exactly why no scholar or theorist has suggested that assemblies, in particular, or deliberative democracy, in general, provide a simple panacea to the contemporary challenges of democratic governance. And yet the central argument of this article is that *micro-politics matters* and the pedagogical pyramid (Figure 1, above) provides an original lens, framework or at the very least heuristic through which to begin teasing-apart and therefore understanding (and potentially managing) some of these tensions. Drilling-down into this argument and drawing further upon the research and data emerging from the ‘Democracy Matters’ project in the UK it is possible to identify four micro-political tensions - (1) *Abstract versus Applied Knowledge*; (2) *Focused versus Flexible Scheduling*; (3) *Interactive versus Proactive Leadership*; and (4) *Experienced versus Inexperienced Facilitators* - that emerged and existed within the pedagogical relationships inside the assembly pilots (Table 3, below).

**Table 3: Key challenges and micro-political tensions**

<b>TENSION</b>	<b>CHALLENGES</b>	<b>RESOLUTION</b>
1. Abstract vs applied content	<p>a. Providing detailed but accessible learning material to support rigorous learning and deliberation (educator-knowledge)</p> <p>b. Deferring to external expertise to explain complex content (learner-learner; learner-educator; learner-facilitator)</p>	<p>i. framed assemblies around the existing literature</p> <p>ii. created assembly steering groups</p> <p>iii. rearranged groups to limit MP or individual domination</p> <p>iv. introduced highly interactive sessions to lift participant involvement</p>
2. Focussed vs flexible scheduling	<p>a. Applying time frames for activity but allowing freedom of learning to develop at a natural pace (educator-learner; facilitator-learner)</p> <p>b. Connecting with external public legitimacy but maintaining mini public integrity (knowledge-learner)</p>	<p>i. active listening to learners throughout assemblies</p> <p>ii. maintained sensitivity to the physical and emotional demands of intense learning</p> <p>iii. provided explicit explanation and discussion of the external public legitimacy demands</p>
3. Interactive vs proactive leadership	<p>a. Maintaining a balance between leadership by the assembly chair and the assembly members (educator-learner; learner-facilitator)</p> <p>b. Balancing nurturing of people with challenging of ideas around learning (educator-learner)</p> <p>c. Allowing for diversity in learning approaches but ensuring a unified deliberative experience (educator-learner)</p>	<p>i. drew extensively on the role of whole and small group facilitators</p> <p>ii. explicit reflection on the nature of challenge and support in learning</p> <p>iii. catered leadership balance to the individual dynamic of each assembly</p>
4. Relative inexperience of student facilitators	<p>a. Ensuring that facilitators had enough knowledge to guide discussion (educator-facilitator)</p> <p>b. Supporting young facilitators in groups with strong personalities (facilitator-learner)</p>	<p>i. utilised lack of expertise of facilitators to ‘flatten’ power structures in assembly</p> <p>ii. provided specific training on facilitation and content</p> <p>iii. supported facilitators as advocates for small group needs and views</p>

*1. Abstract versus applied content*

The pilot citizens’ assemblies exhibited a tension in relation to content and particularly in terms of providing detailed but accessible materials. On one side, it was argued that for the outcomes of deliberation to be rigorous, members needed to appreciate the complexities and competing priorities, while on the other, it was recognised that, if the information were too dense or complex, it was unlikely to be incorporated into their learning. Assembly members expressed



difficulty in coming to grips with a large and new body of knowledge, while advice from local policy officers suggested that members had to experience the complexity of decisions faced by local leaders for outcomes to have political legitimacy. Meanwhile, feedback from the International Advisory Board warned that choices made around the selection or translation of content could also set limits on the potential learning for assembly members. These tensions were demonstrated in practical terms during the proofing stage of written materials, when efforts to run the text through the Hemingway accessibility filter demonstrated the significant amount of rewriting that would be required, which was not possible in full in the available time. At the same time, project partners from the House of Commons library expressed concerns that several of the papers did not capture the fluid, diverse, complex, incomplete and speculative nature of the various ‘devolution deal’ proposals.

