Citizens Make Sense
in
Deliberative Activity

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The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the help and encouragement of many people who believed in me and my commitment.

In June, 2006 while investigating small group dynamics in a Master’s degree study about theories of learning, I had the gumption to send an email cold to an American communications professor to gain his recommendation about a textbook he was using. John Gastil responded immediately and enthusiastically, then pointed me to *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook* that he had recently co-edited and suggested that I introduce myself to one of the volume’s contributing authors, Lyn Carson, who was in another faculty at my university. That happenstance changed my life. John would later join the Australian Citizens’ Parliament (ACP) project at the centre of this thesis and guide much of the ensuing research and publication effort. I thank John for his encouragement and guidance about post-graduate and post-doctoral research.

Immediately after our introduction, “Carson” invited me to work as her research assistant and enter the periphery of a community of practice and academic circle devoted to public deliberation. In 2007, with others whom I mention below, she won an Australian Research Council Linkage grant to design and convene the ACP. The grant included funding provision for a Ph.D. candidate position, that was awarded to me. I cannot express sufficiently the extent of my indebtedness to Carson for her faith in me and for opening to me the world of dialogue and deliberation.

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Activity Theory was first introduced to me during my Master’s degree study, but it was with serendipity late in this project that I found one of its leading contemporary thinkers living only a tram ride away in Melbourne. After meeting Andy Blunden, I gained the crucial keys to adapting Activity Theory to the analysis and practice of public deliberation. I thank Andy profusely for a close reading of an earlier version of this thesis and for gently slapping me with a fish when I deserved it.

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This thesis is dedicated to my two daughters Allison and Gillian, who are aged 8 and 10 years as I write this. I hope you grow up into a world where deliberative activity is normal and expected. I hope you come to know that your father tried to nudge the movement forward with the brightness of your future as my central motivation. I love you both.

Ron Lubensky, December, 2012.
Statement of Authentication

This thesis is submitted to the University of Western Sydney in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.

Signature: ........................................ Date: ........................................ 19 Sept 2013
Published Articles Related to this Thesis

During the period of the inquiry, the author contributed to several publications that relate to this thesis.

Peer reviewed


Other


# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements...............................................................................................................i  
Statement of Authentication..................................................................................................iii  
Published Articles Related to this Thesis............................................................................iv  
Table of Contents..................................................................................................................v  
Table of Images....................................................................................................................vi  
Abstract...............................................................................................................................vii  

1. Introduction.......................................................................................................................1  
   Overview..............................................................................................................................1  
   About this Thesis...............................................................................................................3  
   Introduction to Public Deliberation...................................................................................5  
   Motivations for this Inquiry...............................................................................................7  
   The Call to Inquiry..............................................................................................................13  
   Deliberation and Learning...............................................................................................16  
   Convening an Australian Citizens’ Parliament...............................................................18  
   Capturing the Deliberative Process for Study..................................................................27  

2. Constructing Sense of Public Deliberation.................................................................29  
   Introduction......................................................................................................................29  
   Narrative Methods............................................................................................................31  
   Approaching Social Constructionism...............................................................................36  
   Review of Social Constructionist Research.......................................................................39  
   Axes of Social Construction.............................................................................................42  
   In Praise of a Storied Approach.......................................................................................49  
   The Narrative Arc of Deliberative Activity.......................................................................52  
   The Plots of Other Deliberative Processes.......................................................................60  

3. Deliberation as Cultural-Historical Activity............................................................67  
   Introduction......................................................................................................................67  
   Vygotsky Founds the Socio-Cultural Approach...............................................................71  
   The Activity Theory of Leontyev.....................................................................................80  
   Engeström Advances Activity Theory.............................................................................84  
   Activity as Interdisciplinary Approach..........................................................................88  
   CHAT and Power.............................................................................................................94  
   CHAT, Dialectics and Social Construction......................................................................96  
   Embracing Deliberation with CHAT.............................................................................103  
   Reflections on CHAT......................................................................................................112  

4. Narrative Construction of the Australian Citizens’ Parliament..............................114  
   Introduction......................................................................................................................114  
   A. Approaching difference...............................................................................................116  
   B. The rise of political youth...........................................................................................130  
   C. Evolution of a proposal...............................................................................................145  
   D. Selected Episodes.......................................................................................................174  

5. Citizens Make Sense In Deliberative Activity.........................................................211  
   Introduction......................................................................................................................211  
   Frame...............................................................................................................................212  
   Gather...............................................................................................................................213
6. Conclusion: Improving Deliberative Activity.................................239
   1. How do participants experience deliberative activity?......................239
   2. How do participants experience learning during deliberative activity?..244
   3. What should the project of deliberative activity be?..........................247
Deliberators as Authentic Inquirers.........................................................254
Coda........................................................................................................257

References..............................................................................................259
Appendices.............................................................................................271
   Appendix A – ACP Agenda Outline......................................................272

Table of Images

Figure 1.1: Timeline of the ACP project..................................................19
Figure 1.2: ACP logo...............................................................................19
Figure 1.3: Welcoming to House of Representatives Chamber at Old Parliament House..21
Figure 1.4: Deliberation in the Members' Dining Room at Old Parliament House........21
Figure 1.5: Table recording devices..........................................................27
Figure 3.1: Mediated act (Vygotsky, 1978: 40)...........................................73
Figure 3.2: Activity Theory (Leontyev 2009/1978)..................................80
Figure 3.3: Levels of Activity.................................................................81
Figure 3.4: Activity Theory (from Engeström, 1987).................................85
Figure 4.1: Seating for table conversation.................................................116
Abstract

There is little public understanding and acceptance by authorities about *public deliberation* that invites the public into facilitated, deliberative, small-group processes to improve public policy decision-making. Justifications for a formalised deliberative democracy tend to rest on theoretical visions and on realist claims focussed on outputs, overlooking the activity of deliberation as merely an instrumental black box. A more compelling story about the nature of public deliberation should be told, developed using a methodology that is consistent with the complexity and emergence that defines it.

This thesis portrays an analysis of the unfolding experience of participants of an Australian Citizens’ Parliament as a social construction. The inquiry also embraces a critical socio-cultural approach known to educational researchers as Cultural Historical Activity Theory to reveal immanent contradictions to the activity in its social and political context. A narrative of gathering hope, belief and value exploration across difference, of judgement and projected public action is constructed in deliberative activity. It turns out that participants expend most of their energy *making sense of each other* rather than competing in argument. A narrative re-framing of public deliberators as the authentic researchers in a collaborative project is proposed. This approach may generate greater trust by the public and authority for the convening of deliberative projects and the acceptance of their enduring recommendations.
1. Introduction

Collaboration is a coordinated, synchronous activity that is the result of a continued attempt to construct and maintain a shared conception of a problem (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995: 70).

Overview

My work supports the type of public engagement in political decision-making that applies processes of facilitated, small-group deliberation. Increasingly, jury-like panels of citizens are drawn from a diverse community to learn more about difficult policy issues that affect them, to talk civilly with each other about the options, cut through the rhetoric to explore the pros and cons, and finally make recommendations that lead to action. Working with politicians, public servants, policy experts and stakeholders, these mini-publics recommend options that would achieve broad and enduring community consent, beyond merely satisfying partisan aims or self-interests.

Unfortunately, this ‘deliberative’ approach makes little sense to most people, who deride it unfairly even though it has already been shown to work in many countries. The approach even lacks a consistent name, variously public engagement, participation or deliberation, and ‘deliberative democracy’ when formally integrated into the operation of government. A compelling narrative about public deliberation has not yet permeated our culture. This leaves the public to view public deliberation as merely an instrumental ‘black box’ with little respect for the deliberators or the process, and to judge the output without recognition of the embedded complexities that were resolved.

I was invited to help organise and study, as a Ph.D. candidate, a large demonstration project called the Australian Citizens’ Parliament (ACP), which culminated in February 2009. One hundred fifty citizens were randomly-selected from around the country to travel to Canberra and deliberate over the question “How can Australia’s political system be strengthened to serve us better” I recorded every conversation.

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1 The term mini-public, attributed to Archon Fung (following from Dahl’s ‘mini-populus’), is now well-used in the academic literature to describe a diverse and inclusive forum assembled from the general public to deliberate about a policy issue.
at twenty-three tables for three and a half days, and applied methods of qualitative analysis to gain some sense of participants’ experience.

My work began under the premise that participants in public deliberation should be respected and motivated to give their best to the process. They should be celebrated more. My first inquiry question was, “How do participants experience deliberative activity?” In other words, what is the story they are creating through their effort? My second related question was, “How do participants experience learning during deliberative activity?” After every deliberative process, participants claim to have learned a great deal, but what do they mean? A final question emerged as I proceeded, which was “What should the project of deliberative activity be?” It begs the question of what deliberating participants should be invited to do.

Around these questions is an over-arching concern about how research inquiry about deliberative activity should be conducted. While empirical methods are useful and important, my work is intended to generate narratives around subjective meaning rather than to prove universal truths. I gravitated to a social constructionist research stance that values subjective accounts, tolerates a plurality of meaning in society and views societal structures, including our categorisations, as produced and reproduced as cultural artefacts. My thesis advocates this style of inquiry as necessary for the cultural advancement of public deliberation, which likewise constructs future possibilities through communicative action.

My background is in online and organisational learning, with an enduring interest in educational theory. I was keen to bring perspectives and methods from educational scholarship into inquiry about public deliberation. Viewed from across the disciplinary silos of academia, deliberation looks very much like collaborative and situated learning. From that school I import a foundational concept called Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) for exploring a project of public deliberation.

My mission is to nudge the deliberative movement towards presenting a more coherent and compelling story about itself, and this makes my work worthwhile. To make sense, deliberative democracy needs a better ‘pitch’.

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2 In my Thesis Prospectus, the wording was, “What does deliberative activity come to mean to participating citizens?”
3 In my Thesis Prospectus, the wording was, “What do participants learn about deliberative activity?”
4 Initially, I had two subsidiary inquiry questions: How are some citizens more willing and able than others to contribute to deliberative activity? How do the epistemological beliefs of citizens affect their deliberative activity? The first of these was not addressed, while the second is taken up indirectly in the concluding chapter.
About this Thesis

This thesis contains six chapters, with sections in each. It introduces novel concepts about and methods for exploring deliberative activity and traces my intellectual journey through this inquiry. The thesis is not a report in the logic-empirical style, with a review of previous work at the start, a social science experiment in the middle, and concluding with a monologue that is euphemistically called a ’discussion’. Instead, it unfolds gradually, with references to literature that become relevant as the context of the inquiry shifts forward. Scholarship is referenced more in earlier chapters, but there is not a formal section devoted to literature review. The structure of this thesis is designed with a narrative quality to the inquiry.

This Introduction sets the tone for what is to follow. After describing public deliberation and providing some insight into the background and motivation of my inquiry, I then present the early methodological considerations that led me to the approach that I eventually took. The Australian Citizens’ Parliament (ACP) project that was the site for my inquiry is described. In Chapter 2 I describe in detail the social constructionist and discourse-analytic approach that guided my inquiry about public deliberation. A narrative framework for public deliberation is also presented, building on patterns that are evident in contemporary practice. Chapter 3 presents, with extensive historical background, the dialectical, Vygotsky-inspired Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) that serves as a foundation for examining the sometimes contradictory activity of public deliberation. With the methodological house in order, Chapter 4 provides extended passages of conversational content from the ACP that exemplifies aspects of the participant experience—the imperatives of constructionist discourse analysis subdue the temptation to reduce dialogue out of its original context. Some interpretive work and preliminary local analysis from a CHAT perspective are included. Chapter 5 presents a more holistic and dialectically-informed analysis through the narrative framework, illustrating the benefits of the overall inquiry approach—consider this as the findings of the inquiry. In the concluding Chapter 6 I address the research questions and suggest improvements to the activity of public deliberation that could make it more compelling to potential participants, the general public and authoritative power.
Introduction to Public Deliberation

For several decades political theorists have been advocating a new approach to public policy decision-making under the banner of deliberative democracy (e.g. Dryzek, 2000; Bohman, 1996). This approach is most easily presented by extending the mainstream concept of a jury, which draws a microcosm of the community with the binary remit of judging a criminal charge against the presented evidence and the law. But unlike a jury, a deliberative panel is recruited with the more active task of exploring a policy issue and making recommendations for take-up by authority. Such a panel is called a mini-public, which indexes both its broad representation of perspectives and interests in the community, and the style of discourse it involves. Many mini-publics are recruited from the citizenry at least in part by stratified random selection to ensure representativeness and inclusion, to redress the domination of activists and “the usual suspects” in civil matters. Discourse is conducted in small groups who are professionally facilitated to be constructive, productive and to avoid conversational pathologies. Mini-publics range in size from about 20 participants, for example in a process design called a Citizens’ Jury, to large panels like the 160-member British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly for Electoral Reform (BCCAER) to recommend a new electoral system (see Warren & Pearse, 2008). Participatory Budgeting is occurring in several countries, inviting residents to nominate and then prioritise taxpayer-funded projects in their local region. All mini-publics are invited into deliberation, which includes open and generous exploration of an issue, identification of common ground positions across difference, and agreement on policy approaches and settings that the whole community can live with.

A Citizens’ Jury about a local issue can typically complete its work over two weekends. The BCCAER took eight months to complete, including monthly meetings and regional consultations with citizens. So deliberative designs occur over a range of time scales, depending on the complexity of their considerations and the logistics of bringing them together. New online platforms developed specifically for dialogue and deliberation are bridging distance and time constraints.

While many mini-publics are facilitated, convened and studied by academic teams, deliberative democracy is an innovation in governance, not a research method for political scientists. Unlike focus groups, mini-publics should be empowered to set the agenda of their proceedings, including reshaping the scope and purpose of their investigation and choosing their sources of information. The processes and dialogic
methods are designed and led by a new cottage industry of public participation practitioners and facilitators (see Hendriks & Carson, 2008).

Opinion surveys are useful for ascertaining the range of attitudes to which residents are predisposed, but often citizens do not have shared understandings or considered beliefs about the questions being asked of them. A question can mean different things to different people. Furthermore, a social survey inevitably carries the framing biases of its authors.

In an _ideal_ mini-public, on the other hand, participants are encouraged to see policy options empathetically from perspectives beyond their own. They listen carefully and speak so that they may be well-understood by others. They often invest substantial effort to gain a deeper understanding of the questions that have seeded their engagement. They are aided in recognising media-fuelled scaremongering and misinformation for its coercive intent.

Mini-publics are convened most often at the local government level, especially for the purpose of envisioning future community growth and setting the priorities for development and spending. Even where representative governance enjoys public trust, deliberative democracy offers more timely and substantial engagement between public officials and their constituencies. Local governments have the best record so far of pre-committing to honour the recommendations of mini-publics.
Motivations for this Inquiry

Dryzek (2000) ushered in the delirative turn in political theory over two decades ago, and would be pleased to see growing opportunities for citizens to contribute substantially to decision-making that has direct benefit and impact on them. Encouraged by normative theory, practitioners adapt deliberative process designs and facilitate them in an ever-widening range of community and policy settings around the world (see Goodin & Dryzek, 2006; Carson & Hartz-Karp, 2005; Steyaert & Lisoir, 2005). They contribute to a growing praxis about public engagement that is increasingly being reported in academic literature, shared in professional networks such as the International Association for Public Participation and the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, and through shared resources like Participedia.net.

But the contract between theory, research and practice is occasionally strained. As Neblo (2005: 171) says, we are often “talking past each other.” There is tension between the clean prescriptions of theory and the messy pragmatism at the public engagement coalface. For example, the early Habermasian ideal of wholly rational reasoning in deliberation is seen as unnecessarily constrained for practice (see Bächtiger et al, 2010; Black, 2008; Ryfe, 2006; Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2000; Young, 2000; Forester, 1999; Bohman, 1996). Procedural and epistemic accounts of deliberation (Landemore, 2008) overshadow accounts of the normative and future-oriented motivations for it (c.f. Kompridis, 2006: 137). Many social researchers question the orthodoxy of evidence-based science for studying situations like public deliberation (Adcock, 2003). An industry of deliberative practitioners has emerged that commodifies its services to maintain commercial viability (Hendriks & Carson, 2008).

Yet all these pilots of the deliberative enterprise need to work together to steer their ship against the tide of critics among the public, executives, partisans and media authors who are either dismissive, cynical or unaware of the suggested benefits in the New World of public deliberation. This is the stormy environment in which I have chosen to study. While it would be absurd to ponder the Truth of a normative theory

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5 International Association for Public Participation (IAP2.org) is a globally federated organisation that promotes public engagement by government and its agencies.

6 National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD.org) is an umbrella organisation begun in 2002, located in the USA but with a global horizon serving practitioners (consultants, facilitators, conveners) of public engagement and deliberative designs.

7 participedia.net contains a growing list of hundreds of cases and methods of public participation around the world, authored in wiki style by organisers, academics, practitioners and anyone else associated with these designs. This only began in 2009, well after my study had begun.
such as deliberative democracy, I join a band of vanguards who are committed to a mission that is indeed worthwhile.

If I were to tell a story about a legal case, I would not have to provide too much detail about the process design because I could be confident that most listeners would know enough about court proceedings to fill in the gaps. Even with international variations that may not be well understood, I can play on presumptions and expectations that are prevalent in public discourse. Moreover, I would hardly have to defend the existence of a justice system or justify the application of randomly selected juries.

In stark contrast, deliberative public engagement is not yet a topic that is well known outside its academic and practice communities. Invariably I have to explain it from the beginning. I have to distinguish deliberative from direct and participatory democracy (Gastil & Richards, 2012; Pateman, 2012). I face oft-told stories about the democratic deficit (the perceived failure of politicians and public servants to live up to the ideal democratic expectations of the public) and populism, although not always using those terms. Outside my academic and practice circles, I am acquainted with few people who know a true story about public participation or deliberative democracy. My explanations often degenerate into a defence of public engagement as a viable pursuit.

My research interest is in mini-publics, groups of typical citizens who have been invited from the general population to deliberate together about a public policy problem (Lubensky & Carson, 2013; Gastil & Richards, 2012; Fung, 2007; Goodin & Dryzek, 2006). Often they are randomly-selected like a jury to ensure that they descriptively represent a broad cross-section of the population (Carson & Martin, 1999). The term mini-public does not just name the microcosm of participants, but also the activity in which they are engaged, so they are a deliberating body by definition. This inquiry takes interest in mini-publics who recommend specific policy actions to be taken—therefore the mission of informed survey in Deliberative Polling (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005) is not considered here.

Two important claims advocated by theoretical and practical deliberationists are that deliberative designs help participants become better informed about the relevant issues (e.g. Fishkin & Luskin, 2005) and empathetic to the diversity of values and beliefs that co-exist in the affected community (Young, 2000). This puts participants in a better position to make considered judgements that the public and legislators should trust. Unfortunately, this validation through deliberation is rarely impressed on the public,

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S8 Scholars and practitioners use several overlapping combined terms: deliberative processes, civic engagement, public deliberation, public participation.
the lack of which may have contributed to the failure of referenda based on citizen assembly recommendations (Cutler et al., 2008: 187). The recent rise of deliberative events such as Citizens’ Juries and Participatory Budgeting in many countries has received only limited mainstream media coverage and recognition. In the Canadian province of British Columbia, where I was born, two successive plebiscites have failed to approve the switch to the Single Transferable Vote (STV) electoral system, with declining rather than increasing support. In public commentary, there is now rare mention of the randomly-selected Citizens’ Assembly that initially recommended STV after dedicated learning, deliberating and balancing a diversity of resident values and requirements. The value and competence of deliberating panels not only goes uncelebrated, but is ignored and even denigrated.

The Kettering Foundation (http://kettering.org/), which has supported the National Issues Forums (http://www.nifi.org/) in the USA for over twenty-five years, reports that the experience of public deliberation affects participating citizens in many positive ways (Melville, Willingham & Dedrick, 2005: 48-50):

- raising interest in public affairs, leading to higher levels of public engagement
- broadening the outlooks of participants
- learning new sense of self, new ways of taking part in groups
- enhancing participants’ belief in making a difference
- construing their self-interest more broadly
- moving beyond superficial preferences to considered public judgement.

But after returning to their communities, mini-public participants do not seem to be able to spread the good word about their experience very far. Most media critics of public deliberation have not experienced or witnessed such process designs, so do not know of those benefits—see media commentary reported by Carson (2013). The distinction is often lost between the innovative randomly-selected, facilitated, collaborative, civil processes focussed on informed evaluation, and the familiar noise of open forums, public hearings and ‘talk-fests’. The deliberations of the former are misjudged and demeaned by the failings of the latter (Carson, 2013a).

Some commentators align citizens’ assemblies with focus groups, not realising that participants in public deliberation have far greater agency to explore and unpack the issues. Public deliberation is not market research aimed merely at gaining attitudinal responses from a passive sample of people, with the coercive power of persuasion remaining firmly in expert and authoritative hands.
Designers, conveners and sponsors of deliberative processes want them evaluated positively, to find that they worked well and produced outcomes that the broad population can trust, even when the participants make surprising recommendations. Deliberationists proclaim authentic deliberative democracy in facilitated processes that are organised to be impartial, representative and influential (Carson & Hartz-Karp, 2005), with participants obliged to respect certain performative ideals such as equality, non-coercion, honesty, openness, civility, willingness to learn, reflexivity and mutual respect (Mansbridge et al, 2010; Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2000; Gutman & Thompson, 1996) and agreement at least about how to proceed towards and discern a satisfactory conclusion (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007).

When deemed authentic on these dimensions, a deliberative process is legitimised in theory. Unfortunately, some hostile critics interpret the civil, procedural framing of any group activity as innately coercive (Sorensen, 1981), and thus reject the legitimating claims of deliberative forums outright when they are justified on this basis. This problem is not helped by practitioners who take a strongly progressive stance in their facilitation and advocate for policy change and public persuasion. An alternative approach is needed to satisfy sceptics.

Often, I am asked whether deliberative processes “generate better decisions.” I respond with the cheeky suggestion that deliberators would probably ask better questions. But the truth was that I was unsure whether deliberators were really asking better questions or not. Furthermore, what does ‘better’ mean, and for whom? Deliberative processes are routinely evaluated through survey on certain operationalised normative criteria (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). In my own experience, such surveys may be tainted by euphoric group cohesion (Keyton, 1999; Barsäde & Gibson, 1998) and the career desire of designers to report successful processes. The consulting industry of public engagement provision is becoming commodified as process designs are packaged for consumption by government agencies (Hendriks & Carson, 2008). The contradiction is that deliberative processes are convened because of a lack of trust in policy-setting expertise, yet the public is expected to trust the judgement of experts about the design and success of deliberation.

Many scholars emphasise the traditional prescriptions for deliberation as the exchange of public reasons in various democratic theories proposed by Rawls, Habermas, Bohman (1996), Cohen and others (see Dryzek, 2000). A presumption in all of these theories is that there exist options that stand up to direct comparison, and that such comparison and decision-making constitute the project on the whole. For most cases of public engagement, policy options are clearly delineated. At the local level, a set of
distinct solutions to an engineering, social or environmental problem may be discussed. A state or national referendum initiative may only be one choice presented and the comparison is between going for it, or not. The choice of an electoral system, as the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly for Electoral Reform addressed, similarly boils down to a limited set of options, albeit with some variations available in each (see BCCAER, 2004). But the pre-existence of options removes the capacity of deliberating citizens to blue-sky a future that is unshackled from current paradigms and constraints, to imagine a future that is brighter and different than today. If we give citizens such an opportunity, how are the established theories of communicative action relevant?

Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) claimed that most Americans cannot be bothered to participate in political affairs. Dryzek (2007) is uncharacteristically blunt in his critique of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, revealing the immanent contradiction that they used deliberating focus groups to show that citizens do not want to deliberate. I am also encouraged by a recent study by Neblo and his colleagues that empirically refutes the thesis of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, supported by re-framed survey data. Not only would Americans be willing to participate if given a compelling invitation, as were the Australian Citizen Parliamentarians, but “it was precisely people who are less likely to participate in traditional partisan politics who are most interested in deliberative participation” (Neblo et al, 2009: 567). They just need to have a reasonable idea about it first.

Most deliberative theorists suggest that a diversity of participants should be invited into public deliberation, as they represent the plurality of discourses prevalent in a society, embedding a broad slate of values, beliefs, ethical standpoints and cultural methods of communication. Such mandatory inclusion is the result of the influence of difference democrats such as Benhabib (1996) and Young (2000), who insist on the respectful recognition of minority positions and identities in addition to the dominant voices in a contested situation. The design of deliberative activity continues to focus more on factual rather than normative aspects of deliberative options.

Political philosopher Sandel (2009) suggests that we should deliberatively acknowledge and relate the disparate moral dimensions that shape what a good future might feel like. Mansbridge et al (2010) go further to suggest relaxation of the ideal of deliberation that emphasises the common good. They recommend processes in which participants do not shy away from exploring their self-interests that account for the differences in public preferences. For the most part, these self-interests emanate from the tacit beliefs and values of individuals embedded in historically developed cultures that underscore reasoning in deliberation.
There have been many academic and popular critiques of deliberative democracy and related approaches, but I did not invest in this inquiry with the objective to defend the entire deliberative movement against its critics. The aim of my inquiry was to understand better the practice of public deliberation from participants’ perspectives, how it should be portrayed, and how it should be improved.
The Call to Inquiry

The theoretical prescriptions for dialogue and deliberation have been well spelled out by Dryzek (2000) and many others. Now in the middle of a groundswell in public interest and initiatives around participatory governance, I remain inspired by the call by Putnam (2003) for political scientists to cross boundaries and make scholarship accessible and meaningful to citizens. Thompson (2008) encouraged a continued integration between theory and research, but he should also have added that both should be more willing to engage directly with engagement practitioners.

Ryfe suggested that deliberation should be opened up for inspection as it really occurs, rather than reporting on what is expected or what is found in simulated small-group studies on students in universities. I agree with Ryfe that

we must learn more about what deliberation actually looks like. It simply will not do to place the very practice under investigation into a black box. Psychologists and small group communication scholars provide hints about the nature of deliberation as a form of communication. Political scientists might follow their lead by investigating deliberation in the natural political contexts in which it takes place (Ryfe, 2005: 64).

The success of a deliberative process is usually adjudged on notions of the instrumental quality of the decisions, on endorsement by stakeholders in the affected community, or on evaluations by participants (Rowe & Frewer, 2004) still basking in the euphoria of the event. Several researchers are trying to formalise the measurement of deliberative quality through an indexing scheme (Neblo, 2007; Steiner et al, 2004). But the categories of comparison may be inconsistent across cases in different contexts.

Other academics, practitioners and policy setters are also calling for the black box of deliberation to be opened in the real world. Research accounts about deliberative activity and events are growing in number (Karpowitz & Mendelberg, 2007; Ryfe, 2006; Gastil & Levine, 2005). Case studies which rely on retrospective analysis of non-participant observation and evaluative questionnaires predominate. They tend to examine the organisation and outcomes of deliberation, analysing the politics around an event rather than the micro-politics within the deliberation itself. This is exacerbated when deliberations occur unobserved with only a facilitator present. When facilitators are asked what happens during deliberation, they usually describe what ought to happen and presume the deliberative ideals to be extant (Mansbridge et al, 2006).
Political psychologist Rosenberg advocates expansive empirical research:

In exploring deliberative processes, I suggest that research go beyond testing the degree to which those processes meet the standards of coherence, logic and an orientation to justice and the common good suggested by deliberative democratic theory. While of some value, the limitation of research of this kind is that it can do no more than support the assumptions of the theory or suggest that its view of deliberative processes is incorrect. Insofar as the latter is the case, it would be much more helpful if the research was guided by an understanding of discourse that recognized alternative forms of discourse and did so in a way that was relevant to democratic theory. Again the value of such a design is that it would enable a more comprehensive and positive description of how deliberations actually unfold and thereby provide a basis for an attempt to correct or reconstruct deliberative democratic theory and practice (Rosenberg, 2005: 218).

Often, case studies of public deliberation are reported with only brief description of the preceding events and the evolving culture of distrust and cynicism that envelopes the issue. Empirical analysis, while useful and important, is hampered by insufficient attention to these antecedents of deliberation. A more storied approach in recounting the situation that accounts for the anger and fear expressed by many, both as part of the deliberative activity itself, and in its publicity (Black et al, 2011).

Dryzek prefers to use the term discursive democracy, which reasserts the critical roots of the deliberative movement and centres on discourse as the preferred unit of analysis. Criticality is a contested idea that Dryzek sees as broadly “charting the progressive emancipation of individuals from oppressive forces [which] are ideological contingencies rather than structural necessities” (Dryzek, 2000: 20). Thus, deliberation is a process for collective reflection and improvement of our “dominant institutions and practices (ibid.: 27).” Dryzek elaborates on the concept of discourse as:

…a shared means of making sense of the world embedded in language. Any discourse will always be grounded in assumptions, judgements, contentions, dispositions and capabilities. These shared terms of reference enable those who subscribe to a particular discourse to perceive and compile bits of sensory information into coherent stories or accounts that can be communicated in intersubjectively meaningful ways. Thus a discourse will generally revolve around a central story-line, containing opinions about both facts and values. (Dryzek, 2000: 18).

For Dryzek, deliberation attempts to bridge the contest of discourses that are constituted in the public sphere. Rather than factoring individuals, the discursive landscape (Dryzek refers to it as a concourse) is woven by the diverse and overlapping political, philosophical, cultural, intellectual, environmental and institutional networks of shared perspectives. Since discourse animates values and beliefs, accessing a diversity of ordinary people is necessary to understand those foundations and augment the prescriptions of elites in driving public policy formation.
Hajer has a socio-cultural take on discourse, defining it as:

an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations through which meaning is allocated to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduces in an identifiable set of practices (Hajer, 2005: 44).

Thus, practice (i.e. what is done, including routines and ethics) can be seen as an enactment of culturally-sourced discourse that manifests meaning through shared performance. In a setting with diverse points of view, the performance (for example, by a group deliberating about a policy problem) is the product of negotiation that amalgamates existing discourse scripts and improvises new ones. Hajer’s dramaturgical approach is useful for analysing how discourses are bridged (or not) in public policy deliberation, especially where experts and stakeholders are involved. But my interest is in the inclusion and engagement of ordinary people.

Deliberation by trial juries has been studied, although access is often difficult due to their obligation to secrecy in many jurisdictions, including Australia. While trial juries are recruited such as mini-publics, their conversational dynamics cannot be directly compared to deliberative processes such as Citizens’ Juries on public policy matters because they are not facilitated and the nature of the ‘charge’ is different (Carson & Lubensky, 2008; Gastil, 2008).

Since I began this inquiry, there have been increasing calls for studies not just of what occurs at the micro level of small assembled groups of deliberating participants, but how such processes connect with the macro deliberative system in the public sphere that includes cultural effects and institutional actors (Mansbridge et al, 2012). I agree with this, as too often deliberative forums are convened without sufficient attention, and sometimes with resigned defeatism, to any enduring political influence that the exercise will have. My work should make some contribution towards a big picture view of the deliberative movement. That said, the concrete scope of my work must be bounded to a practical limit of what I can achieve single-handedly for the purpose of this thesis (Piantanida & Garman, 1999: 92-99).
Deliberation and Learning

In evaluation questionnaires completed by citizens who have finished their participation in a deliberative event, I and others (e.g. Ryfe, 2006) have often found comments like “I learned a great deal!” There is something intuitively appealing about the intersection of deliberative and learning theory.

It is surprising that there is little reported about how learning actually occurs in deliberative forums. If learning is acknowledged, then its method is often taken for granted and typically treated only as a cognitive or information-processing operation. For example, in the exemplary government-sponsored citizens’ assemblies convened in British Columbia (Warren & Pearce, 2008; Ratner, 2004) and Ontario (Rose, 2007), each process had a ‘learning phase’ where participants were lectured and workshopped about different electoral systems. With all the best of intentions, the learning design was based on the traditional acquisitional (Sfard, 1998) or banking (Freire, 1974) metaphor of knowledge transfer and storage, and was assumed to have been substantially complete when their deliberations began. Like many who train staff in organisations, process designers are often informed by folk theories of knowledge and learning, especially mind-as-container (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2005, ch. 1). They may be unaware of pedagogical approaches that have advanced well beyond the behaviourism and cognitivism that their own teachers applied many years ago. Educational research has made great strides during the past two decades to develop theories and practices of collaborative and situated learning. Collaborative learning occurs when groups attend to physical and intellectual problems together with common purpose (Stahl, 2006: 3). Collaboration is about not only cooperation, but also knowledge building and idea creation arising from intersubjectivity (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 2005, ch. 8). Situatedness refers to ‘learning in activity’ in authentic settings such as workplaces and everyday situations (Henning, 2004; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situations of deliberative activity should be added to this list.

The political and communications literature often views deliberation as merely a decision-making process (Button & Mattson, 1999). But there is a growing expectation that social learning is an important and desirable component of deliberation (Bull, Petts & Evans, 2008; Daniels & Walker, 1996). This learning with and about others is then manifested in a heightened commitment to citizenship and public engagement after the conclusion of the deliberative event (Gastil, 2008; Melville, Willingham & Dedrick, 2005).
The practice literature (e.g. Forester, 1999) typically views participants in deliberation as transforming their conceptions to find common ground, implying that deliberation is a learning activity. In particular, it can be viewed as a constructivist learning activity because it is learner-centred—they make their way through it on their own terms—and the problem domain is usually ill-defined and ill-structured (Jonassen, 1999). In a constructivist learning environment, scaffolding (a derivative of Vygotsky’s theory of a Zone of Proximal Development, see Chapter 3) is offered by facilitators, mentors and experts who run micro-processes and exercises to stretch learners to advance their horizons and encourage shared reflection. Learners may access resources without constraint. The sense-making proceeds collaboratively in a manner that is relevant to the learner, since their progress is driven by their own curiosity and needs. These features open new avenues for democratic deliberative design. However, constructivism is generally supported by cognitive models of knowledge and learning that tend to underplay the impact of social interaction and cultural methods.

There is also a widespread expectation expressed in practitioners’ literature that transformational learning should occur during deliberation, whereby opinions about matters change after encountering balanced information and perspectives. On the other hand, transformative learning is a prescriptive approach that “transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (Mezirow, 2003: 58). For adults who intentionally enter a learning situation with their identities unlocked, this may be an appropriate pedagogical model. But citizens entering into a deliberative space may not be ready to invite such dramatic change into their lives.

The nature of participant learning during public deliberation has been under-explored and has not capitalised on contemporary advances in learning theory. In this inquiry, opening up the experience of learning by participants in deliberation would be worthwhile.
Convening an Australian Citizens’ Parliament

In this section, the Australian Citizens’ Parliament (ACP) project is briefly described. This thesis does not report on a complete case study of the event. Therefore, a thick description of the agenda and details of the process is not given. The purpose here is to present the chronological context of the project and some of the features of it which turned out to be relevant to this inquiry, as a site for public deliberation. See Appendix A for an outline of the ACP agenda.

The ACP was the brainchild of Professor Lyn Carson and Luca Belgiorno-Nettis, who were directors of the newDemocracy Foundation. They aspired to demonstrate deliberative democracy to the federal Government and the public at large. (For a conversational reflection about the inception of the ACP, see Carson & Belgiorno-Nettis (2013)). Until that time, only a handful of large-scale deliberative exercises had been the object of in-depth academic inquiry, and this project was intended to provide such a research opportunity. In late 2007 the project team was granted public funding by the Australian Research Council, matched by Belgiorno-Nettis’ philanthropy, to convene an Australian Citizens’ Parliament (ACP). The project team included scholars from three Australian universities, who were later joined by an American academic who was able to attract additional public funding. Written into the grant application was a scholarship fund for a full-time Ph.D. candidate, which was awarded to me.

Much thought by the organisers was put into determining the key question that the participants would address in their deliberations. Several World Café (see page 23) events were convened to explore and confirm a question that was capable of spawning dialogue and reasonable responses. The question became:

How can Australia’s political system be strengthened to serve us better?

From November 2007 to August 2008 the project team met monthly in Sydney to design and plan the process. The team was led by a non-academic project manager. The main considerations in planning related to the logistics and administration of participant travel and accommodation, organising volunteers and facilitators, securing the assembly venue, producing invitations and generating publicity.

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9 My Ph.D. supervisor Prof Lyn Carson, then at The University of Sydney; Prof Ian Marsh then at The University of Sydney; Prof John Dryzek and Dr Simon Niemeyer from Australian National University; Prof Janette Hartz-Karp of Curtin University.

10 Prof John Gastil, then at University of Washington.
Taking advantage of my previous career in ICT and interactive media, one of my tasks was to establish and design a public website for the project.\textsuperscript{11} The website included information for prospective participants about the ACP, plus information about Australian democracy. A seal-like logo was created \textit{pro bono} by an advertising agency and displayed on the website, giving the ACP an air of institutional authority (see Figure 1.2).

The plan was to post up to 10,000 invitations, randomly selected from the electoral rolls. The invitations were beautifully rendered on heavy stock, embossed with the logo to give it a compelling official appearance and undersigned by the Co-chairs who are eminent Australians respected for their grace and public service. Fred Chaney is a retired conservative Senator (also Chair of Research Committee of the newDemocracy Foundation) and Lowitja O’Donoghue is a retired Aboriginal affairs administrator and activist.

With the aid of an online registration facility that I built into the website, the invitation attracted an astonishing 2763 applications, exceeding our initial estimates by seven-fold. I then created a software program to randomly select the 150 participants, stratified by gender, age, educational level and indigenous status as self-reported on their application. It should be noted that there was considerable attrition in the lead-up to the main event as participants dropped out for one reason or another, and had to be replaced by other randomly-selected applicants (Lubensky & Carson, 2013).

Starting in November, 2008, each selected participant first attended a regional meeting to learn about the project, their responsibilities and gain some sense of the deliberative approach. I assisted in organising about half of the meetings, travelling to Canberra, Adelaide, Perth, Sydney and Brisbane in addition to meetings in my home city of Melbourne. The meetings were usually held on university campuses that could be arranged without cost.

\textsuperscript{11} \url{www.citizensparliament.org.au} no longer available
At the regional meetings, participants were also introduced to a web-based facility dubbed the ‘Online Parliament’ where they could begin to formulate proposals in response to the key question. Many of the initial proposals did not, by any reasonable judgement, answer the key question. For example, they related to particular policy regulations, or they were overtly partisan. By the beginning of January 2009, eleven (11) proposals were accepted through preferential voting to be presented for further consideration by the ACP. Some of the descriptions were quite detailed and strongly worded.

Then for three and a half days in February, 2009, they assembled in Canberra to deliberate and make recommendations that would be delivered to the Government and people of Australia. The process design was completed primarily by two academic members of the project team. The agenda was ambitious for the short time allowed. Participants were referred to and took to calling themselves Citizen Parliamentarians, or CPs.

Unfortunately, the main event took place on the same weekend that bushfires swept across the Australian state of Victoria, with great loss of life and property. Many CPs, who were effectively isolated in Canberra, were worried for their families and friends. The carefully arranged mainstream media coverage completely evaporated. Temperatures in the eastern states, including Canberra, exceeded 40°C. The newly-built student residences at Canberra University where the CP were accommodated were not cooled, leading to some discomfort and fatigue. But the venue for proceedings at the Old Parliament House, where Federal Parliament sat until 1988, was comfortable and elaborate.

For both the regional meetings and the Canberra event, expenses were arranged and paid for by the organisers for CPs travelling more than 200 kilometres by car, and for airfares and bus fares. All CPs also received AUD50 per day of attendance to cover incidental costs.

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12 All 2763 registrants were invited to participate online. For further information about the Online Parliament, see Sullivan & Hartz-Karp (2013).
13 Prof Janette Hartz-Karp and Prof Lyn Carson.
Figure 1.3: Welcoming to House of Representatives Chamber at Old Parliament House

Figure 1.4: Deliberation in the Members’ Dining Room at Old Parliament House
While some arrived in Canberra the day before, Day 1 (Friday, 6 Feb) began with the final arrival of CPs from all corners of the country. At 2:00 pm, they all gathered together for the first time. I sat in the gallery overlooking the chamber (Figure 1.3) and witness the ceremonial opening of the ACP:

An Aboriginal man ‘pipes’ the invited CPs into the regal House of Representatives Chamber of the Old Parliament House with the rhythmical drone of a didgeridoo. They seat themselves where previous generations of MPs had faced each other in debate. After acknowledging indigenous custodianship of the land, the well-known and respected Co-chairs give warm greetings and encouragement to the participants. The conveners make introductory remarks. Five groups of CPs seated at the centre table present summaries of their initial proposals from their online engagement. The federal Minister of State gives a lengthy speech about the Government’s initiatives towards openness, transparency and citizen engagement. He tells the participants that the Government will view their recommendations with considerable interest.

The 150 CPs then shifted to the Members’ Dining Room to begin their work in earnest. They were seated at twenty-three closely-packed oval tables. Each day CPs were randomly assigned to different tables, to encourage conversational mixing and to track them for inquiry purposes (Figure 1.4). Each table had a notebook computer that was wirelessly networked to a central server. CPs took turns entering table input to the system for transmission to a 'Theme Team' comprised of eight academic volunteers working in the next room. (The software was branded 21st Century Dialogue System, brought into the ACP by the consulting firm directed by Hartz-Karp. The software was operated by a small team of technical experts.)

The processed results of each session, including proposal lists, grouped and summarised responses to deliberation and weighted preference voting, were displayed on large screens at the front and sides of the room. At the end of each day, the system mediated the generation of a report of the daily activity, which was handed out to CPs as they left the room.

The goal of the very brief Day 1 was ‘Understanding what we want to achieve together at the ACP.’ At each table, CPs spoke of what the success of the ACP might look like. CPs then reflected about their initial experience of public deliberation.

The aim of Day 2 was ‘Broadening our perspectives.’ Throughout the day, new ideas for proposals were generated. Several techniques were used. A World Café using

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15 ‘Welcome to Country’ is a ritual now conducted at the commencement of most official gatherings in Australia in respect of indigenous elders and in recognition of traditional indigenous custodianship of the meeting site.
Appreciative Inquiry explored the positive aspects of the Australian political system. World Café events invite participants to talk with each other at small tables around a particular question to generate ideas and responses, in successive rounds of musical chairs. Themes tend to develop, which are captured by organisers who reflect these back to participants (See www.theworldcafe.org). CPs engaged in deliberation to develop table questions and ideas to be directed at expert panellists representing different viewpoints on the pros and cons of existing and new proposals. There was a reflective conversation, with ‘experts’ being interviewed. There was also an Open Space session so CPs could delve into the particular issues they wanted to pursue. Open Space is a dialogue format in which groups form organically around topics of shared concern (see page 60 for more detail).

At the end of the day, everyone shifted back to the House of Representative chamber because of a double-booking of the dining room by the venue operator. During that session one of the organisers, Professor Carson, spoke of her passion for deliberative democracy. This upset Co-chair Fred Chaney who felt that the CPs had been exposed to unnecessary bias. Many CPs spoke up in denial of this, in full support of the process. Carson has since written about the incident and I agree with her claim that bias is everywhere and the challenge is to make it visible and balanced in the overall deliberative design (Carson, 2013b).

The aim of Day 3 was ‘Determining what is most important to us.’ This was a pivotal day, when the large number of generated proposals (52) needed to be understood and potentially challenged, the criteria for assessing them determined and weighed, and then preferred accordingly using a prioritisation facility in the 21st Century Dialogue system. The day began with a focus on further understanding the proposals, amending and adding new proposals, with expert panellists commenting and responding to questions. Next, small groups deliberated about the characteristics of a healthy political system that they wished would prevail for future generations. Using the prioritisation facility, the CPs determined the top five characteristics and then honed down the list of proposals to the top thirteen. To promote further reflection and critique a fishbowl technique was applied, whereby nominated CPs deliberated on the stage about proposals they favoured in light of the dominant characteristic, while everyone else looked on in contemplation. Then through the prioritisation facility the proposals were assessed by all CPs against each of the top five characteristics. Final prioritisations determined which proposals were the easiest to implement, the most innovative and the most important in the long term. Table 1.1 shows the proposals, with descriptions in Table 1.2 that ranked in the top five in multiple prioritisations and thus rated most highly.
Perhaps unsurprisingly considering that they were the most comprehensively developed and considered, most of the highest-ranked proposals originated at least in part in the Online Parliament. The day concluded with the nomination of nine CPs who had earned the respect of others to present the ACP findings formally back to the assembly and the Government representative who would be in attendance on the final day.

The aim of Day 4 was ‘Consolidating and delivering our recommendations.’ A draft of the Final Report was distributed to CPs for their consideration and amendment. Following this there was a dialogue on the lowlights, highlights and insights of the ACP. After a formal presentation in the House of Representatives, and the Government response, the ACP concluded with small group dialogue about next steps, impacts and learning, followed by light-hearted performances by CPs reflecting their experience, and viewing of a final short video of ACP highlights.

Throughout the ACP, facilitators reinforced a short set of procedural and behavioural ground rules shown in Table 1.3.

Several weeks after the conclusion of the ACP, a high-quality ‘handbook’ was produced by the newDemocracy Foundation summarising the event and outlining the deliberative design (Carson & Blackadder, 2009). In a well-presented package that included an extended video of the event,16 the handbook was sent to CPs, all federal Members of Parliament and many others who might be interested. Unfortunately, none of the proposals were directly taken up by the Government with acknowledgement given to the ACP, although during the 2010 federal election campaign, the Labor party proposed a Citizens’ Assembly that appeared to be inspired by the ACP (See p. 247 for more detail).

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16 Video of the ACP was produced by Kaye Shumack (University of Western Sydney Media Unit) with John Pacitto. Photo credits in this chapter: John Pacitto for newDemocracy.
Convening an Australian Citizens’ Parliament | Lubensky

### Table 1.1: Top proposal ideas in different categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Idea</th>
<th>Priority #1: Freedom</th>
<th>Priority #2: Transparency</th>
<th>Most Innovative</th>
<th>Easiest to Implement</th>
<th>Most Important in Long Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowering citizens to participate in politics through education</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce duplication between levels of government by harmonising laws across boundaries</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>#5</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>#2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering citizens to participate in politics through community engagement</td>
<td>#2</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>#3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth engagement in politics</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open and accessible government</td>
<td>#3</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ Question Time in Parliament</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>#1</td>
<td>#4</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Top proposal ideas in different categories

### Table 1.2: Brief descriptions of proposal ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposal Idea</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowering citizens to participate in politics through education</td>
<td>Provide more innovative and earlier education (also for new migrants), also using websites and public television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce duplication between levels of government by harmonising laws across boundaries</td>
<td>Many laws which differ in the different states should be made consistent to avoid duplication or differing requirements. A task force could examine possibilities for unification of legislation across the states and territories. Suggested solutions also include rationalising local councils and federal control of issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering citizens to participate in politics through community engagement</td>
<td>Making it easier for people to participate in politics by providing forums such as the ACP. Draw on citizen participation in reviews prior to new regulation. Correct the disproportionately higher level of influence of business professional and other special interest groups. We need a formal body, for example an Ombudsman or Commission, with responsibility to improve the capacity of citizens to participate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth engagement in politics</td>
<td>A grassroots education program beginning early. Education regarding listening to others’ views, how to make your own decisions and learning to go with decisions arrived at through voting. Education focussing on all aspects of government, the setup, the history, the good and the bad. Leadership programs which align with the electoral process and electing school leaders, with involvement of political leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open and accessible government</td>
<td>So anyone with a question can get an answer, user friendly and free from jargon, e.g. unified online resource - ‘allofgovernment.gov.au’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ Question Time in Parliament</td>
<td>(no description)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2: Brief descriptions of proposal ideas

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17 Hyphens indicate ranking outside the top five.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ground Rule</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speak openly and honestly</td>
<td>Participate by sharing your views and feelings, without dominating the conversation. Stay calm and friendly and maintain confidentiality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen carefully to what others have to say</td>
<td>Focus on hearing what a person is saying and also what their underlying feelings are. Paraphrase to check for understanding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treat everyone with respect</td>
<td>Treat others as you would have them treat you. Put yourself in the other person's shoes so that you can see the world as they see it. Practise being non-judgemental.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep comments brief and to the point</td>
<td>Speak so that you can clearly be heard and use easy to understand common language. If someone has said what you wanted to say, add comments of value without repeating it. Be brief with your comments and focus on the topic at hand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep on track</td>
<td>Repeat the purpose of the discussion so that everyone is reminded of the task at hand. Provide a verbal summary of discussion to assist the group stay on track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you need to take a break, do so</td>
<td>Take a break from the discussion if you're feeling tired. Take some deep breaths if you feel yourself becoming too emotional to contribute positively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.3: ACP Discussion Ground Rules*
Capturing the Deliberative Process for Study

Each scholar carried his or her own research interests which spanned theoretical, empirical and practical concerns around the ACP. Given the large scale of the project, it was important for me early to distinguish between my particular inquiry goals relating to this thesis, and the objectives of the project as a whole. During much of 2008 I investigated various methodologies and methods, which I detail in the next chapter. Late in the year I made a commitment to record as much table conversation as possible, and was able to obtain personal digital recorders and boundary microphones for all twenty-three tables (see Figure 1.5). In addition, recordings were made of plenary activity (including sessions held in the House of Representatives Chamber), the Theme Team activity and of post-event conversations by table facilitators in pairs regarding their experiences.

CPs were required to sign their acceptance of a Participant Statement which detailed their rights as research subjects, including anonymity, as specified by the ethics protocol adhered to by all Australian universities. They wore tags that identified them only by first name, a four-digit identification number that was familiar to each of them, and the electoral district from where they were randomly drawn. This thesis and derivative publications respect the protocol in using pseudonyms when referring to CPs even though many were identified and made public statements in local media.¹⁸

In the lead-up to, and then throughout the assembly, CPs were subjected to numerous surveys and a time-consuming multiple-stage Q-sort procedure (Niemeyer, Bathalha & Dryzek, 2013). There were also feedback forms completed each day, as much for the organisers to recognise problems as for the research record. While many CPs took these procedures in stride, others lamented at being prodded so intrusively. The constant presence of audio recording was not always greeted kindly, but most CPs seemed to ignore it.

¹⁸ CP Peter Cruttenden happened to be a journalist and editor working for a national magazine which published a diary-like article about his experience (Cruttenden, 2009).
A few CPs were disturbed by the presence of several North American researchers, including Prof. Gastil who had brought funding from the US-based National Science Foundation. After emigrating from Canada twenty-two years earlier, my accent still reminds people that I was not born in Australia. At the start of Day 3 a short plenary session was held in the House of Representatives Chamber where we each described in more detail what the research effort was about. When it was my turn to speak, I said:

I’m Ron, I’m a Ph.D. student at the University of Sydney. There have been events like this in the past and typically academics and others come and report on what happened and that’s what gets published in journals and whatever. But I reckon the only people who can really tell your story ... is you. Okay? So what I’m here doing is finding out about your experience and that’s why the recorder is on the table, because I’m interested in how you speak about what’s happening day to day. And so my task for the next while will be to take that and render it in a way that really makes your voice come through in that report.

The deliberation room was very noisy as conversations proceeded with energy but in close proximity to each other. A few weeks after the ACP had concluded, I listened through each table recording and logged the start time of each session, which varied because the digital recorders were not synchronised. I also noted who was talking in each conversation, referring to the table participant assignments. It was only during the World Café rounds when CPs switched tables that it became difficult to identify them in the recordings when they did not, as requested, introduce themselves at the start of each fresh conversation.

I then constructed an audio reference database containing speech samples of every CP based on my recollection of them and clear indications in the audio recordings, such as their self-introductions. I created a web-based interface to access and repeatedly replay samples for comparison during transcription. The audio files were duplicated and sent to a commercial transcription service that used the log files and access to the reference facility to complete their task. I estimate that over 80% of the recorded talk was transcribed, although the accuracy varied across tables and transcription operators. But without the reference facility, the transcription service would not have been able to complete their task to the high standard that they achieved.

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19 Tara Stobart and her team of home-based transcribers, Digital and Audio Transcription Services, Brisbane QLD.
2. Constructing Sense of Public Deliberation

Researchers who present themselves as amoral or, as they might prefer, ‘value-free’ and disembodied spectators on the workings of the social world are mistaken. The truth is that we must live in the world if we would hope to understand it (Weinberg, 2008: 35).

Introduction

There is a growing academic literature of case studies in which public deliberative designs are described structurally and chronologically, from the outside, looking in. Texts describe the policy context, how a public process was organised, who took part, and what they came up with. This literary mode was demonstrated in Chapter 1 where the ACP was introduced. Similarly, practitioners’ texts are provided to potential conveners in the form of guides, handbooks and reports (so-called ‘gray literature’). A well-crafted example is the handbook produced about the ACP, with the following text in its introduction:

The 2009 Citizens’ Parliament functioned as a pilot, showing what is involved in running such an event and demonstrating to governments the potential for citizen involvement in decision-making. It continues to contribute to public understanding of Australia’s institutions of government and to debates about possibilities for their reform. The project is illuminating more effective citizen participation and public consultation in Australia’s democracy and adding to the growing, worldwide evidence that deliberating citizens can competently inform public policy (Carson & Blackadder, 2009: 3).

These resources present public deliberation in its most positive light. They usually include glowing comments by participants about their enjoyment, satisfaction and learning. I am not suggesting that public deliberation should be presented without at least some fanfare. But the experience of participation is expressed rhetorically. A cynical non-academic reader may not be convinced about the merits of a deliberative process, or that there was anything more than “just talk”.

In my experience, every deliberative process is a chaotic adventure for both facilitators and participants. The final recommendations emerge like the construction of a passenger jet, taking shape with collective attention to more moving parts than any
single person could organise. But unlike engineering, the outcome of deliberation can be unpredictable. What ‘works’ in one instance may be less effective in the next. It is the social complexity of deliberation and my pragmatic outlook that leads me away from a positivist research stance that sets out to prove hypotheses about it.

Causal explanations only go so far. The positivist tradition to research seeks to reduce the apparent complexity to a set of straightforward maxims, for universal application and replication. Proponents of case study methodology suggest that its only use should be to support claims about general principles. But I believe that it is through the particularity and concrete social relations in deliberation that it works.

Like the proverbial chicken and egg, there is no starting point between the formulation of research questions and a commitment to a methodological tradition. They grow together because the research approach should be compatible with the purpose of study (Punch, 2005; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). My research questions seek a different kind of knowledge from that which can be generated solely from surveys, statistics and elite interviews. When one really wants to know how people are getting along, they should be witnessed in action in the situation. I am exploring how deliberation transpires as a reproduction of cultural, social and political life. This needs a more personal and subjective touch. I am opting for an interpretive methodology, presupposing that different meanings of a situation may be legitimately held by different participants, and indeed researchers and reviewers (Yanow, 2003). I hope to bring to light the diversity and particularity of deliberation because it ultimately involves relationships between individuals who appreciate their similarities and negotiate their differences.

Finally, as will become increasingly evident in this chapter, this is not a dispassionate, objectified text that sits in the world independently of me, the researcher. The perspective on public deliberation that I intend on opening up positions me reflexively in it. My stance aligns with the evolving academic tradition called social constructionism, well-known to both sociologists and social psychologists, and increasingly in other disciplines such as education, health care, political philosophy and communications. In the next sections I provide some background and further justification for its application to inquiry into the experience of public deliberation.
Narrative Methods

This thesis places narrative as a central concern. The word is overused, so requires clarification here. The first characteristic of narrative, which is consistent across most scholarly applications, is that it consists of contingent sequences, entailing the “consequential linking of events or ideas” (Salmon & Riessman, 2008: 78). This coherence may be episodic or temporal. It need not be a classic story form with a plot, but there ought be a clear beginning and end.

Secondly, narrative describes activity, including a rupture or disturbance in the course of events, some kind of unexpected action that provokes a reaction (Riessman, 2008, p.6) worthy of inquiry. A text (or conversation or speech) is not a narrative if it does not describe something happening.

Thirdly, narrative is told. This means that narrative has a presentation or performative side as well as a substantive side, which can be analysed jointly. The telling can be as a monologic broadcast by one source (like the description in the ACP earlier), or as part of a shared encounter with many contributing voices. In a small group, one individual may offer an anecdote that relates to the discussion topic. Or several individuals could collaboratively construct a narrative that is situated in the future, for example how a problem might be solved. In terms of this inquiry, there are two levels of the ‘telling’: ACP participants may tell stories about their experiences, and I will tell about the experience of the participants at the ACP.

Fourthly, a narrative embodies strategy, function and purpose as a sense-making and identity-forming tool:

- Narratives often serve different purposes for individuals than they do for groups, although there is some overlap. Individuals use the narrative form to remember, argue, justify, persuade, engage, entertain, and even mislead an audience. Groups use stories to mobilize others, and to foster a sense of belonging. Narratives do political work. The social role of stories—how they are connected to the flow of power in the wider world—is an important facet of narrative theory (Riessman, 2008: 8).

With these four characteristics, it is clear that not all communication by deliberators can be treated as narrative. The facilitators could recommend to participants that they tell more stories to each other to aid in mutual understanding, thus generating more content for analysis. But I am more interested in the collaborative story that groups construct through their deliberation.
As I just indicated, it will be me, the researcher, who re-constructs the narrative. This re-construction begins with the enactment and capture of a formal interview, conversation in deliberative activity or other sources of text. The medium may allow for a relatively complete recording, as with digitised video or audio, or selective as in ethnographic field notes. Re-construction proceeds with the selection and transcription of text. Finally, choices can be made about the best way to portray the text episodically for analysis. Each of these steps involves interpretation which must be revealed as transparently as possible.

The realist narrative account found in most analytic case studies is presented as historical fact, with evidence provided to support a correspondence theory of Truth. The typical positivist method to qualitative analysis is to record representational interviews and ‘thick descriptions’ of a situation within the scope of a research question, then reduce that ‘data’ to manageable size from which coder-verified categorisation and mid-level theory can be induced (Punch, 2005: 154-160). Other positivist approaches that are used to study dialogue fall into the category of conversation analysis, examining every guttural nuance in the speech, and even synchronised eye and body movements. Such studies are usually intended as a window into the cognitive states of participants rather than a more social, cultural or political view. They also focus almost exclusively on the conversational interaction itself (Sawyer, 2006; Punch, 2005: 220).

On the other hand, this inquiry applies interpretive approaches of discourse analysis, which presume that conversations are set in a cultural and political milieu that both affect and are affected by them (Punch, 2005: 221). Discourse analysis exposes lived experience as portrayed and constructed in communication. It is in the study of the sequence of situated and contextualised communicative episodes and speech acts in deliberation that an understanding of that experience can be revealed. Rather than proceeding to extract and reduce texts, conversations are presented intact to retain their context. The window of time examined in discourse analysis is much longer than for conversational analysis.

At the beginning of this inquiry, the methodology called Narrative Inquiry (NI) showed useful promise. NI provides a powerful set of methods for analysing texts, especially as prescribed by American sociologist Riessman (2008; 2003; see also Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The methods of NI are aligned with discourse rather than conversational analysis, since it is the contextual and semiotic aspects that are most of interest in this study of deliberation. Detailed analysis of the moment-to-moment interaction of conversation is of less interest here.
Unfortunately, as an overall methodology, Narrative Inquiry is inappropriate for this inquiry because it is about researchers and participants co-constructing a narrative text, as in the recounted story of an individual’s life experiences. It is staged around the event of recreating past events through a shared, reflexive interview experience. However, the analytic stance and methods used in NI are useful and appropriate to this thesis.

Rather than a situation of interviews with a historical perspective, the ACP involved group participants drawing statements from one another. At the ACP there were few exercises that specifically elicited stories (Black & Lubensky, 2013), and table facilitators were not encouraged to draw stories from participants. I needed to look further than just subject story-telling by participants at the ACP. Instead, I wish to construct group narratives that portray the experience of deliberation. These would be cohesive stories that a whole group generates (or not, as the case may be) through their deliberative activity.

To analyse the resulting text, the researcher needs to ask many questions of it, along the lines of critical thinking or close reading (Riessman, 2008: 11), for example:

- what elements are included, and why?
- what elements were omitted, and why?
- who is the narrative for, and why?
- what is its purpose?
- what prompted the narrative to occur when it was?
- why is it sequenced as it is?
- what cultural artefacts does it draw on or take for granted?
- what storehouse of plots does it call up?
- are there preferred, alternative or counter-narratives?
- what are the inconsistencies in it?

Which of these questions take priority depends on the inquiry question and the particular analytical approach taken by the researcher. Riessman prescribes three primary methods of analysis, which she names thematic analysis, structural analysis and dialogic/performative analysis. Like an onion, each builds on the layer underneath.

A good narrative analysis prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of a text, and there is a move toward a broader commentary. Just because narrative approaches interrogate cases ... does not mean results cannot be generalized (Riessman, 2008: 13).

Thematic analysis is the most straightforward. It is limited to an examination of meaning and patterns in the literal content of the text, in other words what is told. A
narrative application of discourse analysis demands that texts be kept intact in long passages to fully reveal their context. In an inquiry that only applies thematic analysis (typical of case studies), the story emerges ‘fully-blown’ from the self of the narrator, “presented as if it came out of a vessel, uncontaminated by human interaction” (Riessman, 2008: 58). The earlier introduction to the ACP was presented dryly in this way, as substantial fact.

Thematic analysis is theory-driven to the extent that case narratives are selected to span a certain predefined theme. In this inquiry, for example, there is an interest in evidence of participant learning, so narratives are selected that include instances of participants asking exploratory questions or making statements that clearly infer individual epiphanies. It is this ‘point’ of the narrative that makes it useful for analysis. Thematic analysis should be done carefully so as not to conflate multiple possible meanings in particular word choices.

At the next level of complexity is structural analysis, which examines how speech is organised by the participants to achieve apparent strategic goals. The analysis starts with what is told, but expands to how it is told. For example, the speaker could use language in a persuasive, rhetorical manner, or the turn-taking and non-verbal cues become important. The topic of conversation may take unexpected turns, leaving certain issues unresolved. The conversation may proceed in long monologues, or in short bursts. These can be usefully interpreted as relating to power relations, intersubjective conflicts, contextual and psychological impacts, and growing mutual affinity in group deliberation.

Structural analysis can attempt to interpret the functions of clauses, the appropriation of metaphors and the clustering of ideas as episodes of discourse (Riessman, 2008: 100). The unit scale can vary from tight phrasing to long stanzas. For example, through structural analysis, one can discern the nature of inductive or abductive logic (Douven, 2011) followed in a conversation by including episodes that are consequentially linked.

The structural analyst is obliged to go to great lengths to portray narrative texts in detail. Analysis might include multiple readings of the narrative with various thematic or structural approaches that build on each other. All the messiness of oral speech and communicative behaviour is portrayed in transcription. This makes structural analysis hard work to render and read, but it can usefully demonstrate how salient meaning is constructed, how identity is displayed, how group cognition emerges (Stahl, 2006) or how meaning shifts across time.
Finally, **dialogic/performative analysis** takes all of the above under its umbrella, but then animates the moment of expression “in all its complexity” (Riessman, 2008: 137). Ideally, the attention here is not taken retrospectively, but at the very moment of the social interaction when the story unfolds—the focus is on “the words in their speaking” (Shotter, 2006b: 590). The dialogic approach demands reflexivity of the researcher:

> withness-thinking ... [that] is a knowing to do with one’s participation within a [research] situation, with one’s ‘place’ in it, and with how one might ‘go on’ playing one’s part within it—a knowing in which one is affected by one’s surroundings perhaps even more than one affects them (Shotter, 2012: 3).

Similarly, Reissman remarks that,

> Investigators carry their identities with them like tortoise shells into the research setting, reflexively interrogating their influences on the production and interpretation of narrative data (Riessman, 2008: 139).

For situations where the researcher overtly shapes the narrative encounter, the researcher moves actively into the narrative account (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). For example, I did choose to talk directly to participants about relevant meanings and interpretations. All aspects about me that could have any influence or benefit to the participants’ expression should be surfaced. Every conversation is presumed to carry the many voices of its cultural and historical context, even if they are not obvious (Riessman, 2008: 107). Meaning must be constantly problematised as a relation rather than a fact, because it

> does not reside in the speaker’s narrative, but in the dialogue between speaker and listener(s), investigator and transcript, and text and reader (ibid.: 139).

In Riessman’s seminal 1993 work, she advocated “text-based coherence” as a touchstone for demonstrating trustworthiness. But since then she has come to acknowledge that it is in the relation between researcher, subject and context where coherence is developed, which may be complex and contradictory:

> Instead of trying to find coherence and factuality in individuals’ stories, investigators might search for coexistent realities—selves and communities that are pulling together and pulling apart at the same time ... Making sense analytically of both convergence and divergence would support trustworthiness (Riessman, 2008: 191).

This fluid and systemic perspective is consistent with and provides an apt segue into the next sections about my emerging constructionist and dialectic stances as a researcher in this inquiry.
Approaching Social Constructionism

On the Saturday morning that I was in Canberra buried in research participation of the ACP, my good friend John, who I have known for almost three decades, was sitting nervously in his timber house at the heavily-forested community of Kinglake 400 kilometres away. He had been warned of extreme fire danger due to high winds, low humidity and an expected top temperature of 40°C. Three hours later he was scrambling into the stone cellar of a neighbour’s property as a massive and intense bushfire roared through, devastating every house in its path.

I visited John several weeks later when he had resettled elsewhere and our conversation touched on the nature of my academic work. I explained that it is not based on proving hypotheses through scientific methods, but on a scholarly world-view and inquiry approach called social constructionism. I began by stating that much of the structures and events that are taken for granted as inevitable and real are human inventions arising out of social interactions, historical confluence, cultural influences and language as people try to make sense of things, exert power, solve problems and put things in order.

Immediately, John was indignant. “You can’t tell me that fire wasn’t real!” I clarified my position by stating that I was referring to how we talk about and describe things, not their physical existence necessarily. John’s blank stare in return indicated my lack of progress with the explanation. I then asked John what “bushfire” meant to him, and he scowled in reply, “It’s fire, what do you mean? It nearly killed me!”

John is an engineer with a world-view that is as realist as anybody I know. For him, the world is a place of propositions, of facts and truths that everyone should recognise with comparable saliency. For John, the purpose of language is to transmit a correspondence to truth. Real knowledge, including validated theories, are proven from objective evidence and scientific methods, the approach referred to as positivism. For every question, there is a rational ‘best’ answer that leaves alternatives quite wrong. Morality is often conflated with reality. John is not terribly judgemental, but when he does pass judgement, then he believes that most people should share it as a matter of truth. Certainty is a virtue—John generally speaks authoritatively. It was probably

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1 My story about John is stylised for brevity. My inclusion of it acknowledges his importance in helping me construct my outlook, even though we may disagree.
2 In Australia the term is bushfire, while in North America it is typically called a forest fire or a wildfire.
certainty-seeking that saved his life, since he had an evacuation plan ready in the face of a disaster risk that was very real to him.

The social constructionist approach is less concerned with absolute truth. For people who did not plan adequately, ‘bushfire’ probably carried various meanings: it occurs elsewhere, the Country Fire Authority protects you, and most people survive. Metaphoric descriptors such as ‘catastrophic’ and ‘deadly’ are not applied in general conversation. A “she’ll be right, mate!” dismissive framing might be endemic amongst some friends and family who are too young or who had immigrated since major bushfire incidents decades earlier, exacerbated by a disregard for mainstream media and general irreverence towards official warnings. Therefore, their socio-culturally influenced concept of bushfire would not have been wrapped in the sort of personal risk that fuelled John’s urgency to plan for his survival.³ To a realist, their complacency was absolutely wrong on epistemic grounds: it was invalid. On the other hand, as a constructionist I would start with a commitment to explore and respect their framing, but judge it poorly on a pragmatic basis: their (in)action not only would not work but could yield terrible consequences. I would also acknowledge the subjective part that an emotion like fear (or the lack of it) plays in shaping our social world, rather than denying its place in the analytic landscape. So I would have chosen to follow John’s preparatory actions too, but on different grounds.

In describing the alternative framing of ‘bushfire’ to John, I was referring to the way one idealises and symbolises events, the way one names, associates, categorises and structures place-holders for concepts and commitments that may be taken for granted or pressed for acceptance, and the stories that are retold about the social world. People arrive at their conceptions⁴ from different cultures and experiences. The same words might be used, but they literally mean different things to different people. For a realist such as John, the world should have (although he probably would not see it as a normative issue) one correct set of accepted meanings and answers. Such a well-defined situation, identified by certain particular and unambiguously essential qualities, presents inevitable conclusions for action, without contingencies. Thus my question about meaning seemed nonsensical to John.

Social constructionists advocate an interpretive approach that holds that different meanings, as products of social interaction and culture, should exist and be

³ It is not my point here to state categorically why others acted as they did, for I have not conducted a study or read the Royal Commission on the Black Saturday Bushfires in detail. I only provide a possible alternative framing for the purpose of this thesis and its narrative.

⁴ I use the term conception metaphorically in the constructionist sense, meaning more how we frame an idea in communication or social relation rather than as the typical connotation of an internalised mental model.
tolerated in a pluralist society. Furthermore, these semantic and semiotic artefacts are capable of change and renewal. As Harris (2008: 232) suggests, “the meaning of things is not inherent.” The physical reality of bushfires is incontestable, but the social and institutional activities around them “are interpreted entities whose existence and qualities are dependent in large part on people's meaning-making practices” (ibid., emphasis in original). Consider the different evocations of a bushfire lit by an arsonist, by lightning or by a controlled-burn crew. In a given study setting, constructionist researchers are neither intent on discovering ‘real’ meanings in any absolute sense, nor on imposing meanings onto those under study, but rather they “ought to study the meanings people live by and how those meanings are created” (ibid.).

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5 A controlled burn is a small bushfire lit by a fire-fighting agency during cool and calm conditions to reduce the fuel load at ground level, so that a major bushfire incident becomes less likely. Also applied to stimulate germination of seeds from cones.
Review of Social Constructionist Research

Since the minds of people are not directly accessible to discover ‘meaning’ or ‘intention’, the typical approach is to examine the use of socially and culturally produced symbolic representations of meaning, in the form of words, gestures, texts, artefacts and communicative actions, and most importantly their named categories. The redundant ‘social’ qualifier to constructionism is associated with the surge of interest following sociologists Berger & Luckmann’s 1966 publication of The Social Construction of Reality, which led to rapid growth in the academic discipline of sociology. Blumer (1969, cited in Frey & Sunwolf, 2004: 279) and Harris (2008) applied social constructionist ideas to extend the framework of symbolic interactionism, developed much earlier but not named as such by Mead, which focusses on how different social groups create shared meaning in language, symbols and textual artefacts, and demonstrate their coherence in mutual activity. In the study of small group communications relevant to public participation, this led to the development of symbolic convergence theory, structuration theory and of particular relevance to this thesis (see Chapter 5), dialectical theory of group communications (Frey & Sunwolf, 2004; Johnson & Long, 2002; Poole et al, 2000).

The most radically ‘post-modern’ constructionists are methodologically uninterested in the reality of social categories such as poverty, gender and class, or even middle-level theoretical categorisations, instead focussing only on the discursive or narrative framings and interpretations of subjects, in response to apparent historical, cultural and social influences (Potter & Hepburn, 2008; Sparkes & Smith, 2008; Shotter & Lannamann, 2002; Gergen, 1992, cited in Pearce, 1995).

In her guide to social constructionism for psychologists, Vivian Burr (2003: 21-22) divides research into categories of macro-construction and micro-construction. Micro-level inquiry typically examines the more private constructions arising directly out of conversations as participants position themselves, develop relations and reconfigure the world around them. The context of micro-level studies would be localised, shared topics such as occupational burn-out, dignity in dying or youth homelessness, with fine-grained interpretive analysis of speech and social acts. Macro-level inquiry typically examines the more public constructions of social structures or institutional practices with particular focus on issues of power. The topics of macro-level studies include gay culture, hospital care or volunteerism, typically applying narrative as well as discourse analytic methods. Macro-level analysis tends to come more from a spectator research stance (Pearce, 2009: 44). Some constructionist research engages with
a context at both micro- and macro-levels using different methods, to produce a broad picture. This typology is useful for planning the scope and methods of inquiry.

Rather than getting too tied up in semantics, Canadian analytical philosopher Hacking, who offered a friendly critique to the take-up of social constructionism, advocates that researchers, “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask what’s the point” (Hacking, 1999: 5). Conversational “words do not in themselves have a meaning, but a use, and furthermore, a use only in a context; they are best thought of, not as having already determined meanings, but as means, as tools or as instruments for use in the ‘making’ of meanings” (Shotter, 1989, cited in Pearce, 1995). This is why metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), aphorisms and sound bytes derived from everyday speech are projected back into the public sphere to serve as short-hand references to complex stories and stakeholder positions. For example, it is easy to accept the common constructionist example that the so-called ‘war on drugs’ is designed to invoke popular support for unconstrained enforcement measures that stretch the boundaries of civil liberty and constitutional protection to the possible injustice of a police state. But social constructionists do look beyond rhetorical euphemisms. By rediscovering and publicising the origins of common language in various contexts, and perhaps by pointing to coercive motives behind their invocation, constructionists show “how certain states of affairs that others have taken to be eternal ... are actually products of socio-historical or social interactional processes” (Weinberg, 2008: 14).

A substantial literature appeared in the 1980s and 1990s which depicted all manner of social categories and institutions as socially constructed, from danger to youth homelessness (Hacking, 1999: 1). These studies reject the inevitability of these things, and point to the historical contingencies that led to their current conception. The power relations and social rules that shaped the construction are brought to light. Sometimes beneficiaries of a particular construction are unmasked.

Weinberg takes the “view that social constructionist studies are those that seek, at least in part, to replace fixed, universalistic, and socio-historically invariant conceptions of things with more fluid, particularistic and socio-historically embedded conceptions of them” (ibid.). For instance, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, a bank is no longer spoken of confidently as the epitome of ‘establishment’, where wealth is held securely—the constructionist would claim that such an idea was always conventionally held through social re-construction rather than an inevitability. Banks would not be located and operate as they do if people did not talk about and treat them as they do. Seeing a situation and the relationships around it as formed and re-formable by people and their activity rather than objectified and finalised, opens the possibility
for change. For example, many people now never step into a bank branch. They get paid by direct deposit and request ‘cash out’ when paying for groceries at the supermarket with a debit card. People no longer ‘do their banking’. The relation to the institution has been re-constructed.

Constructionist analysts are not unanimous in investigating processes of interpretation and meaning-making as their central concern. Some constructionists are more interested in the real things that are instantiated and reinforced out of social interaction. For example, Pearce (1995; 2007) viewed social relationships, identities and institutions as contexts that are ‘acted into’ through patterns of communication and social actions that literally shape them, give them meaning and make them real. The unit of analysis for constructionist inquiry should be the holistic relation of ‘persons in conversation’ (Harré, 1984, cited in Pearce, 1995: 91), rather than just about persons or just about the words. Central to this approach to constructionism is a commitment to view language, especially in conversation, not as a representational medium or mere carrier of meaning and thought in the Cartesian dualist mode, but for expression in language to be social acts in their own right, which always build and shape identities and relations between people. Pearce created the aphorism that, when performed mindfully, “communication makes better social worlds.”

That leaves the question about where the constructionist social-making is really situated. Shotter takes an interactionist approach by situating dialogue in episodes of joint action, which are characterised by mutual attention, obligation, and accountability in the exchange (Shotter, 1995: 54-5). It is through joint action that social objects (including differences) are instantiated and given meaning. Joint action is driven by the intentions of interlocutors. Constructionist communication practitioners focus on mindfulness in dialogue (see Pearce, 2007) which is “open to the influences of both past and present others at the very moment of its performance, and their influences may be present in it too” (Shotter, 1995: 66-7). The ideal is to bring a moral “oughtness” to each interactive moment (ibid.: 51).

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6 Pearce attributed the term “better social worlds” to his wife Kimberley (Pearce, 2009, note).
Axes of Social Construction

All constructionists are open to pluralism, subjectivity and uncertainty, and therefore take a broad view of what can qualify as reality. Along these lines, Pearce (1995) developed three continua for differentiating the approaches of realists from constructionists, and amongst the range of constructionists themselves. These axes are not independent of each other, but provide useful points for comparison.

One of these axes sets the social world as pluralistic versus the social world as monadic. This is the range I have already been referring to, whereby the realist sees the social world as having a single essential reality like the physical world, that is discoverable and unambiguous. Meanwhile, constructionists variously allow for discourse patterns and world-views as claims to different sorts of reality. The term paradigm has been appropriated from Kuhn (1996/1961) who applied it to the advance of science, to “refer to social groups who understand the world roughly the same way and have similar expectations about how they—and each other—should act into it” (Pearce, 2007: 59). Pearce has extended the term to refer to the socio-cultural activity of groups, along the lines of vernacular use, rather than Kuhn’s technical and monolithic abstraction about knowledge production. Pearce could have more directly referred to the traditions of MacIntyre (2007/1981), which more closely match his idea. Perhaps most importantly in the context of communication and public deliberation, the language and performance within one paradigm or tradition may be largely incomprehensible to those acting in a different one—at its worst manifesting a cross-cultural clash. Through their inquiry and intervention, constructionist practitioners foreground such cultural differences and try to help build respectful relationships and toleration across them.

All constructionists resist the temptation to accept the existence of essential qualities, relations or states in human and social activity. This would contradict the commitment that all these are ongoing accomplishments of social construction. For example, constructionist psychology rejects the theory of innate categorical traits as the starting point for explaining social dynamics. This is not to deny genetic and physiological influences and constraints to learning and development, but the social world itself is derived primarily from the relations made in communication rather than from reified structure. Constructionism aligns with anti-foundationism.

It is from the monadic realist perspective that the shrill critique of relativism is levelled at the constructionist who would legitimise space for the multitude of subjective perspectives (Yanow, 2003), the constellation of discourse patterns (Dryzek, 2000) and
the multiple sources and meanings in expressions that Bakhtin called ‘polyvocality’. The typical premise of the relativist critique is quite absolute, that every claim on a particular topic is as good as any other one (Rorty, 1979: 115). But this implies that the generous consideration of multiple perspectives is equivalent to their endorsement, which is absurd. Furthermore, constructionists make judgements about goodness on pragmatic rather than epistemic grounds, so there is no compulsion to assign absolute truth values to claims and necessarily push minority claims to the side. Verisimilitude is not meaningful in the constructionist paradigm.

Borrowing from Dewey (2005/1929), Pearce (1995) identifies a second axis with the comparison of spectator versus participant knowledge. There are several aspects to this, to which various constructionists subscribe more or less. The first, and perhaps most important distinction is epistemological: what constitutes social knowledge? The realist typically lives by the Cartesian cognitive model of knowledge as a correspondence between what is inside one’s mind and a fixed external reality. For the realist, learning (or perhaps more accurately, conceptualisation) is the process of internalisation into a mental schema of patterns and models of the world and the capacity to activate them (e.g. memory recall and application). On the other hand, constructionists typically treat social knowledge as embedded in the ongoing adaptation to and co-creation of a social world that is in continuous regeneration. So knowledge is not acquired and recalled necessarily, but manifests in performance (Sfard, 1998). Of course, one sometimes needs to make reference to the content or product of construction, and it is difficult to avoid using a word such as conception which in Euro-American culture leads the reader to think of a mental representation. It is difficult to escape cultural habits.

The cognitive model, and the associated creation of generalised frameworks, categories and artefacts like graphs as analogues of mental schema, imply that the scientist stands back as a spectator from her subject-matter and dispassionately makes observations and objectifies features under study with every effort taken to remove any hint of subjective judgement or bias. In contrast, the constructionist claims that this is hardly possible for understanding anything except the least complex aspects of the social world. The tactic should be exactly the opposite, to participate transparently and genuinely in the social environment to gain the full experience of its complex qualities, and even act and intervene to initiate change. Rather than steadfastly denying subjectivity, the constructionist embeds knowledge reflexively—mindfully and openly—in the interplay of participatory interpretation and action, depending in these regards as mentioned earlier, by the flavour of constructionism that is pursued.
Axes of Social Construction | Lubensky

Shotter (2012: 8) remarks that to study a social situation is to “function as a participant within the very phenomena one is inquiring into.” Many qualitative researchers choose to avoid ‘going native’ and retain their ‘otherness’ in the research setting and are satisfied merely to acknowledge that there is bias and that the best that can be done is to bring it to the surface. It may not seem possible to participate directly in all aspects of an inquiry, when the only option is to be an observer. But some scholars such as Shotter (2012) and Hosking (2008) suggest that this position does not sustain a genuine constructionist stance, seeing it only as post-positivism with the superiority of the researcher and theory held implicitly. Instead, Hosking advocates a critical relational constructionism which centres on “relational processes and the local realities they make, break and re-construct” (Hosking & Pluut, 2010). This includes flattening the relationship between researcher and community as embedded enactment rather than as received expertise. She even goes beyond ‘intervention’ which still distinguishes the expert researcher. Hosking (2008: 671) advances a reflexive criticality that “is suspicious about any claim to know what is best for another,” which in its very act would stand the researcher apart, in a superior position. This stance is only fully possible in situations where trust between participant and inquirer is easily obtained through a jointly-experienced journey, such as the palliative care situations entered into by Hosking. Nonetheless, its ethic of humbleness is worthwhile to all constructionist inquiries.

This is in contrast to Weinberg (2008: 15) who reports, “social constructionists have tended to cast themselves as gadflies, de-constructing and unmasking their colleagues’ myriad sacred cows as the socially contingent and eminently provisional achievements that they are.” Furthermore, constructionist academics are increasingly committing themselves to political action, social justice and mobilising community engagement, emancipatory outcomes for research participants and a willingness by researchers to be personally transformed by the research process (Foster & Bochner, 2008: 100).

A related aspect of the spectator-participant axis is the attitude towards theory. The cognitive approach privileges theory generation as the pinnacle of human development. Practice is seen as subordinate to theory, as an often suboptimal attempt to perform at some ideal efficiency. As metaphorical spectators, the thinkers stand back and set the rules, and authoritatively judge the activity of the doers. There is a Cartesian division of labour between the agenda-setting theorist-object and hands-on practitioner-subject, with a consequent stratification of power. In sharp contrast, constructionists typically integrate theory and practice into a continuous process of learning and doing, referred to as praxis.
In the context of attempting to address another inflammatory rhetorical construction, the so-called ‘Science Wars’ following the sensationalised Sokal affair, Flyvbjerg (2001: 57) recalls Aristotle’s three ‘intellectual virtues’ of episteme, techne and phronesis. In today’s language, episteme is about the establishment of universal truth by scientific means, techne is about practical skills, craft and artistry, and phronesis is about prudence and ethical action. Whereas the first two Greek terms are the roots for the modern concepts respectively of epistemology and technology/technique (i.e. know-how), the latter term has not carried forward in the English language. Flyvbjerg’s ambition is to challenge the western canon that privileges episteme and techne as the normal means to advance social and cultural understanding and experience, and promote the pragmatic approach inherent in phronesis that connects the particular with the general, the individual with the collective and the practical to the normative. Flyvbjerg asserts that while the term phronesis is relatively unknown, it provided the inspiration and bases for many well-known social science frameworks, including Bourdieu’s ‘fieldwork in philosophy’, Bellah’s ‘social science as public philosophy’, Foucault’s ‘genealogies’ and Bernstein’s and Toulmin’s ‘practical philosophy’. Phronesis aligns with the pragmatism of Dewey and Rorty, and includes the social development of ethical judgement (i.e. what ‘ought’ to be done) rather than theoretical prescriptions:

The purpose of social science is not to develop theory, but to contribute to society’s practical rationality in elucidating where we are, where we want to go, and what is desirable according to diverse sets of values and interests. The goal of the phronetic approach becomes one of contributing to society’s capacity for value-rational deliberation and action. The contribution may be a combination of concrete empirical analyses and practical philosophical considerations (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 167).

Pearce’s (1995) third dimension for differentiating realist and constructionist approaches places certainty and the exercise of curiosity at opposite ends. A realist may see curiosity simply as the quest for truth and certainty. But curiosity in the constructionist tradition is the second order reflexive action of ‘checking in’ with perceptions and stances. As he explains,

The exercise of curiosity by social constructionists consists of an affinity for paradox and irony, a certain playfulness about our own actions that take into consideration the fact that we make the world that we describe, and an orientation towards mutuality, co-construction, and systems rather than toward reductionism or objectivism. From the perspective of [realism], these

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7 In 1996, Alan Sokal successfully submitted a bogus article for publication in the academic journal “Social Text” for an issue devoted to the “Science Wars,” and revealed the hoax immediately to humiliate scholarship in cultural and social studies. The editorial standard of the particular journal was poor (there was no peer review), but the incident was magnified in the media to discredit all post-modernist and constructionist scholarship.
forms of curiosity appear frivolous, incomprehensible, often perverse; from the social constructionist perspective they are the minimal expressions of the reflexivity between what we know about the world and our place in it (Pearce, 1995: 102).

This dimension is in part about the rules we live by and how seriously we regard them. The constructionist tries to be open and patient about experiencing multiple perspectives in a given context, suspending the closing force of judgement (including categorical naming and framing) as long as possible. For many positivists, the search is on for universal laws and truths not only in the physical world, but in the social world as well, extending to morality that may be strongly ordered institutionally and in reverence of authority. While not all constructionists are irreverent, most would not feel bound so much by orthodoxy. They would generally live by a pragmatic ethic in which social norms are negotiated rather than certain. Constructionists may try to be humble and fearless about making mistakes as they experiment with life.

Another aspect of Pearce’s third dimension is the range of focus in constructionist research from process to product. Macro-level inquiry, especially if it investigates interpretations of cultural constructions, tends to be product-focussed. Micro-level inquiry that investigates practices tends to be process-focussed (Pearce, 2009: 46). Investigations that give ontological precedence to process tend to view changing relations as the unit of analysis, so the situation under study and its participants are viewed as ‘becoming’ rather than as ‘being’ (Chia 1995, cited in Hosking, 2008: 673). The research program emerges organically as the immersion in the environment proceeds. This fits with the experience of evolving relations between transforming objects, including the researcher.

Regardless of constructionists’ spectator/participant, process/product, macro/micro or any other orientation, most will take an interest in the construction of power in the context of their investigation. In particular, attention is often focussed on how power is able to mask certain practices to its benefit. This is the critical edge of constructionism, which is attended to by some with moral vigour and by others with reflexive humility.

Talk of construction tends to undermine the authority of knowledge and categorization. It challenges complacent assumptions about the inevitability of what we have found out or by our present ways of doing things—not by refuting or proposing a better, but by ‘unmasking’... Constructionists are greatly concerned with questions of power and control. The point of unmasking is to liberate the oppressed, to show how categories of knowledge are used in power relationships (Hacking, 1998: 66).

Unmasking is a word used in critical theory and originates in Marx and Mannheim. The original German word is more usually translated as ‘exposing’, but this has too many other meanings in English.
Constructionist researchers typically apply *abductive* inference (Douven, 2011), also known as *inference to the best explanation* (Lipton, 2000) in situations of uncertain or partial information. The effort usually begins with an ‘educated guess’, a heuristic or ‘the voice of experience’ which may then be improved iteratively as evidence is gathered in pragmatically developing *practical theory* rather than general tenets. To clarify what ‘best’ means, Lipton playfully demonstrates that it integrates epistemic judgement about what is *most likely* with moral/aesthetic judgement about what is *most lovely*. In other words, abduction can construct a *design* but not a proof. This developmental logic does not discredit orthodoxy, but strives to see the situation in the moment with a full potential for reconfiguration. Constructionists inquire about what is constructed and how, but are generally less interested in questions about why (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008: 5). The challenge for constructionists is their very acceptance by many academic institutions that privilege investigation of explanatory causation, especially where the dominant discourse is in the tradition of positivism, that invites claims of propositional knowledge and theory. Constructionists are often left despondent (as I was with my friend John) because, as Pearce (2009: 37) explains,

> ...we almost always wind up stammering and stuttering and sounding quite silly, because social construction approaches are not just different in content to what ‘communication scientists’ are trying to construct; they are different in purpose, method and structure of argument.

My research questions are primarily about gaining a workable description about what deliberative activity entails for participants. I only gradually came to understand the tenets of constructionism as my project with the ACP advanced. I realised that the reflexive posture that I abductively committed to early, together with my intention to capture and analyse participant conversation in a sympathetic manner was entirely consistent with constructionist research. It was only later that I realised that I had missed the opportunity to fully embed myself in the activity, for example as a table facilitator, instead leaving myself as the spectator of the process.

Nonetheless, my inquiry is presented in a manner that does not presume my authority as a researcher. Although sections may be written with confidence, it is expected that they are read critically. Compared to positivist approaches to qualitative research,

> more latitude is sometimes allowed, however, and the final evaluation of the persuasiveness of an analytic claim is left to the reader. So in addition to analytic grounding, discourse analysis has emphasized the rhetorical persuasiveness, or the convincing qualities of the research report, as well as the reader’s active judgment on its validity (Nikander, 2008: 423).

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9 Pearce (2007; 2009) attributes this term to his long-time collaborator V. Cronen.
There have been many inquiries about public deliberation conducted within a constructionist framework. The ethics of public deliberation that are both theorised by Dryzek (2000) and many others, and practised in a myriad of formats ranging from large Citizens’ Assemblies such as the ACP to small Citizens’ Juries, align well with the constructionist world-view. Public policy is intrinsically socially-constructed, even if elite power continues to dominate its determination. Deliberation, especially in the theoretical context of Dryzek’s model of a constellation of discourses, aligns with the constructionist tolerance for a plurality of ethical and moral positions that should be expressed as viable local realities. Furthermore, in leaning towards the reality-forming stance of Pearce and Shotter, social constructionism underpins the emergent and iterative change process that shapes the reality of citizens through deliberation.
In Praise of a Storied Approach

My research journey into public deliberation at the ACP did not begin with a commitment to social construction. It began with an exploration of narrative as both a social resource and a social product. When public engagement practitioners talk about deliberative activity, it is invariably spoken of as a process. It is generally accepted to be an activity that takes time and passes through distinct stages. But beyond that, there is no well-told story that describes such a process. This may be one reason why commentators tend to focus on the propositional outcomes of deliberation rather than on what happened.

For consistency, and to demonstrate my commitment to a narrative approach, I began my introduction in the previous section to social constructionism in a storied fashion. Stories can help bind ideas together and relate them to human experience. They can make concepts more memorable and provide them with the associated context that makes them meaningful. In the case of my introduction of social constructionism, the storied presentation helps make the concepts distinct from other concepts that may be more commonly understood.

Because I believe that constructing a compelling story about deliberation is necessary for the advancement of the public engagement movement, I am inclined to praise those who would present a staged framework for a deliberative process. Ironically, consultants and their organisations benefit today from the lack of a coherent general narrative about the stages of public deliberation—it is quite easy for them to differentiate themselves. However, wider dissemination and understanding of what a deliberative process usually entails will give potential conveners more confidence in the legitimacy of service providers. Conveners will be better informed about the options for service provision in a competitive environment.

Narrative is retrospective, by definition. The construction of narrative storylines is always a rear-mirror activity both for analysts and for participants of an activity who reflect on what happened. The narrative construction is a sense-making invention. But ultimately there should be a concern with the in-situ development of that story, before anything like a recognisable plot becomes obvious to those in the middle of the developing conversation. Boje (2001) calls this ante-narrative. There is intentional ambiguity in the prefix ‘ante’-, as Boje is concerned with the time before a coherent narrative emerges, but also the cheeky idea that conversational turns (in interview or in table dialogue) are proffered as a bet (as in the ‘ante’ in the card game poker) to nudge
the topical thread forward in a particular direction. Boje suggests that our analytic efforts should not stop at the easily-justified landing zones of constructed narrative, but open the spaces and relationships between them. The incoherence and messiness of a conversational milieux should be valued by recognising the many voices at play, including some who might be at odds with an emerging central story-line.

The inductive logic-empirical approach tends towards categorisation, of inventing boxes, quadrants, typologies and vocabularies that define landscapes authoritatively. Most processes are described functionally, especially in regards to the information or data that flows through them. Stages in a process are drawn as boxes identified with names, but the attention is primarily to what comes in and what goes out of each. As mere models of life, they are simplified so that only a limited and conventional vocabulary is needed to speak of them. They are judged by their efficiency in generating outputs, their cost or their practicality, with majority opinion prevailing. Staged processes seem to demand judgement along these lines, as their outputs are clearly defined and expected.

In the context of organisational development and learning, Weick (see Weick, 1995) describes sensemaking as the method that people naturally use to articulate a situation, especially where a problem or interruption is perceived against the normal course of organisational proceedings.

Sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing. Viewed as a significant process of organizing, sensemaking unfolds as a sequence in which people concerned with identity in the social context of other actors engage ongoing circumstances from which they extract cues and make plausible sense retrospectively, while enacting more or less order into those ongoing circumstances (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005: 409).

Weick describes sensemaking as a process of story formation, based on the naming of “salient” categories (ibid.) and reasons to explain events that are drawn abductively from tacit initial perceptions of the situation. However, the spark for this awakening arises through social interactions that occur within the bounds of the organisation and its micro-culture. The purpose of sensemaking is generally about advancing management and control which tends to reify the categories as explanatory objects.

Some social constructionists rebel against this reductionism as a sort of intellectual colonisation or counterfeit coherence (Boje, 2001: 2). While Weick celebrates the involvement of all organisational actors, he admits that they are often ill-equipped to deal with institutional power and its affective relations (Weick, 2005: 418). Similarly, a
process model that describes a predictable and determined set of linked events seems unsuitable for activities that are characterised by transformation and emergence. The framework presented in this thesis is only intended to be an organising tool to help construct a credible and enduring story about deliberative activity, rather than defining a necessary a priori reality.

Pearce (2007: 131) describes social situations, including deliberative activity, as episodic. This means that conversations occur in blocks, each punctuated with a distinct beginning and end. Most importantly, an episode of conversation does something in a particular context—an instance of something new and meaningful is made out of a conversational episode. For example, mutual respect may develop between the interlocutors, or a shared conceptual frame for addressing a problem may be articulated. Pearce suggests that social situations and the consequences of our discourse can be improved with more consciousness of what is and can be made in communication. Episodes are layered in a hierarchy of storied contexts which could give them multiple simultaneous meanings. Connecting episodes constitutes the creation of story-lines that may not be fully recognised until later.

Pearce describes “clusters of episodes that have a strong family resemblance” (ibid: 141) as patterns of communication. For a group working through a deliberative process, these patterns of communication identify the stages of their activity.

In the 1960s Tuckman suggested a now-famous scheme about how groups develop and its members behave over time (Tuckman, 1965, cited in Beebe & Masterson, 2009: 65). He was referring to groups in general as people associated around a common idea, mission or institution. Tuckman observed groups passing through the rhyming stages of forming, storming, norming and performing. Forming is the uncertain stage of initial self-organisation, when a group establishes its membership and strives for an identity. Storming refers to the internal tensions that arise as members press their sometimes conflicting needs (note that behaviourism was the dominant psychology and learning theory at the time). Norming ensues as members enact rules and conventions to mollify those tensions to fulfil the aims of the group. Finally, performing refers to the ongoing cooperative and productive activity of the group. While suggested as linear stages, group dynamics rarely flow as cleanly as this scheme suggests, yet it continues to resonate as a story about groups.
The Narrative Arc of Deliberative Activity

The four-day agenda for the face-to-face meeting of the ACP in Canberra was designed by the lead facilitator and adjusted after comments by the organising team (See Appendix A). Its general orientation and flow was adapted from other processes conducted previously, to balance many constraints and aspirations to produce a deliverable product. In this section, a generalised plot of the agenda is presented, which is then demonstrated as descriptively applicable to many other designs of public deliberation.

From a constructionist perspective, the narrative path through deliberation should illuminate what participants do, what they make together and what they are becoming. Therefore, it should highlight its constitutive social actions. Deliberation is a complex and busy activity, certainly much more than the “exchanging reasons” that is abstractly stipulated by deliberative theory. To assist in organising the presentation of social actions in deliberation, some form of story-telling template would be useful, just as chapters organise a book.

I present a narrative arc that helps organise the presentation of the main features of the ACP, but as shown below, in alignment with other process designs. Inspired by Tuckman, it applies six words that not only group associated actions of a deliberative process, but also carry a poetic attribute in their alphabetic progression that is intended to make them memorable. The narrative arc is described in stages that are named Frame, Gather, Hope, Inquire, Judge and Take, characterised in Table 2.1 using terms of action often heard in practice.

It is not the intention here to pose the narrative arc as a universalised process model, grounded theory or a formal classification system for deliberative activity. This would invite the search for functional imperatives and explanatory inferences beyond the scope of study. Similarly, the narrative arc is not a definitive story-line for public deliberation, but a narrative template that is useful for understanding and presenting such processes. The purpose of the narrative arc in this thesis is descriptive only. Icons are assigned to each stage to aid in identifying associated types of actions.

It would also be a mistake to read this staged progression linearly. Hope does not begin necessarily when Gather is complete. Re-framing may occur throughout. Many stages can overlap and proceed simultaneously. Different individuals can be momentarily or substantially involved in different stages. Some stages recur in different
ways, or get elaborated upon. Sometimes actions of a later stage begin quite early. Sometimes to complete a later action, one must take a step back and do some more preliminary work. Perhaps it is best to consider these stages as loosely categorising modes of action that contribute to typical deliberative processes. But the lack of simple linearity should not detract from the idea that individuals, small groups and the assembly as a whole can be seen to move through these stages in an orderly, coherent way. Each of these stages will now be elaborated upon, with an emphasis on how the associated actions could be perceived by participants.

| Frame: | Key questions identified, design chosen, event organised, stakeholders identified and involved, name and frame, disparate positions outlined, materials prepared, media notified. |
| Gather: | Receive an invitation, make contact, enter a hospitable space, meet and begin to know one another. Greeting. Be welcomed. Set the norms of civil behaviour. Feel safe. |
| Hope: | Establish why we have been gathered. Express individual and mutual goals and aspirations. Appreciate what there is. Articulate the problems to be solved. Imagine a future. Believe a conclusion can be reached. |
| Judge: | Harvest, theme, make choices, decide, prioritise, pros/cons, categorise, analyse, synthesise, negotiate, seek consensus, converge. |
| Take: | Take up and take on. Consent to judgements, consolidate and prepare outcomes, commit to action, next steps, archive documents, reflect on process, disseminate agreements, celebrate. |

Table 2.1: Narrative arc of deliberative activity

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10 Icons were designed by Sujinda Hwang, used in this thesis under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Australia license. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/au/
Frame

The Frame stage is introduced reluctantly\textsuperscript{11} because with few exceptions it is not part of the story that participants in public participation have much control over. This stage involves all the preparatory work generally conducted by the convener and organiser of a public deliberation event. The word *frame* refers to what is to be considered in deliberation, and how it is organised and presented. Practitioners commonly call this ‘naming and framing’, to appropriate Schön’s famous term (Schön, 1987: 4).\textsuperscript{12} The topics or options to be discussed are decided in advance—they may be contentious in a community, and must be named neutrally. Often the issues are clearly defined for everyone, but in some instances there are different formulations of a common problem. Issue or topic booklets may be prepared as a starting point for dialogue (Kettering, 2011).

The manner in which the deliberative event is publicised should also be problematised. Choices in the design of the ACP, including its naming as a ‘parliament’, its 150 participants from each federal electorate, the development of proposals rather than talking about issues, and the national scope of its key question, were intended to attract maximum attention and take-up, and appeal to potential participants. The ACP was presented as an opportunity for Australians to have a direct voice in the political direction of the nation.

Rather than mandate what the CPs should talk about, several open-invitation World Café sessions were held before the ACP project was formed, to help formulate the key question to be asked. Then the Online Parliament, which included the CPs, was established to determine what preliminary topics should be addressed at the face-to-face gathering in Canberra. So in the case of the ACP, naming and framing were part of their unfolding story.

\textsuperscript{11} In Lubensky (2013) I do not include the *frame* stage.

\textsuperscript{12} Schön (1987: 4) did not define the term ‘name and frame’, but used it to describe how a practitioner should begin in addressing a problem. “Through complementary acts of naming and framing, the practitioner selects things for attention and organizes them, guided by an appreciation of the situation that gives it coherence and sets a direction for action.”
Gather

The word *gather* is given to the first contact that participants have with the process and each other in a deliberative activity. Perhaps more often the word ‘welcome’ is used. But ironically for events that are ostensibly organised to give voice to participants, it is the convener who initiates the welcome and participants are the recipients of it. The term ‘gather’ is more socially-oriented and symmetric.

Young (2000) brought social inclusion into the centre of deliberative democratic theory. She introduced the communicative mode of *greeting* as one practice that reinforces inclusion. “At the most basic level, ‘greeting’ refers to those moments in everyday communication where people acknowledge one another in their particularity” (57-58). Greeting usually takes the form of ritualised patterns, especially in the initial conversational turns when trust is implicitly offered and reciprocated. These initial moves may be superficial and not lead to sustained dialogue that recognises and respects individual values and their worth. But at least at the start, and sometimes re-initiated during a process, the formalised acts of greeting serve as a public acknowledgement of the participants to be included. This stage could have been named ‘greeting’ (and maintained the poetic sequence), a word that in its common meaning extended beyond the momentary action of starting or restarting a conversation is preferable.

A vital part of the gathering stage of deliberative activity is the development of a shared understanding of the norms of deliberation. This is often encouraged through initial exercises of collaboration and learning, group reflection and prescriptions given by the facilitators.

Participants’ stories begin well before they are welcomed and greeted in person. They would have each received an invitation of some sort, and then connected to the activity through communications or travel. Both individually and socially there is much going on for the participants during this lead-up to the event. Many participants of the ACP spoke of talking to family members and friends and seeking advice about accepting the invitation: Was it a hoax? Is it worthwhile? In the case of the ACP, participants were randomly selected. Invitations were sent to 9600 citizens on the electoral roll, evenly distributed across all 150 electorates. This project was presented as a genuine opportunity to influence government, even though it did not have any official authority. But the high production value in the invitation led many to feel privileged and important (Lubensky & Carson, 2013). Because only one CP was selected from each electorate, many identified themselves as ‘representatives’. Some even contacted their
local federal MPs who were largely unaware of the project, and were disappointed when the response was lukewarm.

CPs were given the option to be treated anonymously, or to allow their names to be made public. The media was notified about the ACP and many local newspapers made inquiries to interview the local citizen ‘representative’. Many of those who agreed to be interviewed publicly proclaimed their pride in representing the views and voices of their local area. Less seriously, some CPs admitted that they came for the adventure, for the free trip to Canberra.

The gathering stage is about more than just the physical assembly of the participants. It is about recognising the identity of participants and of the group as a whole. It is about participants constructing a preliminary sense of worth and commitment in the activity and of their place in it. This was reinforced at the start of each day when CPs were reseated at different tables and asked to reintroduce themselves to each other.

**Hope**

For comfort and confidence, participants in a deliberative activity want to know why they are there and what they are there to do. Some will arrive with different ideas and personal aspirations which are explored and synchronised with the group purpose. The motivations for participants are brought out into the open, as well as those for the organisers and conveners. A common task given to participants (as at the ACP) is to imagine what the success of their deliberative activity would look like. All of these future-oriented actions can be summed up in the simple word ‘hope’.

Different deliberative formats have different styles of agenda. Some agendas are only loosely set by organisers, while others like the ACP which have much to do in a short timespan are scripted tightly with only limited flexibility once the activity gets going. In any event, expectations are laid down early about how the activity will unfold. Participants build confidence that they will be able to reach a satisfactory conclusion, and do it on time.

Invariably, deliberation involves a problem or difficult issue of some kind. Before participants get too deep into it, they should share an understanding of the scope that they are dealing with, the extent to which they are coming up with resolutions and
how specific they need to be in their recommendations. So the ‘hope’ stage often involves seeking meta-consensus or consent about the overriding framework of their deliberations (Niemeyer & Dryzek, 2007).

The first day of the ACP was very much placed in the Hope stage, with the explicit goal of ‘Understanding what we want to achieve together at the ACP.’ This included affirmation to converse civilly and to make the process itself exemplary.

**Inquire**

At the centre of deliberative activity is learning about and exploring the issue at hand. The purpose of this thesis (the inquiry of the researcher) is to tease out what this entails for participants. But as the description in Table 2.1 shows, this stage involves a range of actions. Importantly, many of these actions can neither be objectified nor planned in advance. Also, the Inquiry extends beyond mere contact with information. At least some extent, the Inquiry is open-ended and capable of unpredicted divergence.

While other stages tend to occur more at the start or finish of a deliberative process, Inquiry is endemic. This is to say that actions of Inquiry can occur quite early, and continue to occur until the process is almost complete. Its placement in the middle of the plot indicates that in a particular conversational context, it would probably follow from related Hope, but precede Judgement. The expectation in deliberative practice is that judgement is suspended during Inquiry as long as is possible.

In line with the Inquiry stage, the goal of Day 2 at the ACP was “Broadening our perspectives.”

**Judge**

Most public engagement practitioners differentiate public deliberation from public dialogue by insisting that the former is staged to generate a decision or recommendation. Some would view dialogue as the Inquiry that should precede Judgement. I believe this is an irrelevant matter of professional delineation and

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13 The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) provides a typical distinction between dialogue and deliberation and an integrated process description at http://ncdd.org/rc/what-are-dd (accessed 01 Sept 2012).
prefer to see public deliberation as the over-arching activity that could not happen without dialogue.

Judgement is a place-holder term for a variety of actions that organise the participants towards generating a conclusion in the activity. The typical language of theory suggests actions such as preference-setting, decision-making and consensus-seeking. While these objectified and goal-oriented aspirations may be taken up in practice, there are many other actions which fall into this stage, as described in Table 2.1.

Some actions are performed by organisers on behalf of the participants, such as the real-time combination and reduction of texts by the Theme Team in the ACP, for redisplay back to the room. Some actions such as prioritisation are performed by participants using methods devised by the organisers. Other actions of Judgement arise directly out of conversation by participants.

There is also shared Judgement in design. Participants may take on the challenge of collaboratively scripting new propositions, suggesting new procedures (in the policy context of their conversation) and even altering the process agenda.

The goal of Day 3 at the ACP was implicitly judgemental in “Determining what is most important to us.”

taKe

While the story of deliberative activity should not be focussed entirely on outcomes, they are certainly important and occur in different ways. The process has its determined goals like policy recommendations or prioritisations. But there are also subsidiary outcomes related to the personal benefits to participants, public awareness and understanding (their ‘take’) of the issue at hand. The word ‘take’ can be interpreted like ‘take-up’ or ‘take-away’, terms commonly used in practice.

The narrative scheme described in this thesis is about public deliberation that sets out to generate concrete policy actions, unlike stand-alone World Café events or Deliberative Polling (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005) that are intended only to generate ideas or attitudes after helping participants inform themselves. Thus, it is public officials who are meant to taKe the output of public deliberation and make it happen.
Many deliberative process organisers now refer to ‘actions to be taken’ or ‘next steps’ once the formal deliberations are finished. The agency of these actions depends on the context, but usually involves the participants themselves. The project that encapsulates the deliberative activity needs to be ‘taken care of’ too, including archiving of documents, the production of reports and other close-out procedures.

The goal for Day 4 at the ACP was “Consolidating and delivering our recommendations.” While consolidation still involves a certain amount of judgement, the presumption was that the hard work had been done and that the remaining work was a matter of editing and formatting rather than scripting.
The Plots of Other Deliberative Processes

In this section the stages through which other deliberative processes flow are briefly reviewed. The purpose of this overview is to demonstrate that the narrative arc presented in this thesis generally fits processes other than the Australian Citizens’ Parliament. In each example, the process stages are related to the narrative arc of deliberative activity presented in this thesis. The cases selected here are chosen across a wide range of practice.

Some of these staged processes have a functional character, while others are more descriptive. One reason a discipline-wide vocabulary has been lacking to describe the path through deliberative activity in narrative terms is the plethora of ‘methods’ advanced by consultants and others who promote public engagement. But as is evident here, there are similarities across many of these approaches. (For more information about these methods, see Holman, Devane & Cady (2007) from which some of the material is drawn.)

The design of the ACP agenda by the organisers was conducted with the knowledge of these and other staged processes. While aspects of some of these staged processes were included in the ACP design, it is not the purpose here to demonstrate that overlap. Rather, the narrative arc can be seen to largely inhabit many engagement processes.

Open Space Technology (OST)

Harrison Owen originated the dialogue method called Open Space Technology (OST), often referred to simply as ‘Open Space’. This method has gained wide application, and is the basis for the current wave of ‘unconferences’ and ‘bar-camps’. It was also applied across the Occupy Movement in 2012. A variant of it was applied during one session of the ACP.

As for other dialogue methods that take a less structured approach than deliberation, Owen presents just four principles for its operation:

- **Whoever comes are the right people**
  This corresponds to the Gathering.

- **Whatever happens is the only thing that could have**
  This conflates Frame, Hope, Inquiry and Judgement

- **Whenever it starts is the right time**
  This is part of the Gathering
*When it’s over, it’s over*
This is part of the Judgement and the taKeing.

Dialogue in OST does not follow a prescribed pattern, which is why the principles are not ordered chronologically. Also, the ‘whatever happens’ principle purposefully says nothing about the activities that it encompasses, nor its framing. Open Space is a minimalist procedural space with only the endpoints delineated. There is intentionally no pre-determined plot.

While OST can be attended by people with a diversity of interests, it works best with like-minded people, at least insofar as their common commitment to a theme, ideology or community. It is also not decision-focussed, as participants decide on-the-fly what they Hope for and want to taKe away. It is most useful for digging deeply into an idea or envisioning a future from the creative perspectives of collaborating participants.

**Future Search (FS)**

Future Search (FS) is a facilitated planning process that seeks to find organisational or community consensus in the context of a particular challenge, especially where strong stakeholder positions have been taken. It is used often by companies that need to adapt to changing market conditions. While this thesis is primarily about public deliberation, this method demonstrates that process stories are relevant for stakeholder deliberation too. Future Search intentionally takes participants on an emotional roller coaster ride:

1. *Get the right people into the room*
   Gather about 60 people with authority, resources, information, expertise and need.

2. *Reviewing the past*
   This starts the Inquiry about what went wrong.

3. *Mind-mapping the present*
   This continues the Inquiry to an honest depiction of current circumstances, using a mediation tool.

4. *Owning our actions (aka ‘prouds and sorries’)*
   This is a Judgement stage that clears the way forward.

5. *Idealising future scenarios*
   This explicitly brings Hope into a creative and generative Inquiry.

6. *Identifying common ground*
   This is Judgement leading to taKe-up

7. *Planning for action*
   This is the final taKe-up, with Future Search being more action-oriented than many dialogic processes.
Future Search is particularly useful in organisations that have become dysfunctional and divisive. It is psychologically demanding of participants to identify and face up to past events and present circumstances, as ugly as they may be, to provide motivation for a shared commitment to work toward positive change. To achieve this, the method delays the invocation of Hope for special effect. Active facilitation is required.

Future Search takes a conventional approach of identifying problems and causes, then identifying, analysing and finally choosing solutions. Dewey (1997/1910) was an early advocate of this approach as a pragmatic method for progress. The framing is narrowly set, including a well-prescribed procedure.

**Appreciative Inquiry (AI)**

The Appreciative Inquiry method takes a different approach to the conventional analytical and problem-solving orientation. It can be applied to a variety of public or stakeholder situations where change is desired from the inside or outside. It has a very clever process story that goes like this:

1. **Discovery: what do we appreciate most?**
   This is the Gathering of people relevant to a situation, to value the best of their shared experience.

2. **Dream: how can we have more of that?**
   This is a Hopeful and Inquiring higher-order reflection about what is important.

3. **Design: what should be the ideal?**
   Collaborative Inquiry and Judgement to reconfigure the situation to better imbue those values.

4. **Destiny: how to empower, learn and adjust/improvise?**
   This moves towards a sustainable take-up.

These ‘D-’ words are not often spoken of by practitioners, perhaps because their common meanings are too abstract in relation to the actions they refer to in AI. Sometimes, as in the ACP, only the first two questions are pursued. It is most common to see these questions asked in the World Café format of large group dialogue, as they were at the ACP. The appreciative approach is prevalent across public engagement practice around the world.
National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)

The NCDD is the peak body in the USA representing the interests of public engagement practitioners, with a focus on methods of dialogue and deliberation. Because some members tend to position themselves as practitioners of either dialogue or deliberation, the NCDD encourages an integrated approach (Heierbacher, 2007):

1. **Prep work**
   Understand the context, organise the space and invite the people. Part of Framing.

2. **Introductions**
   The welcome and greeting actions in Gathering.

3. **Establish/present ground rules**
   In the narrative arc of deliberative activity, this in the Gathering stage.