The implications of this for the learning phase were two-fold. First, the structure of the two assemblies was set around categories that were pre-determined by the academics and were drawn from the academic literature and the recommendations of the International Advisory Board. This represented a decision by the research team to maintain some form of control over the project through the imposition of a clear and explicit framework. Put slightly differently, starting with a ‘clean slate’ or ‘blank page’ risked either asking too much of members or creating confusion and possibly undermining the project’s capacity for valid data collection. There was nothing inherently ‘wrong’ with this decision – and was unavoidable given the limited time available to evolve member approaches – but it inevitably shaped the potential and subsequent trajectory of learning. Here we note the literature that considers the importance of being open to members framing the directions of assemblies, while also maintaining links to policy relevance (Pateman, 1970; Fung, 2006; Smith, 2009; Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012). That said, the team recognised its role in framing discussion and applied strategies to open up the procedure and content of the assemblies to the knowledge production needs of the members. Formally, a steering group of members met daily and provided feedback to the academic director throughout the assemblies, while opportunities for member reflection and feedback were built into the assembly schedule of activities. Informally, the research team also drew on the many conversations with members that resulted from the learner-centred engagements strategy and specific roles discussed earlier, which were

fed back to the team and resulted in changes to the content and schedule. The success of these strategies was evident in written feedback from the members that they felt that they were supported to work through content and learn in their own ways, while the exit surveys showed that members felt informed and equipped to participate effectively (see Table 4).

**Table 4: Participants' evaluation of their understanding and learning**

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know
I understood almost everything that other group members said during our discussion	-	4%	4%	44%	48%	-
I learned a lot	-		2%	33%	65%	-
I had enough information to participate effectively	2%	2%	2%	42%	52%	-
This process has helped me clarify my views about devolution	-	2%	8%	42%	48%	-

Source: Final Exit Survey. See <http://citizensassembly.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Democracy-Matters-2015-Citizens-Assemblies-Report.pdf>

Second, in the assembly that included local politicians, there was a tendency (at least initially) for groups to defer to the politicians' greater expertise to explain the complexity around devolution proposals. Whether this was practical (and in service to the learning of the group) or an example of domination within the group (and unwarranted) is uncertain. However, it points to the potential value of assemblies in identifying member perspectives that are qualitatively different from that of politicians and policy officers (see Spada et al, 2016). On the second weekend, and with better knowledge of the tendencies of specific members, the further step of reconfiguring groups to minimise potential clusters of domination was carried out. Both of these strategies were successful and the survey results saw a drop in member perceptions of domination by individuals (the learners) over the course of the assemblies (see Flinders et al, 2016). In the other assembly, which contained only non-politicians, there appeared to be more calls on the academic director to provide explanation in whole group sessions. This raised different issues around another source of domination (the educators). The response of the team to these concerns was to make changes to the schedule to inject highly energetic interactive presentations and simulation activities that reinforced equal contribution by members. This shifted the focus back to members driving learning and contributed to the capacity of the participants to deal with the real political tensions of the deliberative process (Andersen & Hansen, 2007).

The point from these examples is that, for citizens' assemblies that are addressing complex topics (such as governance reform), there is invariably a tension between providing abstract/educator knowledge and applied/learner knowledge for which there is no simple answer. This needs to be borne in mind when undertaking citizens' assemblies, while it is also important to be cognisant of the demands placed on educators or facilitators during the assembly learning process. Due partly to time constraints and partly to the fact that the research team learnt as it went, at certain points across the two assemblies, different individuals carried significant physical, intellectual and emotional demands. This resulted in exhaustion amongst the team as the events neared their conclusion and required others in the team to step in to support the learning of the members. This reminds us that the key differential within democratic innovations (namely that they are deeper, deliberative, developmental and reflective) will make demands on *all* participants and this must not be forgotten within the design, operation and analysis of assemblies.

## *2. Focussed versus flexible scheduling*

The choice to prepare and conduct the citizens' assembly pilots over two weekends over the course of less than three months created a significant tension between efficiency and flexibility. This decision was made so that the outcomes of the assemblies could be fed into the considerations of parliament and local government around a rapidly unfolding 'devolution deal' agenda (Blunkett et al, 2016) described earlier in this paper. However, this decision created a constant tension between supporting learning and delivering output demands. Some research team members advocated (slower) creative, interactive and deliberative approaches, while others pointed out that (quicker) traditional 'pulpit' pedagogies were necessary. This tension was experienced in perceptions of less freedom to pause or diverge from the timeline to explore new ideas. That said, the academic directors showed flexibility when requested by members, such as by reordering the schedule or changing the process of voting. Member exit surveys indicated that, despite these tensions, the participants felt well enough informed to

come to decisions (see Table 1). Again, this is a case where there is no perfect resolution, just a constant challenge to strike a balance.