4. **Sharing personal stories and perspectives**
   This builds Hope and reinforces the necessary inclusion of all participants.

5. **Exploring a range of views**
   This is the central action of Inquiry.

6. **Analysis and reasoned argument**
   This is the site of deliberation where Judgement occurs.

7. **Deciding on action steps or recommendations**
   These are the taKe-ups and taKe-aways.

National Issues Forums

National Issues Forums (http://www.nifi.org/) constitute a process of dialogue and deliberation that has been conducted for over twenty-five years, supported by the Kettering Foundation (http://kettering.org/). At hundreds of sites across the USA citizens have gathered in small groups to explore issues of national interest (Melville, Willingham & Dedrick, 2005). Each year the organisation selects several topics for consideration. Note that they are rendered from the standpoint of facilitators:

1. **Lay out ground rules for discussion.**
   Performed during the Gathering.

2. **Introduce issues.**
   In starting the Inquiry, there is the implied Hope that valued responses can be transmitted to central organisers. Issue Books which present common Framings of the issue are distributed.

3. **Draw participants into discussion by keeping a healthy atmosphere for discussion (i.e., ask participants questions).**
   The curiosity of Inquiry.

4. **Encourage participants to consider alternatives carefully.**
   Participants make Judgements.

5. **Lead the final segment of a discussion, to ‘reflect’ upon the experience.**
   These are the taKe-aways by participants. Not mentioned is the transmission of
final texts to the central organisation, for assembly into a report to be presented for take-up by authorities.

Because the forums are conducted in hundreds of venues, the format for them is strongly defined. Local conveners take instruction in facilitating meetings effectively. Issue Books are distributed to all convening sites to open up their dialogue (Kettering, 2011).

**Deliberative Democracy Consortium**

In conjunction with the National League of Cities (http://www.nlc.org/), Leighninger and Mann (2011) of the Deliberative Democracy Consortium advocate public engagement with the following Spectrum of Public Engagement Activities, again from the organisers’ perspective. This process includes not only active citizens, but stakeholders, public officers and policy-setters. Rather than just the group level of analysis, the NLC scheme takes in the whole community. This scheme is an adaptation of the IAP2 spectrum of engagement categories, which expresses a scale of power afforded to participating citizens. The new rendering is more process oriented, intended specifically to provide a narrative explanation and advocacy of public engagement.

In the NLC scheme, the setting of the objective is either presumed (e.g. resolving a policy problem) or it is embedded in steps 1-2, so the Hope stage is not explicitly represented:

1. *Circulating information*  
   Part of the Gathering.
2. *Discussing and connecting*  
   Inquiry.
3. *Gathering initial input*  
   More Inquiry.
4. *Deliberating and recommending*  
   Judgement.
5. *Deciding and acting*  
   Take.

**British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly for Electoral Reform**

This exemplary process was completed over eight months in 2004 and involved 162 citizens who were randomly-selected from all electorates in British Columbia, Canada. Their recommendation of switching from first-past-the-post to an STV electoral system went to public referendum. Since its mandate was prescribed by the Government, Hope-building was presumed. The following process description is gleaned from Warren & Pearse (2008: 10-12):
1. **Government launches process**  
The terms of reference Frames the proceedings.

2. **Regional selection meetings**  
The Gathering, in its full sense.

3. **Learning phase**  
The Inquiry, with only limited Judgement to understand and commit to certain values (e.g. party representation, regional access).

4. **Public hearing phase**  

5. **Deliberation phase**  
The Judgement. take-up was in the form of a report and public recommendation.

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**Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review Panel**

Like many American states, Oregon has a system of direct democracy through citizen initiated referenda. To assist voters to navigate through the media-driven misinformation and rhetoric, legislation was introduced for a randomly-selected panel to deliberate about the ballot initiatives and to produce statements that are distributed to all voters. The five-day agenda for the panel is summarised here. It follows from and is consistent with the generalised process scheme outlined by Gastil (2008: 19-20) and derived from the Functional Approach of small group communications by Hirokawa (see Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999) and the thinking skills of Dewey (1997/1910):

1. **Introduction and training**  
Frame, Gather, Hope: Panellists learn about the initiative process and their role in deliberation.

2. **Orientation to the ballot initiative**  
Frame, Inquire: panellists receive an objective introduction to the ballot initiative, and its background.

3. **Learn the pros and cons of the initiative**  
From advocates, panellists Inquire about the values and reasons for and against the ballot initiative (their findings).

4. **Deliberate and vote on findings**  
This Judgement is taken by the media.

5. **Panel collaboratively prepares statements for citizens; reflection**  
This take by citizens.

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**Summary**

There are many other deliberative designs, especially those created by consulting practitioners who organise public engagement for clients like local

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I thank John Gastil for providing an agenda summary from the 2012 Oregon Citizens’ Initiative Review.
governments. But the few presented here may be familiar to most practitioners, especially those advocated by the professional associations.

Not included here are processes such as Study Circles and citizen advisory panels that are not focussed on a specific public project, but rather have ongoing responsibility for monitoring activity and recommending change. Also, Deliberative Polling (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005) is not included because it does not generate recommendations for concrete action.

With some exceptions, such as the omission of an explicit Hope stage, most can be aligned to the narrative arc of deliberative activity. Therefore, it is more than just a literary invention. The naming of them may be eclectically borrowed from practice. But there is a discernible pattern across numerous process designs that public deliberation proceeds through stages of activity. It is beyond the scope of this thesis project to trace the origins of each of these patterns, such as interviewing their founders.

Nonetheless, it is apparent that the commonality in the way that practitioners organise public deliberation as typified in the narrative arc points to the social construction of the discipline arising out of its historical development.
3. Deliberation as Cultural-Historical Activity

CHAT can be viewed as stretching beyond the confines of science as such (in the mentalist and individualistic traditions of understanding what science is about) and constituting, instead, an investigative project with a unique human liberating potential rooted in its commitment to ideals of social justice and equality (Anna Stetsenko, XMCA Mail List, 31 May 2002).

Introduction

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (‘CHAT’) presents a novel basis for exploring deliberative processes and their contexts. This chapter introduces CHAT through its relevance to my study, its philosophical underpinnings, its cultural-historical background, and its construction as a socio-cultural approach to human development. Its compatibility with social constructionism is also explored. This background takes up most of the chapter, without reference to public deliberation. Then a process of public deliberation such as the Australian Citizens’ Parliament (ACP) is cast as a socio-cultural project and the attractions of this approach are revealed. In later chapters, CHAT is used in conjunction with discourse methods as the basis for an account of the deliberative activity at the ACP and its design.

Deliberative democracy is not a theory in the scientific sense of hypothetical prediction and universal Truth but rather a normative prescription about the best way of practising democracy and involving citizens substantially along the way. However, it does not provide much guidance to help improve the process and determine beyond subjective judgement the meaning of ‘best’ in terms of its design and conduct. Much effort is under way to create frameworks that help researchers and process conveners realise ideals of public engagement such as inclusion, representativeness, conversational quality, participant satisfaction, problem solving efficacy, political influence and so on. My task is to present an alternative approach to investigating deliberative activity that reveals more than just its substantially unprovable instrumental strengths. But before doing so, I believe it is useful to tell you about my background and how I landed on CHAT.
in the first place. As you will see, this reflexive, historical view is a recurrent pattern in CHAT-based inquiry.

I am in my mid 50s as I write this chapter. My interest in deliberative public engagement grew from an eclectic academic and professional progression. My undergraduate degree in Mathematics and Computing Science during the 1970s established me very much with an engineering mindset, but this was challenged in my first professional role in 1981 as a Programmer/Analyst for a large local government engineering department in Canada. This was at a time when personal computers first became available for corporate application, subsuming the administrative need for departmental mini-computers or local applications running on a central mainframe. I learned quickly that the obvious efficacy and economy of such technical innovation was insufficient to motivate procedural change, as staff clung to tried and true methods of doing their daily jobs. Many were still using card file systems designed decades earlier, and were happy to continue in this manner until their retirement. I respected the wisdom of experienced staff and recognised the tension that advancing technology generates.

In 1994, through a trail of chance and opportunities taken in Australia, I constructed a living as an independent designer and developer of learning resources for government and corporate clients, delivered by desktop computer. The product category was called ‘e-learning’, first running off CD-ROM, later via corporate networks and the Internet. I enjoyed a strong reputation in a genuine community of practice (Wenger, 1998) centred on a particular set of software development and ‘multimedia’ creation tools. I was also contracted by Macromedia (later merged into Adobe) to build some of those tools used by my peers worldwide, which enhanced my identity in the field. I presented at several developers’ conferences. The power of the tools and the quality of the projects improved over the 15 years that I worked at the leading edge of the business. Ostensibly, the purpose of the activity was employee education. Managers wanted policies and procedures to be instilled, especially where rules of safety, the consistency of product or service quality and the mandate of regulations demanded adherence. But it became increasingly apparent to me that most of the ‘learning solutions’ that clients wanted me to build did not provide the learning outcomes that were expected of them, even though they ran perfectly, looked terrific and met specifications. The e-learning industry was largely blind to this contradiction, continuing to promote the economic and administrative benefits of e-learning. It was telling that most of my peers in the e-learning developer community rarely ‘ate their
own ice-cream’, avoiding the use of e-learning products and services for their personal learning.

In 2005 I enrolled in a Master of Learning Science and Technology degree program to figure out what went wrong. I was introduced to the various theories of learning that had moved well beyond the early behaviourist and cognitive models to include learning approaches that are constructivist, collaborative, performative, self-regulated, situated, distributed and networked. It dawned on me that the activity of education in the corporate world mirrored features of the authoritarian and didactic classrooms of our youth, and most practitioners had only a folk understanding of recent advances in teaching and learning theory, if they knew of them at all. Employees typically expected to attend workshops as perks and junkets and dismissed their learning value. In our professional circles, we rarely talked about how learning might actually occur. Only lip-service was given to the idea of ‘employee-centred learning’, as there was a persistent commercial interest in supporting corporations to command and control rather than steward their learning communities (Wenger, White & Smith, 2009).

On the other hand, my university coursework promoted personal learning activity (Lubensky, 2006) which was open-ended, exploratory and critical. I discovered CHAT as a frequently applied research framework for the design of constructivist learning environments (Jonassen, 2000; Barab, Evans & Baek, 1999; John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), for the design of human-computer interfaces including online media and collaboration (Nardi, 1995), and for attending to organisational development and change (Engeström, 2001). These studies show how instrumental tools designed to suit their contexts (i.e. culturally situated) help people interact and learn. In CHAT I seemed to have found the socio-cultural jack-knife that could have helped me in all of my life-wide academic and professional incarnations.

It was during that period of genuine self-directed inquiry that I accidentally fell upon deliberative processes and immediately recognised its interdisciplinary resemblance to collaborative learning in the challenges of assisting ordinary citizens to learn about the policy problems they are asked to address in deliberative fora. Existing landscapes for the application of CHAT share many features in common with processes of public deliberation, such as small group communications, problem solving, collaboration, knowledge building, continuous development, identity positioning and consensus seeking, negotiated with the aid of active facilitation and social knowledge tools. I became determined to see if CHAT could be extended to the study and improvement of public deliberation.
Studies in dialogue and deliberation draw from an interdisciplinary array of research traditions. Psychology and cognitive science focus on the subjective mind, largely taking for granted or generalising the social and cultural context of the research setting. Many studies performed from an economic or administrative perspective tend to methodological individualism (Heath, 2011) in collating data gleaned from and about individuals, then constructing an abstraction of the statistically ‘typical’ person. On the other hand, research in sociology, anthropology and interpretive strands of political science tend to explain human activity with macro-level social, national or cultural properties and their transformation, taking for granted the particularity and peculiarity of individuals. I wanted a methodological framework that focussed on the small group level of analysis because it is at conversation tables where actions are observable during most deliberative processes. I believed that this would be fruitful in providing insight into my central research question: how participants experience the activity of deliberation.

The difficulty experienced by proponents of deliberative democracy to advance public awareness of the endeavour is exacerbated by a prevalence of media, research and report attention on the ends rather than the means of deliberation. By focusing more on the purposeful activity of deliberation, I wanted this inquiry to help recentre the conversation towards the design features that realise its normative potential and construct a resonant story-line.
Vygotsky Founds the Socio-Cultural Approach

This section traces the historical development of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Roth and Lee (2007) surveyed the interdisciplinary application of CHAT reported in journal literature and found that its take-up was increasing exponentially. However, considering the word 'historic' in its name, it is odd that most researchers do not report on CHAT’s historical development. Generally, they make a brief mention of Russian psychology, avoid any mention of Marx, name the most recent scholar who has inspired their study, and then move straight into an explanation of their case. This robs readers of an appreciation of the subtleties of CHAT and the bases for its legitimacy as a research practice.

I too had relied on a handful of recent CHAT researchers to form my initial understanding of it. But when I sought more authoritative historical sources for this thesis, I discovered disagreement about the contributions of seminal figures in the early evolution of CHAT in Soviet Russia (see for example Prawat (2000) and commentary by Gredler & Shields (2003)). As with the game of Chinese Whispers, I had not realised that my first reading had been several versions removed from the original authors. I was also surprised to find that several distinct strands of CHAT have emerged. The uncertainty is unsurprising given that some of the original works were hidden for decades under unimaginable political pressure and totalitarian state administration during the Soviet era. Then in more recent times various interpretations and revisions of the original scholars have led to further fragmentation.

Most CHAT enthusiasts begin their historical background with the story of Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (Выготский) who theorised about child development and conducted concrete research in the 1920s and early 1930s. Historical does not mean just chronological, although that is the natural way to narrate events in the past. It also does not mean to emphasise causal relations between successive events and situations, although there is some of that as well. Instead, the focus of an historical analysis is the observation and celebration of change and transformation, in this case reflexively of CHAT itself. As Vygotsky said, “to study something historically means to study it in the process of change” (Vygotsky, 1978: 75).

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1 I am indebted to Andy Blunden, with whom I have had frequent conversations about the background of CHAT and his present formulations. I also found the current and archived discussion on the long-running online forum http://lchc.ucsd.edu/MCA/ fruitful in gaining a fuller conception of CHAT.

2 Dates in some references to Russian authors refer to the publication of their English-language translations preceded by the original publication in Russian. Some texts may have been penned even earlier. Page numbers are not given for texts sourced online.
Vygotsky grew up in the city of Gomel, now part of Belarus. Of Jewish heritage, he was a polymath and fluent in German. He graduated from Moscow University in 1917 after studies in literature, philosophy and law. During that early period he was also published as a literary and art critic. Simultaneously, he undertook courses in philosophy and psychology (an unusual combination) at the Shanyavsky People’s University in Moscow, which did not award degrees but attracted gifted and progressive thinkers. Upon returning to his home city, he married and taught literature and educational psychology at the Gomel Teacher’s College (Kozulin, 1999; Wertsch, 1985: 7). Through this early period of his professional life, he was wondering how to directly examine the process of human development, rather than indirectly and retrospectively by its results.

In 1924 Vygotsky delivered three speeches at a conference in Leningrad in which he disputed prevailing approaches in psychology. Vygotsky characterised the discipline as in ‘crisis’ due to the competing and contradictory theoretical bases for various practices (Davydov & Radzikhovsky, 1985: 50). He was invited to Moscow to work at the Institute of Psychology by its new director Konstantin Kornilov (van der Veer, 2007; Wertsch, 1985), and soon was joined by two other young scholars. Alexander Romanovich Luria (Лурия) was invited because of his medical training and his demonstrated interest in psychoanalysis and experimentation. Aleksei Nicolaevich Leontyev (Леонтьев, also transliterated as Leont’ev or Leontiev) was the youngest, having only just graduated with merit in psychology from Moscow university. While Vygotsky would lead the group and other colleagues and students would join in quick succession, these three were referred to as a ‘troika’ (Wertsch, 1985: 9). Their collaborative program expanded through the 1920s and early 1930s at several institutes in Moscow and Leningrad where they conducted concrete studies in support of their theory-building, especially with children. In response to rising political heat in Russia in 1930, several of the Ukrainian psychologists and their students established a new psychological research institute in Kharkiv, then the Soviet-imposed capital of Ukraine, under the leadership of Leontyev (Kozulin, 1986; Leontyev, 1979: 16).

Their official task was to establish a psychology that was consistent with Marxist philosophy in developing children to be capable and productive Soviet citizens. At the time, psychology was barely recognised as an independent science (Chaiklin,

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3 Most historical accounts give only a single speech, but recent access to historical documents has revealed that he gave three speeches, and by that time had already developed credentials in the discipline of developmental psychology in Russia.

4 Veresov (2010) argues that Vygotsky was working through a personal transformation of concepts, and was explaining his own difficulties as related to the historical development of psychology.
The idea of a Marxist psychology was strongly promoted by Kornilov, but up to that time only in the dogmatic manner of appending Marxist slogans to existing texts (Kozulin, 1986). The intent of Vygotsky and his circle was much more authentic, committed and ambitious. They had a constellation of ideas to draw upon and contrast in establishing a radically new Soviet psychology.

Eighty years earlier, Karl Marx had responded to the works of the German philosophers Fichte, Feuerbach and Hegel to formulate his philosophy of **historical materialism**, in which the concrete actions involved in culturally-saturated human **practice**, derived through historical development, form the basis for cognition and consciousness, rather than ‘idealised’ the other way around (Marx, 2002/1845). To reach the egalitarian aims of the new political agenda following the Revolution, Vygotsky and his circle were keen to lift the learning potential of ordinary Russians at home and at school. Grounded in scientific observation, they were determined to study the localised activity of child development and human learning of even the weakest in the community.

One of Vygotsky’s great insights was to extend the prevailing behaviourist stimulus-response dyad of human action to the triad of the mediated act, as shown in Figure 3.1. The premise was that all concrete human actions require something extra to connect intention to achievement. The ‘A’ and ‘B’ in the figure depict respectively the subjective psychic stimulus and the object of response that is acted upon, while the ‘X’ is a mediating tool that is a cultural artefact and a product of historical development.

![Figure 3.1: Mediated act (Vygotsky, 1978: 40)](image)

For example, one cannot open a door with one’s mind. An intention (A) to open a door (B) is achieved with a doorknob (X), which has a design that is derived from the historical development of latches through various cultural eras. In another example, if one wants to remember (B) what groceries to buy (A), a shopping list (X) could be taken, written in a language and style that has been learned (i.e. socially-inherited). While the first action illustrates an *instrumental tool*, the second action illustrates a special type of

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5 Russians have separate words for, and thus concepts of, life education at home and formal education at school or work.
tool that Vygotsky called a psychological tool or sign which is imbued with meaning and help realise a mental function. A sign could be an instance of language, numbers, symbols, gestures, schemas, models, or pictures to:

control ... behavior from the outside. The use of signs leads humans to a specific structure of behavior that breaks away from biological development and creates new forms of a culturally-based psychological process (Vygotsky, 1978: 39-40, cited in Engeström, 1987).

In another concrete example, if ‘I kick the football’, the subject is the bundle of my needs for team acceptance and demonstrating my skill, all wrapped up in the word ‘I’. The object is not the football alone, but the substantial goal of the ‘the kicked football’ which may or may not go where I intend. The psychological tool in this example might be a routine of taking five steps in approach before striking the ball.

It is common to write of a subject as the person performing actions. However, the activity approach does not use the term Subject to identify a person, or to single out an individual identity or body. The term refers only to the psychic space. This distinction is illustrated in the football example by noticing that it is my attached foot rather than the ball that is the preliminary object of the mediated action, directed by the subjective kicking intention. Repeatedly qualifying the term Subject to refer only to the bundle of intentions would be tedious at best, for example as ‘conscious subject’ or ‘subjective intentions’. So the word Subject in this thesis should be read strictly in its cognitive and affective sense without the physical and identity baggage that is bound up in its common usage. Referring to a subject as a person (e.g. by name) should be interpreted only as an indexing operation to his or her consciousness. The distinction between signs and instrumental tools lies in whether the act is directed inwards or outwards, to effect change in the subject or the object of action:

The most essential feature distinguishing the psychological tool from the technical one is that it is meant to act upon mind and behavior, whereas the technical tool, which is also inserted as a middle term between the activity of man and the external object, is meant to cause changes in the object itself. The psychological tool changes nothing in the object. It is a means of influencing one’s own mind or behavior of another. It is not a means of influencing the object. Therefore, in the instrumental act we see activity toward oneself, and not toward the object (Vygotsky, 1982).

Vygotsky proposed that the cultural resources of sign and tool mediation are developed in and are re-cast by the ‘higher mental functions’ which characterise the matured, sophisticated and most importantly, reflexive capabilities of individuals, which supersede ‘natural’ mental functions such as surface perception and memory. In rebuke of the prevailing Cartesian mirror of mind reflecting the physical and social world,
Vygotsky proposed an *internalisation* process of development, presented here in two translations:*

> [E]ach higher form of behaviour enters the scene twice in its development – first as a collective form of behaviour, as an inter-psychological function, then as an intra-psychological function, as a certain way of behaving." (Vygotsky, 1997: 95)

> ... cultural development is presented twice, in two ways. First socially, then psychologically (Vygotsky, 1983: 145).

The source of today’s *socio-cultural* school of analysis is Vygotsky’s integration of human actions in their social and cultural contexts (“social situation of development”). While Vygotsky was concerned mainly with the development of children, most modern scholars who work with Vygotsky’s socio-cultural framework (although he did not use this term) adapt his ideas to adult learning as well. Concepts that are experienced socially become rooted through intersubjective activity in higher mental functions. But this is not a cognitive model, as those concepts are only redeemed again through ongoing activity and mediated by the signification of language, gesture, performance, and practice.

Vygotsky was attentive to the emotional side of a lived experience (*perezhivanie*), which is also derived culturally and historically, and serves to motivate fresh actions (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994: 340). It is interesting that around the same time Dewey was independently making similar claims about the rational and emotional contribution of experiences to learning and future actions (Dewey, 1938).

In both the tool and sign categories, the mediating tool reproduces and advances the culture in which it is applied, linking the individual to the collective and its history. This framework is more than just a social mechanism, it portrays the method whereby culture is sustained and advanced. Most of the concrete work by the Vygotsky circle between 1926 and 1930 explored how particular methods of cultural and social mediation manifest in higher mental function.

Vygotsky inherited an approach from Goethe, Hegel and Marx known now as the *unit of analysis*, which directs attention to “the conception of a singular, indivisible thing (not a collection of combination of distinct things) ... [that] exhibits the essential properties of a class of more developed phenomena ... [but] is itself an existent phenomenon (not a principle or axiom or hypothetical force) (Blunden, 2010: 190). A unit of analysis is a concrete microcosm of something larger that still retains its vital

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* I offer two translations, indicating the variation among available sources in English. Russian source: “... культурном развитии ... появляется на сцену дважды, в двух планах, сначала социальным, потом психологическим” (Vygotsky, 1983: 145). Often the Russian source for the translation is a highly edited version of Vygotsky’s original works (van der Veer & Yasnitsky, 2011).
characteristics (Shotter, 2006a: 14). The approach is distinct from the reductionism of science that simplifies a living whole under study, such as a social movement or a learning child, into constituent elements (e.g. as a sum of properties or traits), setting aside its ongoing internal relations. Instead, the unit of analysis is the smallest unit of the whole that remains observable and complete. Marx selected the commodity relation as the unit of analysis for capitalism. Vygotsky would focus on the signification aspect of mediation, and in particular ‘word-meaning’ as the unit of analysis for consciousness (Wertsch, 1985: 16).

For Vygotsky the pairs of subject/object, internal/external and individual/collective, amongst others, are dialectic. Dialectic pairs are inseparable insofar as you cannot talk about one in a pair without talking about the other. Ontologically, they are neither distinct nor derivatives of each other. Dialectic analysis demands that both be considered at once. In a dialectic relationship there is palpable tension, paradox, or contradiction in their instantiation that can be experienced as movement or flux between them—sometimes only one in a pair can be sensed at a time. But rather than seeing such tensions as problems to be solved necessarily, they are sites for reflexive activity development:

I envision them as illuminative hinges through which participants in an activity can reflect on their activity system’s developmental trajectory and understand its dynamics. Contradictions are a sign of richness in the activity system, not weakness, and of mobility and the capacity of an activity to develop rather than function in a fixed and static mode. Contradictions reveal the growing edges of the activity system—the places where “growth buds” are able to form and expansive development takes place (Foot, 2001).

An apparent conflict may be transformed by a synthesis to a new configuration, although this is not inevitable. While the dialectic approach was described by the ancient Greeks, it was Hegel who re-introduced it into European philosophy in the early 1800s, which was then taken up by Marx and Vygotsky, amongst others. Dialectic is difficult to comprehend for most people culturally imbued in modern science because science generally seeks reductionist and dualist categorisation and a linear model of explanatory causation for change. Furthermore, stasis or equilibrium is presumed as the norm, rather than change. In contrast, the dialectic approach demands an integrated analysis, a developmental maturity that suspends the drive to essential explanations and instead derives benefits from a tolerance for ambiguity and the normalcy of change.

Dialectic analysis extends the positivist view that cause-and-effect must be organised mechanically or temporally. Where this limited relation can be demonstrated, one cannot then make a counter-claim that reverses the arrow of causation without

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While related, this use of the word dialectic should not be confused with the method of argumentation practised by the ancient Greeks under this name.
contradicting the nature of the relation: this is the classical *circular argument*. But a 
dialectic analysis of causation advocates a legitimate view of mutually-constituting 
phenomena:

The essence of causality is the generation and determination of one 
phenomenon by another. In this respect causality differs from various other 
kinds of connection, for example, the simple temporal sequence of 
phenomena, of the regularities of accompanying processes. ... Causality is an 
active relationship, a relationship which brings to life something new, which 
turns possibility into actuality. (Spirkin, 1983, ch. 2).

Vygotsky did not believe that thought leads to speech in a temporal or 
mechanical fashion, but is constituted as speech. For its part, thinking is simultaneously 
constituted using the cultural artefacts of speech (e.g. language), which may occur as it 
happens.

In the final years before succumbing to tuberculosis at the young age of 34, 
Vygotsky worked frenetically (Wertsch, 1985). He led the circle in a collaboration* that 
gained concrete evidence for the theories they developed. It was during this period that 
Vygotsky named what would become, in Anglo-American academia at least, his most 
famous and enduring construct, the *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by 
independent problem solving and the level of potential development as 
determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in 
collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978: 86)

Leontyev later said, more simply, that:

the zone of proximal development characterizes the difference between what 
the child is capable of himself and what he can become capable of with the 
help of a teacher (Leontyev, 1979).

Thus, as children’s brain development gradually lifts its capacity for concept 
formation, it moves ahead of actual mental performance, creating a potential for 
incremental improvement which can be mediated by instruction. The ZPD delineates the 
extent of useful intervention. This concept led to the modern techniques of instructional 
scaffolding (Bruner, 1985),⁹ the formative *dynamic assessment* approach (Lidz, 1995) and 
the situated learning theory in *communities of practice* (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Vygotsky demonstrated the ZPD through the research method of *double 
stimulation*, whereby a subject would be given a problem that to solve would be just 
outside his or her reach. Upon getting stuck, a second stimulus, an artefact that carries 
some meaning relating to the problem, would be offered. The ability and manner of

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8 Blunden (2010) and Stetsenko & Arievitch (2004) believe that the collaborative nature of the early period 
of research conducted by Vygotsky’s circle remains under-appreciated.

9 The common claim that Bruner’s *scaffolding* is a direct descendent of the ZPD is over-stated, as scaffolding 
relies on a more interactionist than socio-cultural account of development.
internalising that meaning and applying it to resolve the problem (or not) was observed. An educational evaluation of the subject would not be based on the absolute limit of achievement, but instead the capacity to appropriate the mediating artefact. The inquiry itself was performed as a *joint artefact-mediated action* rather than in the mode of detached objectivity. These experiments were conducted creatively and helped Vygotsky and his colleagues come to a better concept of the nature of cultural-historical mediation and the higher mental functions (Blunden, 2010: 134-5).

Vygotsky pushed the boundaries of academic practice in the Soviet Union at that time. His love of creative arts and his intellectual attention to artistic and cultural meaning left him open to the mistaken criticism that he had reverted to a bourgeois idealism at odds with Marxist materialism (Bakhurst, 2009). Vygotsky’s focus on cultural context was also criticised after he encouraged research by Luria to examine the integration of the Uzbek Republic into the Russian political economy, but which was unfairly misconstrued as culturally offensive (Blunden, 2010: 17). While committed to Marxist tenets, he did look beyond it, including entertaining American and Western European innovations such as developmental testing in relation to interdisciplinary and remedial child education (‘pedology’). This put him at odds with the egalitarian mandates of the Soviet state and led to a decree in 1936 banning all publications and practices relating to it (Yasnitsky, 2011; Kerr, 1997). Vygotsky died that year of tuberculosis just as Stalin was unleashing the Great Terror purges. Vygotsky’s colleagues scattered and he was rarely spoken of publicly for twenty years. Leontyev and Luria trod carefully enough during that period to be able to return in 1939 to resume leading positions at research institutes. However, the retrograde behaviourist basis for psychological practice was mandated under Stalin’s regime. Luria would instead switch his attention during the Great Patriotic War (WWII) and break new ground in the fledgling field of neuro-psychology (van der Veer & Yasnitsky, 2011).

In 1962 M. Cole, a young American psychology post-doctoral fellow, travelled to Moscow to meet with and work on a project under the supervision of Luria. He did not know Luria yet, and his project work was unrelated to the activity approach. At that time, even though there was rising Cold War militarism against the US, scholarly activity in Russia was able to progress with surprising freedom (Cole, 2004). Luria encouraged Cole to read the first major work by Vygotsky (1962) that had just been translated into English with Luria’s unauthorised help (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994: 3), ‘Thought and Language’, recently more correctly translated as ‘Thinking and Speech’ (Vygotsky, 1987). Cole read it naïvely and took no further action with it. The book was largely ignored by Anglo-American academia. In the years that passed, Luria continued to communicate with Cole, who gradually came to appreciate the value of Vygotsky’s work. There is certainly evidence of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development at work in Cole’s
transformation. With Luria’s encouragement starting in about 1971, Cole began a project to produce an English translation of some of Vygotsky’s seminal works. After many years of painstaking effort, the book was finally published in 1978 as *Mind in Society*, edited by Cole and Scribner (Vygotsky, 1978). In scholarly terms it was a hit, especially with educational researchers (Cole, 2004).

Scribner was a pioneer in the application of ethnographic research to learning theory and for many years previously had been advancing scholarship with Cole on what they referred to as ‘everyday cognition’, when people learn through the conduct of regular, culturally saturated practices. Newly armed with the works by Vygotsky, she ploughed into ambitious research projects that used ethnographic methods to reveal the learning and development that occurs through activity in common and exotic cultural settings. Her exemplary methods inspired a generation of researchers to explore cases that now fall under the category of ‘situated learning’ informed by an activity perspective (Henning, 2004).

Luria had survived as Vygotsky’s quiet apostle (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994: 3), keeping the candle of Vygotsky’s socio-cultural inspiration aglow. Sadly, he died just before ‘Mind in Society’ was finally published. Anna Stetsenko and Igor Arievitch (2004) claim that typical historical descriptions of Vygotsky’s life, if they extend to any detail at all in research reports such as this, are given in functional and heroic terms instead of focussing on the collaborative project that mediated his work with colleagues, which would be more consistent with his practice. Before elaborating on this term, it is important to review how scholarly descendants of Vygotsky extended his works.
The Activity Theory of Leontyev

Vygotsky’s inquiry focused on actions of individual subjects in dyadic or small group encounters, but Leontyev believed that insufficient attention was paid to the motive of the overall activity and the historical practice in which actions occur. Vygotsky did not pursue an account of the relation between activity and social formation in society (Blunden, 2010: 164).

Unfortunately, the English word activity is polysemic and it is important to be clear about how it is used here. While there is are similarly generic words for activity in Russian and German, the Russians have деятельность (de-ya-tel'-nost) and the Germans have Tätigkeit (tate'-ikh-kite), both of which capture the idea of work with an explicit purpose (Schurig, 1988). Today, this type of activity can realise the mission of a corporation, the mandate of a government department or job categories of occupational practice. For Vygotsky and Leontyev, an activity could be a guild craft or a community practice such as schooling children or preparing for annual celebrations. Leontyev exemplified the term in a story about the activity of a primitive tribe of hunters.

By 1947 Leontyev had designed what he considered to be a more Marxist-aligned, functional and populist view of activity from the standpoint of the material object (Leontyev, 2009/1948). But it was not until 1956 during the Khrushchev thaw that Leontyev could begin to publicly revive the activity approach (Kozulin, 1986). He presented a new formulation of human activity as a functional system which he named Activity Theory (Figure 3.2), depicted with a triangle of Subject and Object, with Instrument/Tool at the apex.

![Figure 3.2: Activity Theory (Leontyev 2009/1978)](image-url)
Leontyev defined activity as a fundamental unit of analysis:

Activity is a molar, not an additive unit of the life of the physical, material subject. In a narrower sense, that is, at the psychological level, it is a unit of life, mediated by psychic reflection, the real function of which is that it orients the subject in the objective world. In other words, activity is not a reaction and not a totality of reactions but a system that has structure, its own internal transitions and transformations, its own development (Leontyev, 2009/1978: 84).

While Vygotsky had not distinguished activity from individual actions, Leontyev was explicit in referring to activity, which he categorised into three explicit levels (Figure 3.3). At the lowest level are operations that are performed automatically without conscious impetus. The conditions for operation may be internalisation due to repetition, or a compelled response to an external stimulus. At one level up are the actions as formulated by Vygotsky which are consciously directed towards goals. If the outcome of an operation is poor, the goal may be pursued afresh with a conscious action. Leontyev described how an experienced shooter does not need to verbalise the actions of aiming accurately, unlike the novice who must deliberately take actions that have not yet been habituated (Leontyev, 2009/1948: 234). At the top level, activity is sustained by a social need that provides the overarching motivation for all the actions and operations. The motivation of activity is directed towards a single Object of concern.

![Figure 3.3: Levels of Activity](image)

Leontyev placed the tool at the apex of the triangle, but primarily in reference to the instrumental tool as it relates to the goal-action layer of activity. He also shifted his emphasis from the cultural saturation of artefacts to their historicity and the evolution of the activity as a whole. Leontyev over-wrote Vygotsky’s culturally mediated internalisation with a configuration that reads more dualist and isomorphic than dialectic:

The object of activity is twofold: first, in its independent existence as subordinating to itself and transforming the activity of the subject; second, as an image of the object, as a product of its property of psychological reflection that is realised as an activity of the subject and cannot exist otherwise (Leontyev, 2009/1978: 86).
Viktor Kaptelinin derives the following interpretation from that dualism with the word projection:

The object of activity has a dual status: it is both a projection of the human mind onto the objective world and a projection of the world onto human mind (Kaptelinin, 2005).

In 1959, the year that Sputnik orbited Earth, Leontyev was able to attend a conference in Milan to speak about how children learn their native language. On that occasion, the psychological theory of activity was back on the agenda and spoken about openly. Leontyev had replaced Vygotsky’s subtle cultural tool-mediation with a blunt ladder of object-oriented functionality as the main connection between social and psychic activity. The distinction between object and instrument is blurred, and the autocratic rather than socio-cultural determination of correctness is not commented upon:

We must first stress that this is always an active process. To master an object or phenomenon it is necessary to do things actively that are adequate to what is embodied in the object of phenomenon. When we say, for example, that child has mastered some tool or instrument, we mean that it is has learned to use it correctly and that it has formed the necessary motor and mental actions and operations for that (Leontyev 2009/1959).

With Leontyev’s high political standing as Dean of the Psychology Faculty at Moscow State University, which he maintained through the 1960s and 1970s, this model of human productive activity became official policy for psychological analysis. While he continued to express admiration for Vygotsky, his revised Activity Theory was presented as the modern and definitive version (Leontyev, 1979). This was achievable because Leontyev continued to support the restriction on access to Vygotsky’s important original works (Kozulin, 1986), some of which would not be published even in Russian until the 1980s.

With the release of Vygotsky’s works in English, Leontyev’s death a short time later, and the rise of post-modern approaches in psychology, some of the tenets of Leontyev’s Activity Theory began to be questioned. In some of Leontyev’s writing it seems that activity is no more than a synonym for ‘a behaviour’ (Lektorsky, 2002). It is not clear whether Leontyev refers generally to a type of activity such as hunting, or a specific instance of it, causing difficulty in operationalising the unit of analysis (Blunden, 2010: 210). For Leontyev, an activity is motivated by satisfaction of a need, but in post-agrarian society there are more cosmopolitan drivers for activity than need (Blunden, 2010: 207; Kozulin, 1986). Bakhurst (2009) suggests that Activity Theory provided a useful vehicle for the psychology profession in the Soviet Union to ventriloquise a

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10 The Russian language does not use definite or indefinite articles, so the distinction between general or enumerated objects can only be gleaned by context. This has caused disagreements in translating the works of Leontyev.
variety of politically-motivated views during the dark period of that nation’s history, which now appear incoherent.

But for all this criticism, it is important to give Leontyev credit for extending Vygotsky’s work beyond the immediate actions and consciousness of an individual to the relations of activity with the concrete society in which it is situated and gives it meaning.
Engeström Advances Activity Theory

The most recognisable name associated with Activity Theory outside of Russia today is the Finnish academic Yrjö Engeström, who in 1987 published the book that would become a classic, *Learning By Expanding* (Engeström, 1987). In it, he began by referencing the influential work of Hegel, Marx, Peirce, Popper, Mead, amongst others, and of course Vygotsky and Leontyev. He appropriated Lewontin’s structure of biological activity depicted as a triangle of individual (as a member of a species), population (referring to other members of the same species) and the natural environment. Of particular relevance in this model are the three dialectic relations between each of individual survival, social life and collective survival. Engeström portrayed the cultural evolution of mankind as the synthesis of those relations respectively into emergent tool-making, emergent collective traditions, rituals and rules, and emergent divisions of labour.

This paved the way for Engeström’s triangular schema that extends Leontyev’s triangle to incorporate the minimal set of components that usefully and commonly represent the context for a particular activity (see Figure 3.4). The Subject represents the individual and group instigators of acts oriented towards a concrete, situated Object of concern. Community depicts the social context of people and their institutions related to the activity, at concentric scales. Rules represent the evolving categorical and procedural frames on the activity, such as laws, rituals, traditions, customs, regulations, norms, morals and conventions. Division of Labour (DoL) depicts the institutional structure of power and the differentiation of roles played out in the actions of the activity. While Community links the activity to its social, cultural and historical heritage, the Rules and DoL are mediating constructions in addition to Tools that transform the Object and effect Outcomes.

The analytic power of the triangular model is not just in its nodes, but especially in the relationships and tensions between them. For example, the DoL in a child’s school is organised by student age which is derived from the historically seasonal cycle of community activity and the need to engage enough teachers to meet the requirements of the curriculum. The activity of public schooling is then mediated through a set of rules about intake and the design of class cohorts that progress through successive grades.

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11 Engeström (1987) is out of print, so my access was by a copy provided online by the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition. Therefore no page numbers are given. http://lchc.ucsd.edu/mca/Paper/Engestrom/expanding/toc.htm
Engeström then appropriated Marx’s economic categories of production, distribution, exchange and consumption as moments of human productive activity:

Production creates the objects which correspond to the given needs; distribution divides them up according to social laws; exchange further parcels out the already divided shares in accord with individual needs; and finally, in consumption, the product steps outside this social movement and becomes a direct object and servant of individual need, and satisfies it in being consumed. Thus production appears to be the point of departure, consumption as the conclusion, distribution and exchange as the middle … (Marx 1973: 89, cited in Engeström, 1987).

There is a motive behind every activity, and an Outcome of some kind that satisfies that motive, which Engeström represents explicitly in his schema. Production is depicted in the schema as the primary sub-activity. In a manufacturing company, the employees (Subject) in various job categories (DoL) in a particular department (Community) activate and process (Tools) physical and knowledge resources (Object) to generate products (Outcome), subject to established procedures (Rules).

Engeström revitalised Vygotsky's central tenet of cultural mediation, but retained Leontyev's focus on instrumental tools. Furthermore, a commitment to tool design should mediate and stimulate change and progress (although stated in individualistic terms):

Humans can control their own behaviour—not ‘from the inside' on the basis of biological urges, but ‘from the outside’ using and creating artefacts. This perspective is not only optimistic concerning human self-determination, it is an invitation to serious study of artefacts as integral and inseparable components of human functioning... Activity theory has the conceptual and methodological potential to be a path-breaker in studies that help humans gain control over their own artefacts and thus over their future (Engeström, 1999: 29).
Not only did Leontyev source motivation from society at large, but his earlier schema presumed an undifferentiated identity of the collective involved in activity. This offered no analytical space for the formation and activity of groups in society, nor of the transformation of individual identity in relation to groups (Blunden, 2010: 223). Engeström does allow for a subject group in the context of organisations where members are considered as simultaneously and similarly oriented to the same object. In this analysis, a barrier to action across members of a group is treated technically the same as a barrier to individual action. Group conflict and individual transformation relative to the group are not problematised. This issue is dealt with in the next section.

Engeström calls a particular instance of activity an ‘activity system’, which he intends as a complex set of dynamic inter-relations rather than a functional topology. His prescribed method is to examine four levels of contradiction, starting with primary contradictions within a particular component (e.g. an unrecognised Object), secondary contradictions between components (e.g. DoL unwilling to collaborate in actions towards an Object), tertiary contradictions over time (e.g. when a new activity configuration is resisted by the Community), and quaternary contradiction arising between different but related activities (e.g. misaligned Objects across organisational departments). The activity becomes the site for progressively overcoming these contradictions and transforming (Engeström uses the term expanding) the activity and the potential of its Subjects to a better dynamic. In analogy to Vygotsky’s desire for cultural mediation to generate higher orders of mental function and human development, Engeström looks to innovate instruments to help ‘expand’ the activity and evolve better outcomes.

It is important that Engeström sees progress in the activity occurring immanently, that is by the synthesis of dialectically-framed contradictions within the system, not by the imposition of cultural imperatives or authority from outside. In terms of the organisational work practice to which Engeström typically applies the framework, employees themselves are invited onto the analytic engine to pull the transformational levers. Engeström insists that the motivation must emerge from within the activity.

Most studies applying Activity Theory are focussed on the mediating tool and its relation to the Object. Some go further to suggest that the schema’s main use should be “as an organizing structure for analyzing the mediational roles of tools and artifacts within a cultural-historical context” (Barab, Evans & Baek, 1999: 204). In other words, Activity Theory can serve as an analytic lens for a subject, with the help of a researcher perhaps, to improve a tool-assisted practice. For example, the design of collaborative learning technology and computing interfaces (Nardi, 2005) has been a common site for
Engeström advances Activity Theory | Lubensky

analysis, with the iterative technical development transforming the activity itself in terms of its emerging Subjective orientation and Object of use.

In his research practice Engeström has adapted Vygotsky’s double-stimulation approach of intervention to foster organisational and behavioural change. He applies the triangles of Activity Theory themselves as a mediating tool with clients. The first phase is to assist participants to examine the local situation, identify the object of activity and make suggestions to address inherent contradictions. But this is often stymied by orthodoxy. In the second phase innovative instrumentation or other mediation is introduced to open new pathways to improvement and then the participants refashion and internalise (e.g. routinise) the activity on their own terms (Engeström, 2011). These phases may be repeated to iteratively improve the situation.

Engeström’s consultative approach is similar to participatory design or action research in that he takes a highly reflexive position with his client. Rather than doing all the work himself with sole authority in the analysis, he shows the subjects how to do it themselves. But unlike participatory or action research that only draws on technocratic and pragmatic resources, the activity approach explicitly draws on cultural and historical resources to construct goals for action. This is why the triangles are useful in themselves, as they recursively mediate the shared understanding of the client’s activity and the inherited tensions that define it. With Engeström’s guidance (‘formative intervention’), they collaboratively map out the activity ecology and possibilities for change.

Engeström notes rightly that there is an unquestioned obsession in commercial practice to strive for completion, for solutions to be applied that do not require further revision (Engeström, 2011). Participatory design and action research typically take a waterfall approach of finishing stages or iterations, and avoiding looking back to revisit earlier commitments. Engeström’s practice of developmental work research is also iterative, but is expected to be ongoing while maintaining an historical perspective.

In some of Engeström’s own explanations, the outcome seems to justify the activity. The intention to model deliberation as cultural-historical activity is motivated against current habits of investigating deliberation primarily on the basis of its outputs. But any practice in the Vygotskian sense should not be viewed as an event that stops at some process completion stage. Rather, any proclamation of activity completion should arise immanently when the original Object no longer exists, having been transformed through activity. Again, this thesis attempts to re-centre the inquiry on the transformation of the Object of activity rather than on the activity’s completion.
Activity as Interdisciplinary Approach

Under the official institutional leadership of V. V. Davydov in the Soviet Union during the late 1970s, the collected works of Leontyev and Vygotsky were released in Russian and would be translated to English during the 1990s. While earlier in his career Davydov was a strong supporter of Leontyev, he was later an authentic voice for a dialogic approach to learning in schools that is more consistent with Vygotsky’s socio-cultural standpoint. Davydov was even demoted from his senior position for several years in the early 1980s for boldly publishing a book that was critical of the state-aggrandising behaviourist dogma that had invaded teaching practice in the Soviet Union under Leontyev. He had to wait for Gorbachev’s policy of glasnost (гласность), which he had perhaps advocated prematurely, to be reinstated in his senior position and jump-start wholesale reform of the Russian educational system in large measure based on the underlying social and collaborative tenets of the activity approach of Vygotsky.

According to Holzman (1990: 14), Davydov has not received enough credit as a re-interpreter of Vygotsky’s work and his methodological practice. Davydov understood Vygotsky’s main intent was in the relationship between the psychological and the social rather than the physical. Davydov was a politically-astute consensus-builder who looked for ways to draw the splitting threads of the activity approach towards each other. He also wanted to formally promote the activity approach beyond psychology into other disciplines where it had begun to spread organically.

Also of historical relevance is the well-known situated learning theory of Communities of Practice (CoP) by Lave and Wenger, which draws quite specifically from Activity Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 49). The ideas in CoP about apprenticeship and acculturation into a practice community and the advancement of communities through joint activity draw directly from Vygotsky’s socio-cultural prescriptions. Analytically, the research focus in CoP is on the transformation that occurs in practice and the

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12 Glasnost is literally publicity or daylight, but usually translated as openness.
community culture as a succession of subjects mature through a trajectory of identity-
formation, intersubjective activity and influence.

In her highly-cited article about learning approaches, Sfard (1998) identified a
cultural split in the way knowledge learning is conceived. Metaphorically, they fall into
the modes of acquisition or participation. For example, in English one talks about ‘gaining
knowledge’, ‘transferring skills’ and ‘listing facts’ as if knowledge is a thing. On the other
hand, we ‘demonstrate expertise’, ‘perform competently’ and ‘participate as informed
citizens’ where knowledge is manifested in activity. Without using the word dialectic or
referring to the socio-cultural stance, Sfard suggests that in any developmental situation
its framing should not swing too far in either direction. This distinction should emerge
in an analysis of activity.

Cole’s early work with Luria and subsequent academic research in the spirit of
Vygotsky led him to theorise about cross-cultural psychology. While working with West
African indigenous communities during the 1970s, he found that different cultural
situations and milieux engender incomparable cognitive capacities. Soon after the
publication of his book, Engeström accepted Cole’s critique that Activity Theory was
insensitive to cultural variation (Engeström, 1999), allowing no analytic space for a
plurality of social, cultural and institutional practices and ideological traditions.
Engeström began working with Cole in San Diego, which was an eye-opening experience.
Next to the Mexican border, southern California is a melting pot of diversity and
liberalism, a far cry from the relative mono-culture and conservatism of Finland. As
alluded to earlier, a group involved in activity may act in various ways towards the
object of activity due to different backgrounds and goals of members. They may not be
oriented similarly towards a single object of activity. By lumping them together,
Engeström’s Activity Theory effectively invited stereotyping.

Engeström took on the challenge and advocated what he called the ‘3rd
generation’ of Activity Theory. Each cultural grouping or stakeholder group in an
organisation is portrayed by its own activity triangle, and the activity triangles intersect
at nodes that coincide. For example, different groups may attend to the generation of a
shared object, but with different motivation and goals of action in each activity system; or
subjects could participate in different activities; or a tool could mediate multiple
activities, serving quite different audiences. More than ever, Engeström sees object-
oriented activity as a knot-work, a complex rhizomatic co-construction through
expansive cycles of collective learning activity (Engeström, 2011). The cost is that
analysis can become quite complex, with substantial dialogue and description necessary
to configure and align the activity model over the reality of the situation.
By the mid 1990s it appeared that the various strands of activity and socio-cultural theory were drawing together and the moniker CHAT (Cultural-Historical Activity Theory) came into broad use. With broadening academic acceptance and the ethical imperative of participatory research methods, approaches like Engeström’s formative intervention are on the rise (Roth, 2007). But there continued to be scholarly disagreement as the research activity with Activity Theory carried its own contradictions.

The main problem that I perceive with the triangular lens of activity is its graphical depiction of ontological flatness. Of course, this is nonsense, as Subject and Object are concepts as disparate from each other as each is distinct from the Community and the rest. Yet the schema invites comparative thinking that draws us away from the dialectic intent of the analytic process. To put it bluntly, the triangles and all the connecting lines invite over-theorisation about muddled categories. Bakhurst (2009) warns,

> You must be very cautious about given, stable, structural representations where you aspire to understand dynamism, flux, reflexivity and transformation (Bakhurst, 2009: 207).

Contemporary researchers appropriating Engeström’s Activity Theory often describe the relationships between the central triangle nodes in functional terms and judge them on efficiency, rather than exploring their dialectic relation. Engeström admits that the triangular spaces as subsystems of Production, Exchange, Distribution and Consumption are not mutually exclusive in the description of activity. In my opinion, this idea of subsystems is certainly convenient in the triangular depiction, but may be an unnecessary over-theorisation. The triangles seem to have taken on a life of their own, as the shape and shaping of active life. Even Engeström warns that the model

> ... can of course be misused as a static representation or categorization device. The model is not a substitute for the theory of activity. It is a conceptual tool to be used by researchers, interventionists and practitioners in the analysis and design of activities. In concrete studies, the model itself needs to be tested and filled with historically specific contents (Engeström, 2009: 24).

The misguided functional interpretation of an activity system is exacerbated by its name as Activity Theory, which carries the positivist connotation of a predictive correspondence model of reality. But the realist stance reifies the power held in institutional structures and assigns inevitable causal agency to historical developments. More commonly, and often without necessarily being explicit about it, CHAT researchers take the critical realist stance that relaxes the absolutist and predictive demands of positivism, opens opportunities for intervention and change, and draws more upon
interpretation and practical knowledge than propositional knowledge (Engeström, 2001). However, the correspondence of the model to reality is tacitly presumed and permeates analysis conducted under the critical realist stance.

Canary (2010) and Foot & Groleau (2011) convert Engeström’s investigative method into activity as a staged process model, where one level of contradiction breeds the next. Furthermore, they see activity transforming through the generation of new institutional structures and forms. While this may be possible in the cases they study, it is a far stretch from the fundamental Vygotskian tenets of CHAT. In reading their conclusions, one can hardly avoid the critique that the real situation is used to exemplify the intricate and abstract model, rather than the other way around.

Another consequence of appropriating Activity Theory as a functional and systemic device is the tendency to view Subjects as whole people, as research subjects. In study after study, subjects are identified by name or role. This clouds the link to the psychic dimension that Vygotsky was concerned with, and its relation to the social and the environmental aspects of activity.

Davydov argued for a revised structure of Activity Theory that represents additional components such as needs, plans, actions, operations, emotions and more explicit connection to mediating signs and tools (Lazarev, 2001). Even Engeström’s third-generation scheme of multiple interlocking triangles may be so malleable that analytic conclusions cannot be drawn with confidence. The risk is that the activity approach becomes a ‘theory of everything’ that leaps too far from its historical derivation. It would be wise to keep the model simple and stable and apply it through only a few straightforward conventions. This is the motivation behind a unit of analysis.

The influential organisational change and communications scholar Poole (Poole, Van de Van, Dooley & Holmes, 2000: 62-63) suggested that dialectic theory provides a useful framework for analysing the paradoxes of organisational development. In most organisations power is exerted towards contradictory and often competing motives. When the situation becomes untenable, the tension may culminate in a synthesis that manifests as a fundamental change in or innovation to the organisation. For example, a public company needs to earn profits to fund dividends for shareholders while simultaneously providing its products at competitive prices. The well-known synthesis, usually conducted iteratively, is to restructure production operations and shift manufacturing to developing countries to produce goods at cheaper prices. However, the dialectic tension persists.
Popular culture reduces complexity to simple factors, dichotomies and linear causation that are more easily consumed on the low road to lazy, short-term gratification. Taking on the dialectic approach is to follow the high road. I do not mean this in a moral sense, although I could argue in that direction too. It is more that the dialectic challenges orthodox approaches and requires dedicated practice to be fully integrated into research life.

In the mid 1990s, Barbara Rogoff addressed rising fragmentation of CHAT-based research by proposing it should focus its lens at one of three distinct planes of observation, which co-exist and constitute each other (Rogoff, 2008). At the top level, apprenticeship is the metaphoric relation of individuals to communities in which practices occur. Next, guided participation is the relation of the individual to specific others who assist them as teachers and co-workers who identify with the activity. Participatory appropriation is about the transformation of individuals as they mature into an activity. This model is a substantial theoretical elaboration to Vygotsky’s socio-cultural scheme, but it helps to both integrate the multiple threads of research and yet bracket them for distinct methodological treatment. The question is whether one kind of complexity was exchanged for another.

Leontyev had broadened the observable and conceptual starting point from the human action to societal activity. But the extent of Leontyev’s concept of activity remained too broad and indeterminate to be considered as a unit of analysis. Engeström focusses on a discrete activity in a particular context like an organisation, but the boundary remains externally constructed and abstract. Such activity looks merely like a special kind of case. Stahl is one among many who recognise the potential of Engeström’s Activity Theory for the study and design of computer supported collaborative learning environments (which share features of evolving online deliberation platforms). He laments that the model lacks “theoretical representation of the critical small groups in which the individuals carry on their concrete interactions and into which the community is hierarchically structured” (Stahl, 2006: 19).

For those reasons and others, including the problem of group identity indicated earlier, Blunden (2010: 255-265) has proposed a new unit of analysis that he calls a collaborative project (or simply project, as joint effort is presumed). Blunden suggests that rather than having mediated actions directed towards an object of societal motivation, actions in a project are committed to the shared construction and re-construction of a concept, a unit of thought that is directed by socio-culturally sourced and sign-mediated word meaning, in accordance with Vygotsky (Blunden, 2010). The human agency in a project is manifested in the collaboration of individuals who may either cooperate to
achieve an emergent vision of that concept, or fall into conflict that takes the project to a new conceptual configuration. Thus, a collaborative project carries the inherently normative ambition of convergence towards some shared understanding or consensus, which may be ongoing. In seeking such outcomes, projects mediate the relations between collaborators to generate artefacts, rules and divisions of labour that in turn mediate further actions and transform individual behaviours towards the project. A collaborative project could be as small as a three-turn conversation between two people, or as large as a social movement, corporate enterprise or even a nation-state. Social, cultural and political life occurs through a myriad of overlapping projects at various scales, which in aggregate construct group identities around various concepts and construct the communities that host them.

Blunden refers to his activity theory of collaborative projects as interdisciplinary because it has progressed beyond its roots in psychology (ibid.: 169). It no longer relies on the spine of a psychologised subject-object relation, although analysis of activity from an individual perspective should still account for it. The Object of Activity Theory has been realised by the collaborative project itself as a social rather than individual concern. The intentions of an individual Subject are subsumed by the inter-related concerns of collaborating participants around a socially and culturally sustained concept. But there is no guarantee that internalised meanings related to the project’s concept are isomorphic across individuals. After all, it is only through the reciprocal activity of actions and operations that a converging sense of the concept is mutually achieved in the project. Whereas Engeström was keen to articulate the salient context elements of activity that may be unbounded or researcher-defined, the context for a collaborative project is bounded by the cultural resources and capacity of its collaborators and the semiotic and instrumental artefacts that the project produces or reproduces.

Unlike the timelessness and abstracted agency in the Activity Theory schema, a collaborative project can have a beginning and end as its concept forms and either transforms or dissipates, with its immanent source the particular volition of collaborators (rather than some universal social need). The movement towards a shared concept is typically called ‘seeking common ground’ in deliberative circles. On the face of it, Blunden’s ‘collaborative project’ certainly displays affinities with the descriptive picture that is painted about deliberation.
CHAT and Power

In the CHAT literature, there is no extended treatise about power within its framework. CHAT has always been a framework for learning and development (individual, social, cultural) rather than a framework about contestation. On the contrary, the concept of activity in CHAT, and therefore its application, has always been towards a collaborative effort in which the actors are trained on a single Object. When a project is being pulled in different directions, it is no longer a genuine collaboration in its current configuration, although that can be re-negotiated. Considering that activity theory is about change that is driven by immanent motivations and subjective intentions, it is surprising that a concept of power in activity has not yet emerged.

There are many contemporary ways of considering power, including successive approaches by Weber, Dahl, Baratz, Lukes, Foucault, Giddens and Gaventa, among others (see Sadan, 2004: 33-39). If we see activity as an animated set of dialectic relations, then it looks similar to Foucault’s picture of power as a pervasive network of dialectic relations across cultural and social practices (i.e. activities). For Foucault, these power-saturated practices constitute and sustain their associated actors, institutions and communities rather than the other way around. This aligns with Blunden’s construction of collaborative projects. But it is not yet clear whether power is categorically or dialectically opposite to activity, a second-order activity that should be considered as distinct sub-projects, or an essential grease for activity that can be related to the immanent motivation of a collaborative project. Further analytical work needs to be done to bridge the conceptual gap between activity and power.

Nevertheless, in this inquiry about the experience of public deliberation by its participants, it is given that the very design of processes with facilitation is intended to mitigate power relations between them. This is its point. Whether a given deliberative project such as the ACP is successful in this regard is a matter for CHAT analysis, which may comment on evidence of dominating behaviour or positioning.

I suggest that power is certainly a social factor, however conceptualised, that modifies the progress of activity. On the positive side, power disposed to the Object of activity could enable its successful progress. But it is rarely that straightforward, as most projects are achieved with a division of labour that positions some actors under the control of others, or of institutional rules. The ends of the project may not justify the means if some internal relations are unjust or inefficient. On the negative side, power can be exerted that reflects egotistic or strategic goals at odds with the project. Also,
projects do not exist in isolation or mutual exclusion of others—actors make commitments to multiple projects which may be contradictory. Such malevolence or counter-activity can render a project untenable, or effectively remove the actors from any semblance of collaboration.

The agenda of the ACP was designed to help carry participants from a starting point of proposals that were not broadly comprehended to a set of agreed recommendations within a very short timespan. The agenda served as a mediating artefact of the relation between the organisers and the CPs. While there was some room for adjustment, the relation offered participants no power in determining the proceedings. While this proved useful in producing a final result, the evident strain on the CPs of having to do too much in too little time, and of the lack of depth in their dialogue were unfortunate consequences of the power relation.

The initial challenge of any project is the articulation and clarification of its Object, including its concept and why it should matter. Players may have different perspectives of the situation (its problems, its constraints, its best features), and need to navigate towards a shared concept of it so it can be transformed, improved, or just accepted. But their motivation would be to achieve that realisation, and they can deliberate about the various ways to get there. If they argue and fight, it is no longer a coherent activity, as egotistic goals become more important than goals that direct action towards the Object. Deliberation, assisted with facilitation, can become the glue that holds a project together against distraction and adversity, against the very human tendency to exercise power.

This inquiry has been about the activity of deliberation in itself, rather than the broader deliberative system that includes the government, civil society and the community (Mansbridge et al, 2012). A consideration of power would have to be central to the project of enacting and sustaining a deliberative democracy.
CHAT, Dialectics and Social Construction

As my inquiry progressed, it became apparent that without a commitment to the cultural mediation of activity (in the sense explained earlier, as purposeful, culturally-imbued actions or practice) as the holistic starting point for understanding the human social condition, research conducted under the banner of CHAT is hollow and arbitrary. How does this fit with a simultaneous commitment to social construction? The answer is conditional because there is variation in how social construction and CHAT are each taken up. Therefore, I need to adopt the appropriate constructionist posture that does not contradict my CHAT commitments.

Researchers who position themselves in the CHAT tent align on two sides. Most educational researchers treat CHAT as an analytic lens or heuristic method that is overlaid on a situation. They adapt a pragmatic ethic to a treatment that is more interested in raising questions than supplying answers. For example, Barab, Evans & Baek (2004: 209) warn us not to get too attached to Engeström’s triangles. The tendency to functional rather than dialectic descriptions in their analysis would reflect this thin adaptation of CHAT as a consistent and useful method of viewing and transforming activity over time. On the other side are theorists and practitioners who make a much deeper commitment to the fundamental dialectic reality of activity in an emancipatory science (Blunden, 2010: 5) that integrates our psychological and social lives with transformative potential:

CHAT aims at the self-determination of human beings. We cannot do this with concepts which fail to capture the essential nature of human activity as being tied up with the projection of our ideals, however mistaken they may be from time to time (Blunden, 2010: 318).

Because this committed stance is grounded in epistemological and ontological foundations, such scholars are far more pedantic about the truth and internal consistency of CHAT, which must be derived rather than abstractly proclaimed. Bakhurst (2009) despairs that current instrumental applications of CHAT remain divorced from the cultural-historical underpinnings that gave it epistemic and normative legitimacy. If an inquiry about a situation is intended to uncover contradictions in relation to a project, then the house of inquiry itself had better be in good order first.

Deliberative democracy invites commitment to normative ideals such as inclusion, publicity and reciprocity. Furthermore, it should be celebrated in modern
culture as community-forming and individual-empowering activity rather than merely for its instrumental political use. Since these are commitments that I share with others working in the deliberative movement, it would be a contradiction to adopt CHAT thinly. The only way to animate the activity of deliberation with conviction is to accept an emancipatory conception of activity as fundamental to that movement.

Since the foundations of CHAT pre-date the rise of social constructionism, it is unsurprising that few CHAT researchers embrace it explicitly. The constructionist presumes that structures, relationships and identity come into existence and are reproduced through communicative action within overlapping circles of cultural and historical development. CHAT also begins with the premise that communicative action reproduces culture. Both constructionist research (See Holstein & Gubrium (2008) for many examples of constructionist research) and CHAT tend to rely on ethnographic methods such as discourse analysis to gain concrete evidence. CHAT can help address the constructionist question of “what are we making here” in deliberation, just as interested in the twists and turns along the way as the final destination. Social constructionist and CHAT research are conducted best when researchers are in cahoots with their subjects, working together towards the object of study, rather than standing back passively with clipboards to watch what happens. It is the difference between being driven in a limousine through a strange town, or riding a bicycle through it (which I have done as a cycle tourer). The former may be easy and safe, but the latter provides uninhibited and engaged contact and collaboration without pretence.

As covered in Chapter 2, some constructionists are mutually at odds regarding which social formations remain eternally idealised as discursive constructs and which, if any, count as concretely real. I have gravitated to the side which claims that in discursive, social practice we act into concrete social situations, but should question whether the reality is inevitable and eternal. To put it another way, social construction questions the history of real social phenomena and recognises where social activity and factors have shaped their existence, perhaps arbitrarily, and continue to do so. Inherent in this view is an acceptance of the normality and serendipity of change.

Some constructionists refer to the relations and artefacts of social activity as accomplishments or achievements. But the English language lends a certain unintentional finality to these depictions that would be unappealing to a CHAT practitioner who would rather not reify the situation under study. It is not the constructionist’s intention to objectify the construction either, but rather to accentuate the agency and mediating influences in construction. Anyway, a CHAT practitioner would problematise achievement as an action in activity, rather than just presume it.
Some interpretive constructionists place discourse ontologically ahead of and distinct from action. Others, exemplified in the “communication perspective” of Pearce and Cronen, explicitly denounce the representational and objectified transmission model of communication that perpetuates the Cartesian dualism of mind and the social world, instead defining communication immanently as the social relations themselves:

Those ways of communicating are not just about other things, relationships, identities, cultures and institutions. They are our relationships, identities, cultures, and institutions. Relationships are the ways each person acts into the actions of the other. An organization is the way persons engage in joint action. They exist in communication (Cronen, 2009: 62).

Cronen goes further to suggest that since relations are constructed in communication, there are no separate mental states of phenomena used in the process of communication. Social construction is not only alternative to foundational thought, but alternative to any form of mentalism or cognitivism (ibid.).

This strand of social constructionism does not ignore cognitive and psychological considerations, but avoids setting them as the primary site for understanding social dynamics. There is growing awareness that “both individual agency and meaning and socio-cultural-historical contexts, as well as explicit efforts to understand the relationship between these two, are essential to a social constructionist approach to communication” (Foster & Bochner, 2008: 98).

CHAT follows Vygotsky’s claim that thought and speech are distinct but united dialectically. Speech completes thought and socialises it:

The relationship of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a movement from thought to word and from word to thought... Thought is not expressed but completed in the word. We can, therefore, speak of the establishment (i.e., the unity of being and non-being) of thought in the word. Any thought strives to unify, to establish a relationship between one thing and another. Any thought has movement. It unfolds (Vygotsky, 1987: 250).

The structure of speech is not simply the mirror image of the structure of thought. It cannot, therefore, be placed on thought like clothes off a rack. Speech does not merely serve as the expression of developed thought. Thought is restructured as it is transformed into speech. It is not expressed but completed in the word. Therefore, precisely because of the contrasting directions of movement, the development of the internal and external aspects of speech forms a true unity (ibid: 251).

Critical psychologist L. Holzman suggests that Vygotsky has provided the integrating synthesis of private thought and social deliberation:
Meaning is created, Vygotsky has shown, through the activity of speaking completing thinking. If thinking/speaking is a continuous process of completing, then the ‘completer’ need not be the same person who is doing the thinking. Others can complete for us. When people speak, participate in a dialogue, discussion or conversation (or write), they are not simply saying what is going on but are creating what is going on. And they understand each other by virtue of engaging in this shared creative activity (Holzman, 2006: 116).

One approach to constructionism, drawing on Mead, takes the immediate social interaction as the source of construction with social objects carrying no inherent meaning (Marvasti, 2008: 318). Similarly, Shotter (1995) presents “joint action” as the interactive moment of meaning co-creation in dialogue, then draws on Bakhtin to suggest that the background of pre-existing social objects only indirectly influences action through imagined obligations to a public. This interactionism is an ahistorical stance that leaves the inheritance of culture in everyday activity to chance or social choice. Although the term ‘practice’ is routinely applied to social situations under study in this vein, it is a very thin view of practice. Instead, I join others in subscribing to an alternative constructionist stance that culture, whether it be macro (e.g. national) or micro (e.g. institutional), necessarily inhabits the resources that are drawn upon in discourse. Neither contemporary activity theorists nor constructionists would support cultural determinism, but would agree that artefacts of culture are necessarily an evolving social construction. Both camps take pains to examine culture as symbolic work that frames interpretation and the construction of social formations and communities.

Constructionist research focusses on discourse and communication, while CHAT takes a broader view of activity that can be enacted or performed in many other ways. A CHAT study of deliberative activity is naturally limited to examining conversations, gestures and its textual products, as that is the extent of performance.

Both CHAT and social construction critique the application of positivist science to the study of social activity and offer alternative approaches. Both CHAT and constructionism focus on the particularities of local situations and do not aspire to prove general truths. Constructionist research addresses questions that are humanist, interpretive and practical, addressed with abductive reasoning while avoiding essentialist claims. CHAT does rest on a foundational commitment to activity, but eschews reductionism and derives understanding immanently through dialectic analysis. Both CHAT and constructionist research often seek emancipatory and performative outcomes in addition to propositional knowledge, and have been moving steadily towards more reflexive, participatory methods in which the researcher is fully embedded in the study site.
Hosking advocates a critical constructionist discourse that comes close to the CHAT world-view. Rather then defining processes in terms of and subsequent to the entities that they connect, she prefers to start with processes as the “the ever-moving construction site in which the relational realities of persons and worlds are continuously (re)produced. This means that the person and world, self and other (including other people) are viewed as reciprocal co-constructions that are always in the process of becoming” (Hosking, 2008: 672). She defines inter-acts as particular instantiations of relations that historically supplement previous local acts in relation to “ongoing practices that (re)construct a particular form of life” (ibid.: 675) (i.e. culture, paradigm, tradition). Although it is derived differently, Hosking’s ‘process’ is analogous to CHAT’s ‘activity’.

Johnson & Long (2002: 31) conceive of any group as “constituted in the dynamic interplay of dialectical tensions, exigencies, and communicative responses among members of an assembly within its relevant context.” This view also aligns Blunden’s (2010) depiction of groups as constituted by collaborative projects. While the constructionist and post-structural implications of defining a group only by its dialectical interplay may be radical, it is a notion worth exploring for groups assembled for public deliberation.

Johnson & Long refer to the foundational work of Baxter & Montgomery (1996) who developed what they named Relational Dialectical Theory (RDT) about family and interpersonal relationships. Baxter & Montgomery studied the communication of romantic couples as actions and reactions towards contradictions, including movements towards both dependency and autonomy, both openness and discreteness, and both stability and change. At a meta-theoretical level, their RDT never pre-supposed an equilibrium or end-state, but rather that relationships continue in dynamic flux, which can be frustrating especially if the source of tension remains tacit. Their constructionist view sees each party living into the relationship with communicative acts shaped by and perhaps ritualised to respond to personal needs and cultural patterns. The moment-by-moment pragmatic adjustments and the ebb-and-flow of positioning constitute a praxis that embodies the relationship as a whole.

Johnson & Long proposed that the RDT be extended to the study of small groups. The first difference one notices when scaling up is that the situation becomes messy to analyse as tensions arise in multiple dimensions and combinations with overlapping dependencies. For example, the pursuit of certainty may play off the complex appeal of novelty, surprise, mystery, excitement, innovation and the like, and the meanings and implications of these may not be mutually understood. Furthermore,
similar to Engeström’s levels of contradictions in his version of Activity Theory, contradictions can exist in relationships between individuals in the group, between individuals and emergent group properties, and between the group and social life at large.

During her development as a dialectic theorist, Baxter became increasingly influenced by the work of the Russian literary critic and philosopher Bakhtin, who was a contemporary to Vygotsky, although they did not know of one another. Bakhtin understood dialectic as a necessary consequence of polyvocality:

To Bakhtin, social life was not a closed, univocal “monologue,” in which only a single voice (perspective, theme, ideology, or person) could be heard: social life was an open “dialogue” characterised by the simultaneous fusion and differentiation of voices. To engage in dialogue, participants must fuse their perspectives to some extent while sustaining the uniqueness of their individual perspectives. Participants thus form a unity in conversation but only through two clearly differentiated voices or perspectives. Just as dialogue is simultaneously unity and difference, Bakhtin regarded all of social life as the product of “a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies:” the centripetal (i.e., discourses of unity or centrality) and the centrifugal (i.e., discourses of difference, dispersion, and de-centering) (Baxter, 2004: 181-182).

Baxter (2004) wrote that Bakhtin was critical of Hegelian and Marxist dialectics because they put too much emphasis on synthesis as an inevitable outcome. Bakhtin believed that their teleologic and evolutionary logic contradicts the fundamental feature of emergence and unpredictability in dialectic theory. He suggested that most social relationships enter into only brief moments when a satisfying coherent wholeness is experienced. These elusive “aesthetic moments” offer only brief transitions to new patterns. Put another way, these are tension-free moments when dialogic flow is unimpeded and parties are able to complete each other’s utterances through ritualised responses, for example, or with the experience of unfettered interpersonal understanding and trust.

From the group dialectical perspective, group ‘norms’ are no longer viewed functionally as centring or goal-determined states, but the result of the complex interplay of tensions manifested in the group. The dialectical perspective also gives little credit to the self-organising and evolutionary premises that underpin complex systems theory, where time points inevitably from cause to consequence. Instead, a dialectic view of systemic change is a timeless negotiation in “ongoing centripedal-centrifugal flux” (Baxter, 2004).

To study groups from a dialectical perspective, Johnson and Long recommend an eclectic mix of methods, including participant observation, qualitative discourse
analysis and other ethnographic methods (ibid.: 37). Importantly, they are clear that the analyst should not start with a general taxonomy of primary dialectics and then proceed to search for them. Instead, researchers should begin with the dialogue itself and interpret it from a dialectic perspective, especially how tensions arise and are attended to. They advocate a reflexive attitude by researchers, including intervention to raise collective awareness of contradictory forces. These recommendations about methodology align directly with those of Engeström and other Activity Theorists. “By maintaining the focus on tensions, responses, and contexts, dialectical scholars can follow a group’s history from its first moments and observe how and why the group becomes what it becomes and does what it does” (ibid.: 31).

While there are few examples in scholarly literature where CHAT or dialectic theory has been explicitly integrated with social construction, I have attempted here to justify and characterise their parallel application and shared language without contradiction. Furthermore, I would claim that the socio-cultural tenets of CHAT and the recognition of dialectics augment and enrich constructionist conceptions of social progress and methods of inquiry. This is the task to be attended to next in the context of public deliberation.
Embracing Deliberation with CHAT

A deliberative process qualifies as an activity in CHAT because it is constituted by social acts motivated by broadly shared democratic ideals to address a contentious (and conceptual) object of concern such as a wicked public policy problem or a planning prioritisation exercise. The project approach provides the licence to view the participants in deliberation as diverse collaborators. The design of the process and its active facilitation are the culturally-informed mediating tools to construct a workable conceptual solution that meets diverse subjective goals. The organisers, facilitators and everybody else involved in the process are included in the project with its citizen participants. To put it concisely, deliberative activity mediates its outcomes through intentionally designed features of instantiated projects appropriated and acted upon by collaborating participants.

Blunden (2010) did not detail a methodology to guide the study of activity in a collaborative project. The construction of a project as an observable complex of dialectic relations can still be derived as with Engeström’s schema, but with stronger immanent justification:

...activity remains the substance of social life for Activity Theory, but we now have a unit of social life, the project. A project is activity, it is not anything different from activity; it is made up of actions; it is an activity. But we have given a coherent meaning to 'an activity'. A project is not an objectivist conception, imposed on society from outside, but arises from and is driven by and therefore subject to immanent critique (Blunden, 2010: 263).

For example, rather than the Community being seen as an amorphous entity external from the activity, it is only considered to the extent that the project itself constructs it (but which may challenge external perspectives). Similarly, the Rules, DoL and artefacts that mediate the actions of a project are considered as constructions of the project and manifestations of the concept that is enacted through collaboration. Blunden suggests exploring the ‘modes of collaboration’, defined as categories of normative relations between people acting in the project, such as management. In this thesis I am adding deliberation to that list.

Some collaborative processes roughly follow the problem-solving script of Dewey (1997/1910) or Functional Theory in small group communications (Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999) of naming and characterising the problem, establishing criteria for an acceptable choice, generating solution options, assessing the positive and negative features of each option. The deficit-oriented initial focus on the problem often digresses
Embracing Deliberation with CHAT | Lubensky

into a protracted exercise of blame-throwing and faltering commitment towards any resolution. In dialogue and deliberation practices, on the other hand, a different design approach is applied in accordance with the constructionist tenets of *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI). Here, participants begin by identifying any positive aspects in the existing situation, even if isolated, then envisioning a future that expands those positive moments and then finding common ground for action towards that emergent future (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2007). A central feature of AI is its cultural-historical intent to carry the best parts of the past into the future and enlarge them (Barge, 2002: 166). While this approach of possibility-creation works well in drawing a disparate group into collaboration, it is averse to reflexive critical analysis as researchers and participants are continually engaged in the construction of a new positive story. A project-oriented CHAT approach is an overlay that does not detract from the affirmative basis of AI while providing an opportunity to clarify what is being constructed.

*In the situation of the Australian Citizens’ Parliament, what are the collaborative projects of deliberative activity?* The ACP was presented to potential participants as an exercise in public participation that was intended to provide them with a public voice. By accepting the invitation, they put into action the development of a concept of participation that they were willing to explore. In every process of public deliberation there is a contestable political issue, relevant to most citizens’ lives and talked about with strong and disparate opinions. It may qualify as a particularly ‘wicked problem’ (Rittel & Webber, 1973) that defies straightforward universal characterisation, although many may believe they have a simple answer. In practice, the deliberative task is either an aggregated prioritisation of options, or a consensus-seeking quest for a particular recommendation. At the ACP participants had a headline question to address, “How can Australia’s political system be strengthened to serve us better?” which added to their concept of what their task would be. They knew that they would form a panel of 150 participants who would work together, although they had little initial understanding of the methods of collaboration, nor their endpoint of a prioritisation. Without going further to characterise it at this stage, it is clear that the whole ACP can be viewed as a collaborative project. There is value in examining this scope of project as it is the site of participants’ and organisers’ conception of the ACP as a whole, and of the possible transformation of that conception. Plenary activity during the ACP also can be viewed at this macro level of participation.

As part of their conception of the whole ACP as a project, the participants came to understand quickly that a recommendation report would be generated for delivery to the Government in response to the headline question. In the case of the ACP, it was a set
of recommended proposals. What that looks like in shape and contents, and where it ultimately goes, is a reflection of the actions and operations of the activity. While the agenda aimed the activity towards a prioritised list, aspects of the outcome (for example its level of detail) were formed by the actions that contributed to the activity, and deserve examination.

Subsets of the whole agenda can define sub-projects if the central concern of participants during those periods is limited and can be bracketed as a distinct concept. For example, on Day 3 of the ACP when participants engaged in priority-setting, they would have constructed a concept of deliberative prioritisation through their actions of dialogue and voting, and the prioritisation activity can be treated as an embedded sub-project of the ACP.

Most fruitful for the purpose of this thesis is the activity at each table, which can also be treated as sub-projects. There, the active concept would be manifested in each exercise that participants collaborated upon to complete. The nature of the table conversation evolved through the ACP as they became more familiar with each other, expressed their hopes and worked towards an outcome. Facilitation and artefacts of their dialogue, including conversational turns and scribed notes transmitted to the central Theme Team, are directly observable as the activity progresses.

Between these macro and micro project levels there are activities along secondary themes that emerged during the ACP. For example, as will be demonstrated narratively in Chapter 4, many of the younger participants both associated naturally with each other and were categorised by the organisers, with a growing sense of identity that can be viewed as an unexpected sub-project of the ACP. There are other sub-projects which formed and carried through the ACP which will be revealed through narrative methods. Attitudes about politicians and public participation changed as a result of their participation. There are also outcomes that were expected by some participants (and organisers) which did not occur, such as take-up of recommendations by the Government.
To fully embrace CHAT and the project orientation, a dialectic methodological stance should be adopted. This means that at each level of activity analysis, light should be shown on the relations between the project participants, artefacts and the contextual elements that are sustained by the project and influenced by it. A guiding principle to discovering the dialectic relations is to note actions and operations initiated by participants that appear contradictory or problematic. In other words, even though the process agenda was intended to be appreciative in quality, minor conflict or difficulty occurred and such events can point to dialectic relations.

I should not end there in my elaboration of the overall project. For public deliberation, the task is usually deeper than just gaining an answer to a simple headline question. That question did not come into being out of thin air. It is not an esoteric question or a idle call to a thought experiment. Who is asking the question? It would be easy to say that the ACP organisers are asking it, but they were merely acting as channellers for public discourse. Well before the ACP began, the organisers convened several World Café dialogue sessions during which public participants (not those at the ACP) talked about what the key question should be. This informed the final design of the question. The question is largely out in the wild, manifested in hundreds of cranky letters to newspaper editors and the disenchantment shown in the steady decline of political party membership and voter turnout in countries, unlike Australia, where voting is not mandatory. Sensationalist news reporting of the scandalous behaviour of a few public officials and administrators fuels general cynicism towards all public institutions and their agents. But there are still optimists who ask, “how can this be changed?” So an overarching project of the ACP was the democratic malaise, which many ACP participants referred to (see chapter 4) in different ways and spurred their acceptance to attend in the first place. But because one cannot witness all nation-wide participants in that project, only a glimpse of its dynamic and its relation to the ACP project can be gained.

Still, I can step back further. Theorists and designers of deliberative democratic processes have pushed for the practice of public deliberation to become mainstream. The ACP was purposefully established to demonstrate the potential of public deliberation. Carson & Hartz-Karp (2005: 135) suggest that community engagement is a practice that builds a reinforcing cycle of inclusion, deliberation and political influence. At this level of analysis, the concept is enacted in the demand for public engagement. Since many ACP participants accepted the invitation to attend as an opportunity to voice their opinions, regardless of the key question they would address, this project must be taken into account. As will be described in more detail later, this project is problematic at the ACP.
because of its overt advocacy: the very staging of the ACP as an example of democratic participation pre-empts the question that is posed to the participants as their object.

The primary mediation in deliberative activity is provided by the division of labour into table conversations and the facilitation provided at each table to help sustain the conventions of civility in dialogue. Other actions connected to the division of labour to mediate activity at the ACP were the randomised recruitment and randomly-assigned seating. Much of the analysis about the ACP as deliberative activity will come from an examination of the actions of facilitators and their mediational effects on the project and its relations, especially between participants engaged in collaboration. It is not my central aim to evaluate the ACP in particular, but rather to demonstrate how a CHAT approach can open avenues of exploration into facilitation and process design.

Practitioners usually make a distinction between deliberation and dialogue. Deliberation is conversation aimed at particular solutions, whereas dialogue is conversation aimed at mutual understanding.\(^\text{13}\) Both are required, and a given process will flow from one to the other and back, or in effect be simultaneously both. Practitioners often argue about the benefits of each, perpetuating the dualist disciplinary split between them. But dialogue and deliberation can also be considered as a dialectic pair, with dialogue striving for divergence and plurality and deliberation striving for convergence and consensus. How they proceed is culturally shaped, as the usual styles of talk may vary amongst participants, who then shape the conversation by what they each bring from their lived experience. They each project their particular histories and culture through the performance of their conversation.

Engeström referred to a single Community in his schema, but it would be better to refer to a plurality of multi-layered and overlapping Communities. It cannot be determined in advance what Communities are relevant to the ACP project because the participants reconstruct them during their deliberative activity. At its far expanse is the Australian population, which would live under any recommendations of the ACP that might be implemented. Then there are neighbourhoods, friends, families and other groupings of people that would form the social contexts from which participants are drawn. There were several levels of participants to the ACP itself. First, there were the 2763 individuals who registered after receiving an invitation. The Online Parliament was opened to this whole pool of people. Second, there were about 150 participants, selected from the registration pool, to participate in the face-to-face assembly in Canberra. Third, participants were seated at twenty-three tables in groups of 6 to 8. The dialogue and

\(^{13}\) For example, see resources at National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (e.g. http://http://ncdd.org/rc/what-are-dd )
deliberation occurred in these table groups, so any group would see the other tables as a broader community in a localised activity context.

There are also communities from the various institutions involved directly or indirectly in the deliberative democracy and public engagement discipline. This includes the university faculties that produce research and education, and NGOs that propel the discipline (such as newDemocracy) and organise practitioners such as facilitators, process designers and public participation consultants (such as NCDD and IAP2). For the ACP, there are also the various Governments that would require change to structure, legislation or regulation to implement any change the ACP recommended. While the primary target of the ACP was designed to be the federal government, it became clear to participants that state and local government issues were also implicated.

Another mediating aspect to deliberative activity encompasses Civility, which represents its procedural guidelines and normative limits, and correspond to Engeström’s Rules. In a deliberative process, civility is literally constituted in the process agenda and specific guidelines of behaviour that are explained and practised at the start, and actively monitored throughout with intervention by table facilitators. These norms include asking open questions of each other, being respectful of others, being reflective, tolerating other ideas, avoiding dominating the conversation, avoiding personal attacks, and so on. Participants also bring their culturally-formed understanding of socially-acceptable etiquette and conduct as an everyday praxis. The problem with the original Rules place-holder is that its name implies a ‘big stick’ approach to keeping everyone nice, because the action side of Rules tends to be enforcement. In other words, Rules present as the solution to a social challenge. Civility, on the other hand, presents as the worthwhile normative goal of collaborating in deliberative activity, especially across difference. Intuitively, Rules stand separate from the activity, whereas Civility emanates from the Community and more positively mediates actions of participants.

An important instance of Division of Labour at the ACP occurred as active members of the Online Parliament were brought into the face-to-face assembly as champions of their proposals. This put them in an influential position in the forum, which some took up rather more enthusiastically than was expected. The irony was that several other participants who did not have a stake in any particular proposal recognised the positive experience of deliberation over the strategic actions of caucusing and lobbying.

The distinction of participants from their mutually respectful relation to organisers, researchers and expert panellists, while seemingly trivial, should be
problematised because it is this very distinction that distinguishes a project such as the ACP from an activist endeavour.

Deliberative activity is constituted by several intersecting sub-activities. First, there is the deliberation by forum participants within a designed agenda and with the guidance of facilitation. A second sub-activity is the design and operation of the forum itself, involving organisers and support staff. With the ACP, there was a third sub-activity in the Online Parliament. I am primarily concerned with the first of these sub-activities, and will examine the other two only briefly to the extent that they relate to the first.

The various facets of Facilitation (and process design) at the ACP should be identified, from the peculiar communicative vocabulary that describes the experience of large scale dialogue and deliberation to the material procedures, technical tools, documentary forms and direct moderation of the table facilitators that had an instrumental impact on how the participants were able to tackle their project.

At each moment that the CHAT lens is refocussed on the activity, the relations between participants and the project can be illuminated. Tensions and contradictions can be identified and tracked. Paradoxes can be re-framed. This is the crucial effort in CHAT analysis that is intended to help make sense about deliberative activity.

Ethnographic methods are typically applied to gain the ‘data’ for CHAT analysis. The recorded table conversations and researcher observations become vital in examining how their talk affected the progress of the activity. In the following chapter of this thesis, methods of discourse and narrative analysis are applied to extract some telling stories and threads of their interaction. A CHAT perspective of the conversation as constituting communicative actions will then lead to an analysis of the activity as a whole through the course of the ACP. The conversations will help identify communicative actions that signal transitional moments when there is a palpable change in the activity at the table and the forum as a whole. Changes in the quality or purpose of the conversation, whether imposed by the agenda or emergent over time, can be interpreted in terms of dialectic relations, providing better insight into the nature of the process. I will be looking for evidence in the conversations of contradictions and tensions experienced by the participants. Some of these may come as a surprise, while others may be deduced while keeping certain questions in mind while reading transcripts of them.

While practice in CHAT demands a continuous connection to the activity under scrutiny, animating it for analysis demands limiting the duration of attention into
manageable sequences. The discourse analytic methods informed by a narrative sensibility, described in Chapter 2 of this thesis, provides useful guidance. Conversational text is viewed as episodes of activity. These depict the communicative actions in the project that participants are collaborating towards.

The historic association of CHAT with Marxist philosophy cannot be sidestepped, which due to the political nature of public deliberation may invite prejudice against any open and honest attempt at expanding understanding of deliberative activity. The mere mention of Marx may cause a visceral response and minds to close. That would be unfortunate because a calm and open study of Marxist philosophy offers much to those who would ask, “how can we view and act in the world differently?” Holzman says,

we think of Marxism as profoundly practical, not in the sense of a practice derived from a theory or a method, but in the sense of being a theory or method that is a practice (Holzman, 2011).

F. Newman, a career-long mentor to Holzman, wrote,

The dialectic is not to be found between the activity and its contemplation (the mind and the body); the dialectic is the full-blown rejection of ‘between-ness’ in favor of a radically monistic (call it ‘one-dimensional’ if you like) methodology. Activity is not a component of reality; it is a radical alternative to modernist (and pre-modernist) philosophy which objectifies the world. Of course, Marx is not denying the world. But more important, he is not philosophically affirming it. Rather he seeks to discover a methodology suitable for transforming it. Dialectics as an activity theoretic method—a practice of method—is that discovery (Newman, 1999: 37).

Like many constructionists, Holzman and Newman take the post-modern stance (sourced originally from Hegel) that sees human and social life as a dynamic and developmental process of becoming. This supplants the approach of experiment which objectifies activity and perpetuates the dualist isolation of subjects. Furthermore, classical experimentation seeks to characterise static modes of existence, whereas CHAT presumes that life is in constant motion that should not be nailed down. Fully immersed in client and community activity, Holzman & Newman (1993) dissolve the theory/practice divide with a dialectic tool-and-result attitude, engaging in continuous reflective practice as they adapt methods to suit the evolving situation. They describe this approach as ‘rebuilding the ship while it is sailing’.

Engeström makes plain that an activity approach to research and analysis should be a naturalistic and reflexive enterprise (Engeström, 2011). That means exploring activity as an authentic experience and the researcher literally becomes part of the Community under investigation. In CHAT, ‘going native’ is a virtue because it is
important that participants see that the researcher is working towards the same purpose as they are.

Unfortunately, the ACP was not designed with CHAT in mind, so the second approach was not available as an option for me. Furthermore, my maturity with CHAT thinking was still at an early stage of development when the ACP took place. With only the possibility for retrospective action, I can only proceed with the first approach and suggest how any research-oriented intervention could have proceeded and how the deliberative activity might be transformed with the intervention. However, the agenda itself can be viewed as comprising a series of interventions that shape the project.

Moreover, deliberative activity as a whole can be viewed as a mediating intervention to the less productive ways that public discourse is conducted in the wild. The dialogic and learning tools presented by the facilitator and appropriated to suitably expand the project open new insights and intentions for action by participants. These can alter the traditional polarisation of political interests and lead to a new cultural and historical development. The CHAT approach draws research attention on the facilitators, who are the agents of intervention. While it is not my main intention to evaluate the ACP per se, the attitudes and backgrounds of the facilitators, and the training they received, become relevant in an analysis of deliberative activity.
Reflections on CHAT

Presenting CHAT as a project of collaboration, including how I have come to it during my own life, is consistent with what Camic & Gross (2004) call the New Sociology of Ideas. In this approach, the actual development of ideas is problematised rather than given incidentally, because that development did not emerge out of thin air or by the obviousness of hindsight. The old sociology of knowledge tends to apply only to ‘non-scientific’ domains, but this has changed with the contemporary acceptance (albeit not universal) that facts are value-laden and shifts in paradigm (as per Kuhn) or tradition (as per MacIntyre) require a transformation of public discourse beyond authoritative assertions of new knowledge. The new sociology of ideas takes a hermeneutic stance that meanings may be drawn differently across contexts and cultures. So texts should not be taken as literal but investigated as a construction by its authors with intentions that deserve ongoing clarification. Accordingly, the development of ideas occurs in local settings which may also present particular cultural-historical influence on their articulation. Finally, the new sociology of ideas recognises idea development as a political activity by individuals working in institutional arrangements and with personal interests that influence how ideas are disseminated and gain acceptance (or otherwise). All in all, the new sociology of ideas is compatible with a cultural-historical activity approach to the development of intellectual disciplines.

The story about my background at the start of this chapter, and my personal introduction to CHAT and socio-cultural theory were given from a CHAT perspective. I identified various projects, their contexts and paradoxes. The CHAT focus on contextual inter-relations and reflexive mindfulness provides a useful narrative structure to the evolving activity of personal, professional and scholastic development. It was no accident that CHAT is central to my thesis. In Vygotskian terms, I have begun to internalise the activity approach as a core practice in my research life.

The design of the ACP applied the ethics and framework of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This plants a necessarily positive outlook in the procedure, which then leverages the ensuing goodwill and energy to construct a collaborative outcome. This is all for the good, but may leave the participatory engagement blind to relevant consequential effects as it focusses evangelically on the positive (Dick, 2004). It would be worthwhile to apply a critical lens to the practice and evaluation of AI, as appreciation can also be interpreted as a respectful recognition of unfamiliar realities (Grant & Humphries, 2006). Therefore, choosing CHAT with its constructively sceptical outlook
provides a useful foil to unearth and characterise tensions in the situation. The irony (and this is a word that signals a dialectic outlook, too) is that the dour penchant of CHAT practitioners to look for contradictions often results in an unwavering commitment to consistency across all aspects of research practice. For this gift, I am most grateful.

This chapter has introduced CHAT and its dialectic approach as a novel analytic platform for the examination and improvement of deliberative activity. I have attempted to characterise the alignments between CHAT and social constructionism. In the next chapter conversational episodes will be revealed and a short response to each from an activity perspective will be given. Then in the chapter following a more complete examination of the ACP as deliberative activity will be offered.
4. Narrative Construction of the Australian Citizens’ Parliament

All of us create worlds that are “complete” or “whole” within our horizons and that are structured by a geometry of “oughtness” that tells us what things mean and what we should, could, must or must not do about or because of them (Pearce, 2007: 40).

Introduction

This chapter presents three mini-stories and a collection of episodes that are sourced from conversations and other texts by participants of the ACP. Each of the mini-stories is comprised of quoted text interleaved with my narrative elaboration. Following each of these renderings is a preliminary analysis considered from the project framing of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), introduced in Chapter 3 of this thesis. A more integrated analysis is presented in Chapter 5.

From an empirical perspective, these mini-stories and episodes constitute the ‘data’ for this thesis. However, social constructionist researchers prefer not to refer to conversational experiences in this cold, objectified manner, for it signifies a certain disrespect of the participants. There is reluctance to calling them research ‘subjects’, too. Fortunately, the term ‘subject’ has a separate meaning in CHAT. Nonetheless, these transcripts become the focus of the analysis that begins in this chapter. In CHAT terminology, the mini-stories and episodes are concrete artefacts of the deliberative activity.

These mini-stories and conversational episodes open a storied rather than merely propositional exploration and understanding of the deliberative activity. It was during the many months of piecing them together that underlying themes emerged. By immersing myself in the recorded conversations and re-constructing them, I literally discovered their underlying complexity, and then to the points which would become the prescriptive principles of this thesis.
The selection of the mini-stories and episodes was not achieved through a deliberate sampling method. Such methods are crucial when conducting research that sets out to produce mid-level ‘grounded’ theory or generalised case study conclusions. In this constructionist inquiry, the goal is simply to provide windows into what happened, and to demonstrate a storied approach to analysis. It does not matter that some episodes which others may feel are important to the outcome of the ACP are not captured here. This thesis is not intended as an evaluation of the outputs of the ACP.

Each mini-story was relatively easy to render from transcripts of the audio recordings of the table conversations that were found to be complete. Too often when following other story-lines I would arrive at apparently crucial moments in conversation, only to be frustrated by inaudible recordings due to various combinations of room noise, simultaneous conversation and quiet speech. There were several other story-lines in which I discarded because they did not reveal enough about their activity. There was not enough happening in those conversations. The presented mini-stories exhibit the coherence and narrative arc that would be expected of stories. I did follow several other thematic leads that were attended to sparsely or in fragmented bursts by participants. Instead, I was looking to track activity that showed participants sustaining a fully-engaged dialogue.

The first mini-story follows a particular episode at one table nominally situated in the Hope stage of deliberative activity. Later conversations referring back to this episode are also included. The telling of this story opens a close view of the conversational dynamics in deliberative activity. Like most stories, it contains a significant turning point.

The next two stories travel through the whole narrative arc of the deliberative activity. They are story constructions insofar as they emerge after editing together conversational episodes and snippets across various tables and periods. Both of these mini-stories could stand on their own due the inclusion of my context-building narration. Therefore, there is substantial redundant overlap between them.

The second half of the chapter consists of conversational episodes. With one exception (a threaded conversation from the online phase of the ACP), each occurred like the first mini-story at a particular time and table in the room. In aggregate, the episodes span the entire narrative arc, but they were not selected specifically to form a story-line between them. Rather, each provides insight into the conversational dynamics at that stage and illustrate points that will be made in Chapter 5 relating to an overall analysis based on the CHAT framework.
A. Approaching difference

This mini-story is comprised of a single protracted episode at a table on Day 1 in Canberra when participants were considering what would make the ACP a success. In relation to the narrative arc of a deliberative activity, it is situated just in the Hope stage.

A follow-on supplement is also added to the story from a conversation recorded on Day 4. This helps contextualise the episode and provides a useful coda to it.

The rendering of this mini-story is distinguished by its auto-ethnographic quality. In it, I am abridging it with remarks and personal reflection as a researcher. Note how this results in two parallel stories unfolding, that of the participants at the ACP, and that of me in the analysis of it. I am also using this mini-story to illustrate the methods of reflexive narrative analysis I have used throughout this research. The conversation style of writing is intentional.

Note that for the sake of completeness, this mini-story carries text that also appears elsewhere in this chapter.

With notepad in hand, I sit at one of the oval tables in the middle of the room. The facilitator and participants introduce themselves to each other. The room is very, very noisy with conversation. Following is an illustration of the table, including the position of the notebook computer and the digital recorder:

![Figure 4.1: Seating for table conversation]

Lead Facilitator: Now, at each table, facilitators, you’ve got some sheets of paper. So have a conversation with each other and see if you can actually reach some sort of agreement, it doesn’t have to be really solid, consensus agreement but, two or three things at your table that would mean, “We’ve had a really, really good time and achieved a lot if we’ve done this”, okay? And we’re going to collect up those bits of paper, and we’re going to shove them up on these things here called ‘sticky walls’. So there’s your challenge, you’ve got about ten minutes to do that, so go for it! Everyone clear?

This episode begins with the lead facilitator suggesting from the stage that the table facilitators help their participants “reach some sort of agreement,” to amalgamate common views if there are any. This exercise is the first to test the participants’ collaborative potential.
Thematic analysis promotes a close look at language to examine what is told by the participants, and also what I am telling in this report. Consider the first question asked by the Lead Facilitator, “What do you want to achieve together?” Is the word ‘you’ singular or plural? The word ‘together’ might lead you to conclude that the Lead Facilitator intended the plural ‘you’, challenging the participants to find collective outcomes. On the other hand, a participant who is strongly self-centred might hear the word ‘you’ directed specifically at her, and interpret the task in terms of qualifying individual effort. As subtle as this may seem, the conversation (and my interpretation of it) could go in quite different directions.

You might also ask whether the Lead Facilitator (and the designers of the process that has scripted him) have asked the question in such a way as to privilege instrumental outcomes over the learning and appreciation of the deliberative activity itself. The intermediate question, “What would you like to say about the process?” would appear to neutralise this framing, but the responses by the participants will indicate how they interpreted the instruction.

Facilitator-11: When you’re home on Monday night or Tuesday morning or whatever and someone says how, “How was it?” Say it was really good …

from notes: Positive demeanour by all.

Edith: Fantastic.

Facilitator-11: … why was it really good? What made it really good?

Edith: Why?

Facilitator-11: What would make it really good?

Structural analysis is the second layer of narrative analysis. It builds on what is told by examining how it is told, or equally the telling. This includes consideration about the layout of the text, the sequencing of referenced resources and dialogic turn-taking. Interpretations from analysis of these features can be sought on matters such as power relations, identity associations, contextual impacts and, in this case, affinity to deliberation itself.

I am asking questions about how the text is constructed. People choose or are compelled to say what they say and when they say it. Structural analysis links those actions together temporally, episodically, logically and by any other relationship that has meaning in the overall context of the narrative.

The facilitator starts the table conversation. What constitutes the start of this group narrative? I am making the choice that it is here, with everything leading up to it merely as background and context. That is because I am choosing the activity at a small table group as my unit of analysis. I am interested in the narrative that emerges from their conversation. Note that I have just been explaining how I am telling the story.
The text can come from multiple sources. Sitting at the table, I had made notes about what I witnessed, which I have added to the story-line exactly as I recorded them. I can not claim that I recorded it just before Edith said “Fantastic”. But I happen to think it makes sense to insert it there to help re-construct the situation.

I am chunking the text into stanzas (Gee, cited in Riessman, 2008: 93) consisting of a few turns of conversation. With structural analysis, I slow down a reading of the conversation, taking decisions about where to take a breath. There is something coherent about the chunks I have chosen that differentiates them from what is previous and to what follows. That might entail who is talking, what they are talking about, or simply that there is a natural break in the conversation, for example when everyone laughs. But ultimately, I am assigning meaning to the chunking, which a reader should receive critically.

The table facilitator restates the exercise question again. But Edith, who is sitting directly in front of the facilitator, is not making much sense of it. She is 80 years young. To simplify the question, the facilitator shifts from a hypothetical future perfect tense to the present conditional tense so Edith can understand how to approach it.

So here is the beginning of a story of a group trying to come to a shared understanding about what it is they are doing and want to do. Through structural analysis the relevance of various aspects of the unfolding story becomes visible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maxine:</th>
<th>Well, one of the, I put up one of the proposals and, which was about party politics and ... I would love to tell, if we if that gets up and if we can then make it so that our politicians [inaudible] consensus, I mean, a conscience vote or they can just go with that without due placations to them as, and their party membership, and if party politics comes second to electing them, to representing their electorates and things like that; if that particular proposal got up, if it was accepted, then acted upon by the political parties, I would...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>from notes:</td>
<td>Maxine talks easily about ambitions of ACP - to everyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>By Monday night you won’t know whether that’s going to happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine:</td>
<td>I won’t know, so I won’t know that, no.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>So on a more general sense by Monday night you might have a sense that’s being taken seriously?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine:</td>
<td>Definitely being taken seriously and I would just, all the people that I’ve talked to, I would love to go home and say, “It got up, everybody agreed or a majority agreed with it, it was a real success, and I feel really glad to have been part of it.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edith:</td>
<td>Very good, I agree with what she said, I do, fully.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>Could you put that into a few more words? [laughter]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1 The names of all ACP participants have been changed, but are used consistently through the chapter, as are facilitator references.
Dialogic/Performative analysis, the third layer of narrative analysis, subsumes the previous two methods (what is told, how it is told), but now opens to a fully active and interpretive inquiry about the communicative actions and the meanings that they carry.

My own rendering of this narrative carries performative qualities too. Had I compressed the conversation text into small boxes, a reader’s impression of the experience of the participants might be quite different. Everything about this rendering should be problematised. Even the renaming of the participants to maintain their anonymity in this thesis was a challenge—it was no accident that I chose the classic name Edith for the 80-year-old participant. Notice that I am using present tense to indicate what is happening in the conversation to help the reader vicariously into the scene.

The facilitator is trying to get the participants to have realistic expectations. But Maxine remains keen to get her proposal to win the endorsement of the others. For her, success appears to be a personal ambition. Her speech appears disjointed in print, but her observed performance is to talk in phrases to each person in turn. She appears to be acting the politician and drawing them onto her side. Perhaps at this early stage she sees the ACP as a competitive endeavour, which may have been reinforced during the discussion threads and proposal prioritisation procedure of the earlier online engagement.

After the close of this whole conversation (see below), Maxine questions the facilitator about the procedures. She is irritated that the proposal to which she had contributed online was not officially introduced in the House of Representatives earlier that morning. On separate end-of-day feedback forms, she complains: “Information on proposals not in ‘House of Representatives’ for Citizens to review when speakers talking. Would have been useful so we could take notes, review.” and “Not going over proposals before start. Time taken doing so when meant to be scribing and discussing.” Maxine is annoyed that the process is working against her personal interests.

Edith is compelled to be in the centre of the conversation and offers her agreement, but is not able to contribute with substance. The facilitator earnestly tries to help her, but unfortunately only gains the laughter of others. It is a challenge to engage people who have developed lifelong habits of dialogue that are less collaborative and openly reflective.

In a group context, the rhetorical intent of speech turns should be investigated. Inter-subjectivity, the communicative relation between participants, must be constantly problematised because it “does not reside in the speaker’s narrative, but in the dialogue
A. Approaching difference | Lubensky

between speaker and listener(s), investigator and transcript, and text and reader” (Riessman, 2008: 139). Thus reflexivity becomes a prime concern to me, as I need to maintain awareness and transparency about how the performance of the participants affects my perception and interpretation of events.

| Pam:     | Mine’s very brief.          |
| Facilitator-11: | Yeah.                     |
| Pam:     | Just I think that the most simple thing to change is that you start a conversation about it, an argument, that’s where things will change so that we are talking about it and we can make the impact in our world. Discussing politics. It’s gotta get home and get to talk with our families that we [?] I don’t know if that’s right... |
| from notes: | Don listening intently. |
| Facilitator-11: | All right, if you want to, sort of, ask questions of Pam or Maxine about what they’re saying ... and as much as possible... |
| Edith:   | Can I say that I agree otherwise I’ll... |
| Facilitator-11: | Yeah, that’s fine. What we, sort of... |
| Edith:   | Okay, good. |
| Facilitator-11: | From my point of view, when it’s working really well you will be talking to each other and not talking to me, and I’ll become a little bit invisible... I might be big, but... What else? What would give you a sense that this was really good? Worthwhile? |

Pam is genuinely trying to answer the question, suggesting a simple outcome that had already been achieved—generate proposals that everyone can take home and talk about. I notice Don, who is sitting quite far away in the noisy room, trying hard to hear. There is a pause after Pam speaks which is not filled by a response to her final request for confirmation directed at the facilitator.

The facilitator is concerned with the group norms, and does not want any one person, including himself, to be the centre of the conversation. This is typical facilitative practice (Mansbridge et al, 2006). In the sequence of people around the table, Edith knows it is her turn next to speak. But she is now unsure about turn-taking and is unable to comment further on what Pam said.

At the end of the day, on a feedback form, Pam writes: “Exciting that it is really happening after the online deliberation. It’s so good to meet so many people who really care about our political system, especially with a random selection.” Pam’s optimism shows in her actions.

Rather than abstractly say that he wants to avoid acting as the authoritative power at the table, the facilitator expresses it through the metaphor of ‘invisibility’. He may be indirectly asking the participants to behave in a way that does not demand his attention, but he can not avoid intervening:

| Edith: | I reckon that the politics, when they say, they promise something they should be made to keep that promise. |
Edith talks with passion, to facilitator. Edith takes her sequential turn to answer the question. But her answer does not address the question—it is apparent that she does not understand the current task. Her strong words belie her gentle demeanour. She refers to others in her social group, and I wonder how much of her emotion is channelled from them. The facilitator has to intervene, but he is not able to make himself understood to her.

There is an aspect of structural analysis that is useful here. Indexicality is a term that describes the use of shortcut references to ideas that are presumed to be mutually understood. The rise in the use of indexicality by a collaborating group is a good indication that they are learning from each other and learning to work with each other (Stahl, 2006: 247). They are making sense of each other.

But in this instance, the indexicality fails. The facilitator asks “why will you think this is a really good thing?” He presumes that Edith understands that ‘this’ means the work of the ACP. But Edith thinks he is referring to what she has just said about the untrustworthiness of politicians.

Having been unable to straighten Edith up, the facilitator closes the conversation with “Okay. Great.” With limited time, he moves on to the others around the table. He turns to Don, cutting Edith off from saying more.

Don: I’d probably be happy that umm, I was able to ... make the most of the opportunity that we have here to have some input,... really. You get a bit of sense of satisfaction from that rather than...
Maxine: It’s, it’s a real, umm... I don’t know... I think you feel the same way that I did, that when you were selected you felt very proud, then put in your submission to do that.
Don: Yeah, that’s right, it’s a great opportunity, and you...
Pam: It’s a wonderful opportunity.
Don: To have a say, a say, yeah.
Edith: I do too. I even told a lady when she come to Western Australia that I was very proud.
Facilitator-11: Does that fit in with you?
Don: Make the most of the opportunity, yeah, sure. It’s a bit of a once in a lifetime opportunity for most people.
Paul: Yeah.
Edith: It is, too. I would never ever come [inaudible] before today.

When Don finally speaks, he speaks softly and slowly, with pauses. He seems nervous, but friendly and open. A conversation breaks out with agreement about their good fortune to be personally engaged.

It is not clear from the text sources why Paul spoke next rather than Stan, who was seated next around the table. Perhaps Stan was looking elsewhere and the facilitator gestured to Paul instead:

Facilitator-11: We don’t have to, sort of, go around. So...
Paul: People, yeah before I came, people were,… some people were more doubtful about the success of it all and where it was all going to lead, but we won’t really know on Monday whether it’s going to be effective about, but I hope to have a feeling that it will.
from notes: Paul talks to everyone; Maxine leans in to listen; Researcher cannot hear.
Maxine: Yeah.
Facilitator-11: What do you think will give you the feeling that it was worthwhile?
Paul: Uhh, probably, hopefully, the quality of the issues that come up in the quality and sensible, … recommendations, you know, who, you know, sorry, I forgot your name.
Pam: Pam.
Paul: Pam’s, Pam’s, Pam’s uh, uh, proposal, you know, there’s good quality in... sensible things to come forward then I’d feel happy, but at the top of the world they think that’s never they’re never going to take that up,... then...
Facilitator-11: Feel free to put your ideas down on that piece of yellow paper.

Paul had difficulty articulating his idea. He was sceptical about the quality of the proposals that had come from the online engagement, and hoped they could be improved by the end. He knew that Maxine, Pam and Don had contributed strongly to the online engagement. I can only suggest that he may not have wanted to be disrespectful to them. But there is no corroborating evidence about that.

The facilitator gives the instruction to record the ideas after hearing Paul’s suggestion—perhaps he thought that it answered the question more adequately than previous answers.

At the end of the day, on a feedback form Paul writes: “Encouraging to see quality involvement and good discussion.” This is Paul’s reflection on what occurred in this and the follow-up conversations. Quality was still on his mind and he was optimistic.

Facilitator-11: Stan, what makes you feel, really, it’s all worthwhile?
Stan: Oh, well, if there are any hidden communists in the house and we found them and converted them.
from notes: Pam and others laugh.
Facilitator-11: Found them and what?
Stan: Converted them. [Laughter].
Stan had been sitting near the stage end of the table with his arms folded, looking around but not engaging with the others to that point. When he takes his turn to speak, he replies flippantly. It is very noisy in the room and the facilitator does not hear clearly. Although I do hear and laugh too, the facilitator does not laugh.

I am moving well beyond a detached analysis of text. There are many voices in this article. I present the participants as engaged in the construction of a story that involves coordinating actions and managing meaning (Pearce, 2007).

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stan:</th>
<th>But seriously there’s a few of these proposals that I completely think are 100 per cent wrong so I would like to see a lot of changes in a few of them, for sure.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>Some of the proposals you think are wrong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan:</td>
<td>Yep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>And you would like to see changes in them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan:</td>
<td>Yep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>What if you were wrong, do you, sort of really mean you want to see really in-depth consideration of the proposals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan:</td>
<td>Just some things that were stated that are not accurate... Oh, I don’t want to... [others speak]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>Oh, no, no, no, that’s fine. I’m not meaning to personally challenge you, but it’s that thing for being curious of what other people say and what you think.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan:</td>
<td>Yeah, I understand that. You know, I have my opinion and I will express it and let it rest and see where it goes from there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>Yep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine:</td>
<td>I really look forward to hearing what your comments are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam:</td>
<td>Me too!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan:</td>
<td>Ya, well, Like I said I, you know I just have my opinion and I’ll let it be known...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Facilitator:</td>
<td>Okay, you’ve got one minute left for that!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-11:</td>
<td>Do you want to try and put that down on there?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Due to the room noise and the facilitator facing away from me, I do not hear much of what Stan says. I can only go by the transcribed text. Like Paul, Stan is worried about the quality of the initial proposals. But he is more forthright: in his opinion some proposals are quite wrong.

I listened repeatedly to the facilitator's recorded response “What if you were wrong...” I found this response quite surprising and his follow up guidance just did not make sense to me. He is putting up a barrier and I do not understand his motivation. The sudden turn in the narrative defies immediate explanation.

Maxine and Pam jump right over the facilitator, inviting Stan into conversation and debate at an unspecified future time about their respective proposals. This seems reasonable because Stan is not acting aggressively. He does not show any disrespect towards the authors of the proposals that he disagreed with.
In analysing the performative aspect of the unfolding group narrative, I have to be empathetic towards the subjects, in appreciation of the challenges they face. This is not only the first group activity for the participants, but it is the first session of the ACP for facilitators too. This facilitator, as experienced as he is, is having a difficult start.

The conversation with Stan continues:

Maxine: So is that something you want to get out of it, sharing your opinion as well as listening to other people’s opinion; is that what you’re saying, yeah?
Stan: Yeah, just umm, I’m not sure who the author was of one particular proposal, but umm...
Pam: Which one was that?
Stan: Let’s start with the last one, eh
Pam: Of this [inaudible] or of [inaudible].
Stan: This proposal here, “We’re over-governed.”
Pam: Oh yeah.
Facilitator-11: Given the time it’s probably not...
Stan: Not the right time, that’s fair enough.
Facilitator-11: If you wanted to just put something down about what you just said, question the proposals, your own ideas and a few of your own opinions.