Such adaptations by the team inevitably shaped the nature and potential of learning. For instance, the importance of public legitimacy and political linkages (Renwick, 2014) had been identified by the team and within the assembly design there was an impact plan that aimed to maximise the effective dissemination of results to political and public audiences through the media. Further, to increase the chances of media success, the assemblies needed to develop a few statements of consensus that could be expressed clearly and simply in press reports. The plan was for the assemblies to complete a number of votes on the last afternoon to inform this part of the design. However, within the project design was also an emphasis on deliberation, which seeks not to close down the range of views and options under consideration. These two design features stood in clear tension, particularly after only having two weekends to learn and deliberate on such a complex and potentially divisive topic. Further, this tension resulted in some conflict. In one assembly, it resulted in tensions between the learners and the educators about how the outcomes of the assembly would be represented publicly. This tested the learning culture near the end of the assembly and threatened disintegration into rancour. In this case, one of the research team members provided a presentation on the current state of devolution deals, the political and media interest and explained clearly the tension between the knowledge demands of the media and deliberation. While voicing discontent about the media and how things should be different, the members acknowledged these points and the focus shifted to how they could actively get the ‘real’ message out about their learning after the assemblies.

Meanwhile, in the other assembly, disagreement amongst the project team over the media reporting of vote outcomes sapped the energy of the chair and resulted in a difficult and flat penultimate session with members. Again, a member of the research team, through an energetic presentation and humorous interchange helped guide the assembly back toward a more positive space for democratic exchange. What should be noted from the above tensions is that they required significant effort from educators, facilitators and learners alike. The point being made here is the pursuit of deeper democratic exchange through different pedagogical

relationships should be cognisant of the deep demands that may be made of different participants.

### *3. Interactive versus proactive leadership*

Leadership is a perennial challenge for democratic innovations, particularly in relation small group management and issues of domination (Sanders, 1997; Young, 2000; Shapiro, 2003; Smith, 2009; Vargas et al, 2016), This was borne out again in the case of the citizens' assemblies. As has been made clear, the citizens' assembly project chose to build a learning community that emphasised interactive learning and enabled a safe space for democratic exchange. However, when working with diverse groups, a challenge is striking balance between pushing and leaving, provoking and serving, passion and impartiality (Thompson and Hoggett, 2001). What is important to recognise is that these micro-political tensions have pedagogical implications. Too much proactive leadership can result in members disengaging from learning, feeling imposed upon, or becoming sceptical of claims of equality between educators and learners. Alternatively, too much emphasis on interaction or consultation can result in a lack of scaffolding for learning, frustration at a lot of talking but little learning, or perceptions of assembly activities being a waste of time. While both assemblies appeared to strike a sound balance between these competing demands, it did not mean that this tension was any less of a challenge. One area of tension was the contribution of the main facilitator, where in one assembly this role was offering direction to members, in the other it was a less prominent support role for student facilitators. This had implications for how the learning unfolded, with the 'facilitator as leader' assembly tending more toward learning through whole-group information transmission, while the other tended toward small-group facilitation of discussion. While both responses were appropriate, they do point to a potential tension between an important feature of learning (i.e., exposure to new information from educators and experts) and deliberative design (i.e., developing the views of members).

Another example of the tension between learning approaches and deliberative demands was evident in one of the assemblies through a provocative approach from the chair. This brought

an angry response from members and group facilitators. In their view, the chair clashed with the community approach of the assemblies and undermined both learners and learning. However, in the view of the chair, it was part of his role to engage the audience, provoke critical thinking and not let the assembly become too disconnected from reality. In some sense, both were right, with one body of literature reinforcing the importance of safe spaces (notably Boostrom, 1998; Arao & Clemens, 2013) and conditions for deliberation (on this see Dryzek, 2010; Mansbridge et al, 2006), while another stresses that learning only occurs in response to uncertainty, emotional demand, confrontation or discomfort (see, for example, Boler, 1999; Berlak, 2004; Redmond, 2010). Further, if we accept the premise that assembly member expertise is of equal value to that provided by the educators, then it follows that this can be put to similar rigorous critique. In practice, these conflicting views presented an unexpected challenge, which saw one of the team send a message telling the group facilitators to stop engaging in direct advocacy with the chair as it was seen to be shutting out the members. However, this proactive response to the problem risked alienating the student facilitators, who felt they were defending their groups from attack. Another team response was quickly enacted when team leaders met with the facilitators to reassure them that this was not a shift to authoritarian-assembly-leadership and to re-establish the positive tone. This second strategy worked well and what followed was an interactive session where the student facilitators had the confidence and sense of empowerment to model the values and importance of participant learning in small-group discussion. Importantly, these discussions continued into the feedback session for staff at the end of the day, while the chair also undertook reflection. The next day he started proceedings by revisiting the incident and opening with an apology, but at the same time defending the importance of critical thinking and realism, which provided a perfect segue for a day that involved learning with expert witnesses who expressed diverse views in a more confrontational discussion format.