Maxine, too, recognises that Stan is not really answering the question, so prompts him further. There are particular proposals that upset Stan and he wants to talk about them. Why does he want to know the author of one particular proposal when he would know that most proposals had several? Perhaps, like Paul, he just does not want to be disrespectful to anybody else at the table.

The facilitator does not want the conversation to continue because it is off-topic and the session is almost finished. He shuts the conversation down with an instruction for Stan to record his points.

Supplement 1

I chose to examine the first day episode at this table because it was at the table that I observed and the audio was relatively clear for transcription. I did not choose it specifically because of the difficulties the facilitator encountered. Later, I was listening through a series of paired facilitator co-interviews recorded immediately following the close of proceedings on the final day. The facilitators were answering some prepared questions about their experiences. One of the questions asked them to describe their most challenging episode. To my surprise I heard the following from the facilitator who was at this table on the first day:

Facilitator-9: [describes an episode that challenged her facilitation skills] How about you?
Facilitator-11: Umm, yeah, early in the piece I had someone, when we were talking about, must have been it was Day 1, “what is it that would let you know that when you leave on Monday that it’s been worthwhile? What do you really want to achieve out of this?” And someone said, “A lot of the information in the, in
the umm proposals is inaccurate,” and he really wanted to meet the person who had written number whatever it was, and set them straight. Because he had the facts and he needed to tell them. And that’s what he wanted to do. Umm, well, it was pretty direct! And a few people sort of sat back and sort of watched this bloke, and he wasn’t sort of aggressive, he was just direct. He made the point of saying, “I’m not here to make friends,” you know, you know, “I just want to get on with it.”

Facilitator-9: yeah.

The facilitator is describing the events of the conversation text in hindsight and from his perspective. To put it another way, this is a narrative re-construction of events by the facilitator. I start with a thematic analysis of the facilitator’s version of events. From this text, there is no question that Stan wants to argue for changes in some of the proposals. This does coincide with a reasonable interpretation of the table conversation.

The facilitator states that Stan “wants to meet the person ... and set them straight.” The facilitator is shocked in believing that Stan wants to go toe-to-toe with a fellow participant. I did not see this in my initial reading of the conversation text. I do not recall leaving the table with that impression either.

Facilitator-11: And I’d already talked about the need to sort of try and cultivate an attitude of curiosity, and suspend your judgement?
Facilitator-9: hmmm.

The advice about curiosity must have happened earlier, not in this conversation. It is commonly advocated by facilitators, but it is not found in the transcript.

Facilitator-11: If possible, you come along thinking this, but allow the possibility that new information might change your mind. So I took him back to that, and said, “you know, remember that thing about curiosity. To put another way, just imagine the disappointment what if you were wrong...”
Facilitator-9: yeah
Facilitator-11: “...with your facts.”
Facilitator-9: hmmm.

The transcript of the table conversation does not quite match what the facilitator tells here.

Facilitator-11: [inaudible] He did a mini-sulk. [Facilitator-9 laughs] But it didn’t last long,
Facilitator-9: yeah

Having been at the table, I did not record Stan’s physical response to the intervention. But he stopped talking when the facilitator stopped the conversation a bit later.
...and other people joined in and he was back before long. And I was a bit worried that I might have lost him, but he got back into it and I think he accepted it. Other people just sort of wanted [inaudible] toward if I needed to do something. "I'm here to present these people with the facts, because I know they're wrong and I'm right."

Facilitator-9: yeah, yeah
Facilitator-11: But I had to do something.
Facilitator-9: You had to manage that.
Facilitator-11: So that was as challenging as it was on the first day.

Shifting to a structural and performative analysis, what led to the facilitator to be stern with Stan with “What if you were wrong...?” I now think that the facilitator believed that Stan did not actually tell a flippant joke about “communists”—perhaps he miss-heard that word. Instead, the facilitator actually thought Stan was referring to his deliberating compatriots and was dead “serious” about “converting” them to his way of thinking. With this interpretation, the text begins to make sense.

In dividing the conversation text into stanzas, I separate Stan’s apparent joke from what he says afterwards. My re-construction of the conversation isolates that text as functionally distinct from the dialogue that follows. Unlike the facilitator, I interpret Stan’s use of the phrase “convert them” as metaphorical. I do not think Stan actually believed there was a cult or conspiracy. I see what Stan said as merely a joke, and have tilted the rendering of the narrative to privilege that perspective. Stan wanted to persuade other participants that some of their proposals were misguided, but his presence was not threatening.

You should expect that the deliberations about proposal options in the days that follow would have been heated and difficult to moderate. Yet, the facilitator still nominates this episode with Stan as the most challenging over the whole four days that the ACP convened. The facilitator’s performance is probably motivated by his belief that Stan was making an aggressive move in conversation. I can only speculate, but he may believe that Stan was more intent on putting down the authors of proposals rather than just challenging their ideas. They were having difficulties making sense of each other.

I had first met Stan weeks earlier at the regional meeting that he had attended. I also spoke several times to Stan during the evening breaks of the ACP. I found him to be an unassuming, literate, somewhat awkward man who lived in a small regional centre. I liked his quirky humour and his even temper. When asked in a lead-up questionnaire whether he was compelled to defend his views on political matters, he was neutral. On the end-of-day feedback form, Stan reflected: “Nice group—no business owners in group though, so was a bit disappointing. Maybe tomorrow!” Stan appeared optimistic and non-combative, although with a strong stance.
The facilitator describes Stan as having a ‘mini-sulk’, which is an odd expression—the second facilitator laughs at it too. The conversation text (with re-listening to the audio) does not have Stan silenced, so perhaps this happened later.

In telling the story to the second facilitator about how he responded, the facilitator embellishes his paraphrasing and reorders the events to make them seem more cohesive. The debrief gives him a chance to replay the episode and tell himself that he “had to do something.” I can not tell whether or not he harbours any lingering doubt about his understanding of Stan. I wonder if he would nominate the episode as a challenge if there were no dilemma regarding his understanding of Stan, or how he might have articulated his response differently.

He probably knew that a researcher would examine the audio recording and open his actions to judgement. He may be telling his story to the recorder in part to assert his status as a professional facilitator. Ideally, I should have interviewed the facilitator to explore his feelings about the episode and co-create this narrative, but that was not possible.

**Supplement 2**

On Day 4, while reflecting on the process at a different table with a different facilitator, Stan reiterates his displeasure about having to consider many proposals that he believes are poorly conceived. He feels that there was not enough space given to critiquing and ultimately discrediting them.

Stan: I think that they could include the minorities’ proposals, where they might be extreme, but rather than having say an exercise where you get six or ten people on stage debating, talking about the proposals.

Facilitator-5: The fishbowls?

The facilitator is trying to link Stan’s complaint to a particular event. She does not realise that Stan is talking about the lack of any critical debate, rather than a particular ‘fishbowl’ exercise on Day 3.

Stan: Yeah, make sure that you have asked the question of the people whether there are people here that actually don’t support any of the proposals or, a few of them, maybe they might support only like half a dozen out of the 50 proposals, and get them up there and debate about “Why? Why don’t they like them? What’s wrong with them?” For instance, I don’t, out of the 51 proposals, I’d say 40 of them personally I wouldn’t even waste my time with. [Long pause] and maybe there’s half a dozen there that have some merit.

Facilitator-5: So more of a focus on minority positions?

While speaking empathetically, the facilitator is still misunderstanding the thrust of Stan’s complaint. Stan does not like the ‘appreciative’ approach taken by the process designers, although he does not know it by name. He believes that a traditional
format of argumentation would have allowed for the sort of critique on the proposals that he believes to have been necessary.

| Stan: | Not so much minorities but just have a fair, like this is what democracy’s about. You can have a debate [inaudible] the pros and cons. But you have to find the people that are for it and against it, and then have them there discussing why. |
| Facilitator-5: | I think that’s, one of the... |
| Stan: | I just felt that everyone was sort of [agreeing] that “we’re all for it, we’re all for accountability, we’re all for empowerment.” |

Stan is describing the consensus-seeking pattern of appreciative inquiry, and finds it lacking in drawing out the downside of proposals. Of all the participants, only Stan and Abe are recorded articulating this important criticism.

| Ray: | Too one sided. |
| Abe: | It’s hard to argue the negative. |
| Stan: | Yeah, it can be argued, but everyone [needs to] have that opportunity. |
| Abe: | Sure it can be argued, but it’s hard to argue. To find people in a forum such as this, we’re all trying to be positive... |
| Stan: | The thing is, like I said, you know, ummm, I just felt like they didn’t have their chance. |

Stan finds support amongst others at the table. With “a forum such as this, we’re all trying to be positive,” Abe articulates an important feature of the appreciative approach.

| Facilitator-5: | Okay. So I don’t want to put words in your mouth but just give me an idea, so the minority view was that the voice of minority view was... |

The facilitator is unable to see that Abe and Stan have taken a meta-view on the process. His critique is not about the views expressed at tables, but the design of the process that did not allow for a framing of differences.

The facilitator goes on to ask Stan to provide examples, but this causes confusion and does not resolve the misunderstanding. The problem for Stan is larger than just about views:

| Facilitator-5: | Okay, so you’re saying certain views weren’t exercised. |
| Stan: | They sort of seemed a bit umm closed-minded, once you’ve got a proposal it was like “Okay, let’s just go from trying to fix this proposal,” but we never actually got, people that were against that proposal, actually having their say as a team maybe? So, I could be here at the table and I’m the minority against [the proposal while] you’re all for it. Then there might be one over there, one over there, there might be a dozen that are against it. Maybe they should have got together, had their chance and got another dozen that were for it, and actually let everyone listen to both sides of the argument... The fish bowl could be expanded to actually have people from both sides of the argument. [D4T13] |
Stan goes further and suggests a process improvement. He sees that contrary views have been divided across the room and have lost power. He suggests that the fishbowl exercise should operate more like a debate.

Surprisingly, Stan was not disappointed in the end at all. In exit feedback he wrote, “Incredible satisfaction. Lovely to see so many nice Aussies.”

**CHAT Perspective**

This story is principally about the early stage of deliberative activity, with two later episodes added for completeness. It portrays an especially dramatic table conversation by a diverse selection of randomly-seated participants, with a facilitator. One participant presents as somewhat different from the others. He does not believe others share his concern about independent small business interests, yet sticks to his mettle. He believes that only a few proposals would find broad acceptance because they lead to unsatisfactory consequences for many people. In many ways, Stan is testing the rules of deliberation activity. He has a feeling for some of the contradictions of a process that demotes difference and privileges agreement. But the contact with people in such a positive and civil manner pleases him and he leaves as an advocate of the ACP. He may question the rules of the activity and goals of the exercises, but not the overall motive of the project nor its relation to the community.

The story demonstrates how the facilitation, as a central tool of the deliberative activity, has a decisive impact on the project. If for any reason the facilitator has a difficult time making sense of the conversation, and intervenes in ways that participants do not anticipate, then the disruption can be upsetting for them. Furthermore, if the facilitator and participants are talking from different vantage points which they are unable to bridge, opportunities for understanding and progress are lost. However, participants such as Stan show a great deal of resilience and support for the project, despite hiccups with facilitation.

The project is set to imagine a shared future. To get there, the participants have to reciprocally makes sense of each other and be understood. The project involves making sense of the activity itself. It is clear that there are several barriers to the success of the activity. The apparent failure occurred in the communicative actions which were stimulated by operative misinterpretations. A miscue by the facilitator is especially deleterious to the progress of the project because he is effectively the system’s enabling tool. But all is not lost, as the commitment to collaboration by participants is only momentarily distracted.
At the early stage, Stan was probably hopeful that a critical dialogue about certain proposals would occur. When it never did eventuate by the end, Stan makes it clear that his concept of the project had been different. In conversation, it becomes evident that he was not alone.

A striking feature of this episode is the maintenance of deliberative norms. Portrayed in Chapter 3 as 'Civility', even early on Day 1 the participants are trying to collaborate well along suitable protocols of conduct. Don is careful to make appropriate contributions. Edith proves to be a handful, as she lacks the ability to share in the conversational equity, and appears to channel the concerns of her home community. The facilitator controls turn-taking early on, but later participants speak freely to try to make sense of Stan, who uses humour that was misunderstood. The facilitator’s intervention is an attempt to enforce the central norm of deliberation of promoting an open and exploratory rather than self-centred and strategic conversational approach. The participants want to make sense of each other and collaborate in deliberative activity.

B. The rise of political youth

*This mini-story follows the theme of youth at the ACP. The organisers had worked hard to ensure that youth aged 18 to 24 years had proportionate representation at the ACP, which was made difficult because a disproportionate few were reached by randomised invitation, and their subsequent response rate was not high. In addition to following the young participants, this mini-story also follows the development of proposals that relate to youth. It was mainly through these proposals that older participants took notice of the political understanding and needs of youth.*

*Note that for the sake of completeness, this mini-story carries text that also appears elsewhere in this chapter.*

Frame

The story of every participant who attended the ACP begins with the happy surprise of receiving a compelling and attractive invitation in July 2008. They were informed that they were amongst 9600 citizens who had been randomly selected from the electoral rolls of all 150 federal lower-house electorates to participate in a Citizens’ Parliament.
Several thought that it might be a hoax, but were satisfied after checking the comprehensive FAQs on the ACP website. Many mistakenly thought the invitation had come from the federal Government, underlined with the signatures of two eminent Australians including a retired senator. They were told they could register online or by phone to go into a lottery to be one of the 150 randomly drawn, one from each electorate, to assemble in Canberra in February 2009. Of the 2763 who registered, 274 were between the ages of 18 and 24 years inclusive. Eighteen of them were selected and completed the whole process.

Gather

Unlike many of the older married participants who accepted the invitation in spite of partners’ cynicism, all of the young participants told me that they had been encouraged by their parents and friends. I asked them why they accepted the invitation. Following is a typical response:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peta</td>
<td>I wanted to learn something new. I am 20 years old and I don’t really know much about politics and what goes on around Australia. Plus I wanted the experience. I thought it would be fun.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For many older participants and a few of the younger ones, the ACP provided an opportunity to identify with and be recognised for participating in an initiative of national significance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>To gain more experience and understanding of politics. Being part of the younger generation I believe that some of my thoughts and ideas can be put forward and better the Australian political system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many older participants talk of feeling ‘privileged’, ‘honoured’ and ‘important’ about their inclusion. But younger participants generally just express their good fortune at having ‘an opportunity to contribute as a young person’ and to ‘have a say’. They are ready for ‘adventure’.

Their first contact with organisers had occurred at one of fifteen regional meetings aimed to introduce them to the project, to practise the deliberative method of small group interaction and to start thinking together about how to improve Australia’s democratic system.

The Adelaide meeting was attended by Skye who at 18 years of age is the youngest participant of the ACP. Wide-eyed and shaking, she spoke timidly but took everything in eagerly. At a Melbourne meeting, 21-year-old medical student Brian had been up all night working as a hospital intern, but was determined to pay attention and
contribute. At a meeting in Sydney, 19-year-old Nick was paying attention, but hanging back.

At a different meeting in Melbourne, seven participants gathered for the first time, including two women under 25 years of age. After their introduction and some brain-storming about topical areas related to Australian democracy, they took up the idea of a national curriculum for teaching civics in schools. But in the absence of table facilitation at that meeting, tension rose as an older woman pressed her case strongly without appreciating the perspectives of the others:

Ellen: They just need to get back to teaching basic history, and within that, the history of our democracy, our democratic system.
Sharlene: Well, Australian history should be first, I think, in my o ...
Ellen: Of course! Well, it should be ... not ... not only
Debbie: Not in grade 5, but later on maybe in high school
Sharlene: No ... When we’re doing, when we’re back doing, what was it, ‘SOSE’, when that was actually like social, the Study Of Society and Environment ...
Ellen: Well I think the reason ...
Sharlene: ... that’s something that is relevant to our own country.
Ellen: The reason my generation is fairly well informed on politics is because we were taught ... history ... and politics ... in school.
Sharlene: Yeah, well, I think it needs to be done.

For eight weeks leading up the face-to-face assembly in Canberra, an Online Parliament was convened to generate an initial slate of proposals for consideration. Only half of the youngest cohort signed in, and only two made multiple and substantial contributions. The proposal about a civics education curriculum was copied online, but it did not gain sufficient participant support to advance. The last of the eleven proposals advanced by the online participants is the only one specifically targeted at youth: ‘Politics is not appealing enough for the younger generation – we want young people to enrol to vote.’ Ironically, none of the young participants had enrolled online to develop it.

On 6 February 2009 the 150 selected participants gather in Canberra. Many travel from far across the country. The opening session is held in the grand House of Representatives chamber of Old Parliament House (OPH, now a museum). Participants occupy the seats where previous generations of elected representatives had sat, some trembling with excitement and pride. They are welcomed in speeches by the Chairs, a Government Minister and the organisers.

To begin proceedings, five of the proposals are introduced by participants who had helped develop them online. While the proposal mentioned above is not included, Kenneth, an older man, introduces his proposal about public engagement through education, which receives warm applause:
Kenneth: Our group’s proposal is to empower the citizens of Australia politically and empowerment needs several things. It means that we need to have political ideas and attitudes. We need to have capabilities that we can use in the political arena. We need to have the techniques and skills to use those capabilities. We need to have opportunities to use our political capabilities and of course, we need to have awareness of where those opportunities lie...

[We] believe that through this experience of being involved in politics at the educational level, these students will then, as they progress through their lives, feel more empowered to engage in politics in the wider sense.

At the start of each day in the Members’ Dining Room at OPH participants are randomly seated at twenty-three tables and re-introduce themselves. It is rare for multiple young people to be seated at a table. Younger participants rarely identify themselves by electorate (it is on their name-tags), but by the third day almost everybody identifies just by their home locality or state:

Dan: Hi, I’m Dan from Sydney. I’m having a reasonable time, it’s interesting hearing people list out their ideas, so, yeah it’s been enlightening for me in lots of ways.

Alison: Alison from Melbourne. This is amazing, it’s mind blowing and wonderful to hear so many perspectives on things that I’ve ...

Facilitator-14: Where in Melbourne, sorry, just that I’ve got on my mind those Victorian fires.

Alison: I’m from metropolitan south-east.

Facilitator-14: Right.

Alison: So, the areas they’re talking about I know people in them.

On this occasion the room had just heard a morning report that bushfires were raging across northern Victoria, with devastating loss of life and property. The participants and facilitators are isolated from the world, including their families. Gathered, they can share their worry.

Hope

In their first small group exercise on Day 1 in Canberra, participants cast their vision forward three days to imagine what a successful ACP would look like. Many of the older participants are primarily focused on the outputs, and hope that they are empowered with substantial influence. This ambition is expressed at most tables. Several participants, especially young ones such as Sharlene, are also explicit in wanting to demonstrate the value of the engagement process and the opportunities afforded by gathering such a diverse group of people together to deliberate:

Ian: ... It’s a really important initiative and you never know it could be the start of something very interesting in Australia in terms of you know the way the Government, the way our democracy works. So it’s good to be a part of it.

Facilitator-15: Yep, okay.
Sharlene: My ideal weekend ... I think everyone will ... gain more knowledge and understanding of the political system ... for a common view perhaps or discuss why they've come to that decision, to that view. So just to really get a vast knowledge of what everyone else is thinking and why.

Facilitator-15: Excellent.

Shaun: I think the involvement in the process creates success in itself and finding out about other people too. I would hope that at the end of this that there would be at least two proposals that would go forward that was backed by solid arguments and were compelling proposals that Government would actually seriously address.

Meanwhile at their table, neither young Adam nor Angélique make contributions to the discussion about success factors, and the facilitator fails to intervene and broaden the conversation beyond the older participants who are dominating. Ironically, one of the stated success factors is the opportunity to speak out.

At his table, Doug is optimistic but restrained in his expectations. The question about success is ambiguous—did it mean for the process as a whole or personally for the individual participants? Doug addresses the latter. From a performative standpoint, note that participants are already seeking agreement with each other:

Doug: I think tangible results are going to be hard to see because it’s going to take time. I was very excited to be part of this purely for, Katrina said it, to learn a bit more about politics in this country, I don't know a lot, I don't know much at all but I’m willing to learn. I’d like to see that there’s other people out there in the same boat that I’m in...

Facilitator-25: Is there somebody else who would like to say what success would mean to them?

Amy: I agree with everything Doug just said, well everything, and at the end I would like to say that we hope we can contribute something of value to make this a precedent for the following years to come if possible.

Some of the older participants speak with cynicism:

Facilitator-12: What do we want to achieve here?

Ed: Maybe dot points, that’s going to help us drive this country into the future.

The first exercise relating to content occurs in the multi-round style of a World Café (WC). Between rounds the participants disperse and sit at new tables of their choice. In the first round, they address the question of what they ‘appreciate in a democratic system that works well.’ Robert makes an early contribution at his table:

Robert: Being well governed. Not necessarily being empowered, like able, but being secure in the knowledge that the Government is acting in our best interests.

A lively discussion ensues that teases out some nuances about the safety and security afforded by good government, but neither Robert nor young Lory participate further even with prompting by the facilitator. Responses at other tables mention hopes about the Constitution, social and political inclusion, voting, access to politicians, accountability, openness and vigilant media. At one table, the young participants
identify signs of a good democratic situation, but cannot logically link it to democratic features, even when prompted by active facilitation and a useful suggestion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator-13:</th>
<th>So when do we know it’s at its best?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anand:</td>
<td>When people don’t complain. [laughter]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed:</td>
<td>Well I think when we’ve got fair and equal representation in the decision making process. [pause]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam:</td>
<td>I don’t know about when it’s working but there is some evidence that Australia is a great country to live in, so something’s got to be right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-13:</td>
<td>How do we know when it’s right?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed:</td>
<td>We live in harmony and peace with each other I suppose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam:</td>
<td>That’s it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fay:</td>
<td>I suppose when everyone’s happy, something’s working.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonetheless, it is apparent that they share some idealised hopes for democracy.

**Inquire**

For the next day the participants thrash through proposals, modifying, combining and adding to them. The eleven proposals from the Online Parliament expand to 52. The new proposals are synthesised behind the scenes by the academic Theme Team upon receipt of suggestions and comments transmitted from the notebook computers at each table as the participants work through various agenda exercises.

The following episode occurs during an Open Space session at a table that attracts participants interested in the proposal ‘Empowering citizens to participate in politics through education’:

| Wayne:          | I think that the major problem is that most, well not most but a lot of people vote on what their grandfather, their father and their mother all say... You know, you just vote because your Dad voted Labor and I vote Labor, or Liberal or National or Greens or whatever. |
| Facilitator-10: | So do you think that’s a good family tradition? |
| Wayne:          | No. It’s stupid. They should be taught more at school to get involved in politics and understand where each party is coming from, what their pro’s and con’s are, rather than just go along with whatever a person who is older than them has told them that that’s the way it is. |
| Jane:           | Yeah, and that’s where I think the education of the youth needs to come in. There’s no education in schools on how our politics works. |
| ...             | |
| Facilitator-10: | What do you think is a factor in Denmark that has not compulsory [voting] but [still] a high level of participation? |
| Lars:           | Well I think it is because one, it’s a small country. You possibly therefore, we feel closer engagement with our politicians. I’d like to say too that I think we should give citizens the right to not participate, if they so choose. |
| ...             | |
| Viv:            | But something has to be put in its, you can’t just take the enforced, the compulsory vote away, without putting in an education system or something like that. |
| Lars:           | Oh exactly, exactly. |
This all-in conversation shows participants collaborating to build knowledge and make sense of the question about whether education is a more democratic alternative to Australia’s compulsory voting law. Indexicality is high. Active facilitation provides probing questions that open opportunities for all participants to bring in new ideas and reflections. Wayne brings a storied perspective of why leaving voting to family units may be insufficient, Lars relates the situation in Denmark and Viv concludes with a summarising coda for this episode. While the topic is ostensibly about ‘citizens’, they frame ‘education’ as a matter just for youth. They work their way down to the implied question: how can education inspire youth towards independent political judgement?

Jane provides a personal testimony of how the culture of youth places no attention on politics. For Lars, it changes when you have a stake in something.

Viv and Moira articulate an answer about education to focus youth passion, and their summary is entered into the table notebook computer for transmission to the Theme Team.

From the start, young Skye hardly said a word. But during the Open Space session she joins a table talking about a proposal to ‘Ensure the expertise of ministers’. Skye asks question after question about how a ministerial office works:

There are several sessions hearing from the expert panel seated on the stage or in the middle of the parliamentary chamber. But only one question during the whole
ACP is directed to them in relation to education, in connection with the 'Harmonisation of state laws' proposal [J]:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lester:</th>
<th>Education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert:</td>
<td>Education, in curriculum there are attempts to put in place a national curriculum and the Commonwealth has been quite active in trying to standardise leaving and certain education standards. So that's again, an issue of some discussion at the moment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At another table, there is prejudice against the capacity of teachers to present politics in an objective manner. But they miss Donna's point that people can learn from each other rather than relying on the authority of teachers. And the contradiction in Asad's over-statement is not commented upon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donna:</th>
<th>Well this [the ACP] is a prime example of how to educate the others. To me this is...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ross:</td>
<td>You’ve got to get, with the schooling you’ve got to get unbiased views of educating people because there’s a lot of teachers that are say unionist teachers and they lean...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alistair:</td>
<td>One way or the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ross:</td>
<td>... so there’s no sway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asad:</td>
<td>They’re never on the fence, they’re always totally extreme left or totally extreme right.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These conversations about political education are usually about electoral voting decisions rather than the operation of government or the potential of practising democracy in school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoe:</th>
<th>Do you think it would be helpful if teenagers were given the option to vote?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharlene:</td>
<td>Yes, I do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian:</td>
<td>What do you call teenagers? Do you mean under 18?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank:</td>
<td>Fourteen to 18.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe:</td>
<td>To get people involved at a young age while they’re learning about it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That idea is sent through by the table notebook computer to the Theme Team. Two of them decide that a new proposal should be created:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themer-1:</th>
<th>Okay, Youth Engagement ... ‘Introduce optional votes to High School students aged 14 to 18’. Should stand alone as a separate point?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themer-2:</td>
<td>So that’s an additional proposal?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themer-1:</td>
<td>Ah no, it’s just a point within the proposal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themer-2:</td>
<td>No, they’re saying ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themer-1:</td>
<td>Do you think it’s additional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themer-2:</td>
<td>Okay, send that through [to the lead themers].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately, the new proposal becomes lost in the electronic data shuffle and then finally reappears on the morning of Day 3 as the 50th proposal.

---

2 In the ACP, each proposal had an alphabetic index, which was often used as a conversational shorthand.
At another table, Kenneth is having trouble getting others to see his perspective of politics relating generally to everyday practice and institutional decision-making activities rather than just to the structure of government and voting, even though he had introduced it during the opening plenary session:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maxine:</th>
<th>What would you feel as a teacher? You said you’re a teacher?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Murni:</td>
<td>... It’s quite dry and unless they see that relevance and the connectedness ... writing to members of parliament and all that, it’s not going to mean much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth:</td>
<td>I would like to see it based on real issues in the schools, for example if the school was coming up with an issue like, “let’s change the starting hour,” instead of that just being decreed, that the students should be invited to create a political process to do that...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxine:</td>
<td>They do that somewhat when they elect their sports captains ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On Day 3 a table of three young participants, plus the elderly Ellen, realise the problem that different Australian states follow different school curricula.

| Andy:  | I would have to definitely agree that it is very important to have [history] in the education system. I’m sort of confused how people missed it because I had excursions in Year 6 down to Canberra where we did political stuff and ... |
| Adam:  | Are you in New South Wales? |
| Andy:  | Yeah. |
| Adam:  | That’s New South Wales’ curriculum and the other states don’t have it. |
| Andy:  | In Year 7 I had Australian history and we did Federation and all stuff about Conscription and World War I; we did all the Referendums going through the 1940s through to 1960s. |
| Ellen: | Sorry, was that in your history? |
| Andy:  | Yeah, that was compulsory into Year 10 and that was in the school certificate so everyone in the state had to do that. |
| ...    |                                                            |
| Skye:  | In South Australia there’s nothing. There’s absolutely nothing. |
| Andy:  | They should all have the same. |

This conversation ties their desire for education about politics in school to the proposal about ‘Harmonisation of state laws’ [J].

**Judge**

On Day 3, with a weighted ranking procedure controlled through the table notebook computers, the participants identify and prioritise democratic values and then, with those in mind, allocate priority to the proposals. Their judgements are delivered by the table notebook computers and collated electronically. There is not a lot of time to talk through their comparisons, but Dan makes a case at his table for the ‘Youth engagement in politics’ [K] proposal:
Dan: It may not be anything to do with you but I know I seem to come back to 'Youth engagement in politics' because in 20 years time down the track, when all these things come up, I'm going to be your age. I'm going to be like all the guys up the back there [the expert panel]. We're going to be 40's, 50's or whatever... you've got to still look at what I'm going to be turning into.

Kathy: Is that so bad?

Dan: ... I reckon you ask any general kid off the street [like me] ... and ask them about politics, they're going to have no clue what you're even on about. They probably won't know who Liberal and Labor are.

At another table, before discussion starts on prioritising the most important proposal, the facilitator performs a preparatory exercise to identify larger themes or concepts that are important:

Facilitator-22: So going beyond us as individual or our family, or our town, or our State, for the benefit of the nation what do we think of those is going to be the most and the biggest bang, a wow factor, if you like to use that bit of jargon. Now, I'm going to ask each of you to talk to whatever one you've chosen in your head, for the rest of us to listen and as each person finishes maybe a bit of comeback, query that might be of clarification or to extend those concepts a little bit. Who wants to kick off? [D3T2]

Notice that nobody is going to follow the facilitator's turn-taking instructions, as their conversation has reached a sort of 'flow' (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991):

Cynthia: I will.
Cynthia: Education.
Pete: Education.
Cynthia: Education of our younger children.
Candice: You stole my idea.
Maxine: And mine!
Cynthia: Sorry! [D3T2]

Without doubt, education is central for most participants at this table as they can not help but speak up.

Cynthia: Educating our young people, especially in the area of their, their rights and their country.
Facilitator-22: So it's education about democracy. [D3T2]

The facilitator generalises Cynthia's qualification about the content of the education, to which she agrees:

Cynthia: Democracy, yeah democracy.
Pete: I mean, democracy is not ...
Cynthia: Yeah, democracy.
Pete: ... a simple ...
Cynthia: Yeah.
Pete: ... a simple term as I think we've gathered in the last two days. [D3T2]

Pete reiterates that education has occurred in the ACP itself too for the participants, who should now recognise the complexity in 'democracy'.

- 139 -
Cynthia: And for someone to take over from when we've gone.
Facilitator-22: Yep, yeah.
Cynthia: So that it doesn’t just die with the first Citizens’ Parliament … [D3T2]

Cynthia takes the reasoning in a different direction, reinforcing her earlier-expressed hope that the ACP (and her identification with it) would carry a legacy to future generations.

Pete: … that people, the young people, like the ones who have been here this time, the young ones who are …
Terry: Who are very …
Cynthia: Vague …
Terry: … could be very proud of them too, yep.
Cynthia: And that’s right, we want to get them fired up and we want to get them passionate about Australia …
Facilitator-22: Yep, okay.
Cynthia: … and to be educated.
Facilitator-22: All right. Excellent. [D3T2]

It is not clear whether the participating youth are included in the general attribution of vagueness. But the model youth participants in the ACP are seen as the catalyst for getting youth interested and engaged.

At many tables, participants think that the ‘Empowering citizens through education’ [D] and ‘Youth engagement in politics’ [K] proposals should either be amalgamated or else grouped together with related importance. This table divide into pairs to decide and then report back before ranking them with values:

Asad: What is the most important for you in the long term?
Hilton: ‘Youth engagements in politics’, in the long-term strategy I think K.
Martin: … Getting the youth involved is one thing but shouldn’t we get everyone involved? Because we’ve got a long time before we have to worry about the youth actually taking over and taking charge. Shouldn’t everyone be engaged in education about our politics?
Asad: I agree, you’ve got, every 3 or 4 years you get a new Government and the youth from the age of say six or seven have got five or six terms before they get into Government, anyway.

Gay: D is number one.
Feng: Yeah, I agree with that.
Martin: We had M, which was, ‘Empowering citizens to participate in politics through community engagement’. See I’d love that one to be in community engagement/education.
Sheryl: You’ve got D, K and M?
Hilton: Yep, D, K and M.

**Take**

On Day 2 during a plenary session, one of the organisers expresses passion for deliberative democracy, which upsets the Chair who believes the process
integrity has been damaged (that’s another story). Participants respond that the benefits of the process stand on their own merits:

Janet: I have just found this an incredible learning opportunity. It’s been amazing and certainly speaking to lots of different people I came in while I might have been very opinionated politically I wasn’t very well politically informed ... I have just found the wealth of information that has come yes from the [expert] panel, the panel was fabulous but just from each and every one of you as we’ve sat around the table, just bringing the wealth of your experience, your stories, the information that you have.

At that time, an older participant adds the following comment:

Keith: During that process I learnt a little bit about how politics works or how it doesn’t work and for that reason I can see the importance of why politics and this process should be taught at school.

In a fishbowl exercise on Day 3 before prioritising the proposals, nominated participants relate proposals to the democratic value identified earlier as ‘freedom’:

Sharlene: The biggest one for me and my fellow peers, I think, will be youth politics ... through the education system. A point that was raised yesterday that I think was fantastic that if you don’t like something you can do something about it ... If you don’t like how the politicians are running the country or what they’re doing you can become a politician. I think that’s such a magnificent freedom ...

Bruce: ... I certainly agree with the young lady from Victoria, get youth engaged in politics. The youth are the future in this country and if we want to maintain our freedom we’ve got to make sure the next people coming along have the same feelings that we have and get them to do the dirty work over the next 30 years!

During a break, Pauline finds 90-year-old Elizabeth on her own sitting in her walker drinking coffee. Pauline draws impressions from Elizabeth in one-turn exchanges:

Pauline: Have you enjoyed the process though?
Elizabeth: Oh yes, extremely interesting experience. I mean what do you expect to do when you’re 90, you don’t expect to be living with the whole of Australia [chuckles].
Pauline: Well, I don’t think anyone, even the 18 year olds, I don’t think they expected anything like this.
Elizabeth: No, it’s just so great to have everybody come together isn’t it, to meet you, to meet the mixed communities, to meet everybody with similar interests, all the same, working the same direction but from all different corners, aren’t we? All different eras, everything.

Elizabeth is viewed upon as a delegate of the aged, but sees herself as part of the whole demographic landscape. She continually expresses her good fortune at being randomly selected.

Pauline indicates that the process is new to everyone, even the youngsters who may have experienced collaborative approaches at school. Elizabeth answers each of
Pauline’s comments with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’, in agreement. Elizabeth is particularly impressed with the diversity of perspectives, and welcomes it.

On the final day, the top proposals are summarised in speeches delivered to a Government representative. Here are parts of what Sharlene says in support of ‘Youth engagement in politics through education’:

Sharlene: Good morning everyone my name is Sharlene and I’m going to be talking about ‘Youth Engagement in Politics’ … I think we need to start from a lot further down in primary school when we’re sponges and ready to learn. I think also a lot of us are forgetting that voting is compulsory … So many of our youth are walking into voting booths with absolutely no idea as to who to vote for and why, that’s something that needs to be addressed … A lot of you seem to think … that we don’t want to learn, this is untrue. If we are given the tools in the right way we will explore them, we will learn and we will help to shape your nation. I promise you, give us the chance and we will.

In a final debriefing exercise, participants at each table discussed the actions that they would take once the ACP was over, as a result of their experience.

Brian: For me personally I think it might have kindled a small interest in politics. I was hardly passionate about politics coming here, and it’s not as though I’m going to rush out and join political parties and organisations, but...

Stan: Why don’t you start your own?

Facilitator-8: Well Luca sort of did didn’t he? newDemocracy.

Brian: Yeah, but I think I’ll take a keener interest in it, read the papers a bit more, and who knows where it will go.

Lory: I had the same, had no interest in politics. Whoever you voted for would be a politician, so it didn’t really matter. But now it, does matter and I know how it works. I didn’t get taught that at school. I’m 19 so I’ve only just come out of school in the last couple of years, and I would have loved to have been taught about it. Just coming here and talking to other people, I think it’s great. So ...

Facilitator-8: So the next steps ...

Lory: ... when I go back I’ll tell all my friends my age and just try and get them interested.

Facilitator-8: So you’d go straight to the youth, would that be an aspect?

Lory: Yeah.

Facilitator-8: Would that be your target area?

Lory: I’d talk to anyone. I really enjoy talking to people of different ages. They have different perspectives, and life experiences and views, so I love doing that. But probably immediately, because you see your friends all the time, I’d just chat to them about it. My dad is a little bit interested in politics, so I’d get him going. [Laughter]. Oh he’d love that ...

While Brian is reticent about making a commitment to action, Lory is energised and expresses confidence to speak about politics and to help young people especially become engaged and active. Stan has been a voice for small enterprise throughout the ACP, and is consistent in his suggestion that individuals can step up for change, which the facilitator endorses. A short time later, in thinking about concrete actions, Lory proposes a return to her high school to talk to teachers and students.
Near the end of the ACP, Skye is interviewed on stage as the youngest participant:

Skye: This has been a pretty big learning experience for me because I didn’t know a thing about politics when I came here and I just feel like I know a lot now and I feel like I can go home and read the paper and just turn straight to politics and understand it [laughter] [applause].

Lead Facilitator: That’s alright. Here’s a question. What, apart from turning to the politics section in the paper do you have any sort of wild ideas about what you might want to do with your life or anything?

Skye: I’m going to work for the first woman Prime Minister! [Laughter and applause].

Then the lead facilitator invites the oldest participant Elizabeth to the stage.

Lead Facilitator: What advice have you got … for Skye as our youngest Citizen Parliamentarian here?

Elizabeth: Oh, learn all you can, join in all you can, participate in all you can and give all you’ve got. [standing ovation]

Postscript: two weeks later Skye gains employment in the office of her state Member of Parliament. The answers she received about the operation of ministerial offices probably helped her secure that position with confidence.

Analysis

It is no coincidence that this mini-story reads like a documentary screenplay. Contemporary documentary-making practice reveals a story mainly through the actions and words of its subjects, with limited or no narration. Invariably, such documentaries demand an empathetic viewing that challenges surface judgements. However, a constructionist story-telling demands more transparency of the researcher as narrator. I have told you why I have chosen certain episodes and followed certain subjects. A documentary-maker may take sides in the story, but I have an obligation to not intentionally skew the story towards a particular advocacy beyond respecting the views of subjects.

There is a recognisable hint of the story genre of youth maturation and redemption in an adult world. Rendering a story that aligns with a meta-narrative helps readers make sense of what occurred and provides associative meaning that makes it memorable. Perhaps if the broadcast media sought and recognised some entertaining story genres evolving in deliberative activity, there would be more compelling mainstream coverage.

3 Australian readers would be familiar with the Australian Story format presented on ABC Television. (http://www.abc.net.au/austory/). National Public Radio offers similar programming in the USA.

4 akin to the classical German narrative genre called Bildungsroman.
There were incidents of adultist\(^5\) positioning (“my generation is fairly well informed”) that deflates young people and inhibits their participation. In a deliberative process, the perspectives of youth are recognised and the dominating habits of adulthood are tempered, but not without substantial intervention by facilitators. At the end of their final day at the ACP, participants did not know whether their recommendations would be taken up by the Government. But it mattered less to the youth, so it is not part of their story.

Although the ACP did not seek a consensus outcome, just a priority listing, participants still worked together towards agreement. The prevailing theoretical position that deliberation should involve the exchange of reasons is hardly on display here, although what counts as reason has been steadily expanding since Habermas’ idealisation of rational communication (Habermas, 1984). Instead, most of their effort just went into making sense of each other and what they were talking about, and they would have benefited with more time and help to that end.

The conversations show how different people view learning and education. Recent school graduates accept that learning is life-long endeavour. They are used to learning through collaborative problem-solving, role-play and other social methods. This is in contrast to many older participants who believe that education is for children, delivered didactically by a teacher-authority. There is also the tendency of conservative citizens to view democracy (and education) as a set of institutions with historical legitimacy rather than as a set of evolving everyday practices, which demands different pedagogic treatment. Still, many did realise the collaborative adult learning potential of deliberation.

The mini-story illustrates how participants become aware of the complexity of their task. In this case, they began with distinct proposals to consider, but then realised through their discussions how there were substantial and often unpredictable overlaps between them. Also there were many new and confounding considerations to be discovered.

The depiction reveals the need for improvements in process design and facilitation to help participants make sense of each other better and recognise more clearly the implications and values embedded in different perspectives. More re-framing guidance by facilitators would be useful. In a nutshell, participants need more time and assistance to unpack and reflect on what they say to each other.

\(^5\) adultism describes the disrespect for youth that adults may exhibit, to deny them developmental opportunity and voice. See Understanding Adultism: A Key to Developing Positive Youth-Adult Relationships by John Bell (http://www.freechild.org/bell.htm retrieved June 2011)
CHAT Perspective

While the ACP was randomly selected and no formal distinctions were made between categories of participants, the participants see each other as representing different demographics. The distinction of age effectively becomes a division of labour as the organisers single out the young participants and promote their involvement. Active facilitation is required to enable the timid and less articulate among the younger participants to be heard, even when their insights are only just being formulated. Many of the older participants display confidence and act without apparent constraint in despatching their opinions. However, the societal norm of acceding to the wisdom of age should not normally be honoured in deliberative activity. Facilitators, some of whom are not young either, experienced difficulty in balancing conversations where adultism was evident.

In deliberative activity, the social attitudes of the community are played out in participant conversation. For example, as mentioned earlier, there are differences in how participants understand what constitutes learning. While one is talking about lifelong, participatory, ubiquitous learning, another only sees learning as the education that children receive in school. These differences limit the mutual understanding that participants can gain and the common ground they can claim in recommending outcomes. More insidiously, participants can make a recommendation for quite different reasons without realising it because they use the same vocabulary to mean different things. This activity was not established to investigate such epistemological and hermeneutic challenges with any depth. The strong push in the activity design towards an outcome precludes reflexive back-tracking and realignment of the project. Many communicative acts present as conditioned responses.

C. Evolution of a proposal

The following mini-story follows the conversation around the development of one proposal from its inception to its conclusion. Since it extends over the entire period of the ACP process, all six dramatic stages are involved.

Note that for the sake of completeness, this mini-story carries text that also appears elsewhere in this chapter. Also, unlike the other mini-stories presented in this chapter, I take a stronger stance as a researcher with expert knowledge about the content of their discussion. I inject this commentary as italicised text.
This story demonstrates that the participants are largely ill-informed about the electoral voting system in Australia. They incorrectly think that changing it requires a constitutional amendment in addition to a referendum. Many (perhaps even most) participants confuse and conflate the preferential election of single-member House of Representatives (‘lower house’) seats with the election via single-transferable vote (STV) of multi-member Senate (‘upper house’) seats. For lower house seats, voters are presented with ‘how to vote’ cards on election day by political party supporters and candidates outside the polling stations, indicating their recommended ranking of candidates, but voters can choose for themselves how they rank candidates on their ballots. For the upper house seats, voters can similarly rank all dozens of individual candidates in their multi-member upper house constituency OR they have the choice of group voting tickets. On these ballot papers, this choice is separated by a thick black line, so voting for a group voting ticket is commonly called ‘voting above the line’ and voting for individual candidates is called ‘voting below the line’. Group voting tickets are candidate preference lists that are registered by each political party or independent candidate group with the electoral commission, the independent government agency that oversees elections in each state or federally (the Australian Electoral Commission). By placing a single ‘1’ in the box of a political group, the voter consents to the preference list recommended by that group. The lists are not available at the polling station, but can be accessed on request or online from the federal and state electoral commissions’ websites. To complicate matters further, the state government of Queensland does not have an upper house, and the state government of Tasmania is structured and elected quite differently to the rest.

For most elections in Australia preferencing is mandatory insofar as all individual candidates on a ballot must be ranked in order. Omitting any candidates from the ranking renders the ballot invalid, or what Australians euphemistically refer to as an ‘informal vote’. This is one reason why it is far easier to vote above the line on multi-member ballots. Only at the state elections in Queensland and New South Wales is optional preferential voting offered, where as few as one candidate needs to be ranked, without assigning rank to any others.

Frame

The story of every participant who attended the ACP begins with the happy surprise of receiving a compelling and attractive invitation in July 2008. They are informed that they are amongst 9600 citizens who have been randomly selected from the electoral rolls of all 150 federal lower-house electorates to participate in a Citizens’ Parliament.
They are told they can register online or by phone to go into a lottery to be one of the 150 randomly drawn, one from each electorate, to assemble in Canberra in February 2009. Those who register and who were subsequently selected are invited to attend an introductory meeting at a regional location.

**Gather**

At the regional meetings participants are told about the project, experience deliberation and its norms of behaviour perhaps for the first time, and are invited into a preliminary dialogue about how the Australian federal system of government could be improved.

At a regional meeting in Melbourne, Cynthia suggests firmly that preferential voting is “ruining democracy” in Australia, and should be replaced with first-past-the-post (FPTP) voting. She does not gain support from the other dozen participants at that meeting.

CPs are also introduced to the online deliberation platform which was active for eight weeks before the main assembly. After attending a meeting in a different region, Walt starts a proposal online entitled ‘One man one vote’ with the intention to switch to FPTP voting. Within two weeks, a team of 14 from around Australia (including applicants who have not been selected to go to Canberra) are gathered online around this proposal. Of the dozens of online proposals that are launched, this one attracts the most comments by its contributors (296) over the ten weeks that the online platform runs (although much of it was dominated off-topic by Keith). It is the sixth of eleven proposals that are prioritised by the online participants for introduction to the face-to-face assembly in Canberra.

Eight of these team-members go on to the main assembly in Canberra. This is the highest proportion of any team, due in part to a decision by the organisers to replace a significant cast of last-minute withdrawals with active online participants. These recruits do not attend a regional meeting.

On 6 February 2009 the 150 selected participants gather in Canberra. Many travel from far across the country. The opening session is held in the grand House of Representatives chamber of Old Parliament House (OPH, now a museum). Participants occupy the seats where previous generations of elected representatives had sat, some trembling with excitement and pride. They are welcomed in speeches by the Chairs, a Government Minister and the organisers.
To begin proceedings, five of the proposals are formally introduced by a pair of participants who had helped develop them online. Since it was just outside the top five, the proposal now renamed ‘One person one vote’ was not announced in the chamber. The assembly then shifts to the stately Members’ Dining Room at OPH, where most of the work would be done over the following three and a half days. Their proposal is listed on the discussion sheet.

At the start of each day the 150 participants are randomly seated across twenty-three tables where they re-introduce themselves. At table 15 on Day 1, Keith introduces himself with authority. At that moment, a collaborator in the online effort who was seated at a different table near the back of the room finds him and interrupts the conversation:

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Keith: I’m Keith, I’m a Justice of the Peace, qualified in, for the State of Queensland.
...
Albert: Is there a Keith around here somewhere? I was looking for you over there. How are you mate?
Keith: Not too bad. I’ll catch up with you later. [D1T15]
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Members of the team working on the ‘One person one vote’ proposal seek each other out early. They are ready to promote their proposal to the rest of the assembly. Kel gives voice to the online team and attempts to legitimate their work:

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Facilitator-24: Did you guys go to regional meetings as well?
Dale: No.
Facilitator-24: You didn’t, Dale?
Ruby: Were you pulled in at the last minute too?
Kel: Yeah, mainly because that’s what I worked on.
Facilitator-24: Which one, ‘One person one vote’?
Kel: Yep.
Facilitator-24: This was “first-past-the-post”?
Kel: Yep. So that was me, Keith from Cairns and Cynthia is here, where is Cynthia? She’s from Melbourne. She’s a big girl wearing a pink dress. We were sitting next to each other in the, in the, uh, Senate [sic] Chamber. So the four of us that had actually worked on that one are all here.
Ruby: Ahh, good!
Kel: So, and my job on, on, on that was, I took on the job of researcher and Jesus, have I learned some stuff that I never knew existed in this country. Unbelievable! I’d no idea that we had different rules and regulations between States and the Territories...and also at the Federal level. [D1T16]
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**Hope**

The hope for change had begun online, but the participants are largely ill-informed about the electoral system. The following is one of many threads of conversation over nine weeks extracted from the online deliberation platform:
Dennis: Keith, in Queensland they have an optional preferential voting system. Perhaps we could look at something like that for Federal elections. [13 Nov 2008]

Keith: Thanks Dennis. You are right in Queensland, we have Optional Preferential Voting. Only problem is as I have stated before 99% of people don’t have a clue as to how the voting system works … Why do you think the Government do not teach (how it works) at schools? Because they do not want voters to know just how the system is rigged. More often than not, a Major Party will advertise “just put a (1) in my box.” Again a disadvantage to the Minors as a lot of them are conned into giving a preference to a Major for some benefit like having their how to vote Cards and road-side signs printed for their preference vote. [13 Nov 2008]

Walt: Dennis, it would be a step in the right direction, but I would like to see it deleted completely as to give us a complete and accurate result. [26 Nov 2008]

Murray: It seems that we all agree but does anyone know what the constitution says on this subject if it says anything or if there are any Parliamentary acts that govern what we can and can’t do?? cause we would hate to come up with some good ideas only to find out when presenting that you can’t have them. [27 Nov 2008]

Walt: I suppose too, that this is all about making the system better and if that included changing the constitution, well lets have a crack. Surely our constitution can be subject to change, it would have to. It may not be a constitutional matter. We need help. [27 Nov 2008]

Murray: Doesn’t changing the constitution require us having a referendum? As we did when we voted to become a republic? [27 Nov 2008]

Walt: Yes that is correct. It would take a lot of work to have it changed. But then again if that’s what this is all about, why not give it a crack. [16 Dec 2008]

Kel: Those that participated (5 out of 14) put a lot of effort and time into this proposal. I certainly hope our efforts have not been in vain and that hopefully we will get our referendum for ‘ONE MAN ONE VOTE’ [02 Jan 2009]

Dennis introduces the idea of optional rather than mandatory preferential voting, but it was not taken up by the team. Keith implies that there is a conspiracy to maintain public ignorance about the electoral system to the advantage of power. Throughout the eight-week online phase, no new information is introduced by participants to dispel the need for a constitutional referendum. For Kel, the goal becomes convincing the ACP to recommend a referendum to enact FPTP voting.

Here are some of the statements in the initial proposal as provided to the assembly:

- Our current system is floored [sic] by virtue of the fact that the person who has the majority of individual votes may not necessarily win the race. The potential solution is to eliminate the ‘Preferential voting system’ from our constitution by way of a referendum.
- The people of Australia are not getting the most popular person (Candidate with most individual votes) that they want in Parliament.
- The current system needs to be changed to equalise the voting choices of the constituents. To facilitate an honest and accurate selection of candidates for Parliament to run OUR country.
- We request the holding of a referendum to change the constitution. Give the people an accurate result at voting time. ONE PERSON ONE VOTE.
Notice the positioning that is evident in these statements. The expression of “our Constitution” and “OUR country” positions the participants as a separate species to those in government. It is as if public servants and politicians take those things away.

Also notice that the preferential system is viewed as a false, incorrect and misleading account of votes. There is a desire for the most ‘popular’ candidate, measured in strictly majoritarian terms. The preferential system is viewed as a distortion of this reality.

Early table work at the assembly in Canberra is quite general, exploring overall goals of the ACP for example. Regarding content, they do review the initial proposals, which are arbitrarily assigned to each table for discussion. At Table 15 on Day 1, Keith, Dennis and Janelle are lucky to be seated together after having worked on the ‘One man one vote’ proposal online. In a final session of the day they are reflecting about the process itself, but they are champing at the bit to get into the proposals.

Dennis announces that the proposal is incorrectly written because electoral system change does not actually require constitutional amendment. This may be threatening to the others on the team because their goal is to get a referendum recommended by the ACP. But the facilitator suppresses the discussion at this early stage, in an effort to help participants focus more on a bigger picture. He may also want to indicate that all proposals have equal merit for consideration, regardless of the detail of their development. This is not met with enthusiasm:

| Facilitator-28: | To actually put it in a nutshell, as you said before, the nitty gritty doesn’t have to be there, all you need to put through is the general idea. There’s too much nitty gritty in some of these proposals and it leads down to a much more general idea than what we have here. |
| Keith: | You know, one of the things that was in here was “One Vote, One Value” [sic]. We didn’t look at that [in our earlier discussion], and I think that’s very important because we had no time to discuss it, but our preferential voting, preferential votes are counted now… |
| Dennis: | But you were working on that proposal for quite a long time, weren’t you? |
| Keith: | I was what? |
| Dennis: | You were working on that proposal, and so was I. And I have found out I think you do not need a referendum. The voting is not covered by the constitution. It comes under electoral law. I don’t think… |
| Facilitator-28: | So we’re back into content now. If I could just pull you back… |
| Keith: | But I think we need to… |
| Facilitator-28: | If it’s a point that we feel strong about, we make a note and post it and see how we’re going to handle it. |
| Keith: | We didn’t get a chance to do all of them today. |
| Janelle: | [We’ll do it] tomorrow. |
| Facilitator-28: | We’ll get a chance to go through all of them. |
| Harrison: | We’re not going to do all of them, are we? |
| Facilitator-28: | What we’re doing now is we’re looking at fine-tuning the proposals, but then tomorrow we’ll open it for discussion and later on we’ll come back and really chew through all the proposals. |
On Day 2, Greta expresses the need for the system to seek a “majority” but Raylene’s question about its meaning is not explored further (perhaps due to her unfortunate tendency to chat and disrupt the flow of conversation):

| Greta:  | And democracy is a majority voice. It should be, a democracy is always a majority voice. |
| Abe:    | It should be. |
| Raylene:| Yeah, it should be. |
| Greta:  | Majority rules. |
| Raylene:| Majority can rule but is it a majority? |

Participants often express their opinions of universalised hope about how voting “should” or “should not” be conducted, or what “needs” to be done. At table 21, Walt talks about electoral fairness and a necessary focus on the individual candidate rather than the party he or she represents:

| Walt: | You should win the race on your own ability. People in the Labor and the Liberal Party are winning the race with the help of others. |

But a few do think that the displeasure about the electoral system is due more to misinformation about how it works:

| Jillian: | People are presently confused about preferential voting. People need to understand the system before they can truly debate it. We need to address this issue in society before we address the issue of party preferential voting. |

Notice that her shorthand expression “party preferential voting” reinforces the conflation of preferential voting and group voting tickets.

**Inquire**

On Day 1 the participants at Table 5 choose to review the “One person one vote” proposal.

| Jarad:  | Yes, first-past-the-post. |
| Facilitator-16: | What are other views on this? |
| Mike:   | Yeah I support that. |
| Facilitator-16: | Why, tell us why, what’s your thinking about that? |
| Mike:   | Because I just think the preferential, once it starts it starts to get complicated and time consuming and I don’t see why it just doesn’t simplify and direct what you want. |
| Jarad:  | It may not be what people want when you’ve got to do preferences. |
| Betty:  | That’s right. |

---

6 The Labor and Liberal parties dominate Australian federal and state politics, with only a handful of minor party and independent politicians elected to office. The Liberal party often forms government in coalition with the National Party.
Linus makes a strong statement that preferencing is “not a true vote.” The facilitator then tries to drill deeper to get at the source the perceived distortion and lack of voter control:

Mike: It sort of takes the control away from the voter.
Linus: It’s not a true vote then is it.
Mike: No, it’s sort of strange, strange, complex. [D1T5]

Facilitator-16: What would the benefits of that, so we talked about it maybe would be less confusing, do you want to give me just a little bit more meat about why it’s [bad now]?
Mike: Well I suppose it opens up for more wheeling and dealing behind the scenes as well as between political parties. They can make all these agreements with each other and it just seems that that’s the way they’ll swing as their preferential. I think why are they taking the control against, away from the main issue which is the politics and what they’ve I guess been elected for. [D1T5]

Mike reinforces the view that voters are the victim of various conspiracies.

The participants at Table 8 are also taking a first look at the ‘One person one vote’ proposal. Here is an episode of conversation extended through several stanzas:

Ida: Because of the preferences, they put the Greens on people that don’t want the Liberals, if they don’t want Labor to go in they just put the Greens up and that’s how they get in on those.
Jeremy: Yes, yes. This is – actually this is a good one.
Louise: So it really means that someone can get in on preferences.
Ida: And the minority, the smaller ones get in because they put them up there to keep the other stronger party down, you know that they give them the preferences. [D1T8]

Ida expresses the common view that the rightful winner is denied because of preference “deals” by the political parties. This episode starts off with some reasons given for the dislike of preferencing. There are large gaps between each utterance, as participants read the proposal, including almost a minute before this next stanza:

Adam: I remember studying preferential voting at school … I don’t agree with all this … [inaudible]
Facilitator-20: Any other opinions? Can anybody remember why preferential voting [was introduced] or how it works? No? Feel confident? [D1T8]

Adam does not agree with the statements in the proposal. The facilitator tries to tease out some more opinions and information. Her question about whether they “feel confident” may hint at her own misgivings about the proposal.
Jeremy: It’s a funny thing this one. What they say here is all quite good but as a comparison in our last election if they had first-past-the-post the end result would have been nearly the same ... and still ended up as the Government we’ve got.

Facilitator-20: I think in many elections it varies quite a lot ... [D1T8]

Jeremy remembers a fact that discounts the effect of reverting to FPTP, although it is not clear whether he is referring to a vote count for a seat or the seat count for the lower house. The facilitator takes the unusual step of contradicting the participant.

Louise: I’m just concerned if it is “One person one vote,” you vote for the most popular, is that going to be the person that is in the newspaper more, on the TV more, is more popular, speaks better than somebody who might be a dynamite person, and they really could be a good Government, but quieter and don’t have the – probably the money to pay for a million billboards, etc, etc, and so the people who know that they have to vote by law but don’t know anything about the political system just say, oh, well, I’ll vote for Greg Blogs because I saw lots of him on TV or in the newspaper or whatever. So those sorts of people can get in. [D1T8]

Louise questions whether voting should be about selecting the most ‘popular’ candidate, as this invites campaign excesses. But in her lengthy monologue she does not relate this to the vote counting method. The facilitator does not intervene, and there are no follow-up comments.

Ida: The first-past-the-post, you wouldn’t have to vote for anybody else, so the smaller minority ones wouldn’t ever get in. If it’s first-past-the-post and you vote for one, you don’t vote for anybody else.

Bryce: Is that a bad thing? [D1T8]

Ida reiterates the benefit in FPTP of not having to rank candidates who she dislikes. She appears to blame the preferential voting system for giving them more power than they deserve.

Louise: But is that also changing the way we vote? Instead of having to put 1 to 18 or whatever ... 
Ida: You’ve only got to put the one in, the one person.
Louise: You just tick – tick the box of the person that you want.
Jeremy: That’s a good idea.
Louise: You’re voting for the four or five who are standing in your district, your electorate.
Ida: I don’t know what I think about that. I mean I can see that you’re only voting for one. People would have to be clear in their minds but I don’t know that they are clear in their minds when it comes to voting, really. Some are. [D1T8]

Again, the conversation is only about the upper house elections. Ida may be confused about the contradiction of having multiple member seats yet only one vote with FPTP.
Bryce brings in voices from outside the forum, who are unanimously against the proposal to bring in FPTP vote counting. After more dialogue, the facilitator suggests that they draw in an expert from the panel.

In the absence of any sarcasm in her voice, she reveals her bias in the framing of the question—that the preferential system is good.

There was some question-answer after that, but the experts explain the preferential system competently. They are describing the election of single member lower-house seats. The extra complexity of upper-house elections is not mentioned.
Ida: Well, he said preferential you would get the most wanted vote, and that’s what we’ve got now, I think. [D1T8]

Ida arrives at the final statement in this episode that summarises quite simply the aim of preferential voting as ‘the most wanted vote’. This new framing makes sense to Ida.

Meanwhile, at table 11, Hilton expresses the common irritation about preferential voting, that all candidates need to be ranked including those who are despised:

Hilton: The preference vote is the vote that goes to somebody that I’ve never voted for, that’s what I’m trying to say. And that’s why I’m against the preferential vote. [D1T11]

At Table 16, Kel tries to talk up the proposal, but is really only talking about the upper-house group voting ticket.

Debbie: Now yours was, ‘One person one vote’.
Kel: Number 6.
Greg: The only concern we have is that it perhaps hands too much power to the large major parties, in that the smaller ones are never ever going to really win anything with one of these things. Because their power is largely in who they deal their preferences to rather than who actually gets the initial vote.
Kel: I must have missed something there.
Greg: What the suggestion is, is ‘One person one vote’. [D1T16]

Greg is somewhat contrary towards Kel, with a concern about a polarising effect of FPTP voting.

Kel: That means whoever gets the highest number of votes wins that seat that’s it full stop. If I had the highest number with say 40 percent you might have had 29 percent okay, the way the current system is at 29 percent if you have gone and spoken to that candidate ...
Greg: And they’ve done a deal with them.
Kel: And that one there and you’ve done deals with them which is what goes on and a lot of these deals are done by the major parties in the States who are minority party, “Look can I have your first preference vote please? Can I have your second preference vote please? Now what I can do for you and for you too is I’m going to pay for your how-to-vote cards, all your advertising costs, everything involved with the cost of you running your election.” … [D1T16]

Kel then describes a particular case of group ticket collusion (not shown in detail here).

Greg: No, no I agree with you, my only concern is that would lead …
Kel: Because what happens it leads to people who may get say 30 percent of the primary and someone else gets 28 but he’s got all the first and second preferences, comes up and then takes the seat and he was not the most popular person. If I want to vote for somebody I don’t want my vote going to, I don’t want to be rude, going to someone that I can’t stand. [D1T16]
Kel gets his argument off his chest, including the same desire as others to avoid ranking disliked candidates on the ballot. But he is not listening to the concern of Greg.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greg:</th>
<th>Yeah and again the thing I’d be worried about is that would basically lead to a two party political system.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kel:</td>
<td>Well it’s whoever gets the highest vote wins it and you could have an Independent that could come up with the highest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg:</td>
<td>You could but it would be unlikely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kel:</td>
<td>Oh no, no, no and the seat which I’m in now which is Lyne, okay, Rob Oakeshott won that with about 75 percent of the primary vote as an Independent. He has the highest recorded primary that’s ever been recorded in Australian history. To have over 75 percent of the primary, they didn’t even think about looking at the secondaries. [D1T16]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kel’s response is about an independent candidate with a clear majority, not a minor party candidate vying for policy attention. Also, the independent was a candidate for a lower-house seat, whereas the thrust of Kel’s argument is about the upper house.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator-24:</th>
<th>What do other people think because I’m hearing a couple of these [questions] about this? Is it about first-past-the-post? Is it preferences or what?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate:</td>
<td>I know that trading goes on that we were talking about but the voters should know shouldn’t they? They should be able to …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kel:</td>
<td>But the interesting thing is that they don’t know. I mean when I was working on this all my friends and relatives I asked them about this and said, “Do you know about the preferential voting system.” I did not find one person that could explain to me how it functions. [D1T16]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The facilitator lets the discussion play itself out, but recognises that it is at cross-purposes. There is irony in a straight reading of Kel’s claim about the general ignorance about how a preferential voting system works. But from his standpoint, the public are being intentionally deceived by a malevolent system, and therefore should support the change to FPTP.

At Table 10 the discussion flows from Jon’s explanation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jon:</th>
<th>The problem is obviously the most popular gets elected so how do you determine who is the most popular? In the first-past-the-post it’s the one I ticked, I voted for. The first person might get 30 per cent of the vote. If no-one else gets 30 per cent, and that’s all he gets [he can still win].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kenneth:</td>
<td>The first-past-the-post is the one who gets the most, wins it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon:</td>
<td>Yeah, one, you just vote for one person and whoever gets [the most, wins].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-9:</td>
<td>Yeah. [D1T10]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The facilitator lends credibility to the explanation about FPTP because she comes from Canada where all vote counting is performed that way. But she does not promote either FPTP or preferential voting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jon:</th>
<th>Whereas a preferential system starts eliminating from the bottom, it takes out the person with the least votes and then allocates them according to the preferential votes, and so it goes … First-past-the-post, you get ten, she gets ten, she gets ten, you get 15, he gets 20, he wins.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raylene:</td>
<td>Isn’t that right?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jon: That’s first-past-the-post. But the way, the way that preferential works is that the people by ten, they get their second choice votes put back in. They don’t get thrown away. They get allocated for people they picked as their second choice.

Raylene: Oh gee, I hadn’t heard that, I’m not into politics. [D1T10]

Raylene tends to think aloud.

Jon: And that goes on their vote, and then the next one goes out... So the person who wins in a preferential system should be more widely favoured. The only problem is often if there’s 20 candidates. It’s very confusing for old people.

Shirley: Yeah, it’s a complicated, the system. [D1T10]

Shirley is an older woman who agrees with the difficulty inherent in voting a full slate of preferences.

Jon: A limited preferential is better where you just – you know, you pick four out of the 20 that put their hand up.

Facilitator-9: So what we’re suggesting here isn’t the fact – isn’t that we totally agree with the preferential voting that we have, it’s a modification of the system that we currently have? [D1T10]

Jon suggests the alternative of optional preferential voting, although he misnames it. The facilitator senses a turning point in the dialogue, and pushes towards a conclusion.

Jon: I think we’re saying that we don’t agree with the proposal format.

Facilitator-9: Okay.

Raylene: So we do or we don’t?

Kenneth: We don’t.

Facilitator-9: We don’t.

Shirley: [I’m] totally against eliminating preferential voting. Does everyone agree with that?

Facilitator-9: We have consensus, congratulations! [D1T10]

Shirley has demonstrated a penchant for wanting to own group agreement and finds it here. There is unanimous agreement that the proposal for ‘One person one vote’ should be rejected.

The alternative of optional preferential voting is entered into the table notebook computer, which is received by the Theme Team, who create a new proposal (AL) to implement optional preferential voting across Australia.

Early on Day 2, during a session when they are looking to clarify proposals and prepare questions for the panel, the participants at Table 6 consider the ‘One person one vote’ proposal:

Brad: Who’s our resident expert on voting systems here? Is anybody really cluey on the voting systems?

Dennis: Not very cluey but I’ve done a bit of work on it.
Brad: Okay, the preferential system, as I understand it, is that if you elect someone and they don’t get the numbers to actually win more than 50%, then their vote goes to whoever they’ve decided.

Dennis: 50% plus 1 vote.

Brad: Yeah, so if they don’t get more than 50%, then the votes that you gave them go to someone that they decide to give their preferences to, right? [D2T6]

Brad is mistaken, as the distribution of preferences during vote counting starts with the candidate with the least votes, not the most. Also, for candidates who win their proportional ‘quotas’ of votes in multi-member upper-house seats, surplus votes are redistributed according to voter preferences. Again, the “giving of preferences” has nothing to do with how votes are counted, except to the extent that for upper-house ballots most voters choose to use the preference slate in the group voting tickets rather than cast their own configuration of preference votes.

Dennis: When the first votes come in they keep the primary vote. The highest number of the primary vote, they count his preferences. If he doesn’t get 50% plus 1 vote then they take the second primary vote, they count his preferences. If he gets more than 50% plus 1 vote, he wins the election.

Jon: That’s something you could save on.

Dennis: 50% plus 1 vote. [D2T6]

Dennis, who was in on the original online proposal, is still not clear how preferential vote-counting works. Since we know Jon understands how preferential votes are counted, his response here appears to be cynical, but unwilling to correct the others. He does not speak further.

Brad: Is there a system in existence where you vote for someone and if that person doesn’t get more than 50%, then you choose who gets their next vote.

Dennis: No, you’ve already put your preferences down.

Brad: Wouldn’t that be a better system.

Dennis: You can’t do it twice. [D2T6]

Dennis interprets Brad’s question to refer to something like a multi-round run-off election.

Brad: No, but I’m saying, you vote and if your first choice doesn’t get in, then your next choice gets your vote instead.

Dennis: That’s how it works.

Brad: That’s how it works.

Sheryl: Yeah. [D2T6]

They finally make some sense about how preferential voting works, from the perspective of the individual voter.

Brad: I thought so but the thing is, don’t the parties decide? They swap the preferences amongst themselves. They decide what ... So if you vote above the line, they do what they want. If you vote below the line, then you do what you want. Okay that’s fine, that’s fine. That’s alright, I’m not an expert. [D2T6]
In one conversational move, Brad identifies the barrier that so many are having trouble crossing: the distinction between upper-house and lower-house voting. Here he makes it clear that he is talking about the upper-house ballot, above and below the line. His incorrect “they do what they want” should probably be understood as “you do what they want.”

Robert: You can get a situation like in NSW, the last two elections there were 52 candidates, so if you wanted to vote, you had to get all those numbers filled in.
Brad: I was getting confused about it.
Robert: So if you didn’t allocate a number or missed a number, that then became informal.
Brad: Now that you mention it, that’s what I do anyway. I only do it every three years, so I’m not an expert. [D2T6]

Brad repeatedly mentions his lack of expertise (and later admits how much he learned during this episode) and defers to others. Robert indicates that the group voting ticket was invented to make voting easier, hinting that mandatory preferencing of every one of the dozens of upper-house candidates is the main cause of difficulty. The table goes off-topic for a minute or so, then:

| Robert: | You can get a situation like in NSW, the last two elections there were 52 candidates, so if you wanted to vote, you had to get all those numbers filled in. |
| Brad: | I was getting confused about it. |
| Robert: | So if you didn’t allocate a number or missed a number, that then became informal. |
| Brad: | Now that you mention it, that’s what I do anyway. I only do it every three years, so I’m not an expert. [D2T6] |

The idea that the political parties overtly control and directly distort the election prevails.

| Dennis: | But if you can educate the population to look at their preferences, instead of just writing 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 ... |
| Brad: | Yeah, but what I’m saying, is maybe giving the parties or the politicians the ... We’re effectively giving them our vote, we actually telling them, “Our vote, you can decide what you do with it” whereas we should say, “Okay, if our first choice doesn’t get in, then our second choice is the one we want our vote to go to.” So that option of the parties picking how they use the preferences should be scrapped. I know you’ve got the option but most people don’t use it. What I’m saying is that option shouldn’t be available for the parties to use for preferential. [D2T6] |

Dennis thinks many people make ‘donkey’ votes: ranking them in the sequence they are printed on the ballot. Brad speculates about giving up group voting tickets
altogether. *Preferential voting does not directly answer the self-centred question of “where exactly is my vote going?” in a nice binary fashion: whether it counted or it did not.*

Robert: I have a question. With above the line, where you just vote for a party and then if that party doesn’t get in, you vote for another party, do you know before you vote which party is the second one it will go to?

Brad: Yes, they usually announce who gets their preferences. The thing is, they use that power to make forced trading deals with the other parties. You know, “We’ll give you our preferences but you’re going to have to do this for us.” That’s what I don’t like about it, anyway what do you think? [D2T6]

Robert has probably never had the group voting tickets explained to him—it is not clear whether or not he has voted before. The opportunity is missed here.

*It is with the electoral commissions at the federal and state levels that group voting tickets are registered, rather than with the media. Brad expresses the prevailing view that powerful parties frequently get minor parties to provide high ranking in the registered group voting tickets in return for financial and other favours.*

Sheryl: Then you’ll have to fill out the whole sheet.
Brad: No, just fill out the first five or ten.
Sheryl: But if you don’t like it, then you have to go to the trouble of doing all that.
Brad: Yeah, but if it’s optional preferential, you don’t have to do the whole lot. We should actually get answered now to approve that.

[Talking simultaneously].
Dennis: That’s the way they vote, optional preference voting. If there are 10 candidates and you don’t want seven of them, you just vote 1, 2, 3. [D2T6]

The inaudible talking is probably about the lower-house in Queensland, where optional preferential voting is already applied. There is no upper house in the Queensland parliament.

The intensity is rising as different tables crossed this proposal. By mid-morning on Day 2, several authors of the ‘One person one vote’ proposal are finding more participants are not supportive.

Garry: I like the ‘One person one vote’.
Mandy: I do.
Greta: I don’t. [D2T5]

The participants are invited to pose questions, via the notebook computers at their tables, to the panel of political experts on the stage. From Table 3 comes the following question:

Bruce: I would have liked a bigger and better clarification on ‘One person one vote’.
...
Kel: “What is wrong with the ... removing the preferential voting system. What is wrong, what is wrong with first-past-the-post?” [D2T3]
In an otherwise vacated hallway outside the deliberation room, I walk past elections expert Antony Green and hear him say in exasperated tones and arm-waving gestures to another expert panellist that many participants “really don’t have a clue” about the electoral system. Soon after, he is on stage answering questions:

Antony Green: We start as a broad category between electoral systems based on single member electorates and multi member electorates. Single member electorates are very good at representing the local area. They represent an accumulation of interests of the local area. You elect an MP who’s elected to be the representative. The difficulty is what system do you use to elect them? The common systems are simple majority systems, the first-past-the-post, whoever has the most votes wins. The disadvantage of that is if you’ve got lots of candidates say in Papua New Guinea where they sometimes used to get 20 candidates standing, the candidate elected might only have 7% of the vote so how representative of the electorate are they? So that’s one of the problems of first-past-the-post is, does this person really represent the area or is he just the person who ended up at the top of the vote? Then you have some forms of preferential voting which allow the building of a majority after the distribution of preferences somebody has majority support in the electorate and this can be seen as more representative. So it allows the Liberal and National candidates that run against each other, while also competing against Labor, whereas under first-past-the-post that might deliver Labor victory because they have the highest vote. The majority of the electorate might be happy with either the Liberal or Nationals and they don’t care but they want one of them to get up. So that’s where preferential voting came from, allowing candidates of like mind to compete against each other without actually denying one of them the right to vote even though they’ve got majority support. So first-past-the-post doesn’t build majorities, preferential voting builds majorities. There’s an intermediate that applies in New South Wales and Queensland which is optional preferential voting. You don’t have to fill in preferences for all the other candidates and that seems to be very popular where it’s applied and it’s certainly something that I get asked about, “Why do I have to give preferences to all the candidates?” The solution is optional preferential voting and I must say some of the political parties are terrified of that. I’ll just let you in on that …

… there’s no one electoral system which answers everything. You’re trying to balance local representation against representation of interest. You’re trying to compare representational Parliaments versus responsible Government. You’re trying to balance local versus national and it’s very complex. What you end up with is a balance and my personal view is I would like to see more change towards optional preferential voting. I think it’s unlikely that many Australians want to really get rid of full preferential voting and while some people like the idea of the Hare-Clarke system in Tasmania, it is very difficult to introduce that sort of system in big electorates on the mainland.

Antony speaks clearly, suggesting an important advantage of preferential voting. But he then goes beyond his brief of informing the participants with factual information by making a personal endorsement for optional rather than mandatory preferential voting.

Many participants report in feedback about the crucial impact of the expert panel. At table 19 Marion is deeply affected by Green’s rebuke of the ‘One person one vote’ proposal.
Facilitation makes them reflect upon the dominant influence of the expert panel. But young Nick seems happy that the FPTP proposal is derailed.

Rightly, the facilitator is concerned about the dominant effect that the panel has on the participants. She brings this to the surface, and wants it transmitted to the organisers.

In the end, only Marion is found to be disoriented by the panel, so the concern passes.
Philippa: It’s giving us expert viewpoints because we don’t know and we don’t have that background and we can’t see why something will work and why something won’t work. Because we don’t have that knowledge whereas they’ve probably been through some of these processes before or think tanks or whatever.

Facilitator-25: So, you’re not being swayed but informed by it at the moment, yeah. 
Nick: mm-mm [no]. [D2T19]

Shortly thereafter on Day 2, Kel collapses at Table 3 and is taken to hospital. During public engagement events organisers are always prepared for medical emergencies, especially since they attract older participants and the intensity in dialogue can be high.

That afternoon, an exercise in the style of Open Space (see Chapter 2) is convened, with participants gathering as they please at tables to which particular proposals, now numbering almost 50, have been assigned. At Table 18, the topic is the ‘One person one vote’ proposal. This is the first exercise that attracts all the original online proposal authors together (except Kel):

Facilitator-16: ‘One person, one vote’. Let’s just start the conversation and I’ll do my best to scrawl some notes down and I’ll just summarise it. We’ve got about half an hour but when it’s over it’s over. So if you’ve run out, you’ve run out but you might want to take a pause and think about that. You can also call in an expert, “We need some information,” you might want to call on one of the panellists to come in. The floor is yours. [D2T18]

The Open Space format is unfacilitated.

Hilton: Well whoever was going to be the presenter will start it off I suppose. Anyone here was going to be the presenter of it?
Walt: Well listen, I came up with the thing originally and Cynthia and I have been doing a lot of work with Dennis and a few of the others.
Cynthia: And Kel who’s gone to hospital.
Hilton: Oh! [D2T18]

Because he had been at a table near the rear of the room, Hilton has not realised that it was Kel who had required medical assistance.

Walt: But after listening to the little guy in the blue shirt, what’s his name, Green, it was Green.
Hilton: Oh yeah, Rob Green wasn’t he.
Facilitator-16: Antony was it.
Hilton: Antony Green, yeah. [D2T18]

Antony Green would be best known to viewers of the national broadcaster, ABC Television, as a commentator during state and federal elections. Viewers of commercial television might not know him.

Walt: I felt shattered after he spoke.
Hilton: Yeah.
Walt: Because I thought that the way my feelings at the beginning were, about the people were not getting an honest accurate result ...

Dennis: Yep.

Walt: ... at the election and I used an example of a Local Government election in Newcastle where the person who ended up getting the top job actually got the third, was third in line with the most individual popular votes but it’s been a bit of a stone in my core for a long time, preferential voting, especially the big two and I just don’t think that the citizens are getting who they vote for, you know, and any how, I’ve been passionate about that but after listening to that guy this morning I thought “Oh.”

Hilton: He knew what he was talking about didn’t he? [D2T18]

It is not clear whether or not Walt and Hilton are impressed with the logic of what Antony said, or his eminence as an expert authority in dismissing the FPTP proposal. Their respect for him comes reluctantly.

Cynthia: Can I just say, he was the one who brought up the business about Papua New Guinea, they had 20 people standing and the person who got the most votes only got 7% of the votes. I have yet to see an Australian electorate where we have 20 representative candidates.

Andrew: Yeah but the potential is there is you open it up to this type of voting then the potential is there that, that could happen. ’Cause every Tom, Dick and Harry might think that I only need 7% of the votes, I’m bound to get elected. I guess it is, it could happen, I’m not saying it will but the potential is there.

Cynthia: Well it’s very corrupt at the moment. I’ll go on record as saying that it is corrupt. [D2T18]

Cynthia is upset by the turn of events, and looks to critique Antony Green’s argument. Andrew uses a ‘slippery slope’ argument to support Green. Andrew had joined the table after being the only participant at a different table that was set to talk about proportional electoral systems (already implemented under Single-Transferable Vote in most upper parliamentary houses in Australia).

Walt: I’ve got to say, in listening to what they said I sort of thought about it and at this point AL option, preferred, optional preferential voting, that to me seemed like it would be a great alternative, you know but this isn’t about me it’s about you guys. [D2T18]

This is the turning point in this mini-story, as Walt makes the switch to advocate optional preferential voting rather than FPTP. He shows respect for the others by promoting it as a “great alternative” explicitly but without stridency.

Facilitator-16: When you say it’s important that you, ’cause what we’re saying is we don’t like the current system so what is it that you do, we need to articulate specifically and you can make a recommendation, that’s fine. Someone else may say “and this is my recommendation,” so don’t hold back. Don’t hold back it’s okay. [laughter] We’ll work out a way amongst individual ... [laughs] [D2T18]

The facilitator struggles to summarise what just occurred, and encourages them to advance from their original position even if they do not agree with each other.
C. Evolution of a proposal | Lubensky

Walt: At this point in time it would be interesting to hear what someone else says especially if someone’s got a negative towards it because obviously I’ve only been focused one way. [D2T18]

Walt recognises that he has had blinkers on and had not considered alternative perspectives, and indicates his willingness to hear more.

Andrew: No, I tend to agree with what you just said Steve. I think the optional preferential voting is probably the better option because if you have only one candidate in mind and you vote for that person, that’s all well and good, that’s fine, if you don’t see anybody else elected then that should be your right but if you think “Oh well, if he doesn’t make it maybe I’ve got a second choice or a third choice” or whatever, then you should be able to exercise that right. [D2T18]

Andrew adds support to the value of optional preferencing supported with logic about preferential rights. He was never a fan of FPTP, which begs the question of why he joined this table.

Cynthia: But the way it stands at the moment in most of the [Australian] states is that if you don’t vote for every person on the ballot it becomes informal and that’s my big bug bear. We have to vote for someone whose political beliefs or affiliations are completely opposed to our own and so that way I don’t quite [inaudible].

Andrew: That’s what we did too. If you don’t want to cast your preferences or the person you vote for once you vote for everybody. I usually start at the end and work my way back up to the top, that way you get rid of the people you don’t want in.

Cynthia: But see it may not turn out that way but the thing is this, umm, let me read it again [proposal AL], umm, optional preferential voting, I mean, that’s almost like a Senate ticket where you either vote for one up the top or else you go through a metre of paper and number every one and I just think it’s wrong that those people either leave out a number on the current ballot papers in the other States, it becomes informal. And I mean, because some people just aren’t interested in politics and the fact that they have to vote every 1, 2 or 3… See, it becomes a major crisis for them. [inaudible]. [D2T18]

Cynthia is thinking aloud, trying to get her head around the problem. She is thinking about the challenge of having to rank all candidates rather than accepting the group voting ticket.

Hilton: No well my point of view is I would like to see the representative get in for the person I vote for. If I vote for a person, he’s the one that I would like to see represent the voter and in turn enter the parliament. I’m just a bit dubious about this voting above and below the line business too. I don’t really go along too much with that, that’s party political voting and I like to vote for the person and if he wins the vote well and good, that is the one that I would like to get in. I don’t like this preferential voting because that person I’m not voting for.

Andrew: Well that’s right. The person you elected, that’s where you have to research where those preferences are going as well so if the person you like is casting preferences to somebody you don’t like then you obviously have to think twice about voting for the person you really want in the first place. That’s what makes it hard.

Hilton: Yeah, that’s right. [D2T18]
Hilton’s statement is crucial as it establishes unambiguously his reason to support FPTP. He votes for the person, not the policies or ideology to which other candidates may also have an affinity. Andrew understands Hilton’s voting intentions by commenting on how hard it is to follow candidate- or party-recommended preferencing when it’s only considered a choice of individual identity rather than ideas. This distinction is not explored further.

| Walt: | But in the end, generally speaking, the preferences are going to go to the big two, you know. |
| Hilton: | Yes they are. |
| Walt: | I just think we haven’t got enough options. And if we go to “one man, one vote” or the “optional preferential voting” maybe we might have a few more options. Like you said about the 20 [in PNG], I don’t think personally we’d ever get that but I think we’re certainly going to get a few more. If a person wins a ballot on their own, whatever the word is, due to their own actions and who they are and what they believe in, good luck to them. |
| Dennis: | He’s the one first-past-the-post. |
| Walt: | That’s the way the majority vote will be. [D2T18] |

They are still grappling with the problem of constituting an electoral winner, and what “majority” means.

| Dennis: | If first-past-the-post is accepted in the legislative assembly at this moment, how can representatives in all States [inaudible] if it’s possible in these places why can’t it be used in all of them. |
| Cynthia: | And it should be used for them throughout the country, the fact that we’ve got a couple of States that actually have a different voting system, I mean aren’t we Australian, shouldn’t we be working the same way? |
| Dennis: | How do they vote, preferential voting, they don’t use it in Western Australia, is that right? |
| Andrew: | I don’t think so, I’m not sure. |
| Walt: | And does it work? |
| Andrew: | They don’t use it in Queensland I think, I don’t think there’s preferential voting in Queensland. |
| Cynthia: | No they use optional preferential. |
| Dennis: | If there are eight candidates you can vote for 1, 2 or 3 or whatever. |
| Andrew: | Yeah [inaudible] you either vote for one or you do them all. That’s what the ‘optional’ is. [D2T18] |

There is still the false belief that Western Australia uses FPTP. During this stanza the participants explore differences across states, realising that they do not have all the facts, but recognising that they are not the same.

| Cynthia: | That’s thrown a spanner in the works, hasn’t it Walt? |
| Walt: | Yeah ... we put too much work into it. |
| Cynthia: | Boy did we but the point is we need something where it’s simplified and also just because it’s simple it doesn’t mean that it’s not valid. [D2T18] |

Cynthia appears to be looking for justification to let go.

| Cynthia: | We need to have it throughout Australia, uniform, it’s like the road laws and the gauges on the trains, it should all be uniform. |
They recognise the overlap with another proposal for ‘Harmonisation of laws across States’.

The facilitator is looking for consolidation of the shifting perspective of the table. Andrew is interested in proportional representation, and they get an expert to help explain how that works, and how preferential voting fits in with that.

Like Antony Green earlier, this expert adds his personal opinion to reinforce the desirability of optional preferential voting. The end of this episode of conversation is rendered in its entirety as a single stanza:
Andrew: It can do, if done properly, yeah.
Cynthia: Exactly.
Dennis: If it’s done the right way.
Walt: So how do we write it, that we withdraw the option of first-past-the-post, as they’ve got it, one person, they’ve changed that on ... because I had one man, one vote.
Facilitator-16: So it’s first-past-the-post, we’re withdrawing that.
Walt: Withdraw that option and replace with ...
Dennis: Optional preference votes.
Walt: Yes. Compulsorily.
Facilitator-16: When you’re saying compulsory, what do you actually mean? Across Australia.
Walt: Yeah.
Hilton: Nationwide.
Facilitator-16: The whole of Australia, okay sorry.
Walt: That’s giving the voters a correct thing at the end.
Cynthia: And compulsory voting yeah.
Facilitator-16: Oh, and compulsory voting.
Cynthia: Yeah.
Walt: The option of non-preferential vote. [D2T18]

This last stanza of conversation proceeds rapid-fire as each participant enthusiastically elaborates on the previous speaker to clarify the new proposal, which is entered into the table notebook computer. Cynthia is resigned to a “compromise” in the company of peers she respects. A new push for electoral system consistency across Australia emerges. Walt finishes with a coda that aligns their resolution with one of the aims of FPTP, the option for a voter to cast a single vote and ignore the rest.

When Kel recovers and returns on Day 3, it is explained to him what had occurred during the Open Space session. It turns out he had also been looking beyond the facts that he had brought into the assembly:

Cynthia: She [Lorraine, see below] said some lovely things about us in Parliament yesterday.
Kel: Who, “Us” as in ...
Cynthia: Us the proposal, the man thing. One ...
Kel: Oh, ‘one man, one vote’?
Cynthia: Which has now changed.
Kel: To what?
Cynthia: Well, they said they should notify you while you were in hospital so you didn’t have another attack. We’ve just changed it to optional preferential.
Kel: Yeah?
Cynthia: Yeah, we had a we ended up on the table and Andrew ... He wanted to have proportional representation so he joined our team ...
Kel: Yeah what I wanted to find out ...
Cynthia: Yeah, but we just changed it so that optional preferential voting means you can vote for, just one person if you want. Or else you could vote for two or for three.
Kel: Fair enough. Fair enough. Because before I collapsed this is what I was doing, I was talking to that young lady on the computer to say I want information on what was a quota vote and that’s what I was waiting for then was to go and find a table that was going to discuss the quota and I figured you would have picked that one then. [D3T7]

The rising support for nationwide optional preferential voting gains momentum:

Nick: Change the electoral system, optional preferential voting.
Jane: Yep. Well I mean we’ve already got that in Queensland but I’d like to see it at the Federal level.
Nick: Yeah. So do you reckon it works really well that they’re not forced to actually have to put all the preferences down?
Jane: Well I actually had the original opinion with that first-past-the-post. Then when our experts were talking and they were explaining and clarifying a lot of that it made me realise yeah the optional preferential voting we’ve got in Queensland is a better way to go. Because I couldn’t see the pitfalls and things of the first-past-the-post thing before.
Nick: And that’s why we’re here to find out. All right.
Jane: Yeah, so I think that is a good one.
Nick: Sweet. [D3T12]

On Day 3, with a weighted ranking procedure operated through the table notebook computers, the participants identify and prioritise democratic values and then, with those in mind, allocate priority to the proposals. Their judgements are delivered by the table notebook computers and collated electronically. During the prioritisation more participants recognise the overlap of several proposals and how they reinforce each other.

Maxine: Can I throw in my hobby-horse which is the optional preferential voting. If we bring it in the education system to help educate our children and also to bring in things so that the country is unified in its laws and all those aspects, then we should have one system for voting within Australia so that we haven’t got different states using different systems so that we can have a uniformed education system, uniformed laws, hospitals, rail and then – throughout the country and have a unified voting system. [D3T2]

Maxine is a convert from the initial FPTP proposal, and realises that it is related to proposals about both education and harmonisation of laws and regulations across states. The participants at Table 14 are thinking about the proposals that would make a real difference in the long term:

Facilitator-10: Yeah. What about you, Dennis? What are the things you want to have as a legacy?
Dennis: Transparency, make all the information available easily.
Facilitator-10: That’s your number one, is it?
Dennis: Honesty, two of the things that are promised. And number three, make voting at election uniform at all venues.
Facilitator-10: Okay, what do you mean by that?
C. Evolution of a proposal | Lubensky

Dennis: Well you’ve got different systems in Queensland and New South Wales. Different to Victoria and South Australia, Tasmania. Tasmania and Canberra have different systems for voting.
Facilitator-10: Oh okay. Different systems like ...
Greg: I’m over the other side [WA], I don’t care.
Facilitator-10: ... in terms of what happens when you go into the voting booths or those big electoral systems?
Dennis: [Hare-Clarke] system of voting in Tasmania and Canberra. [Queensland and NSW have] optional preferential voting ...
Greg: That’s what I reckon everyone should go with.
Mairead: Is that what you have in WA?
Lester: No we don’t, preferential.
Cathy: Optional. I think optional preferential's the way to go.
Facilitator-10: So you’d like to see in that area uniformity?
Greg: ‘Cause I’d never hear that you could actually do that.
Dennis: Well, we’re a Federal country, why not have one system of voting? You’re voting in a Federal election. [D3T14]

During prioritisation, many put their money on optional preferential voting across all constituencies. But it is not entirely clear to some what that meant as the new proposals are presented as titles without descriptions:

Mark: Yes, it’s one of my favourite topics actually, to change the electoral system to optional preferential voting. So briefly what that means is you have the choice of either voting for a party, say put your one in the party that you prefer and then they allocate the preference [of candidate to] come next or whoever.
Pauline: Oh, okay.
Mark: But you should be able to have the choice. If you don’t want to vote that way you just go through and you number, you tell where your preferences should go. [D3T17]

Mark thinks that optional preferential is just the system already in place of either voting above the line (group voting ticket) or below the line (ranking candidates).

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The proposal for applying optional preferential voting across all constituencies and levels of government places fifth in the overall prioritisation.

Lorraine makes this announcement in the Chamber at the end of Day 2.

Lorraine: I’d just like to say that I couldn’t get into the group that I chose to go last session and I moved to another group and then went out to the media people then I came back in and I happened on this group [Table 18] that were discussing, change the electoral system to first-past-the-post and I was so impressed with them that they withdrew that one and then they put one in to recommend optional preferential voting and I thought they had absolutely grown tremendously in this period of time and I commend them. I wasn’t really part of it but I just happened to come in on that one. Fantastic. [applause]
On Day 3 one group recognises the similarity between optional preferential voting and the prioritisation procedure they are completing:

| Pete:  | Yeah. One thing I’d say about this now, personally, I don’t want to spend all my money this time because today ... |
| Maxine: | I’m not going to either because I don’t really think [I want anything] else. |
| Pete:  | ... I don’t want to allocate money because I have to allocate money. I’d rather go 70/30 probably, but I’m not allowed to. |
| Maxine: | 30/30 instead. |
| Pete:  | Exactly. So just ... |
| Candice: | See Pete, you’re using your preferential – your optional preferential voting... |
| Maxine: | Ohhhhh! [laughing]. |
| Candice: | ... because you don’t wish to vote for everybody. See? That’s true! [T2D3] |

Near the end of the day, participants are realising the educative value of the process:

| Adam:  | Preferential voting, I only learnt this weekend what it was about. |
| Donna: | Oh you only learnt, see that’s what I’m saying but to me I think people if they did get into it and look at their qualities, these certain things they would want to change if they knew what they were. |
| Adam:  | Well, that’s us. That’s exactly right. [D3T18] |

Many speak later about how much they have learned:

| Greg:  | Yeah, I found the panel, the one Antony Green was on that was really good. That was just purely about the nuts and bolts of Parliament ... |
| Betty: | Yes. |
| Greg:  | And how the system works which and I certainly don’t, wasn’t aware of all the different things and... |
| Betty: | No, I certainly wasn’t. |
| Greg:  | ... systems of voting and then there’s the optional proportional, no which one was it? One of them that I had never, ever heard of. Yeah, optional preferential voting. |
| Betty: | Oh, yeah. [D4T7] |

But there were still many who had not unravelled some of the distinctions:

| Cynthia: | And with a lot of the independents you don’t know exactly where their allegiances lie, especially the ones who turn around and say, “Oh, I don’t give my preferences to anybody,” and you think, “hold on, there’s an agenda here.” |
| Amy:    | There’s a lady in my room who said ... when she went to vote, and she asked this guy, one of the [candidates] there how his votes [would be preferenced] and he told her it was none of her business ... How stupid is that? [D4T4] |

Since there are no group voting tickets in the lower houses in Australia, the candidate had no reason to reveal his personal voting preferences.

There was considerable unrest about the poor integration of the online deliberation with the face-to-face assembly that led many participants to advocate strongly for their online proposals as finished products:
Mairead: I’ve huge issues with the people and I know people have done a lot of work online but I have issues with the people who have done work online coming in and saying, “This is what we did, this is what we wanted.” I didn’t have the time to get online and do stuff and so did a lot of people here… Just ‘cause you worked on it online doesn’t mean that anyone else can’t come in and have opinions as well.

Lester: And do you know, it’s very hard for me for being one of those people who worked online to actually then justify giving that proposal money because I’ve got to judge all the other proposals by that particular thing. That’s a fair point.

Viv: They’ve been working on the proposal since online time and now we’ve been thrown a spanner or something from left outfield just this afternoon, as a reference point. To be able to sort those, put those square pieces in this new round hole… We’ve been doing it our way through discussion, thank you for doing it that way but we really want you to use this new tool.

... 

Mairead: I don’t feel hard done by and it’s not even at this table, but I have heard some other people grumbling, you know, “We did all this work online and they’re not even talking about this stuff,” and I thought, “Oh well.”

Viv: Even doing the online stuff … I never thought, like that girl that stood up and spoke [in the Chamber] and she said, “I thought we were going to discuss just these [11 proposals],” I didn’t get that impression. I knew they were going to be used perhaps as a starting block, there would be more brought in. [D3T14]

Viv was on the team of the FPTP online proposal, but she did not make a big contribution and was not as invested in it as her team-mates. Her main complaint was in the overall process was incoherent, jumping from the online to the dialogic and finally to a prioritisation with an unclear method of comparison. Mairead indicates the common complaint that there was insufficient depth in discussions about proposals, including the ones which originated online.

**Analysis**

It would be simple to focus just on the particular table conversation where the proponents of first-past-the-post made a committed switch to optional preferential voting, and declare it to be an example of deliberative preference-changing that theorists predict should occur. That is how one participant (Lorraine) witnessed it and interpreted it too.

But revealing this story at length from the conversational record shows the transition to be much more complex. It is apparent that the participants were helped to that conclusion by facilitators who inadvertently discounted the original proposal, and by expert panellists who actively promoted optional preferential voting. The force of these expressions must have been great in order to counter the strong but dubious initial sentiments about the preferential voting, including

- most votes, rather than preferred votes, equates to popular will
- people are disadvantaged by ignorance about preferential voting
- preferential voting is a distortion of the ‘truth’ in selection
preferential voting entrenches the major political parties
preferential voting propels undeserving candidates to victory.

Many of these questionable positions arise due to the inappropriate conflation of preference vote counting and the group voting tickets used in the upper parliamentary houses of Australia. While there were some participants who were not confused, the majority were and this confusion was not identified explicitly and addressed in conversation at the tables. Still, many participants came away with a clearer understanding of the voting system and its workings.

It is apparent that the Online Parliament enticed a team of like-minded individuals to form who were focussed on a very particular solution. While they had a mandate to perform independent research, few of the members did so in an effective manner, including the man who volunteered for the specific role of ‘researcher’. Thus questions such as the vote-counting rules in Western Australia remained unanswered throughout, with misinformation allowed to fester. Nobody visited the national or state electoral commission websites, which are very informative. Perhaps worse, the team arrived at the ACP confident of their commitment to FPTP but without any peer pressure to re-evaluate the problem or premises and to consider alternatives. It is an exemplar of group-think.

The stanzas show participants willing to explore ideas and explain themselves as best as they could. For example, some recognised the prioritisation exercise as akin to preferential voting. But too often, opportunities for exploring fundamental values and foundational ideas were missed. The participants often asked each other for answers, but they were not known for certain. Too often, the blind were leading each other as incorrect facts went unchallenged.

**CHAT Perspective**

Activity is oriented towards a particular object. In this case, the catalytic tool of the deliberative process should be optimised to produce proposal recommendations. But not all participants acted with consistent goals. The participants who worked earnestly during the online phase arrived at the ACP as champions for the proposals that they had generated. They had a stake in promoting their proposal in the nicest possible way. Other participants came with a more open view of proceedings without privileging the initial proposals any more than those generated later in the face-to-face forum. The distinction between participants who did and did not participate in the online phase inadvertently introduced a division of labour that affected the dynamics of the activity.
Also, the expert community did not adhere to the rules laid out to them by the organisers regarding impartiality, instead advocating particular positions which directly influenced the evolution of proposals.

Looking across the room, several tables of participants embraced the initial FPTP proposal while only one table rejected it out of hand. The others found differing views at their tables. Deliberation is conducted in small table groups, but the overall project includes all the tables. The synchronisation of these tables by the Theme Team is part of the tool design which appeared to work in recognising the new optional preferential voting proposal when it was generated, and propagating it back into the whole room via the front-of-house display and the updated proposal lists.

The context of the recommendation for optional preferential voting demands that the expert panel be situated in the project. The expert panel has been co-opted as an agent of the deliberative tool, to help participants generate the proposal outputs in answer to the key question. The connection of the experts to the community is weak, as they are presented as elite authorities. While they may have persuasive understanding of the rules of government, they were not compelled strongly enough by the organisers to respect the rules of the project, especially in making strong judgements about what the participants should decide. Only at one table did a facilitator attempt to bring the contradiction to the surface.

D. Selected Episodes

1. Gather: Reflecting on the first day

This conversation occurred at the end of Day 1 when participants at each table giving their first impressions about the face-to-face process so far. Three of these participants were involved in the ‘One man one vote’ online proposal to revert to first-past-the-post electoral vote counting. First, they respond to the question of what they appreciated about the process on the first day:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>There was no put downs, ignoring people, no antagonism.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>Everybody got a chance to put their own opinion on the table, and I noticed myself when the opinions came around the table it gave me a bit of a different set of shoes to sit in from where I stood initially, and I thought, “Oh that’s not a bad idea.” So it allowed me to change my opinions to a certain extent. And I think some of the information we put through on the computer reflected that. From what we first started with to what actually was sent, it was sort of modified somewhat after all the opinions, we all agreed on it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Then the facilitator asked what surprised them:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator-28</th>
<th>What’s the outstanding wow in all of this? The process, the outstanding wow?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
<td>We seemed to be getting somewhere. We seemed to be getting somewhere, you know, we're not just sitting here jabbering on, we seem to be achieving something.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhys</td>
<td>It’s not a social chitchat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>I’m surprised that the general consensus on those three issues that we had [the World Café session]. It’s very good, very good for a mixed group like us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janelle</td>
<td>I agree with that, we’re all different and we’re all ages and we’re from all different parts of life but we’re at the same level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>That surprised me as well. I think if we were, like somebody said there was 9,000 [invitations sent out] if you didn’t give a rat’s backside about politics and you came here, well I don’t think you’d even bother coming here. Most everybody here can see there’s something wrong and that’s probably why we all agree. If you didn’t have a clue about politics and didn’t care, then you wouldn’t be sitting here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-28</td>
<td>That’s our common uniting thing, that passion. [D1T15]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this episode, the participants provide an account of the deliberative experience that matches what was suggested to them at the start. It appears that they did not initially share a strong belief that they could proceed without argument, especially with their apparent diversity. While their tasks in this episode led them to monologue to some extent, they take speaking turns naturally, elaborating on each other’s ideas without cutting each other off. They are gaining confidence in themselves as participants, and in the process. The ‘Greeting’ is taking shape.

I believe these people have come to Canberra to collaborate, so it is not surprising that they can reflect on the first day of activity and see that aim fulfilling. Most importantly, some participants are surprised that they are learning from each
other, especially at this early stage, including better articulation and confirmation of their pre-existing understanding.

But hidden under the passion that is identified encouragingly by the facilitator as the “uniting thing” lies the strategic goal of the three conspirators of promoting a particular proposal. The growing agreement amongst the random diversity of participants adds confidence that their strategic quest is legitimate.

The conspirators continue to reinforce their collective identity behind that proposal by speaking primarily to each other. Meanwhile, Jean and Inge, who were not part of that proposal team, did not speak during this episode and the facilitator did not press them to do so. There is no research record of whether their gestures were positive or negative. Given that the facilitator is one of the most experienced in deliberative fora, from his consensus-affirming coda we may assume that he read them positively.

**CHAT Perspective**

From an activity perspective, this episode provides narrative evidence of the exemplary effect of the process and facilitation in helping participant groups “do more than just chitchat,” find alignment in their positions during the World Café, and really “get somewhere.” By the accounts of the participants, their habitual operations of contestation in political contexts are replaced with the intentional and mediated actions of collaboration derived from the deliberative rules of engagement. Keith is compelled to speak first in each stanza, yet acknowledges that he must curb his tendency to be overbearing. In fact, their ready turn-taking and general lack of dominating talk demonstrates that in a short period of time they have managed to routinise the deliberative norms of behaviour. Already on the first day, they experienced the unexpected outcome of personal learning. The basis for the success of the process, and contradictorily their surprise in that, is attributed by the participants to their division by random selection.

The process by the end of Day 1 had not been designed to differentiate and perhaps subdue the strategic initiatives from the central intent of the ACP to openly explore the object of their inquiry. The strategic potential of the group is exacerbated by an unlikely clustering in the randomness, allowing three participants involved in one proposal to sit together. Thankfully, the procedure on the first day did not provide them with the scope to exercise that power, and furthermore they would all trade tables on subsequent days.
2. Hope: Imagining success I

This is an episode from a table near the rear of the room on Day 1 about what success would mean to the participants.

Facilitator-23: ... I just asked you before what you wanted to get out of these four days. They're turning the question around a bit and saying at the end of four days, what would success mean to you? What would you go away with, thinking “I've, you know, it's made a difference?” We just want to talk about that as a group, decide okay, what sort of things would you measure your success by in this kind of way?

The table facilitator restates what was requested by the lead facilitator from the stage. He alludes to an informal discussion earlier which unintentionally framed the question in individualistic terms. But the general question can be addressed from individual or collective perspectives.

Lester: Here’s one now, I’m going to table straight away, that parliament actually looks at what we produce and considers if not implements some or all of our recommendations. That is going to be, the big one, that’s …

Darleen: That’s the ultimate isn’t it.

Lester: That’s the ultimate, the pipe dream beyond all pipe dreams.

Facilitator-23: All agree with that?

Darleen: Yes.

Facilitator-23: Strong for you?

Esther: Yep.

Gay: That’s the ultimate.

Esther: That was the, would be the ultimate ...

Lester speaks up quickly and with pace. He is the only participant in the room wearing a shirt and tie. His expression about “tabling” an idea implies a certain formality that is distinct from conversation. He is not talking with the other participants, but rather to the list that they are generating.

On the one hand, Lester says he wants the recommendations of the ACP to be taken up by the Government. But by calling it a “pipe dream,” he shows that he may not be confident about fulfilling that potential. Lester has come to the ACP to promote a proposal, generated during the online phase, for Australia to adopt citizen initiated referenda (CIR).

The facilitator’s search for a consensus appears premature in the transcript, but he may have seen affirmative gestures amongst the other participants.

Facilitator-23: Any other ideas, any other measures of success that you think would be important besides getting proposals that are fantastic, that would be real change.

Lester: How about …
Esther: Sorry. The other would be just to sit around with a group of people that we’ve never met before and to be able to get our, what we’re thinking, clearly out in the open and to be able to discuss it.
Facilitator-23: Yes.
Esther: Oh, not for people to really agree, but for people all to listen and yeah.
Facilitator-23: To feel listened to?
Esther: Yeah.
Darleen: And people agree to disagree.
Lester: That’s quite a feat to agree to disagree, as long as we get a chance to speak.
Darleen: Yep, yeah.
Facilitator-23: So to have your first viewpoint as listened to and respected?
Esther: Yes.

The facilitator is doing a good job of keeping the conversation active, although much of the turn-taking is going through him. The language points more to the prospect of speaking freely and without fear, rather than listening to broaden personal perspectives. Lester picks up in an optimistic tone on the tolerance required to respect difference, but the implications are not explored further.

Gay: And to come away knowing that you’re not the only person that feels that way.
Facilitator-23: How would you send that up [via the computer]? Towards a certain ??? …
Darleen: A lot of people in the same boat?
Facilitator-23: Similar camaraderie or?
Esther: Yes. Yes or similar aims.
Lester: Well, camaraderie is something that will come out of this for sure…
Esther: Similar aims.
Facilitator-23: But sharing a similar view?
Gay: Yeah. Particularly when it’s people from all different corners…
Esther: Yes.
Gay: So you know it’s sort of in the same …

The facilitator picks up on the salient point of participants from different backgrounds clustering around common interests, which several foresee as self-affirming.

Lester: It’s a huge cross-section.
Esther: Isn’t it.
Gay: Yeah …
Lester: Oh yes.
Esther: Oh, the mix is … amazing.
Lester: Young people, older people, it’s great.
Facilitator-23: That’s good.

The diversity of the participants is recognised as a benefit, but the reason is not expressed. These comments further objectify the gathering, as if they are distinct from it.
Tyler, who has not yet spoken, provides a new answer to the meaning of success. He professes to eschew personal goals and puts his faith in the endeavour as a whole. He is happy to contribute diligently in whatever way is required. It is not apparent whether he is lowering his expectations in comparison to the others.

The group speaks about itself in the third-person, literally as if they are standing back from themselves. But Tyler’s contribution flips from third to first person, as his point is more personal. As is typical, he may be rhetorically pluralising and seeking approval or self-deprecatingly avoiding the egotistic ‘I’.

This conversation continues with the facilitator evangelising the process. There is talk about more media coverage and education about such processes. The facilitator suggests alternative processes such as citizen boards, etc.

**CHAT Perspective**

This episode demonstrates strong facilitation that intervenes in the conversation with questions and prompts. The facilitator takes this action to quell the dominating tendency of one participant, Lester. The effect on the activity is that participants only respond with short sentences and there is an exaggerated level of surface agreement. But the facilitator does not control turn-taking, which opens the door for Esther to respond incessantly.

The group comes to easy agreement on the first success factor, of being influential (although they do not use that word). It is not brought to their attention that their ultimate influence may not be known yet on the final day. So the relationship between the ACP and the official parliamentary community and its conventions is not discussed. This is a missed opportunity.

On the other hand, it is striking that the participants objectify themselves and thus turn the project inwards on itself.

### 3. Hope: Imagining success II

This episode about what success would mean to the participants occurred in parallel with the previous one, but at the table portrayed in the earlier Greeting which includes three participants involved with the ‘One person one vote’ proposal.
Three table participants immediately elaborate on the problem of publicity. Two present their claim as a story vignette, while Dennis’ idea is related to a proposal for strengthening the political system. The facilitator is asking for the participants to drill down to the essence of the problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator-28:</th>
<th>Alright, how are we going? Anyone like to contribute, starting ...?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inge:</td>
<td>[inaudible] had some proposals that we talked about, [inaudible] where we’re actually going. We haven’t, well, in Brisbane, like I watch the news every day and we’ve never heard anything about this happening at all, I mean in both papers, or anywhere else. And I think the public, you know, we should know about it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis:</td>
<td>How successful you would be if you had a public communication centre. Why do you need to appreciate [inaudible].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith:</td>
<td>It seemed like the only people that knew about it were the 150 that were coming. ’Cause when you talk to somebody and say, “Oh, I’m going to Canberra for Citizens’ Parliament.” “Huh?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-28:</td>
<td>How would you like to word that particular one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janelle:</td>
<td>They had no idea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inge:</td>
<td>More public awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator-28:</td>
<td>More public awareness of ...?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Janelle explains that there should be more publicity about both the process and the outcomes. With the observation that “it’s ... in so many countries,” Janelle wants to be part of something important, for the legitimacy of the ACP to be promoted. This extends Keith’s earlier comment about the lack of acknowledgement about the ACP by his friends. But the facilitator summarises only to the goal of public awareness.

| Harrison: | If you look at the last one [question about achievement], success would be that this whole process can achieve a reasonable, umm, or a sensible proposal. Something that is not unachievable, something that’s quite achievable. And um, probably another part to that would be something that the government would probably take on board legitimately not just give you the typical lip service ... |
| Janelle:  | Yes. |
| Harrison: | ... that politicians tend to give you. Once you hand in a proposal, they take it on board, they don’t just chuck it in the bin the next day. |
On the surface, Harrison’s first sentence implied that a good outcome reflects a good process, especially since he segued off Janelle’s comment about process legitimacy. But it becomes evident that he is more concerned about gaining the personal acknowledgement of the Government.

| Janelle: And I think it should be extended to the government and the opposition and all independents. Listen to what the people are saying ... and actually act ... in developing ... what the people have said ... they want. So “this is what we want to happen, these are our proposals” and have the government holistically ... the federal government holistically ... follow through and say, “Right.” |
| Facilitator-28: So it would have to be someone that the government listens [inaudible] ... |
| Janelle: Listens and develops. |
| Harrison: I think they need to legitimately take it on board and not just give you lip service. |
| Janelle: Absolutely. |

Janelle sees the ACP as a structure that can exercise power, although she does not use the word. She speaks defiantly and with hubris. She projects a voice of the whole ACP with “this is what we want,” amplifying her own desire that she and her fellow participants be treated with importance. The facilitator only echoes back the procedural aspect, not the implied compulsion. Harrison seems to recognise the distinction. His use of the adverb “legitimately” could mean “officially,” “formally” or even “seriously”, but also in acknowledgement of some intrinsic power invested in the ACP process.

| Rhys: It’s a worry of mine that this will be the last time... |
| Keith: They put you off and say “put it in writing.” |
| Facilitator-28: Sorry? |
| Keith: Or put you off by saying “put it in writing.” |
| Harrison: Yeah, well come Monday afternoon they could all say thanks very much, come Tuesday it’s sitting in the bin. |
| Facilitator-28: Yeah. |
| Harrison: You know, I’d like to think that they’d take it on board, but politicians are politicians. |
| Keith: A member of parliament told me that they tell you to put it in writing because 83% of people don’t get around to putting it in writing. |

Keith cuts Rhys off and tries three times to get his idea across, that it works to put suggestions in writing. He gets no response because it is not understood that he is elaborating on the exercise of power that Janelle indirectly expressed earlier. Harrison’s reply correctly advises that the ACP has no direct influence whichever way the recommendations are expressed, to which the facilitator agrees. Harrison is pessimistic, citing the lack of moral pressure and his poor regard for politicians. When Keith says “a member of parliament told me” and quotes the 83% figure, he is rhetorically positioning himself as an authority in the conversation.
Janelle: Proposals.
Rhys: Act on the proposals.

The facilitator tried to broaden the objects of success (such as whether processes like the ACP are worthwhile), while Janelle and Rhys are firmly focussed on the proposals and their content. After all the talk of process legitimacy, it is only the means to gain influence with their recommendations.

Harrison: Maybe I got it wrong, but when it says, “What would success mean to you?”
Knowing that there will be a change.
Janelle: But we’re never, we’re not going to get that at the end of this.
Harrison: No. Down the track ??

Perhaps sensing the dilemma, Harrison confirms that he has come to the ACP with the objective of having direct influence on Government. Janelle correctly notes that this will be unknown at the conclusion of the process. Unfortunately, in the audio recording we cannot discern how Harrison copes with the dilemma. But he does not speak further, which might indicate that he remains confounded.