Another tension that was experienced was the need for *a diversity of learning approaches* amongst assembly members and the need for *unified deliberative experience* across the assembly. In one of the assemblies, the tone that emerged was more vibrant and assertive, while in the other, it was relatively more relaxed and compliant. Further, the different educators, facilitators and learners within each of the two assemblies resulted in different relational dynamics, which

highlights both that no two assemblies are ever the same and that the pedagogical pyramid needs to be a flexible frame through which to understand different learning demands and power relations. This flows into a brief focus on our fourth and final tension.

#### 4. *Relative (in)experience of student facilitators*

The central argument of this article is that theorists and practitioners of deliberative democracy should pay greater attention to the micropolitical components of learner-centred pedagogy. Hence, our extension of the pedagogical ‘triangle’ into a ‘pyramid’ achieved – as Figure 1 (above) illustrates – gives us the ability to place the role of facilitator very much at the heart of understanding learning relationships. It is hard to overstate the importance of skilled and committed facilitators within a deliberative process. The centrality of these participants has been underlined in a range of studies (see, for example, Escobar, 2011; Moore, 2012; Polletta and Chen, 2013) and Kathryn Quick and Jodi Sandfort (2017, p.177) are correct to note that ‘One of the manifestations of the professionalization of public participation is the growing demand for people to have the facilitation skills to convene participatory processes’. And yet few studies have examined the micro-politics of facilitation, let alone the specific role played by facilitators within pedagogical relationships (i.e. *r4* and *r5*, Figure 1, above).

The responsive and reflexive role of the facilitators in the ‘Democracy Matters’ has already been discussed in the previous section and the aim here is not to repeat those points but simply – and in line with the other elements of this section – to highlight the existence of an interesting deliberative dimension that has generally not been discussed or raised in the existing research base. This is a critical point. Serving as a facilitator is itself a learning relationship, in terms of both the generic skills of facilitation and the specialist focus of the specific project. Depending on the resource envelope of the project the organisers might recruit a cadre of highly-trained and highly-paid professional facilitators or have little option to recruit (and train) a team of volunteer facilitators. These options form the two poles of what might be termed the ‘experience/inexperienced’ or ‘amateur/professional’ axis.

The interesting insight *vis-à-vis* this dimension to emerge out of the ‘Democracy Matters’ project revolves around the manner in which the facilitators were unpaid students from the local university who, although operating in a highly supportive context, had been given fairly limited training. It could well have been thought that ‘experienced’ and ‘professional’ facilitators would have done a ‘better job’ in terms of ensuring the successful delivery of the assemblies but with the benefit of hindsight it is possible to question that assumption. The fact that the facilitators were not only inexperienced but critically were also generally open about their lack of experience arguably played a crucial role in the ‘flattening’ of politics that has already been discussed. Although this is clearly a topic that deserves further detailed analysis, it could be suggested that the risk of recruiting professional or experienced facilitators is that they may come to an event with a set of implicit (possibly explicit) assumptions concerning how to ‘do politics’ within a deliberative setting. This may clash or grate with the learning needs or expectations of assembly members in ways that are contrary to the overall success or value of the project. This returns us to the key argument in this article, namely that a consideration of each pedagogical relationship (and the micro-political tensions within it) must be at the heart of the design, operation and analysis of citizens’ assemblies.

## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In response to a growing democratic disconnect in western societies a range of innovations have been proposed and tested in an attempt to close the gap between the governors and the governed that seems to have grown to disturbing levels (see Foa and Mounk, 2017). However, creating the opportunity for citizens to meet and discuss politics and policy issues does not automatically mean that learning will occur: it has to be supported by an awareness of the pedagogical relationships that underpin engaged and rigorous learning. Much of the current literature around deliberation and democracy emphasises establishing pre-conditions and procedures, ensuring balance and neutrality in learning activities, then measuring the outputs and quality of deliberations. We contend that while these are essential considerations, a sole focus on them can result in a relative lack of clarity on the contribution of pedagogical



relationships and risks a neglect of micro-political challenges and tensions that place deeper demands on deliberation (Andersen & Hansen, 2007). In this article, we have sought to enhance the existing literature on the ‘real politics’ (Grolund, Setala & Herne, 2010) of deliberation events through the application of a ‘pedagogical pyramid’ to understand the different types of learning that emerged as part of the first citizens’ assemblies on English devolution. In doing so, we have emphasised both the relational aspects of learner-centred pedagogy and four micro-political tensions for democratic learning that emerged. Such insights are important, not just to improve support for more rigorous learning and deliberation in future assemblies, but also because if new forms of democratic innovation and reconnection are to develop, then one way forward is to integrate theoretical insights that help shift from the conventional constraints within which they currently operate.

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