Facilitator-28: So we have two themes, the education, and the policy actions, ... Any other thoughts?

It is noteworthy that the facilitator uses the word “education” which was not mentioned by the participants. This shorthand expression reveals his interpreted extrapolation of the missing agency in “raising awareness” the ACP.

Rhys: I’d like to come out of here at the end of the few days and say that this process was either workable or it wasn’t.
Dennis: Leave the last word off.
Rhys: No, no. Don’t get me wrong, I’m not being a sceptic about it, I would truly like to say...
Dennis: No, but we don’t want it to look like...
Rhys: ... that this type of process was a good process...
Dennis: ... that we’ve wasted our time.
Rhys: ... and that it achieved something. Whether we do or we don’t, or whether it’s a good or a bad process, at the end of the day, we’ll find out on Monday.
Lead Facilitator: [interrupts] [D1T15]

In this stanza, Rhys allows for an appraisal of the process, although he frames it as a dichotomy of “workable” or not. Rhys denies being a sceptic, but his usage is probably closer to “cynic” than the act of healthy scepticism that he is exhibiting. Then, in talking Rhys down, Dennis fears that admitting to any failure would diminish their importance as participants. Unfortunately, this landscape of denial could not be explored by the facilitator.
**CHAT Perspective**

This episode demonstrates how participants position themselves and the ACP in the activity with regard to power relations, although they do not speak explicitly about power. Janelle wants the ACP to have substantial power to influence the elected Parliament of Australia and the public, and displays a conspicuous presence at the table. Their initial response is for the ACP to gain publicity, reflecting their desire to compel the public towards their proposal. To these ends, Janelle probably sees herself as at least equivalent to an elected parliamentarian in terms of power. But the others are less confident and appear to believe they have to earn public and official respect.

Rhys recognises the ACP as a procedural design that should “work,” although this is just a restatement of the task about success that they are addressing. Nonetheless, he is assigning the agency of success on the organisers rather than the participants themselves. To him, the procedural tool of the project is more important than the participants. But as Dennis indicates, failure of the process may reflect badly on them.

4. **Hope: Imagining success III**

This episode about Hope occurred in parallel with the other two, addressing how success of the ACP might look to them.

The facilitator starts the group off in a very neutral manner, privileging neither process nor outcome.

Murni: First a personal reason because I have been busy raising children for the last how many years I have not taken perhaps an interest in politics. So if I can walk away and say that I actually learned something and I think that’s one of the proposals too. They talked about that in the [online forum?] so I think personally I would have achieved something if I walked away being more informed. But as a group as the Citizens’ Parliament I believe that if any of the proposals get implemented then we will feel that we have actually contributed and it wasn’t just something that was you know for research but something positive and actually [gets up].

Alicia: Yeah I agree with Murni.
Murni: Which part?
Alicia: Oh both really [laughter].

Murni presents both personal and collective aspirations. Alicia is quick to agree and support her and indicates that she appreciates “both” aspects.
Alicia: Yeah.
Owen: Finished! You have got the best group.
Facilitator-18: No come on.
Owen: No really that would ...
Alicia: But coming up with substantial proposals to actually put forward would be the perfect outcome.
Owen: I don’t think anyone would go into this if they thought the whole process was going to be discussed, written on a bit of butcher’s paper and some fancy bits of coloured paper up on the wall and then they put them in a drawer when we all went home. We really don’t want to waste the time we’ve spent on the last 6 months without some implementation. Picking up one of the ideas, how good would any of those ideas be if they weren’t discussed in the House of Reps.
Alicia: And that was only five, there’s 11 isn’t there?
Owen: There’s 11. So if any one of those gets picked up it means I reckon that our society and our parliamentary system would be better off. So exactly what you said.

Owen and Alicia tip the conversation towards outcomes, as they see it as the raison d’être for the project. Owen cannot imagine an outcome that does not involve take-up by the Government. He sees that take-up as just reward for their efforts, which would otherwise go to waste.

Murni: I’d like to see this not just, this the first of many Citizens’ Parliament to come to and know that we were there at the first one.
Alicia: First one. And that in 10 years time it was still going.
Mary: Need a T-shirt. I was there.
Owen: We should get a T-shirt.

Four participants make a strong claim to identify with the ACP, and wish to be vanguards of an ongoing legacy. At the same time, the T-shirt idea is somewhat flippant and quells the seriousness of their attachment. It also portrays the ACP as an event or a spectacle.

Abe: One measure of our success would be if we get good newspaper, radio and television coverage of what was done. Now we can talk all we like about the government’s wonderful proposals and the politicians may pick it up but even if we can reach out to the wider public, forget the politicians, hopefully we will reach them. But if we can reach out to the wider public through good media coverage at the end of it that’s something because you know we’re stimulating our minds, maybe out there.

Abe takes a different tack in his monologue. In his phrase “the politicians may pick it up,” he indicates that he is not convinced of that outcome. However, he puts value in the publicity that could generate public respect for the process and stimulate public debate.

Lilin: I thought, you know, first of all today John Faulkner is here, already is the first step of success which means we let the Government listen and I also feel Peter is very right, should let other people know this as well. I realise most of the people have no idea why you need to go away to Canberra and also I
agree with you and if even one of the proposals can be brought forward to the House of Representatives you know to discuss to go, to under some kind of consideration, it would be a great success.

Lilin is invited to monologue, and summarises what was said before, which builds the cohesiveness of the table participants. It is interesting that she sees Senator Faulkner’s opening speech as preliminary institutional acceptance of their work. Also, she is the first in this conversation to mention the lack of public recognition of the ACP, which is what Abe was effectively responding to.

Derrick: From a personal point of view I’d just like to elucidate my ideas in a way that can be picked up by the people I would come back saying well they listened to what I’m saying. I learnt some things and I think it would be positive, what is it? It would be a good conclusion for me on top of obviously the bigger picture issues that’s just been mentioned. Of course, that’s important stuff but just for now I’m happy if I can get my points across and listened to I guess.

Facilitator-18: Just to have a voice.
Derrick: Yeah.

The facilitator recognises that Derrick, being younger perhaps, lacks confidence. His monologue is rambling and in the end he simply seeks acceptance within the process.

Abe: People are interested in politics yes but they feel they can’t have any input. It’s all too far removed. Nothing they say will ever be heard but if there was the hope, maybe forlorn hope, of what I say maybe gets through to the [government]. People are interested in politics. They want to know, they want to be involved.
Derrick: Yeah, they do feel disenfranchised a lot of the time.
Abe: Yeah. And in today’s electronic age they can be empowered, whether it’s internet voting or straw polls they do on the Sunrise and the Sunset programs on TV. That sort of thing is important but it should go to an official level, not just an entertainment level.

Abe encourages Derrick with his comments about having a voice, and Derrick brings in the technical term “disenfranchised” indicating that he is aware of the challenges of political engagement. Abe then has the insight that people are engaged in public judgements all the time, but not where it counts. Unfortunately, this line of conversation, and how it relates to the success of the ACP, is not pursued.

Alicia: Oh I agree totally with what these guys are saying. I don’t know what else to add, frankly.
Owen: I am surprised how many people who’re here don’t know who their local Member of Parliament is. I’ve already spoken to a heap. So I guess the, if it stimulates 150 people to be more interested and find out and have a bit more access to their parliamentarians that’s a [benefit].

Alicia takes her turn on queue, but only acts to build agreement. Owen makes the modest assertion that the participants will all learn from the experience by being more motivated to engage in political matters. It is interesting that he is keen on people
knowing their MPs as a measure of public engagement, but his comment is not taken up in dialogue.

The facilitator tries to get more out of Alicia. Her first sentence is a circular restatement of the question, which together with the long pause indicates that she is struggling to find an answer. In the end, she thinks that a substantial proposal recommendation will be required to give the ACP process political recognition.

Mary is unable to extend or elaborate on anything that was said. The facilitator knows she has to move forward and summarise the ideas.

The activity at the table now turns to cooperation in writing the ideas onto flashcards. Alicia volunteers.

Alicia remembers that Murni started the conversation with two points.
Then Abe recalls his point, although the underlying reasons are forgotten.

As Alicia writes, the conversation space opens. Abe tells an anecdote, which leads to levity. Murni compliments Alicia. The conversation is mutually supportive.

Interestingly, Owen and Abe paraphrase Derrick, perhaps recognising his good idea but lack of articulation. They were also sitting closer to Alicia who was writing. Derrick then paraphrases himself in agreement.

CHAT Perspective
This episode should be compared to the previous one. Notice how different tables come up with similar ideas. Unlike later exercises that used the networked notebook computers at each table, the outputs of this exercise were recorded on cardboard cards that were grouped on a pin-board. This grouping was done live, and although it was not stated (perhaps it should have been) mirrored the work of the Theme Team. Seen from a CHAT perspective, the division of labour of the ACP into twenty-three tables simultaneously provides the diversity for conversational threads to emerge independently, and for ideas that are widely held to become evident through clustering. However, it is apparent that filtering takes place as ideas pass from the conversation itself, through the recording to the aggregation. The outcome of projecting the aggregation back to the room and capturing in reported proceedings surprises some participants when they match expectations, and disappoints others when they do not.

The point of this activity, to imagine what would constitute success for the ACP, also acts to relate the participants to the broad community. There is talk about publicity, but not of what public expectations there might be of them and the ACP as a
project. Some participants see themselves as messengers for their friends and family of particular claims and demands. But the participants generally do not see themselves as representing sets of ideological positions or public interests from particular perspectives.

Some important insights by participants were not taken up in conversation. The activity was focussed on answering a particular question to produce a list of answers. When different insights emerge, they may be outside the conversational bubble that has developed to that point. The tool of facilitation in this context may not be geared to make space for such diversions, and other participants can not (or may not feel they have the licence) to elaborate either.

This exercise brings out the best in the participants, who naturally behave co-operatively and constructively. Consensus is not demanded, as every possible avenue for success is acceptable. The facilitator ensures inclusiveness in the discussion and the qualified positiveness in their remarks indicates a growing confidence in the process. This outcome would be by design.

5. Inquire: Appreciating Democracy—What did you learn?

This episode occurred during the third round of the World Café session after participants tried to tease out what they valued in the system of democracy enjoyed by Australians, and how they might have “more of it.” In the third round, participants at each table were asked to reflect on what they had just learned through their dialogue in the first two rounds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator-24:</th>
<th>This question 3, what can be learnt from what we’ve talked about so far at various tables? What can be learnt from it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lester:</td>
<td>I’ve got some trouble dealing with that question because it seems to me, what we learnt from it, is all of those things we’ve already discussed about how we can improve the situation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lester expresses a view common across tables that the question about learning did not make sense to them. Some facilitators pre-empted this problem by re-phrasing the question with “what was surprising” or “what sticks in your mind.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harry:</th>
<th>That there’s always chances to change and monitor the system [to improve it] so that’s one thing we’ve got. There are plenty of avenues for us to do that.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diane:</td>
<td>Our democracy is fluid and it allows us to meld it. It’s fluid but it’s …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed:</td>
<td>A lot of it’s stable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane:</td>
<td>Yeah, it’s not vulnerable or fragile. I mean it’s still open to abuse but …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lester:</td>
<td>Has anyone ever heard the term, continual improvement?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lester hijacks the conversation somewhat.
Harry: Pardon?
Lester: Continual improvement. We are always improving, always. There’s always going to be room for improvement.
Harry: Evolution verses revolution. We had that discussion before.
Lester: Oh, good.
Harry: Evolution if you adhere to revolution, you’re always open to make mistakes. Evolution is a safer way to travel because of your stability, both financially and socially.
Lester: What, so a gentle ...
Harry: It is and then most people resist change as well. The majority of population resist change. Not many people embrace change whether it be politicians or ...
Diane: Or councils [laugh]

The table is talking about aspects of change and what change means, but are unable to put their finger on something learned.

Facilitator-24: I’m just wondering what can I write, as a summary and we can we agree on about what we can learn from this. I’m not looking for a lot. What did you agree on about what we can learn from this? You don’t have to agree on it, but what can we learn from it, what can we put as a message?
Harry: We’ve agreed that a democracy, if flexible can in fact change.
Diane: Yeah, we had a great system [inaudible] that’s able to improve, we’re allowed to improve it.
Lester: That’s a good one.

The participants agree that they are lucky to live in a democratic system that can be improved. The conversation went off on a tangent for a couple of minutes, then the facilitator refocussed the table:

Facilitator-24: We’ve learnt that we have a flexible system we are allowed to improve. Does anybody have anything they want to build into this, or add something into this?
Lester: How about, we’ve learnt that we need to increase participation, in order to decrease apathy or something along that.
Facilitator-24: I heard you saying something, were you saying people want to participate?
Viv: Yes, to get rid of the apathy in people and encourage participation.
Lester: Yes, I think we need to encourage that. We’ve learnt that we need to increase participation and decrease the apathy towards the system.
Facilitator-24: Is that okay with people? Is that okay with you guys?
Harry: I mean, it’s not something we’ve discussed up till now. It’s a new point which is fine. Yeah, I’m happy with that.

In the end, the table finds something to enter into the notebook computer for transmission to the Theme Team. But these items seem disconnected with their previous conversations.

**CHAT Perspective**

This episode demonstrates the challenge of stepping participants back from their project and asking them to reflect on their collaboration. Participants have difficulty suddenly shifting gears to a momentarily different project: themselves. Also,
they do not have an ongoing and overarching view of their activity when they are in the middle of it. They reiterated statements that were made before, but do not take them to new levels of synthesis. Also, the scope of their concept of learning appears to be limited to factual knowledge. In agreeing that they live in a good and flexible system, the participants were commenting on their whole project, the actual capacity of Australia’s system of democracy to be improved. With more time and active facilitation, they may have been able to explore that framing more.

6. Inquire: Characteristics of democracy I

This episode occurred at the start of Day 3 when participants at every table were exploring the characteristics of a healthy democracy. It begins with Greg reviewing the printed daily report about the previous day’s activities, and noticing an omission.

| Greg: | In the summary for that section, ‘what have we learnt from this?’ [Round 3 of World Café on the previous day], what I heard, in our group and a lot of other groups, was that we actually thought that our system wasn’t too bad and it just needed minor tinkering and yet, that’s an item that’s been left off here. |
| Facilitator-10: | Okay. |
| Greg: | So I don’t know how we get it … put it back into the section but I think that needed to be captured. |
| Lester: | That what we have is good. |
| Greg: | Yeah, that what we have is pretty good and just needs minor tinkering rather than … |

This idea is not a direct answer to the question they are answering. Greg helps the participants step back from the framing and recognise the system’s stability and relative goodness (similar to what the other table group learned).

| Mairead: | I think one of the … yeah, one of the speakers yesterday was saying, you know, first you need to actually say, what is the problem? And if there’s no huge problem then we need to define what the problems are. And as you’re saying, yeah, it … |
| Greg: | It just needs to be maybe reinvigorated. |
| Mairead: | Just the little things maybe need … but I think ultimately Australia has no problem, huge problem with Democracy or the way we run it, so … |
| Greg: | And I just thought that was missing from here. |
| Mairead: | Yeah, I agree. |

Mairead refers to the orthodox stance of the expert panel to support the idea.

| Mairead: | So how did we word … I don’t know, so what is that? A character … upholding the … |
| Greg: | It’s not really a characteristic in terms of this exercise. |
| Facilitator-10: | I’ll put that as a note aside and make sure we put that up. |
Greg freely acknowledges that he has taken a sideways step, and the facilitator takes advantage of the moment to indicate that it will be treated as a minority view.

| Lester: | You want to make sure that everyone here is aware of it. You want to acknowledge that we do have a good Governmental system? |
| Greg: | Yeah, and it wasn’t just the group we were in I thought there were quite a few other groups. |

But Lester does not want it dismissed like that.

| Lester: | [The problem is] its inefficiency so you just want to acknowledge that it is a good system. |
| Greg: | Yeah, and needs maybe some minor tinkering or reinvigoration but, on the whole, the system works. |
| Mairead: | But I think that might be a characteristic and that sort of gets into the patriotism, your pride, your loyalty to your country, you’re proud of your country, I don’t know, is that like a characteristic that people should have? |
| Facilitator-10: | Yeah. |

Mairead finds the hook that keeps it relevant to the topic, which the facilitator accepts.

| Lester: | It is a characteristic. |
| Mairead: | Would you call it patriotism? |
| Cathy: | Sure. You can say patriotism, I thought also the pride, saying that we have a system that we’re proud of I think that would be a great characteristic. |
| Lester: | I think pride is better. Pride is better, patriotism can inspire some, … but pride is a good word. |
| Cathy: | Yeah but if … I mean Mairead can have her words, too. |
| Mairead: | Unless some people don’t like the word patriotism. I don’t mind it because I know what it means to me, I know some people take it out of context but … |

Mairead used both ‘patriotism’ and ‘pride’ and asks the others to help decide which is better. She prefers to ignore the nationalist connotations of the word ‘patriotism’.

| Greg: | It’s the same issue with the use of the word mateship. |
| Mairead: | Exactly. |
| Cathy: | That’s been really turned over and turned over. |
| Greg: | Which is unfortunate because as a concept it’s actually a wonderful concept. |
| Mairead: | See, I think pride in our country is enough, it’s okay for here. [D3T14] |

Greg again takes a lateral step in considering the word ‘mateship’, a word that carries an Australian narrative load on its back. As a result, Mairead decides that ‘pride’ is the most unproblematic word to use.

**CHAT Perspective**

Progress during deliberative activities often get slowed up on semantic nuances and differences. This episode shows participants drawing on community narratives and cultural understandings to determine the best wording for their recommended
outcomes. This activity is complicated by the contradictory desires of some participants to both accede to the reciprocal norms of deliberation and promote particular interpretations of language use. Progress occurs when nobody expresses overt disagreement, and thus nobody effects veto power. The contradiction is that activity may proceed on ambivalence rather than agreement.

7. Inquire: Characteristics of democracy II

This episode also occurred during the session when participants were exploring the characteristics of a healthy democracy. At this table, they first spent a couple of minutes thinking about the question and writing some notes down to talk about.

Mandy: I wrote down ‘understanding’, in other words [building political] education.
Bruce: Yep, definitely. I’ve got education.
Facilitator-24: Okay.
Mandy: And that’s the understanding because if those people, as with my grandchildren, if they don’t understand our political system it’s not going to work for them.

The first point offered relates to sustaining general understanding and knowledge about the political system.

Facilitator-24: And how do other people feel about that?
Mike: I don’t know if that’s entirely accurate. I think there are a lot of people that don’t understand the current system but it’s still working for them.
Mandy: But with more education it would work better.
Mike: Possibly. So is that what you wanted, more education?
Mandy: Well more education is one of the proposals but part of our characteristics is understanding...

Mike questions the necessity for an educated public. Mandy suggests that the idea that the system works better with an educated public should normatively underpin the proposal for more civics education.

Susan: Do you wish that you had more education about the political system?
Mike: Well I don’t know if I would have been particularly interested so I’m not sure if more education is the answer, I’m just putting it out there because I think there are a lot of uneducated people that don’t know the system but it’s still working and I think I like that aspect. There are people who are protected by a system and it has these qualities that we’re talking about like its openness, respect. I’m just not sure about that point, that’s all.

Susan takes a facilitative action and turns the question back on Mike, who repeats his assertion that there is no cost to a politically uneducated public.

Bruce: But as you’ve learnt more about our political system over the last couple of days do you think it’s working 100% perfectly.
Mike: Oh no, I think there’s definitely room ...
Bruce: So you’re not necessarily better education but maybe more education open to a wider population would give them the opportunity to discover what we’ve discovered that no, it’s not working as well as they thought it was.

Bruce makes the important suggestion that an uneducated public is not positioned to be critical.

Mandy: Education doesn’t have to be in schools.
Bruce: Oh no, open access.
Mandy: But going onto the internet and looking everything up for yourself, that’s what I would take as education.
Bruce: Awareness.
Mandy: Yeah awareness possibly is a better word. Understanding our friends. Yeah that’s a better word.

The word ‘awareness’ rather than education about the political system is introduced, in response to the developing tension.

Facilitator-24: I’m wondering if we said something like understanding awareness of our political system and maybe we want to put a minority view in as an extra thing which says something like, that we also have a, that the system protects those people who are not so well informed, is what I heard you saying and ...

The facilitator provides an accurate summary of the conversation so far, with a view to entering it into the table notebook computers for transmission to the Theme Team.

Bruce: And don’t care to be.
Facilitator-24: Yeah.
Bruce: Don’t have an interest in it.
Facilitator-24: Does that work for you?
Fay: Awareness is a better word than education I think.
Susan: I agree because then, yeah, the onus comes on people to be educated about it [inaudible].

There is further elaboration about enabling the individual who chooses to become aware rather than universal provision of education. As Mandy indicated earlier, they have been talking about adult education.

Bruce: But I think what we need to try and include there is that the system in the future should have avenues for people that want to get involved and become more aware. Make it easier to become aware.

Bruce corrects this somewhat by suggesting that some focus on provision would still be required.

Facilitator-24: It’s how the system we want our democracy to be I think? It’s what we want?
Fay: In the future.
Bruce: In the future.
Anthony: But we were saying that you can participate ...
Mike: If you want to.
Bruce: Of course, most definitely.
There is general agreement around the table as participants respond in quick succession.

Facilitator-24: ... that have we got understanding and awareness of the political system ... I think you had a point which was the system actually protects those who don’t wish to participate. Okay. [D3T16]

The facilitator completes the exercise with a summary of the fundamental characteristics.

**CHAT Perspective**

This episode shows participants exploring each other’s statements and digging deeper into their concepts. While they are drawing understanding from each other, they are conscious of the range of people in the community who may lack interest in political matters or the capacity to understand political strategy. The recommendation that emerges from this conversation adapts to the elaborations and distinctions that are expressed. Participants are thinking critically about what is being said, and getting past taken-for-granted positions. This session is about exploring community values and the facilitation helps this along with many questions that encourage further consideration and conversational exchanges. There is no rancour or competition between participants whatsoever. Turn-taking is not enforced because all participants are appropriately active in conversation—by Day 3 these participants seem to be ‘in the zone’. This is an excellent example of collaboration in deliberative activity that is working well.

8. **Inquire: Questioning expert panel**

This conversation occurred on Day 2 after participants had heard several expert speakers provide comments about the proposals. Academic John Warhurst spoke about the necessity of state and local government to address issues in ways that suited the locality and context, rather than universal policy that does not cater to localised needs. While Chairman Fred Chaney did not speak to the proposals, he did provide an anecdote about how his political party, while in opposition to a minority Government, went against public opinion to defeat a bill (with the help of minor parties) for the introduction of an official Australian identification card. Popular opinion soon reversed, which vindicated their principled stance. He raised the question about the balance between popular and principled decision making by politicians. The task of the participants at this stage was to generate further questions to ask members of the expert panel.

Terrence: Well I guess they themselves have responded to some of the proposals.
Alistair comments on the recognition that proposals contradict each other. The facilitator tries to broaden the conversation on that topic.

Katrina resists the prospect of contradiction and suggests that some proposals avert contradiction by shifting the game altogether.

Some participants are ready to challenge the experts. Richard has career expertise as a public servant and offers a cogent critique.
The participants recognise the conservatism that is expressed by the expert panel. They are unhappy that the experts are pushing back on the proposals for change.

### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator-9</th>
<th>I think it's really important that we get this conversation and we scribe it into the computer. So in 10 or less words what are we talking about here.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Well we've two issues so far, one issue is this question of levels of Government. Can I just say, we want to say that we are talking about not centralising everything but having two levels of Government and the capacity for 20 or so regional assemblies being able to make laws for their own areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Terrence</td>
<td>I'm saying something here, like Citizens ACP suggestion is not necessarily to do away with checks and balances, we still believe in that but we can still have diversity with a strong two tiered system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrence</td>
<td>They have Upper and Lower Houses and a stronger Local regional Government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrence</td>
<td>That's about 20 words but that's what we're going to do.</td>
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</table>

Two participants collaborate to form a question that challenges the advice of the experts. The facilitator and scribe then work for a moment to put the question through to the Theme Team. Note that the participants ignore the word limit imposed by the agenda. The conversation then continues:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Richard</th>
<th>It's like this thing with populism where [inaudible] that I was talking about, sort of like populism verses principles.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alistair</td>
<td>Fred Chaney's point about the 70% going one way and then back the other way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>Yeah, principle verses populism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>So things can be popular but because people haven't thought them through they can ultimately change their mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>They said 70% were for and now 70% were against and in effect we've still got it in any case in our Medicare card.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>And we just asked them then on the panel, is democracy still important to the elected people? Well that's kind of the same with the principle thing, it's like you voted us, you trust us to make decisions on your behalf, we could come back to you on every decision, every legislation that goes through parliament, trust us to be [your representative].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brent</td>
<td>Well this is the issue of representative democracy verses total democracy and the way the Athenians did it was by, as most of you probably heard in the Regional Meetings, they went out into the streets and pulled in a bunch of citizens who were all men and weren't slaves and said, &quot;Okay, tell us what you think.&quot; Whereas we've evolved a system where we elect representatives and put our trust in them but we've always got to remind them that they are our deputies, they are our servants, not our masters. But I don't know how to fix that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>I think that was well put. [D2T10]</td>
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</table>

The conversation continued, teasing out Brent’s ideas further. This table is dominated by a clutch of participants who are attentive and knowledgeable about the issues and the complexities that are involved, and articulate their points well. There is some disagreement between them, but the conversation flows along lines that they agree on, including their shared disagreement with the panel. These participants are
exhibiting confidence and their collective stature relative to the expert panel has grown through the Inquiry.

**CHAT Perspective**

Contradictions are identified, a touchstone of dialectic motivations. The discomfort about them is evident when Katrina suggests that solutions may cut through and effectively resolve the contradictions.

As the Inquiry gains momentum, the relationship between the participants and the expert panel develops. While some participants hold the experts in awe, others critically consider what they were told without cynicism, and share their impressions easily with their table partners. In this short conversation, they recognise the important tensions in public policy relating to politicians following principles or majority public opinion, and to the resistance to change by elites who benefit by their knowledge of and standing within the status quo.

### 9. Judge: Choosing easiest

On Day 3 the proposals are prioritised along several dimensions. This conversation precedes a prioritisation of proposals that participants think would be the easiest to implement.

| Terry: | Out of the long list, it’s easy. I’ll tell you which will be the easier; extending the term of government will be the easiest because that’s what government wants. |
| Maxine: | That’s what – that’s what the politicians want. |
| Terry: | That’s right. That’s why it’s real easy. |

Terry suggests that the proposal to extend (and fix) the term of government would be the easiest.

| Maxine: | More superannuation in their bank account. |
| Terry: | That’s why it would be the easiest. |
| Maxine: | Anything that benefits the politicians. |

Maxine and Terry play tag team in expressing their cynicism about why it would be the easiest to implement.

| Pete: | I’m not quite as cynical as you when it comes to that Maxine, I have to say. |
| Terry: | No? |
| Maxine: | Oh, aren’t you? |
| Terry: | No, honestly ... |
| Pete: | No, I’m not. |

Pete effectively dismisses the reasons given.
Maxine: You're not as old as me, darling, you haven't had a chance to build that
cynicism up. When you get to my age come and see me. [laughter]. Gee.
Terry: Because that's something that they'll want to say, that they'll write about us
in a few years.
Cynthia: Yeah.
Terry: That would be the easiest.

Pete is met with a passive-aggressive response and speaks no further. There is
no facilitative intervention.

Maxine: How many bites of the cherry can we have over this?
Facilitator-22: I think we will be doing the same thing, distributing $100.
Maxine: Oh.
Candice: Oh, really.
Facilitator-22: Yeah.
Terry: Yeah.

The facilitator reiterates the procedure, of allocating a theoretical budget of
$100 to proposals that would be the easiest to implement.

Candice: Gee, how much money have we spent today. I love it. It's like a shopping
spree.
Facilitator-22: Exactly, getting that shopping hype ...
Maxine: And do you know what ...
Facilitator-22: ... although you don't get to take anything with you.
Terry: We've never been able to go out...
Maxine: ... we haven't actually hurt our feet doing it.
Terry: No, it's great. Air-conditioning.
Maxine: It's almost, I'm like blind shopping. [D3T2]

The participants are not taking their work very seriously here.

**CHAT Perspective**

Unlike the previous episode, this episode shows participants who are not
genuinely engaged in the activity. In fairness to the participants, this is the third day of
a gruelling agenda and they are becoming physically and mentally weary. There is a
breakdown in the relationship between the participants and the overall project. There is
cynicism and distraction, and a lack of commitment to the task. To most observers, this
session does not involve deliberation or even sense-making dialogue, but instead is
designed to gain preferential votes from the participants to prioritise the many
proposals they had collectively generated. During this particular session, they are
judging the ‘easiest’ proposal to implement. The voting method and the question itself
do not seem important or credible to at least some of these participants. The rules of the
exercise are somewhat derided. The participants do not recognise the opportunity, as
intended in the process design, to **practise** the voting activity on increasingly more
important decisions.
10. Judge: Choosing best overall

For the session to prioritise the most important proposals overall, the facilitator at Table 12 gets the participants out of their chairs and shifts to a different location in the room. Energy was waning, and this was a way of getting them literally thinking on their feet. They first spend fifteen minutes talking through their favourite proposals in small subgroups.

Facilitator-12: I’m going to interrupt...Our next step, could I have your attention, Jane?
Okay. Our next step is to, in your groups is to select one of your strongest ones to present to the rest of the room. What I want you to do is between you in each of your pairs decide which is your, which has got the strongest argument for the proposal you’re most passionate about.

Jane: We’re in unison because we’re most passionate about the same one.
[laughter]

Facilitator-12: Excellent.
Ed: Yeah.
Facilitator-12: And then present it to the rest of the group and then we’ll have a discussion around that. So is that going to take long?
Doug: Yeah.
Alistair: Give us a couple of minutes to talk about it.

The facilitator asks the participants to select particular proposals to speak about. Jane indicates that there is broad agreement already about which proposals are most important. The facilitator greets this possibility enthusiastically. Alistair indicates that he and Doug need a bit if time. They then group for discussion. The microphone picks up the conversation between Mabel, Ed and Nick.

Mabel: I would say I and J together, possibly.
Ed: I and J?
Mabel: I and J together.
Ed: Yeah, yeah, possibly.

Proposal I is ‘Remove or reduce state level of government’, and proposal J is ‘Harmonise laws across states’.

Nick: Mabel what was your one sorry, originally?
Mabel: Accountability.
Nick: Accountability.
Mabel: State Government has always interested me too you know. For me it’s not removing it’s just streamlining.
Nick: Streamlining, yeah.
Ed: [inaudible].
Nick: Same with me.
Mabel: So I think I’ll go with the same thing then I and J. Because I don’t believe in removing, as I said. So, if you can get rid of the remove, and reduce.

Mabel is not keen on getting rid of the state level of government, just designing it to work better in concert with other government functions. Rather than get rid of the
state level of government, Mabel would prefer it to work more in concert with other governmental functions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nick:</th>
<th>See if you if you can combine I and J together it would make it a lot easier to me for the Federal Government to be able to fund the States in my mind a lot easier because there’s no differences in how they’re going to operate these.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mabel:</td>
<td>And when [inaudible] you define what they have to do and what the State Government has to do instead of them just accusing each other of putting [inaudible].</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nick:</td>
<td>Instead of the yeah, instead of the State Government going, “Oh, the Federal Government’s meant to look after highways” and they’re like, “No you are they’re in your State”, it’s like, “No, no, they’re the ones with the money.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mabel:</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed:</td>
<td>Yeah, and I think the, yeah well, the argument between the two Governments always carries on and if you come to the Federal Government it’s not going to help. I think you’re better off going with one or two and then maybe you know representing your State maybe that’s better than sort of 100 people standing there with their hand out I need money for this, this or this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nick:</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
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</table>

The main problem is identified by all three.

| Ed: | You probably need one or two people with some wisdom for projects or some good ideas rather than trying ... |
| Nick: | So you’d... |
| Mabel: | I also covers that too, ‘Attending to over-Government’, that’s the same thing isn’t it? |
| Ed: | Possibly yeah possibly something like that is. It doesn’t that’s ... |
| Mabel: | [inaudible] |

They realise that a third proposal is also related.

After two minutes of discussion the facilitator draws the whole group together again.

| Facilitator-12: | Okay. Let’s do it. We’re back as a group now. Who wants to go first? The ones will go first. |
| Ed: | Us. Okay we’re looking at I and J which seems to relate to each other, remove the, uh, or reduce State level of Government. Now, we’re not sort of talking about eliminating the State Governments but just withdrawing their power a little bit and maybe giving some of it to Councils because the Councils are the ones that are closer to the people and accountable. I think more often be more efficient than State Governments and maybe more accountable as well because the people can actually sit in Council meetings and, you know, they’ve got direct access to the Councillors whereas Federal or State you’re a lot further removed. So I think give more power to the Council or Local Governments and remove it from the State and then that gives the Federal Government I suppose more responsibilities like make sure that you know they look after the major infrastructure like hospital, hospitals ... |
| Nick: | Hospitals, schools. |
| Mabel: | Roads. |
| Robyn: | Education. |
| Ed: | Education, yeah that type of thing. And also that way maybe you get a, I think it also aligns itself with harmonising between States. You’ve got a look at the harmony between the States laws. |
Ed speaks for the sub-group in suggesting that two proposals should be recommended in tandem.

The facilitator does not get a reaction to this statement. The participants are being asked to make important decisions in a very short time.

Jane summarises her conversation with Robyn, adding further justification with different emphases to the selection made by the first sub-group.

Alistair said quite a bit more, but it is edited out here as he was struggling to articulate clearly.
Robyn: Yep, well in the construction industry it’s the White Card now nationally there’s the White Card, the Construction Induction White Card which is now a national, well it’s soon to be an accredited thing so there’s movement certainly in that direction already.

Jane: But if you’re a business and trading I know there was a lady at our regional meeting who’s in like the funeral sort of businesses where they sell pre-funeral ...

Facilitator-12: Sorry, I’m ...

Jane: And she had something like 70 lots of legislation that they had to make sure they complied with and if one State changed one sentence they then had to re-do their whole thing because they then had to because it might impact on the other States legislation ... ridiculous.

There are more comments about the need for uniform national regulation.

Facilitator-12: Okay, now we’re at that point where we have to start looking at the input so what I’m going to do it’s probably best if we go back to our seats because I’m going to have to go back to, it was a good move, that was handy.

Jane: I mean that was really good actually to know that everybody was all on the same page.

Facilitator-12: That was amazing. That was amazing [laughter].

Nick: Just shows how much of a theme it is carrying through here. [D3T12]

The facilitator ends the conversation with an instruction to shift back to the table. As they walk, the recorder was still on. Jane reiterates her earlier claim of unanimity of the participants at this table, and the facilitator expresses her surprise at that. Nick’s final statement in this episode summarises the perception that there are themes emerging from the process.

**CHAT Perspective**

This episode demonstrates how participants in deliberative activity deal with the complexity of issues by recognising overlaps between the various options that they ultimately must select. The activity was designed to generate discrete proposals, but they did not end up being independent of each other. The prioritisation process does not provide a clear mechanism for inter-relating proposals, although some newer proposals did emerge after deliberations over the initial set on offer. In the end, participants could only vote for related proposals *en masse*.

This episode also demonstrates how many of the experiences of participants, as revealed through the stories they tell each other about their lives, focus them on a small set of proposals which were meaningful to them. This convergence is made easier because the proposals are stated in general terms as approaches or topics of government attention rather than as specific and detailed policy solutions. This contributes to the belief by many participants that they have reached widespread consensus.
11. taKe: Reflecting on process I

This episode of informal, unfacilitated conversation begins on Day 3 with Trish and Rhys reflecting about the prioritisation procedure.

| Trish: | Okay, because I thought voting like that are they going to pick the top 1 thing each. |
| Rhys:  | I don’t know why they’ve done innovative or freedom, it’s part of their research I would imagine to see how people think. |
| Trish: | I don’t know either. I didn’t know and I had no idea why we were voting that way. |
| Rhys:  | I’d say it’d be just purely research on how people view certain issues, why, why they’re keen. |
| Trish: | When he told us about the voting first up he said it doesn’t matter even if you don’t like it, if you think it’s the one that describes that. But then later on she came out and said you’ve got to actually like it and vote for it. And I thought something’s changed there. |
| Rhys:  | I don’t know. I think they’re making the rules up as they go along as well; the whole process is new to them. It’s gone along very well for, as big as it is and the fact that it’s never happened before, and they’ve got all these Yanks and people around watching over them. |
| Trish: | Yeah, I think it’s ... |

The distracting impact of the research effort shows through in these comments. The initial prioritisations on ease of implementation, innovation and the value of freedom were neither to be discounted nor for survey, but more to condition the participants to the procedure itself, in gearing up for the important final prioritisations.

They are also questioning the rigour of the research effort. Although there was one American on the research team, and I carry a Canadian accent, there was nobody “watching over” the process beyond the Chairs.

| Rhys:  | It has gone very smoothly really, not too many glitches. |
| Trish: | I think everybody’s happy to be here and to be doing it. |
| Rhys:  | There’s been very, very little conflict. |
| Trish: | No. |
| Will:  | Yeah, very ... |
| Rhys:  | There are only a couple of people here that have pushed their barrow too far, two people. |
| Trish: | Actually I haven’t seen anyone do that. |

These comments were reiterated by many others, that there was a surprising lack of argument and disagreement.

| Will:  | There were a few tables; especially not women but men, there were 2 or 3. |
| Rhys:  | Mm, two men in particular. |
| Will:  | Yeah, they sort of go against each other all the time. |
| Rhys:  | Two people ... |
| Trish: | Today or yesterday? |
Rhys is referring to a few participants who assertively champion proposals that were established during the online phase of the process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhys:</th>
<th>That are really pushing their own agenda's over the top [of everything else]. One of those men the first day was sitting around the table and he was there, he had a long spiel, no one interrupted him and let him say his piece. I’m sitting down the end of the table and I’ve said look, I totally agree to disagree with what you just said, and he kept trying to interrupt me. I wanted to have my say on what he’d said and I put him right back in his place. I said “excuse me I didn’t interrupt you, don’t interrupt me.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trish:</td>
<td>What did he say?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhys:</td>
<td>Sat there and shut-up, he had to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trish:</td>
<td>[Chuckling].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhys:</td>
<td>But he was just totally rude and I haven't come across that with anyone.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rhys tells the story of a minor altercation with another participant. On the first day, he sat at Table 15 with three of the original authors of the ‘One person one vote’ proposal. That conversation does not show up in the transcript of the audio recording.

| Trish: | No. Well, see most of us; well I think all of us … |
| Rhys: | We try and cooperate with each other. |
| Trish: | Yeah, we’re here to say our piece and listen, that’s what they said. |
| Rhys: | Yeah, he wouldn’t listen to what I had to say because I disagreed with him. |

In this exchange, the participants repeat the behavioural expectations that were expressed to them at the beginning of the assembly. Rhys implies that the participant with whom he had the altercation did not understand the expectation of respectful conduct.

| Trish: | To be honest, I didn’t think we were supposed to agree, I just felt we were supposed to come up with ideas and listen to each other. |
| Rhys: | Exactly right. If you say something I totally disagree with I’ll tell you and that’s what we’re here for. |
| Trish: | That’s right yeah. |

They understand that they participate with a plurality of viewpoints that have to be acknowledged whether one likes them or not.

| Rhys: | Y’know, I got really pissed off [at what he was saying]. |
| Trish: | [Chuckling]. |
| Rhys: | But I didn’t show it. |
| Trish: | [Chuckling] You’re good, you’re good [chuckling]. |

Rhys is proud to have maintained a civil posture, and Trish compliments him for it.

| Rhys: | I’ll get even. I’ll get you Bob. [laughing] |

The tone of this comment is not serious, so this is just an expression of frustration rather than a plan of action.
Will: It’s typical you know … [inaudible]
Rhys: The same two men, every time there’s been questions asked …
Will: They’re [up] on their own …
Rhys: Every time there’s been something up on the stage, or here, or there they’ve been in it, and to me they’ve been very unfair to you and I …
Trish: Yeah
Rhys: … because they haven’t given other people the chance to get up and ask their questions. This is the wrong environment to push your barrow and I don’t think they’re [inaudible] their lives, they think they’re doing a wonderful job.
Trish: Too big ego you think.
Rhys: Yeah.
Trish: They’d make good politicians then.
Will: [Laughing].

They see the alignment between the inappropriate strategic endeavour of those participants and ‘politics as usual.’

Rhys: Or too wrapped up in their own agenda. I was fearing that would happen more, I thought there would be a lot more plants in the group, people that were actually put into the parliament to bring certain agendas [inaudible].
Trish: Yeah?
Rhys: That was my fear, but it hasn’t turned out that way.
Trish: No, it’s been very good.
Will: Now, we’re just trying to get somebody to take our vote [chuckling]. [D3T9]

Rhys expresses his satisfaction that the process has been fair. Will just wants to get on with it all.

CHAT Perspective

This initial stanza reveals the perception by some participants that there are distractions to their mission, including a procedure that seems piece-meal and certain participants who are not collaborating well. In other words, their object is not being sought in an optimal manner.

Later, the participants reflect well on the positioning of individuals who are championing proposals rather too vociferously and without humility. They share a good understanding and acceptance about the lack of required consensus and the rules of the deliberative activity. This group knows its project.

12. taKe: Reflection on process II

This episode of conversation occurred near the end of Day 4 as participants were reflecting on the highlights of the ACP process:

Facilitator-10: And what do you think? Was there any particular factor about the way the process happened? Your experience, someone you met that you think hit that education or that experience being positive to the next level?
Carla: I think the panel.
Bruce: Yeah.
Carla: I think the panel was excellent.
Facilitator-10: Okay, in terms of education, the panel?

Many table participants thought the panel was excellent. It was the only source of new information in the room. The facilitator frames it as “education.”

Viv: The calibre of those experts that they brought in ...
Facilitator-10: The what, the calibre?
Viv: Yeah, you know Antony Green and Mr Gorgeous David Hamill.
Ellen: Yeah. Antony Green was a highlight for me. I touched him. [Laughter]. I haven’t washed my hand since.

This table is dominated by women, some of whom idolised the panel members.

Jane: The thing I found with the panel too, is like we know that some of them belong to specific political parties, but they kept any of their political beliefs out of it, and didn’t try and influence us in any way.
Carla: Yeah, they presented their knowledge in a totally unbiased way, but the knowledge that they brought certainly shifted a lot of my opinions that I had.
Jane: And the same with mine.

The participants express an essential contradiction. They believe that their positions were shifted but without the panel expressing positions themselves. The only way to read this is that they believed that the panel only presented incontestable and value-free facts.

Viv: You know, you enter in here quite bullish and, “[Gasp], we can do this, we can do this,” and “I’ve always thought this was a dud way to do things” and blah, blah, and they just explained, “This is why we have this kind of a system,” I’m a bit more tolerant.
Carla: The processes, I understand the process a bit more.
Facilitator-10: Yeah, yeah.
Ellen: Well I think all of those people probably made most of the participants here realise that we do live in a very privileged political environment. We’re very fortunate.

There is an awkward pause after Ellen’s generalised comment—she is probably the most conservative of them. But the stanza illustrates participants learning to be more tolerant of the status quo, due to the expert panel.

Viv: [building] friendship, too.
Jane: That’s been a real complement for me. I’ve been in a unit with ... all five of us are from a different state ... 
Facilitator-10: Oh, great!
Jane: ... and I don’t know whether that was done by design, or whether it was accident. We tended to think that it was probably by design.
Viv: Yeah.
Carla: Yeah, I think so too.
The accommodation assignments were not ‘done by design’, they were quite coincidental. But it is interesting how the participants had become ‘institutionalised’ to the research and democratic structuring of the ACP.

Jane: And we got a great group, and we have swapped email addresses and I’ve got four new friends.
Facilitator-10: Great, great. You’re saying, yep, yep. So the fun in friendship. Meetings ...
Jane: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Just being able to converse with other people from around Australia that have had vastly different experiences in life. [D4T14]

The episode finishes with the women talking about the new friendships they have gained as a result of the ACP, which is very important to them.

**CHAT Perspective**

The design of the project included the expert panel as the instrument for informing the participants. They were seen as distinct from the organisers and drawn judiciously from the academic and political commentary communities. The participants think the expert panel did not break the rule of bias even though they overtly expressed personal viewpoints (e.g. Antony Green recommended optional preferential voting nation-wide).

The social benefits for the participants seem disproportionately important to them, in comparison to the capacity of the project to generate an influential output. Perhaps this is an indication of their lack of confidence that there would be substantial take-up by the Government. Ellen’s endorsement of the status quo could be viewed in this light too.

**13. taKe: The Isolation**

This conversational episode on Day 4, when the participants were reflecting on the event, juxtaposes two stanzas.

Cynthia: Because I didn’t go to breakfast, so it was my job to do all the blinds that morning and I said, first of all I seen, I pulled the blind down and this guy got up, next thing I went to the next room and he just [inaudible] so I’ve gone, oh, far out, it was so funny.
Jennifer: Yeah.
Cynthia: You could see them all [inaudible].
Jennifer: It could have been an added benefit, you know, just that little bit of a...
Cynthia: I should have got a camera out, shouldn’t I?
Jennifer: Yeah.
Amy: No, what comes to Canberra stays in Canberra.
Cynthia: Stays in Canberra.
Jennifer: Usually it’s the politicians.
Mark: Yeah, that’s right.
First, Cynthia tells a story about a funny incident, and they agree that sometimes it is better not to broadcast everything that happens. Jennifer and Mark see a link to the lives of federal politicians, who insulate themselves in Canberra.

Jennifer: This business that’s going on in Melbourne at, in Melbourne, Victoria at the moment, the bushfires, I got an overwhelming sense on Saturday night when we were in the common room and we were watching the TV and then suddenly it came up, police had confirmed 14 dead, and the three of us who were there, we’ve just gone…

Facilitator-11: Yeah.

Jennifer: And I’ve suddenly, it became so clear to me how isolated Canberra is. I mean, I realise the pollies and all that have got TV, they’ve got people to read the newspapers for them and highlight special bits and all that sort of stuff and they get their emails and that, and I felt that was one thing where we were really isolated and it was very frustrating that we couldn’t just pick up a paper and, and I know they did a fantastic…

Amy: Especially being where we are now, you know, not even a TV in the room.

Jennifer: No. Well, we had a common room with a TV.

Cynthia: Oh, did you?

Jennifer: So you know that was, that was good that we had that but up until then, ‘till Saturday night we didn’t know what was going on and now it’s over 108 [died in the fires]. [D4T4]

Jennifer talks about the isolation they experienced, being cocooned from the rest of the world for four days. She dominates this conversation. For some, the isolation was debilitating as they feared for relatives and friends who had encountered the Victorian bushfires. Jennifer is reluctant to be critical of the organisers, recognising that they could not have foreseen the weather conditions and the external events.

**CHAT Perspective**

The activity of the ACP was isolated from the world at large. This disconnect from the community had positive and negative ramifications.

Only a few participants had access to radio and television in the accommodation they were provided. Many carried mobile telephones, but they were turned off during the ACP sessions. Many of the older participants do not have mobile telephones. They were effectively sequestered like a trial jury.

But the serious bushfires in Victoria, coupled with the brutal heat, left participants feeling anxious in the absence of information. The organisers tried to alleviate this problem by providing reports to the assembly twice each day, from the print media.

The lack of distraction in isolation was intended to assist them to focus on their tasks and take the time to bond better, which they appeared to do. As well, they were not subjected to and therefore not distracted by immediate commentary by the community.
The isolation adversely affected their access to information. There was no internet connectivity available to participants during the sessions at the ACP, so they could conduct independent research and communication about the proposal topics they were talking about and evaluating.

14. taKe: Nothing about power

In a post-ACP conversation, some of the facilitators express the judgement that the inquiry should have taken some different turns:

| Facilitator-12 | What I found completely lacking in this whole thing was talk about power. |
| Facilitator-20 | There wasn’t, was there? |
| Facilitator-12 | … that’s what government does. It limits power, it distributes power, it’s how power is managed for governments and there was no talk about power whatsoever and never at any stage did I mention that... That’s my biggest disappointment with this whole thing, is that there was no talk about it. |

CHAT Perspective

The conversational record supports the facilitator’s view that issues around power were rarely taken up substantially by participants. One exception was the participants who favoured first-past-the-post voting talking about the power of political parties to subvert the preferential system. For political scientists and the commentariat, a fundamental concept of power lies at the heart of any analysis. The design of government, for example bicameral legislatures (except Queensland) and the attempted separation of executive, legislative and judicial branches of government and their monitory inter-relationships to control for the excesses of power, were not touched upon in conversation at the ACP. From a CHAT perspective, this raises the question of the role of facilitation, and of process design in general: to what extent should participants be guided in framing their deliberations in the way academics and experts prefer? How interventionist should facilitation be in framing public processes of dialogue and deliberation?
5. Citizens Make Sense In Deliberative Activity

“Learning democracy is a matter of learning to live with ambiguity and contingency as much as it is learning how to apply deliberative decision-making procedures” (Brookfield, 2005: 269).

Introduction

So far in this thesis, I have developed two distinct threads, first about a narrative of deliberation, and second about an approach that places the dialectic of activity rather than the objectified outcome of a deliberative project at its analytic focus. Wrapped around both of these threads is an active constructionist stance that provides the licence to position deliberative activity as a cultural-historical project concerned with common ground. Like others who are committed to the deliberative mission, I carry a certain vision of the world and of our knowledge of it, that both consists of activities of various kinds ... and also a certain stance towards the product of research into such activity—that of investigating its nature from a position of active involvement in it, rather than contemplative withdrawal from it (Shotter, 1989: 132, cited in Pearce, 1995, emphasis in original).

In the previous chapter, story constructions and episodes were presented, each with a concluding analysis from an activity theoretic perspective. These approached the texts through a lens that usefully revealed the dynamic tensions and contradictions that were held during the Australian Citizens’ Parliament (ACP). This chapter will go further to bring meaning to the activity of deliberation, as experienced at the ACP. It will be demonstrated that the project was initially elusive but then takes shape through the stages of activity. At the centre of the deliberative experience, unlike most other democratic methods, is a growing trust in the project that builds capacity to deal with complex issues. In other words, participants gain the deliberative confidence through their mediated activity to make sense of experts and each other to generate substantial outcomes.

The narrative arc of deliberative activity developed earlier in this thesis helps organise the telling of the story of deliberation. The participants (and facilitators) were not invited to gain a conscious meta-conception of these stages in this narrative arc.
beyond the particular action types which are categorised by them within daily agendas. As social constructionists are reluctant to categorise, the narrative arc is not devised as an explanatory model of deliberation, nor as the answer to the research question of how participants experience deliberative activity. It is no more and no less than an organising template for telling a story about deliberative activity, like the chapters of a book.

The story of deliberation is of participants experiencing the dialectic contrasts and tensions that are part and parcel of their activity, whether they are aware of them or not. These distinctions are manifested during some but perhaps not all periods of the deliberative activity. This chapter traverses the stages of a typical narrative of public deliberation as exemplified in the ACP to find dialectic relations that matter. The conversational episodes are referenced to illustrate the salient points. At the end of the chapter, the dialectic development through the deliberative process is summarised and related to shifts in the project and the learning that participants (‘Citizen Parliamentarians’ or CPs) enthusiastically claimed through their collaboration.

Frame

In her remarks at the opening ceremony, Lowitja O’Donoghue, one of the two eminent Australians who co-chaired the ACP, read from a statement prepared by the organisers who laid out their intentions for the ACP and for its participants:

I want to remind you of the aims of our forum and they are:
• to provide the space and the opportunity for dialogue and deliberation on how Australia’s political system could be strengthened to serve us better;
• to enable participants to explore different ways to achieve this through deliberative processes that facilitate participant understanding of different views;
• learning new ideas, testing assumptions, identifying values, weighing options and developing priorities;
• to provide the opportunity for participants to develop a final report of their recommendations and to have that report heard and seriously considered by those in positions of influence.

While at the start the organisers mentioned the key question about strengthening Australian democracy, there was no unprompted discussion recorded about that framing. (There is no record of what was discussed by participants away from the formal gathering of the ACP.) Beyond the production of proposals, the conversational record shows no questions asked by CPs of each other or to the organisers in the first hours in Canberra about what the key question meant or how
their work would be taken up by the Government. The framing of their work as proposal-production appears to have been accepted unproblematically as their overall project. This demonstrates that deliberative activity generally begins with CPs willing to go along with the initial framing.

**Gather**

When the participants of a public engagement assembly meet face-to-face for the first time, they are all immediately ready to talk about their various backgrounds, localities, work endeavours and recreational interests. At the outset, their excitement propels them to talk about themselves. They are eager to be heard and for others to know about their journey to the forum. There are many examples of participants expressing familiarity with aspects of others’ stories and assertions told to them. At the ACP, many had already been assembled to travel together by bus or plane from across the continent. They came already loaded with stories to share about their invitation and induction into the ACP. It was clear by their friendly mutual engagement that they generally had a desire to be understood and to be accepted by the others.

Rosenberg (2007) calls the talk at this stage ‘proto-discourse’, rife with clichés, and merely a formulaic precursor to the main event. But I disagree, as this communicative intention is authentic and it begins the construction of social relations that carry forward. Rather than discount the talk at this stage, it is useful to explore the various sub-projects of dialogue and mediating facilitation to reveal the intentions behind initial communicative actions.

In expanding the theoretical scope of what should be held as deliberative conversation, Young (2000) introduced the communicative category of Greeting as moments of public acknowledgement of those with whom people enter into conversation, often ritualised in their first turns, for example in the utterance, “how are you going?” Greeting:

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is this communicative moment of taking a risk of trusting in order to establish and maintain the bond of trust necessary to sustain a discussion about issues that face us together (Young 2000: 58).
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The early conversations and ‘small talk’ when CPs first meet each other (e.g. mini-story B: Gather) are crucial not just to help every individual get past their early nervousness and become comfortable, but they provide opportunities for each participant to acknowledge each other and recognise the good fortune that they all
share to be there. At the ACP this was repeated each day because the CPs were re-seated randomly. Of course, it became easier each day as they became increasingly familiar with one another.

Several mini-stories and episodes demonstrate how some CPs, especially among those who are older and well-established, were compelled to expand on their standing in their work, their localities and their associations. They could see the political expertise on the stage and appeared to want to demonstrate their capacity to be similarly authoritative in their own contexts, that they are anything but 'ordinary citizens'. Some CPs also brought memories of periods in the past when practices were different and, for them at least, patently superior. Such examples of individual positioning are commonly heard in everyday conversation, so it is unsurprising that positioning was also initiated in the deliberative space.

On the one hand, these expressions of potential authority from citizens serve to raise their perceived self-importance when they may not be initially comfortable and confident. Their sub-project may be the personal recognition and respect that the early conversation most directly affords and which they are conditioned to earning at that stage of a typical meeting. However, CPs’ positioning intent was directed at each other in contradiction of the deliberative ideal of inclusion about which they would all have been made aware.

On the other hand, CPs recognised very early how diverse they were as a group. As Janelle says when reflecting on the first day (episode D1), “we’re from all different parts of life but we’re at the same level.” So a housewife, a truck driver and a student deserve to be heard just as much as somebody who might self-declare as a ‘political junkie’ or who has been involved in political processes.

This is the first example of a dialectic tension between the individual intentions of self-promotion and the promotion of the ACP as a collaborative project. It is dialectic insofar as one facet cannot be considered in isolation from the other. The self-confidence needed to contribute to a collaborative effort necessarily raises the returned respect and appreciation for the individual participant. Conversely, the growing synthesis of collaborative knowledge through the deliberative process gives confidence to participants who can recognise with pride their individual contributions to the overall scheme. But when they Gather, the participants do not yet have a concept of that collaborative effort, and have not yet begun to work together in earnest. So the dialectic balance was tilted towards individual goals, manifested in posturing.
As they get down to business, the constraints of civility are imposed through the mediation of facilitators who enforce turn-taking in table conversations, and also by participants who actively dismiss such posturing. It falls on the culturally-inherited and ritualised patterns of politeness, tact and small talk to guide their actions as they Gather together. The facilitation at the early stage of most processes like the ACP is generally non-interventionist, but the agenda includes some ‘ice-breaker’ exercises that limit the extent of such positioning, even when participants are invited to open up about themselves. Young (2000) would include such exercises in her conversational category of Greeting.

The helpful work of facilitation becomes familiar to participants at the early stage of their project. It is common, as was the case at the ACP, for early table conversations to flow through the facilitator at every turn. This behaviour is amplified when speaking turns are taken in sequence, as often there is a prompt by the facilitator to the next participant to respond to the topic. They are often not confident to direct their response to others, so must be encouraged to do so, and for others to subsequently respond with questions or constructive comments.

One communicative act shown purposefully or as a conditioned response by less pressing participants, seen in several conversations especially at the start, was to exhibit humility with expressions of being “eager to learn”, “contribute what I can” and “lucky to just be here” (mini-story B). Upon hearing this, the more strident CPs were effectively asked to be more open to the needs and wishes of others in the forum. So the ebb and flow of reciprocity is the umbrella concept for this dialectic, which begins to develop as soon as they Gather.

One cannot underestimate the mediating effect of the venue on deliberative activity. Not only were participants invited to come to the centre of Australian political culture in Canberra, but holding the main event at Old Parliament House made CPs want to pinch themselves to ensure their experience was not a euphoric dream. Sitting in the leather seats where past generations of elected politicians had sat gave CPs a feeling of importance and responsibility. The formal opening of the ACP including speeches by an eminent serving politician would have added to their sense of duty. Their project was literally immersed in the historical context of Australian political culture.

Meanwhile, CPs were invited to dress informally as they would amongst friends, many sporting bare legs and sandals during the heat-wave that had enveloped the east side of the continent that summer. There were no formal rules of argumentation, such as Robert’s Rules of Order, by which everybody had to abide. The
CPs could leave the room at any stage. So there was always a dialectic contrast between the apparently orthodox standing of the ACP and its relatively informal and pragmatic operation.

An important mediation towards the levelling relationship of participants relative to the community was the random selection process of participant recruitment. Most CPs correctly attribute the diversity of people and evidence of the attempted representative proportionality to the random selection process, although most would be unaware of the stratified sampling by age, education category, gender, locality and aboriginality that helped make it happen (Lubensky & Carson, 2013). Because of withdrawals and the challenge of finding demographically-matching replacements, the stratification was not perfect. But the CPs’ perception was that they formed a microcosm of the Australian adult citizenry, which added to their sense of legitimacy as a representative body.

Everyone had to accept twice to attend, first with the initial invitation, then after random selection or to replace somebody who would not attend. The normative effect of randomness was compromised when many realised that over a third of the CPs were replacements and eleven had been given special invitations from the Online Parliament that preceded and fed into the assembly in Canberra. The recruitment process had filtered out of those who would be sceptical towards the project. So recruitment in itself represents a dialectic pair of selection and acceptance which cannot be treated independently of each other in impacting their activity.

The presentation of recruitment as a lottery energised those who recognised their luck in being selected to make the most of the opportunity. Randomised recruitment helped focus participant attention on the collaborative project from the start. While some CPs arrived with strategic stakes, there is sufficient evidence from the conversational record that everyone gathered with the intent of making the ACP a success. The initial task was to figure out what that meant.

Hope

Most deliberative processes include an attempt early in their design to tease out, through table dialogue, the expectations of participants relative to the task at hand. At the ACP, the question was put to them quite directly: what will its success look like? This was a clever way of posing the exercise, because it asked CPs to remove themselves from their current concerns and to imagine themselves days and months in
the future. This exercise in ‘visioning’ invites participants into a critical mode of consideration, abstracted from the concreteness of particular proposals and their present selves.

Several of the older CPs did not understand the exercise and were unable to shift to the abstracted consideration (for example, Edith in mini-story A). They were compelled to invest in every utterance, and this was only possible with concrete positions. They could not imagine the process as a whole or its overall reception by the community. Furthermore, their pathological cynicism of government precluded any rational expression of its possible action in the future. Facilitators attempted to clarify the requirements of the exercise to these participants but were thwarted by their inability to shift them into a creative mode. For these participants, the challenge was beyond the mediating capacity of table facilitation.

The purpose of this exercise was not to reach an agreement, but to express and share the range of views about the meaning of success. This is an important consideration because the intent was not to present the project as a teleological pursuit. The answer to the question, “What should be the key success factors?” is “All of the above,” an idea expressed by the lead facilitator in the summary of the exercise. So while this exercise did sharpen the view for many on the project, it did not determine any particular outcome in their activity aside from dedicated participation according to an agenda that was still unfolding for them.

Some CPs were very focussed on the generation of high quality proposals that would be compelling for Government take-up. Others were sceptical of that potential, and were more interested in demonstrating a worthwhile democratic process and more generally for their efforts to be respected. Most CPs also had personal ambitions in their attendance related to learning, adventure or social opportunities. It was left intentionally ambiguous as to whether expectations for success should be ascribed to personal ambitions or to the collective endeavour. No table conversations brought this distinction to the surface, but some tended one way more than the other depending on who spoke first.

The tables that spoke of personal ambitions were more optimistic and approached the process with levity. For example, Murni in episode (episode D4) was pleased to be able to contribute to a research effort that demonstrates democratic potential. Owen and Mary (episode D4) thought they should all earn souvenir T-shirts. Many expressed the idea that they would be richer by learning how others thought about Australian politics.
Pessimistic table conversations expressed doubt that the proposals would be rigorous enough to meet public and official scrutiny. In the ‘Approaching Difference’ mini-story (A), Paul was worried about the “quality” of the proposals and Stan thought some were “100% wrong.” In the ‘Rise of Political Youth’ mini-story (B), Ed cynically mutters that their “dot-points [will] help us drive this country into the future.” Lester (episode D2) wanted all the proposals to be considered by the Government, but revealed his doubt by calling it a “pipe-dream.” While they hoped that the Australian population would come to know about their deliberation, they feared that publicity would remain poor, especially with the Victorian bushfires taking all the media airspace. The irony of these expressions is that rather than imagining what success would mean to them, they were worried about possible failure, especially as Judged by the community including the Government, who would be invited to take up the outcome.

Many CPs were intent from the start to advance particular proposals as final recommendations. When asked what success would look like, they immediately mentioned take-up of their favourite proposal. The design of the ACP created that desire by shaping the agenda around proposal generation, started during the online phase well before they reached the assembly in Canberra. This founded a process culture and instantiated historical steps around proposal generation rather than problem exploration, appreciative inquiry or future visioning. It is no wonder that there was consternation amongst some CPs when they were asked to step back from that track and broaden their inquiry for a while.

As was apparent in the ‘Evolution of a Proposal’ mini-story (C), the design of the Online Parliament and its generation of preliminary proposals for consideration by the face-to-face assembly had unintended consequences. When online team members met in Canberra, they immediately began to caucus with the goal of promoting their particular proposals. They had invested in a particular outcome, in contradiction to the egalitarian intentions of the organisers. Several postured as experts in their own right about the proposal topic, which would eventually put them at odds with the expert panel that was convened to help inform the assembly. While some CPs accepted that the proposals could be transformed through dialogue, others were intent on pulling them through in substantially their original form. So their initial project was to gain plenary endorsement rather than deliberate from the beginning on a set of worthwhile recommendations.

From a CHAT perspective, the proposals are artefacts of the activity, both created by it and a reflection of the wider context of their construction and their mediating effect on the activity. In content, the proposals were motivated by the
normative concerns that contributors believed ‘should’ occur for various reasons. So when they arrived at Canberra, the early contributors were eager to get straight into the task of getting their proposals ratified by others.

But the organisers planned the first day of the ACP to be less about proposals and more about laying the groundwork for civil and constructive deliberation. This frustrated many CPs, who wanted to move quickly to the task as they initially saw it. They were even more upset with the prospect that some of their early work would be de-constructed.

There was ambiguity about what they were starting with in their dialogue and what they should be doing with it. Should they start with the proposals as projects-in-themselves and work to justify them more fully? Or should they start with the discovery of general aspirations about democracy and from those create recommendations that flow out from them? Were they pulling up to predetermined ends, or embarking on a process in which the ends would push out of their efforts? The tension between emergent and teleological approaches can be viewed as a dialectic pair. No deliberative process can be entirely push- or pull-driven, as there would necessarily be aspects of both at work.

The upshot was that for various reasons there was a lack of understanding of and agreement about the project among the CPs when they had initially Gathered. Niemeyer & Dryzek (2007) would describe this ambiguity as a lack of meta-consensus, that there was no general agreement about how substantive agreement should be reached. They were implicitly asked to trust the organisers to shepherd them forward through the agenda.

The reticence by some to fully engage with the process is also seen in episode D2 when CPs spoke of the ACP in the third person about their hopes. Of course, they were doing what they were asked, to remove themselves from their present circumstance and imagine themselves at some future vantage point. This provided a licence to speak more as an observer than as a participant of the process. This represents a dialectic relationship between the participant and the project that could be labelled as commitment, with the dialectic pairs ‘apart from’ and ‘a part of’ the project. The act of critical reflection shifts the perspective to ‘apart from’. The ACP was assembled for the participants, not by them, so initially the CPs do not fully identify with it. Their hopes were expressed more in personal than in collective terms, indicating that at the early stage they were not yet fully ‘a part of’ the ACP activity.
Most would have understood that the ACP was an ambitious and innovative demonstration of public engagement. Several expressed views around the idea that there would be common perspectives shared and differences would be better understood. Certainly from the start they found themselves searching for and finding agreement on many ideas. Because the ease of agreement surprised them, many CPs believed at the outset that consensus would be an inevitable consequence of the process, rather than something that required the engaged commitment and hard work of participants, for example, “A lot of people are in the same boat” (Darlene, episode D2), and “Similar aims” (Esther, episode D2). Participants wanted their efforts to be rewarded and for the ACP to be judged a success in the end. But nobody thought that large differences would become apparent, nor was there any doubt that overall agreement could be reached.

Inquire

Every deliberative process is focussed by a compelling key question to be addressed in forum. Answering this question is the collaborative project. This is the reason why most deliberative process designers put great effort into getting the question just right. As a member of the research team who designed the ACP process, I can say that there was much deliberation among us about different questions. It was always going to be about challenging the way politics transpires in Australia—this was the mission of our civil society partner, newDemocracy Foundation. Several World Café exercises were run with different audiences during the planning period by newDemocracy and the organisers to evaluate the responses it could generate. The key question was shown on the initial invitation to potential participants, and considering the high response rate it must have been compelling enough.

The primary tension was to find a question that was focussed enough for the assembly to tackle in a satisfying manner, yet broad enough so that issues that might be important to participants were not bracketed out. The chosen question about how to “strengthen Australia’s political system” was very broad indeed. From a CHAT perspective, the key question is a cultural product that mediates the overall activity by providing a useful framing. In this case, there was little framing by organisers.

Another tension was in finding a question that was simply and briefly expressed, yet sufficiently specific to be clear and unambiguous. But a term such as ‘system of democracy’ carries different connotations to different people. The research
team did not think that this made much difference in this case, since it would be beneficial to attract a diversity of views on how democracy is perceived. However, it was unanticipated that many people do not distinguish the structure and procedures of government from the legislation and regulation that are generated by it. It had been hoped that the use of the word ‘system’ would point sufficiently towards the former, but many of the proposals were about the latter. Again, the CHAT perspective helps illuminate the public culture around politics, especially as shaped by the mainstream broadcast media that accepts the constitutional and institutional arrangements of government as unproblematic and reports only on policy and regulatory issues. Similarly, the operation of government is portrayed more through broadcasts of Parliamentary Question Time and doorstop interviews, rather than the deliberations of the executive caucus or committee hearings.

If the key question had been more specific, there may have been fewer applicants in response to the initial invitation to participate since many would wonder why any suggestion that change in the system of government would be warranted at all. In fact, one potential participant who attended his initial regional meeting, and who did appear to understand the design intent of the ACP, dropped out immediately thereafter because “there is nothing better than the Westminster system.” During several early table conversations at the ACP there was general agreement that Australians are fortunate to have the kind of government that they do (episodes D5, D6). This was emphasised by participants who had personal experience of living in other countries where the characteristics of government were less democratic. So this raises another dialectic tension in the kind of key question that is asked for a deliberative activity. The question should identify a challenge or aspiration that is meaningful to people, given the social and political history that brings them to that point, and the popular culture in which the activity occurs. At the same time, that history and culture can render the challenge or aspiration incomprehensible, even absurd. This is the dialectic of traditions, the co-existence of distinct and substantially incompatible world-views.

In addition to allowing some consideration about legislative and regulatory arrangements, a second mediating factor that addresses the above tensions was the extent of change that the proposals entailed. The key question invited participants to consider ways to ‘strengthen’ Australia’s political system. Rather than just use the word ‘change’, which might be off-putting to conservatives, the word ‘strengthen’ was purposefully ambiguous to invite suggestions for incremental as well as revolutionary change. It was also intended to be non-threatening to the Government and loyalists. As
Greg said, it “needs maybe some minor tinkering or reinvigoration but, on the whole, the system works” (episode D6).

The ACP assembly in Canberra was offered little time to delve into the intricacies of the proposals and a strategy for sorting them all out. By allowing the proposals initially presented from the lead-in online phase to be critiqued, the activity was made even more difficult as CPs continued to broaden the field with more and more proposals. This process design decision was taken to ensure that the 150 participants felt they had ultimate control over their process. This is a dilemma that is common to most large-scale public participation processes where options for action are prioritised. Often, the options or positions are determined prior to the assembly by the organisers who compile them after conducting surveys or focus group sessions, or with the advice of experts or stakeholders. On the other hand, the ACP organisers decided that no such pre-framing should be undertaken from an expert or researcher position. The research team was not unanimous in this design decision, as some felt that CPs were not informed well enough at the outset about the operation of government to construct reasonable proposals (Marsh & Carson, 2013). This presents a dialectic that is familiar to anybody planning a project (including doctoral research): the initial high-level work on a project will shape how the project will play out and determine its potential for success, yet at the start, one is in the weakest position due to lack of information or resources to make wise decisions about how to shape the project. In the end, the organisers decided to have faith in the CPs and see whether they could handle the inevitable complexity. The participants’ initial inquiry, then, was about exploring what mattered to them without too much judgement. With a diverse range of participants, it was inevitable that they would identify topics and needs not covered by the initial slate of proposals and raise new proposals as a result.

In the deliberative design called a ‘consensus conference’, which shares many features in common with the ACP process, the participants are offered the opportunity to request particular experts who should address them and provide information about the problem and the various options and positions. Because of the wide range of proposals in the ACP, it would have been impossible for the organisers to offer this fairly to all. This is one example of the dialectic tension in all deliberative processes of the extent to which participants influence the organisers’ agenda.

Awareness of another dialectic also rose during the Inquiry. While the agenda had begun with a list of potential proposals, which seemed straightforward enough, it became increasingly apparent that the deliberative activity had to deal with a lot of complexity. The proposals were not independent of each other, rather there were
several that were linked together, for example educational curriculum (especially for civic education) and harmonisation of regulations across states. Unfortunately, there was insufficient time for the CPs to explore these emergent linking ideas fully. Sticking to an agenda with limited time that would deliver final recommendations contradicted the emergent object of their activity to gain a better understanding of the complexities of their Inquiry.

Perhaps most importantly at the Inquiry stage, in conjunction with recognition of the complexities of the topics, was the rise across the ACP of the need for citizens to be better educated about the system of democracy. This arose in part due to the admitted lack of knowledge by the CPs themselves in identifying democratic characteristics and their frustration about not having enough time to dig deeply. But many were able to relate stories about their families, friends and others in their communities who were frustrated, misinformed or misguided about political matters. Many recognised the failings of the present educational system to prepare students for active citizenship. Proposals that dealt with educational responses began to gather support and momentum.

Unfortunately, in the various conversations about education, CPs tended to talk past each other. For example, in the 'Rise of Political Youth' mini-story (B) the object of civics education for an older CP as the inculcation of authoritative institutions was at odds with the pragmatic and active learning perspective of the younger CPs. This difference, which is an example of a fundamental societal-wide dialectic of authoritative versus experiential learning, was not explored to any depth. Furthermore, in trying to gain a common sense of a situation, "Ambiguity allows people to maintain the perception that there is agreement, when in fact, there is not" (Weick, 1995:120).

This relates to another challenge of deliberative talk. From a CHAT perspective, words and terms have a cultural and historical lineage that may be experienced in different ways by different participants. So a subjective meaning, including its scope, connotations, associations, agency and all manner of narrative references may not be shared initially. As the conversation proceeds, careful listening is required to pick up the differences in the appropriation of the words or terms in their stories and explanations. Through popular culture and a school education that tacitly promotes the existence of singular ‘objective’ definitions, most people would either discredit word usage that was different to what they had learned, or would want to shift to a single, agreeable definition. This is the folk ontology that words come first and ideas are made from them, rather than the other way around. Therefore, it is a productive exercise for deliberators
to consider the best word use to express an idea that may be shared, perhaps to learn that it is not that simple.

On Day 3 the CPs at one table deliberated about which of the words ‘patriotism’, ‘mateship’ or ‘pride’ (of country) best represented a quality exhibited in a healthy democracy (episode D6). At another table, CPs talked about whether citizens in a healthy democracy should be ‘educated’ about or merely ‘aware’ of the political system and current events. It is ironic in both of these cases that before tackling the semantic problems, they did not notice that these words did not describe characteristics of a healthy democracy, but rather consequences of it.

The characteristics of a healthy democracy were intended to amount to categories of normative expectations of Government and its relationship to its citizenry, although the word ‘category’ was never used. They were effectively categories of democratic values to be used as weighting criteria for judging which proposals should rise to the top of the ACP final recommendations. The list was generated through dialogue and collated by the Theme Team: freedom, transparency, guaranteed education for all, justice and fairness in government and inclusiveness, access for all to the political system, access to information, diverse media and active citizenship.

Several CPs did not understand how considerations about the characteristics of a healthy democracy would relate to the overall project (episode D12). For those focussing on the final output of proposals, and who did not interpret ‘characteristics’ with their value-laden intent, this discussion was taken as an eclectic exercise to stretch their dialogical muscles. One CP was upset when he came to the realisation only later that they had been working on criteria for decision-making, but the facilitator believed that this should have been taken for granted.

The exercise of exploring the characteristics of a healthy democracy was particularly useful in raising awareness of the stability/change dialectic. Most table conversations identified the need to value both sides of this coin and the emergence of this shared idea may have galvanised the ACP towards collective recommendations (episodes D5, D6, D8).

All of these characteristics are expressed from the perspective of citizens. Unmentioned were structural characteristics that political scientists tend to list when detailing democratic ideals, including separation of power across legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, barriers to absolute power such as bicameral legislatures, constitutional assignment of powers between federal and state governments, and independent electoral supervision. Power was not taken up explicitly
as a topic at any tables, but only referred to generally as a synonym for coercion or a winning position. CPs speaking about reducing Australia to two levels of government, federal and regional, spoke of the need for regulatory harmonisation and elimination of duplicate efforts, but the distinct political cultures that envelope each level was not discussed (episode D8).

For some CPs, it was difficult to turn away from proposals and talk about values. It is not surprising that some categories are the essence of some of the proposals that had earlier occupied their conversations, such as transparency with the various proposals relating to Open Government. However, some proposals such as the electoral system (mini-story C) did not fit neatly into any particular value category that they identified.

To this stage in the agenda, the CPs had not been asked to pin down meanings for democracy and its strengthening. Therefore, there is the possibility that the characteristics are properties of different sorts of goals. Moreover, meanings and values are subjective and the exercise of identifying criteria is disassociated from the project and its context. It is an attempt to objectify and universalise goals and intentions that are individually conceived, experienced and felt. In the case of the ACP, participants were invited to give names to categories that are at least as emotive and affective as they are rational, resulting in more instrumental outcomes, as indicated by categories such as ‘guaranteed education’, which look more like proposals.

Through the Inquiry, participants became more aware of the ambiguities and complexities that inhibit easy pathways to political solutions. In their discussions with each other, and in the corrections offered by the expert panel at the ACP, it became apparent that policy decision-making is difficult for those who care about their work. An example that resonated throughout the assembly was Chairman Fred Chaney’s eloquent suggestion that the decision for a competent and thoughtful politician to lead or to follow popular sentiment is not taken easily or lightly (episode D8). There are costs and benefits to both approaches and public expectations change. Most participants immediately recognised and appreciated this dilemma (although in dualist rather than dialectic terms), which I believe went a long way to helping them accept the challenges of governing.

This dialogical stage of the ACP on Day 2 and the start of Day 3 was energising for the CPs and in feedback featured as the highlight of the process for many. It helped to ameliorate the tension between those who were intent on justifying or rationalising particular proposals, or at least raise awareness amongst others of the value of stake-
free dialogue about issues, as the persistence of a few became annoying to others. With exemplary table facilitation, many CPs were able to achieve moments of conversational flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1991) when knowledge is built in a manner that can only be experienced in a small group of trusting and committed participants (episode D7).

Importantly, there was less individual positioning expressed by CPs during their Inquiry. They identified less with the electorate that was written on their name-tags and more with the ACP itself (Hartz-Karp et al, 2013). This fact alone indicates the development of a shared project of completing their task together.

By Day 3 there was also more consideration of ideas and perspectives outside of the immediate conversations. CPs would remember what others in the room had said earlier. In exploring characteristics of a healthy democracy, CPs put themselves in the shoes of the community in considering and speculating on their behaviour and actions (episode D6). The deliberative process shifted participants to a more empathetic posture in relation to the rest of the population. Deliberation opened the socio-cultural and cultural-historical windows for participants.

**Judge**

For several ACP participants, judgement began even before they arrived for the Canberra assembly. They had invested effort online with the initial set of proposals, and were determined that these were the solutions that they would propel. But when the ACP process began to unfold, it became apparent to them that it was not all so simple. Some of their initial judgements were being questioned. There were some notable changes in position due to the assembly process, for example the shift to optional preferential voting by the group that had initially promoted first-past-the-post. However, even though the number of proposals increased almost fivefold, most of the initial eleven proposals were still in the mix at the conclusion of the ACP.

Many of the other proposals did not rise in the final tally because they were introduced late in the Inquiry and were little more than place-holder titles for areas of policy development, or statements about what Government should do. Some were merely suggestions for events or legislation. There was some flippancy, for example a suggestion to run a “Policy Idol” reality television event. Without a substantive body of descriptive elaboration, many remained too ambiguous to gain high regard. This was a result of a process of inquiry that allowed for breadth but did not provide sufficient time to investigate new ideas to substantial depth.
Of course, the Inquiry did not proceed without Judgement. The transmission of text through the table notepad computers required careful negotiation of wording and often the selection of only the two or three ideas that carried the most approval that arose out of a table conversation. Occasionally, an idea expressed strongly by one CP was entered and labelled as a ‘minority view.’ These actions all involve incremental Judgement along the way.

It was inevitable that the establishment of the ACP as a demonstration of public deliberation, and its headline question of strengthening the Australian political system would lead to public deliberation being both the method and the conversational content of the assembly. A crucial juncture in the ACP occurred at the end of Day 2 when the entire assembly met in plenary in the historic House of Representatives chamber of Old Parliament House, where the official opening Gathering had been held the day before. This gathering was unscheduled because the dining hall where the table group-work took place had been double-booked by the venue management. Adapting to the situation, the organisers decided to stage a short, informal session, and began by providing more background about the ACP and their academic research into deliberative democracy. The expressed passion upset one of the Chairpersons, who believed that the organisers were explicitly promoting deliberative democracy and biasing the assembly (Carson, 2013b). Several experts on the panel also advocated the method, but it was deemed inappropriate by the Chair for the organisers to weigh into it. After an apology was given, CP after CP rose to state their enjoyment and high regard of the process, and in particular how the Chair had lived up to his responsibility to oversee the integrity of the process. In later recorded transcripts and feedback, it was clear that this unexpected event was instrumental in firming the confidence held by many CPs about the design of the ACP.

The Judgement of all CPs who spoke in response was that they were not unduly influenced by her remarks. Yet, Carson demonstrates that the expert panel and the chairpersons often advocated positions which they held personally (ibid.). However, by the time of the incident, CPs had generally grown comfortable with the process and nobody later tied their high regard for proposals for more public engagement to the demonstrated effect of the process to improve their attitudes towards it (Niemeyer, Batalha & Dryzek, 2013). The effect of deliberation itself on the CPs was that they expressed positive judgements about deliberation; this effect has generated considerable academic attention (Young, 2001; Talisse, 2005; Hendriks, 2011).

There was an unexpected consequence of the Online Parliament participants taking strategic positions during the early stages of the ACP. Because the general
approach of the ACP was appreciative and exploratory, the strategic positions were in marked contrast which was noted. The non-necessity of assertive behaviour in facilitated dialogue was Judged as a benefit already on Day 1.

Analysis of the conversational record and from an associated study of the ACP (Niemeyer, Batalha & Dryzek, 2013) leads to the conclusion that the appeal of public engagement rose through the process. The most obvious evidence is that three of the top six recommended proposals advocated for more public engagement. However, none of the CPs spoke of the inherent tension of a process that both improved their Judgement for public engagement, and opened the possibility for wider public engagement to be amongst their collective recommendations.

The official shift in the agenda from Inquiry to Judgement was directed quickly, starting on Day 3 after exploring the “characteristics of a healthy democracy.” They used a ‘priority spending’ scheme to preference the characteristics they valued the most. After voting, the top characteristics were freedom, transparency, guaranteed education for all, justice and fairness in government and inclusiveness. The effect of this vote was more to remove the other characteristics from their instrumental use towards finalising the overall Object.

The earlier exercise of Inquiry, and the tacit Judgements involved in that, proceeded organically with the aid of table facilitation. Voting, on the other hand, was applied using a technical instrument. While there was dialogue between each round of voting, the voting itself was a mechanical operation intended to transform subjective appeal to aggregate prioritisation. On the one hand, its preferencing feature did not force CPs to pick winners, and this was acknowledged favourably. But many CPs struggled to allocate their preferences, as indicated by the time it took them to complete the tasks. Whether in choosing characteristics of healthy democracy, or in choosing proposals according to those characteristics and other criteria (ease of implementation, most innovative), many had difficulty Judging items against each other. As Maxine (episode D8) said, “It’s almost, I’m like blind shopping.” Many applied a process of elimination. In later and unfortunately more important votes many CPs took less time to decide because they based their choices on affective compulsion rather than rational choice, and admitted as much.

It is notable how open Inquiry led to genuine and constructive dialogue about individual and community experiences with government. But as the ACP shifted to the Judgement phase of voting, cynicism returned. This may have also been due to participant fatigue and the tedium of performing a succession of priority voting
exercises. Nonetheless, there was a significant drop in the commitment of CPs to the process. The facilitators noticed how difficult it was to maintain the focus of CPs and reported this to the organisers during their lunchtime briefing session.

Bonito et al (2013) demonstrate that participants at the ACP reverted to less egalitarian turn taking in table group conversations about voting options. In my observations, there was substantial variation in communicative behaviour across tables and across the day as voting proceeded. The more experienced table facilitators were able to temper the recurrence of dominating participation and help those who had gone quiet. The organisers altered the afternoon agenda leading to the most important votes, allowing for more social interaction and levity to maintain group cohesion.

From a dialectic perspective, it is quite a challenge for organisers to maintain participant commitment to be ‘a part’ of the deliberative activity, and avoid the possibility of having them disengage to become ‘apart’ from it. For many participants, it takes substantial time to accept the commitment to the process, but that commitment remains fragile and can be broken rather too easily by a procedure that is perceived in a poor light. The anonymity of voting, no matter how fairly it is presented, may always have the risk of turning committed deliberators into mere instruments of the activity.

Just before the final vote about which proposals should gain the highest priority from the ACP, the participants were given a chance to talk to each other at their table about their preferences. By the end of Day 3 it was apparent to many that broadly accepted themes had emerged out of all their dialogue along the lines of public participation, education and federal/state relations. There was often agreement in conversations at tables regarding the proposals that were most important to them (episode D10). This is surprising given that at the same time the number of proposal topics had grown to over fifty. How could there have been both convergence and divergence of attention? While the contradiction would immediately raise the spectre of a dialectical relation, in this case I doubt it. Instead, I would suggest two factors. First, many of the proposals arose out of minority views and innovative alternatives to existing proposals. Therefore, right from the start, most of the new proposal topics did not gain much following. As indicated earlier, CPs did not have enough time to explore the new proposal topics. Second, and at least as importantly, there may have been an exaggerated perception of consensus. As indicated in mini-story (A), there was little encouragement given to critiquing ideas or proposals. During the informal judgement which occurred in the first two days, as table ideas were filtered down to the most salient for transmission to the Theme Team, agreement was voiced by a few CPs while others would remain silent (episodes D2, D3, D4). In the absence of veto capacity, and
tacit pressure to behave civilly, ambivalence is co-opted to agreement. From a CHAT perspective, this is a dialectic relation involving subjects and mediated civility that affects the perception of project success.

The decision by the CPs in mini-story (C), who had initially promoted first-past-the-post voting, to instead recommend optional preferential voting raises another dialectical issue. Deliberation needs to be informed, but from what sources? In the ACP there were two main sources: the participants’ own knowledge and recollections, and the expert panel who addressed them and answered questions. A problem with participant knowledge is that it may be framed in a way that privileges a particular perspective. Important details or other perspectives may not be mentioned. At worst, information may be factually incorrect, distorting the conversation especially when it is expressed with confidence. But when participants own the evidence for their judgements, this provides them with an enormous sense of empowerment. At the ACP, the expert panel, who included past-serving politicians, countered some of the prevailing concepts held by the assembly, especially in relation to attitudes about political and public service officers. They also sharply influenced the CPs who had come to the assembly in favour of reverting to first-past-the-post voting with rational arguments and advocacy of optional preferential voting. The CPs did not have access to the Internet or other resources during the assembly, and could not ‘phone a friend’. The dialectic in a deliberative process between providing authoritative advice and letting participants rely on their own collective knowledge and personal resources is a challenging balance to get right, especially when the content is about facts and evidence. In the electoral case, the experts also provided value Judgements without extensive elaboration.

An unexpected development in the final Judgement was the pattern at several tables of CPs deciding to preference some proposals in blocks because they were inter-related (episode D10, mini-story B). The design of the ACP called for distinct proposals to be drawn up, but it became apparent to many participants that they coincided. For example, to bring in a national curriculum for civics education, there had to be better legislative harmony between the states and with the federal government. While the organisers tried to keep the process simple, this is a good example of how participants in deliberative activity are able to recognise the complexities inherent in the project in conjunction with its context. The strategy to ‘block vote’ is an extension of the rules that had been given to them regarding setting their preferences.

Many participants came to the ACP believing that a consensus view had to be achieved. Even with the eleven initial proposals, there was doubt that any one could
emerge as a winner, especially with the championing that was evident early on. Then when the proposal count ballooned to over fifty, it seemed untenable for 150 of them to agree on even a few. The organisers knew that the pressure would be relieved by framing the decision-making as an aggregated prioritisation, which is typical of broad, large-scale visioning exercises. So the CPs faced the ultimate dialectic in any decision-making process between consensual and majoritarian methods. Of course, these are not mutually exclusive, as all the lead-in dialogue would have generated some common ground and instances of agreement. Perhaps most importantly, participants who did not understand or who were unfamiliar with the issues underlying certain proposals would be better able to align with others in their prioritisation. For some who had committed fully to the dialogue, the mechanical exercise of prioritisation was a let-down. In contrast, others found satisfaction in the quantitative concreteness in the voting.

**taKe**

Rather than examining the final day of the ACP only through its outputs, the dialectic perspective presents the ACP as a maturation process, having traversed through stages of Frame, Gather, Hope, Inquire, Judge and finally to the taKe. The focus of this thesis is in the meaning that is made in deliberative activity, especially the participants’ take on the activity itself. The narrative record provides two inroads into such insights: first, through what participants said and wrote about their activity; second, through their communicative actions as the activity matured.

The use of the word ‘mature’ may seem quaint. It does not mean that there should necessarily be a virtuous goal state with a set of characteristics which when matched lead to the declaration of ‘maturity’. Instead, it means to mature without that moral or teleologic imperative, just the emergence of group patterns of behaviour and shared attitudes about the process that could only arise through their inaugural experience and their endurance of the tensions in it.

During the second round of the World Café session on the first day CPs were asked to talk about what they had learned from the previous round, when they explored the characteristics of a healthy democracy (episode D5). Around the room, CPs were dumb-founded by the question. In the context, the question made little sense, and many wondered why they were being asked. Yet, in dialogue at the conclusion of the ACP and in feedback and questionnaires submitted by CPs, a majority of participants indicated without prompting that they had learned a great deal. What was the difference? It may
come down to what ‘learning’ means to people. For most, learning is about acquiring timeless facts and propositional knowledge. After four days of talking about how government and legislation work, most participants would have picked up on many truths. They also heard many stories and Judgements by other participants in different contexts to their own. The expert panel was acknowledged by many as a sometimes overwhelming source of new information. But the earlier question that demanded a reflection on the characteristics of a healthy democracy was not about facts, it was about conceptual understanding and moral Judgement. It demanded a connection between attributes of democracy and the values inherent in them. Unfortunately, abstraction was limited due to the preponderance of talk about proposals. CPs generally did not have the time and reflective capacity at that moment. The mediation through the agenda instructions and table facilitation may have been insufficient to bridge the dialectic gap to the deeper level of consideration.

As indicated earlier, ‘The rise of political youth’ mini-story (B) also portrayed different approaches to the meaning of learning. But there the distinction was between factual knowledge and the respect for it, and the pragmatic approach of experiential and collaborative learning.

Neither of these dialectic distinctions about learning was made explicit to participants through mediated intervention. ‘Learning about learning’ was not an object of the activity. Yet in their behaviour and attitude towards public engagement, as indicated by the high priority given to proposals that involved increased public engagement, many participants learned more than perhaps they realised. Almost everyone recognised how few altercations and arguments had occurred during the process. Incidents that did occur were stark in comparison, and their cause was easily identifiable in participants who exhibited strategic behaviour in advocating for specific outcomes. The majority of participants became aware of the benefits of the deliberative approach by its visible comparison to ‘politics as usual’. In feedback many told of their intention to return to their homes, communities and workplaces to promote this more civil method to political negotiation. During the final dialogue CPs suggested ideas of what they might do in the weeks and months following the ACP, and many talked enthusiastically about ways of promoting the process to others, for example through talks at service club meetings. One fellow suggested development of a dialogue ‘dinner-party’ game. Thus participants displayed their new conceptual learning through their intended actions. The shared understanding and acceptance of these suggestions demonstrates that the activity had tangibly shifted participants’ identity as potential champions of public engagement.
An important take from the proceedings involved CPs’ perception of the political culture of Canberra. The relative isolation of the ACP made them realise how displaced Canberra is from the rest of the country (D13). The ACP led many participants to deal with their cynicism about politics and politicians. The need for more public participation in legislative policy setting was identified by several as a way of connecting politics more directly to the people it serves, with communication acting in both directions. But to fully understand this, they had to come to Canberra and be effectively sequestered in deliberative activity and in their campus accommodation.

In another separate analysis of the ACP conducted by Hartz-Karp and colleagues (2013), evidence was found for the construction by deliberating participants of a collective voice and identity. The primary source of this claim is in the use of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ in statements by participants to each other and in plenary. I am less persuaded by the claim to identity than I am to collective voice, because in examples from the recorded transcripts I interpret many instances of inclusive plurality as rhetorical, more in the persuasion for group commitment than in its presumption. Nonetheless, the satisfaction that the majority of participants expressed about the process in the conversational record, feedback and questionnaires completed even a year after the ACP had concluded, indicates their willing association with the ACP, which arose because of their positive, shared experience and their perception of having found some common ground. A majority indicated that the prioritised results reflected broadly the sentiments of the whole assembly. While there remain a few cynics, including perhaps many among those who refused to submit questionnaire responses, the broad endorsement of the process as a transformative experience speaks highly of its value as a journey for those who chose to jump in with both feet and an open mind. However, a group forum for ACP participants was not sustained after the conclusion of the event, probably because there was little hope of direct Government take-up of the final recommendations. The ‘part of’ and ‘apart from’ dialectic tension continues.

I should reflexively mention that the research study of the ACP was very visible to the participants, who often mistook the tasks that provided content for the researcher’s endeavour with tasks that directly advanced their project (episode D12). This raises the question of whether research methods should be perceived to be aligned better with the object of the deliberative activity, because that is what many participants expect. This important topic is taken up in the next chapter.

The final exercise conducted by the CPs, after their recommendations had been compiled and formally presented to the Government representative, was to consider personal actions once they returned home. At every table came comments about
spreading the word about deliberative processes and their value (mini-story B: taKe). While there were a few participants who remained cynical about the ACP and the political influence it would have, most recognised it as a demonstration that could be repeated to better effect with promotion and political will. CPs promised to talk at local functions and to their state and federal Members of Parliament to describe their experience and recommend public engagement. In a survey conducted a year after the ACP, many confirmed that they had done what they had promised. They became ambassadors for deliberative democratic activity, which can surely be described as a transformative taKe-up.

Deliberative Confidence

In an earlier case study of a Citizens' Jury (Lubensky, 2007), conducted under the conventional methodology known as grounded theory, I first suggested the term ‘deliberative confidence’ to represent participants’ rising understanding and trust of a deliberative process. As with the current inquiry, I was attempting to sidestep the contentious problem of evaluating the success or legitimacy of a deliberative process by the reception of its results or in objective relation to theoretical ideals (Rowe & Frewer, 2004). The term was operationalised under observable categories of active deliberation (or not) that were gleaned from qualitative analysis of an interview of an experienced public engagement facilitator. The indicators included observations of participants

- proceeding with purpose
- requiring clarification
- exhibiting confusion
- harbouring cynicism
- judging value
- arguing with each other
- making recommendations with conviction.

Some of these indicate rising deliberative confidence, others of a lack of deliberative confidence, while a few require context for that assignment. These categories were used to evaluate the deliberation in the Citizens' Jury process in response to the expert presentations that they witnessed. The analysis showed that experts and stakeholders who presented to the jury in a facilitative rather than authoritative manner were able to gain more generous consideration of their positions. A facilitative approach by presenters tended to raise the deliberative confidence of participants.
I now re-cast ‘deliberative confidence’ in a dialectic sense under the lens of CHAT. Given that the empirical origin of the categories in the earlier study was weak with only one interview subject, I am not going to place too much store in them as a definitive set quite yet. However, the categories can easily be portrayed as actions and relations in the CHAT model, which shows that the term can be applied usefully and with similar meaning. Proceeding with purpose, for example, is an action mediated by the participants’ shared orientation towards the project. Clarification is a mediated task of making sense of the project to its participants, and confusion and cynicism are subjective relations in a cultural-historical context. Value judgement is a communicative action that is mediated by the relations between each participant and the project. Argument constitutes actions towards disparate objects. Making recommendations with conviction is mediated by the inter-subjective relation of collaborating participants and their relation to the community. Other interpretations may be possible, but the point here is that ‘deliberative confidence’ can be usefully applied as a composite term for the transformation of dialectic tensions held in deliberative activity.

In particular, a rise in ‘deliberative confidence’ can represent the maturation that occurs as deliberative activity progresses through its narrative stages of dialectic adjustment. Confidence in the activity of deliberation is held initially by the organisers in establishing the process, then by the participants through their experience, and finally when there is sufficient influence and momentum, by the community.

Several of the dialectic relations noted during each of the six stages of development of the ACP shifted as the process settled in. At the start, many communicative acts were ritualised, from the grand opening ceremony down to the facilitated turn-taking and clichéd patterns of small talk. As the process advanced, formality gave way to informality as participants felt comfortable with what they were doing. As CPs dug into their Inquiry, members of the expert panel were invited to tables to engage in explanatory conversations. During the prioritisation of proposals on Day 3, the deliberative confidence regressed somewhat, but the agenda and its timing were relaxed to help participants engage better with their task. There was more banter during the final plenary sessions. These moves demonstrate that the activity became more fluid overall with better mutual cooperation sensed on-the-fly rather than based on protocols.

The early positioning by certain individuals became muted as the Inquiry deepened. Younger and more timid CPs became more vocal, especially in asking questions of clarification or to draw attention to particular ideas. There are many examples during their Inquiry when there was little requirement for facilitators to
control conversational turn-taking, as all CPs at a table took opportunities naturally to contribute in ways that built shared knowledge. Up until they began to vote on Day 3, their conversations had shifted from a focus on themselves to a focus on the proposal issues they were addressing. Of course, much of this shift was due to the instrumental effect of agenda, but it is noteworthy nonetheless. The strategic approach of several CPs who were intent on promoting particular proposals gave way as they took interest in other proposals as well. During voting, there was increasing anxiety expressed in conversation about how the recommendations would be received by the community, including the Government. So there was a gradual shift from internal to external concerns as their project.

Most CPs acknowledged and were surprised that there were very few instances of hostility between them—some CPs did not witness any at all. One reason for this may have been that the ACP was not conducted on a ‘hot’ issue. Certainly, many people are weary of the theatrics of Parliamentary Question Time, the framing of politics around parties rather than policies, and of the grandstanding of politicians broadcast by the mainstream media. But there is no mainstream campaign under way to change the ways in which government works. The spectre of changing the basic category of government from a constitutional monarchy to a republic was hardly talked about, even though only a decade earlier it had been high on the national agenda with a referendum that ultimately failed.

The associated study of the ACP conducted by Niemeyer, Batalha & Dryzek (2013) used Q-methodology to identify the predominant political orientations (a more granular analysis than mere progressive or conservative) and take snapshots of discourse patterns of participants in these clusters through the process. To paraphrase their interpretive findings, a statistically significant set of participants tended to shift incrementally from disenfranchised and unhappy citizens to political participants more supportive of and willing to participate in a democratic system that is accepted as broadly satisfactory. This shift in orientation would be due to their raised understanding of government and its execution, but perhaps more so by their recognition of the potential of processes like the ACP to mediate the relationship between people and a responsive government. This concept of raising deliberative confidence was expressed on the final day of debriefing conversation by participants (although not using that term), and indicated in much of the feedback received from them at the close of proceedings. This finding is consistent with the conclusion that participants increased their commitment to the process as the object of their efforts became more clearly into view.
Kaptelinin (2005) wrote that “the object of activity can be defined as the ‘sense-maker’ that gives meaning to and determines values of various entities and phenomena.” Thus, the collective construction and iterative re-construction of the object of deliberative activity is a process of design, with the value of new potentials of public involvement coming into view only as participants are able to experience for themselves the assembly and its progress. Citizens realise that a project like the ACP is more than just a talk-fest, it deliberatively constructs its purpose and its potentials. The engagement process not only helps participants make sense of the content of their discussions, but injects new ways of considering them and provides the confidence for new possibilities for action.

Compared to other deliberative public engagement processes, the ACP was special. More than most, the process itself was being judged and offered as a solution. However, it is common that participants of Citizens’ Juries and other processes recommend the ongoing involvement of citizens in such activities as implementation review, monitoring and in some contexts process repetition. At the ACP, proposal generation in response to the key question of strengthening the political system was the primary object of their attention throughout. With their new experience of the public engagement process, many decided to become advocates of it. This was reflected in their promotion of proposals that related to public engagement and civic education, and in their intentions after the event to speak to their families and communities about the virtues of deliberative public engagement. I would suggest that this general shift to a more favourable respect for public engagement would occur as a result of most processes, and would be reflected in their recommendations.
6. Conclusion: Improving Deliberative Activity

“To deliberate is to learn, and learning can take place from the time problems are named through the process of implementing decisions. The power of deliberation is in constant learning through acting (David Mathews, Kettering Foundation).”

In this, the final chapter of the thesis, I respond to the research questions and suggest improvements to the activity of public deliberation that could make it more compelling to potential participants, the general public and authoritative power. In the previous chapter, which could nominally be called the ‘findings’ of the inquiry, an integrated analysis of the Australian Citizens’ Parliament was presented by taking dialectic snapshots through the six narrative stages of deliberative activity. This produced a rich set of descriptions of the activity of all project collaborators, including Citizen Parliamentarians (CPs), facilitators, process designers, the expert panel and the research team. There are changing tensions and contradictions which frame the collaborators’ relationship to and experience of deliberative activity. The concept of deliberative confidence was also introduced as a dialectic category. While some of these are positive and normal for deliberative activity, others point to deficits in the design and facilitation of the ACP.

1. How do participants experience deliberative activity?

This question has many aspects, not all of which were recognised when it was first asked. From the beginning I carried the conviction that growing public understanding of the positive experience of deliberative activity by participants will dissipate public resistance and official defensiveness towards it. This research question relates to the methodology behind the presentation of the experience of deliberative activity. During the inquiry a constructionist stance and a focus on narrative animated the deliberative activity at the ACP. The mini-stories in Chapter 4 assemble extended episodes of conversation that bring the reader into the lives of the collaborators in the moments of their communicative actions and operations. By retrospectively linking

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1 David Mathews is President and CEO of the Kettering Foundation, quoted from Facebook post 27 July 2011.
these episodes together, guided by my own experience as an observing researcher in the room with them, the social micro-history of the activity comes into view. Staging the activity of deliberation through Frame, Gather, Hope, Inquire, Judge and taKe has organised the telling of the participant’s experience, and provided meaningful intervals for analysing how the activity progressed. The staging also provided a context for the portrayal of the conversation episodes in Section D of that chapter.

The experience of deliberative activity was consistently characterised by participants themselves in non-combative and trust-building terms. It was a rare event for emotive disagreement to arise, even when time limits were pressed and fatigue had set in. On the whole, CPs either elaborated on what was said before, or asked for clarification in attempting to build emergent, shared conceptions of their relations to the issues. Only the participants with a stake in certain proposals which they had worked on during the Online Parliament spoke with stridency and an obvious intention to persuade others. But such strategic action generally declined as the ACP activity progressed. Although a few instances of difficult behaviour were noted by participants, there were no recorded instances of disrespectful talk between participants, even on occasions when contentious opinions were issued. For most CPs who had not experienced public deliberation before, the easy conviviality came as a most pleasant surprise.

Each CP arrived in Canberra as a delegate of the electoral district where they lived. Some took their constituent representation quite seriously, but this was not the design intention. Quite organically, they gradually referred to themselves less by their constituency and more by the Australian state they knew best—this was helped by topical concerns at the state rather than local level of governance. Random selection helped them form a concept of themselves collectively as a microcosm of Australia, with each bringing a particular regional or demographic perspective to the discussion. In an associated study by Felicetti and colleagues (2012), a rising Australian nationalism is reported as the ACP proceeded (see also Hartz-Karp et al, 2013). The conversational episodes selected for this inquiry do not reveal these developments conclusively. But since the ACP presented as a microcosm of the Australian population, there would be little symbolic difference between the group and the nation-at-large. Therefore, the growing social cohesion of participants at the ACP, their advocacy of more public engagement, and their proud self-references as “Citizen Parliamentarians” supports the claim that they aspire to be a part of (rather than apart from) a rising national social movement.
Near the end of the ACP, CPs were asked to generate a list of take-up actions they might follow up with later, in relation to the work of the ACP. Many CPs would speak at service group meetings, and contacted their Members of Parliament. One fellow tried to develop a board game that required deliberation to succeed. While the greater project of gaining official recognition of proposals did not eventuate (but see section 3 below), many CPs took a personal commitment to act back to their communities. They were determined to make the ACP worthwhile. There was broad support for it to be an annual event, so for CPs it may have looked like a social movement that extended well beyond their own empowered experience.

In most instances of deliberative public engagement, the project is to make recommendations towards a concrete policy. The ACP was a special case of deliberative activity because it was self-referential, in that the content included several proposals for public engagement policies. The fact that the appeal of those proposals rose during the ACP indicates that the deliberative activity was satisfying to participants overall. Had the ACP gone badly for the CPs, other types of proposals may have gained ascent.

It is not a trivial observation that the ACP project was structured with a succession of putative exercises and methods, which CPs and facilitators appreciated for at least keeping the activity moving forward. While many of the tasks were new to the CPs, most indicated through their communicative actions that they understood what was required of them. However, the relation between the sequence of tasks to the overall project was not always clear to some participants. In particular, there is no recording of any discussion about the concept of “strengthening the system of government,” except indirectly when discussing the “characteristics of a healthy government.” In the language of CHAT, they did not start with a shared concept of their object, and had difficulty developing it in their own terms.

Beyond knowing when scheduled breaks occurred, CPs generally set the agenda aside and let the proceedings unfold under the control of the organisers and the facilitators. There was concern that the growing list of proposals would make the final recommendations difficult to establish. This was resolved on Day 3 with the technology-assisted prioritisation procedure. At that time, many referred back to earlier discussions they had had at various table groups around the various proposals. Thus, CPs experienced a flow of ideas and their modification from the start of the ACP through to the voting procedure. This flow of ideas was also demonstrated empirically in the associated study by Gastil & Wilkerson (2013). This is the content for a narrative account of their deliberative activity, as captured in the mini-stories.
The word ‘consensus’ was rarely mentioned in conversation by CPs, and was specifically not demanded by the facilitators. This is consistent with the claim by lead facilitator Hartz-Karp at the ACP, that

in their practical efforts, facilitators have reframed the concept of consensus by talking instead of 'the search for common ground', incorporating the notion of the common good into a less-uniform, less-threatening collective quest to identify (and construct) areas of shared, overlapping and complementary interest (Hartz-Karp, 2007: 4).

One change that is evident through the narrative arc of the deliberative activity at the ACP is the developing commitment of participants to the project. In randomly-selected public engagement the participants already arrive with a commitment to collaborate, at least to the extent that they do not generally arrive with strategic interests. This commitment is sealed as they Gather, express their Hopes and get down to shared Inquiry. The process should then be designed to sustain the commitment to collaborate and build deliberative confidence. Applying Judgement by individual voting, as with the prioritisation exercise at the ACP, shook the deliberative confidence of some participants, so this method was less than ideal in this case.

The project of the CPs was more than just agreeing on proposals in response to the key question. It was their relation as citizens to the institution of government that became their project, which changed as their commitment to collaboration furthered their mutual respect and their recognition of the diverse situations of all Australians. For example, mini-story B portrays a sub-project of the young participants gaining recognition as future custodians of the political system and their right and duty to active citizenship even in their youth. In mini-story C the CPs who initially advocated the switch to first-past-the-post voting found new respect for the experts and politicians in recognising the better option of a nation-wide adoption of optional preferential voting. In doing so, they shifted from out-group stakeholders to constructive shareholders in the collective project, without relinquishing their individual beliefs about political matters.

One of the overall research objectives of the ACP (in its funding submission) was to investigate how well deliberative methods can “scale up” to a large forum and a national context. This was not entirely new procedurally, as organising hundreds of participants to deliberate has been done many times before (e.g. BCCAER, 2004; AmericaSpeaks\(^2\)). However, it was unprecedented logistically to bring 150 people together from across such a large country, including isolated regions. A major difference in the ACP over other large-scale processes was the expanse of the key question, which

\(^2\) www.americaspeaks.org
was vast and abstract. The ACP was not about the kind of concrete endeavours such as choosing an electoral system or deciding what to do with the property where the twin towers had stood in New York before their destruction at 9/11. Instead, they were sweeping national proposals such as harmonising state regulations and institutionalising public engagement. In the short time allowed, it was impossible to gain the necessary background information to cover the issues and to discuss them to any depth.

The face-to-face assembly in Canberra began with eleven proposals that had been raised during the Online Parliament. By the beginning of Day 3, the proposal count had risen to over fifty. So while the CPs where proceeding with their Inquiry into the initial set, they realised that there were many other important initiatives that could be embraced. In the conversation episodes prepared for this thesis, the inception of only two proposals is captured. One proposal was to allow optional voting for youth aged 14 to 18 years of age (mini-story B). The other was for the national adoption of optional preferential voting (mini-story C). While the first idea arose spontaneously out of conversation, the second was submitted by a table that did not agree with the first-past-the-post proposal. The rapid expansion of the proposal pool indicates that participants spent most of their energy in the first two days exploring the landscape of their Inquiry and their relations to it. By pushing out the boundaries of the scope that had been initially set, they were extending their sense of what should matter to their fellow Australians. A collective sense was forming of the rising complexity of their project, which disturbed many.

Nevertheless, when addressing more contained issues the conversational record shows instances when many table groups were interacting productively and advancing to agreed positions with satisfaction (e.g. mini-story B-Inquire; D7). At these moments when they are experiencing conversational ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihályi, 1991), they are making sense of each other and mutually confirming their growing understanding that expanded the shared concept that they were constructing. These are the moments that participants recall with pleasure after the project has concluded. These moments should be central to any narrative description of their collaborative experience of deliberative activity.

The situation at the ACP was complex and abstract, in that the participants were given the task of generating proposals which did not directly answer to a particular problem or challenge. In none of the proposals was a statement made along the lines of, “this proposal strengthens Australia’s system of democracy because ...” This would have made direct comparison across proposals easier and related the communicative actions of participants directly to the stated project. If a statement such as this had been asked
at the start when proposals were being generated, perhaps a different set of proposals relating more to the fundamental structure and operation of government would have emerged. Also, a set of criteria could be more concretely applied and demonstrated to underpin Judgement (Blais, Carty & Fournier, 2008: 138). In these respects the ACP does not present as a typical site for the study of deliberative activity.

While the narrative arc places Judgement after Inquiry, there was Judgement throughout the ACP as decisions were made about how to reduce twenty-minute conversations to bullet points that were transmitted via table notebook computer to the central Theme Team. There was also Judgement during the conversations that either sustained or dropped certain topical threads. In some situations facilitators were alert to the need to retain minority perspectives, some of which became proposals in their own right. In other situations, participants chose not to offer alternative insights or simply stopped talking, although fatigue may have had an effect (see episode D6). Such agreement with abstention is not addressed in deliberative theory. Urfalino (2007) suggests that such practices of reaching apparent consensus should be recognised and accepted as legitimate forms of deliberative consent with careful facilitation when the stakes are low and the process must be propelled forward. This could be an important topic for future research.

2. How do participants experience learning during deliberative activity?

In examining all the transcribed conversations in Chapter 4, the overall picture is of CPs making sense of the project and of each other as they make their individual situations public. It was rare for complete stories to be told, as time simply did not allow for it (see also Black & Lubensky, 2013). Instead, CPs would paint brief pictures in words of their perspectives as they related to the particular threads of conversation. In such episodes, CPs would reveal their understanding (or misunderstanding) of the topic and enrich it for their own benefit (i.e. thinking aloud) and for others. Even with a high level of noise in the room, CPs were observed to be listening attentively to each other. This is not a description of debate, or even of ‘giving reasons’. It is a picture of collaborative learning.

Most CPs concluded the forum claiming to have learned much. Certainly, this includes the factual information they have taken in from the experts and from each other. But more importantly, the regional diversity of ACP participants led them to
realise that government works differently in different states, and public needs vary across the country. City dwellers became aware of rural circumstances and vice versa. Younger participants learned about the concerns of the elderly and vice versa. Variations between public and private education surfaced. The need for policy settings that accommodated these differences was taken for granted as participants moved towards overall agreement.

In everyday life, participants may practise habituated ways of thinking, within existing cultures, paradigms and traditions. In deliberative activity, they explore these spaces and the variations across the country, across demographic categories. They witness many different ways of talking about situations and about propelling their ideas. The ACP demonstrated how many CPs learned new patterns of group behaviour in talking through difficult issues, especially with the help of facilitation. They learned this by doing it, as presented in the conversational episodes. For many, this is what they wanted others in their families and communities to understand afterwards, when they described their experience of the ACP. It is a pity that such retrospective oral narratives were not available for this thesis. One CP did publish a glowing narrative account of the ACP in a national magazine, concluding that social change is a desirable outcome of deliberative activity:

150 ordinary Australians have been challenged—some for the first time—to learn about and analyse our democratic traditions and institutions, to engage in and to contribute to a broad public debate, to listen and pay respect to dissenting opinions, and perhaps to bring these lessons, experiences and newfound energy back to their local communities. Not everyone will change their behaviour, but I think many will. The ripple effect of all of these efforts might not be immediately discernible, but I have faith that they will make a difference (Cruttendon, 2009: 21).

Some proponents of deliberative activity promote the “transformation” that should occur in participants who learn and accept the alternative perspectives of others. These proponents often see themselves as progressive change agents in communities that are dogged by polarised debate. However, as advocates for change, they have clearly taken a stake in the outcome and are convening public deliberation for a strategic end. This threatens the legitimate democratic credentials of the deliberative activity.

The personal transformation in participants should not be an expected part of the story of deliberative activity, as this can be misconstrued by the public as the coerced shifting of position. Even the prospect of “persuasion” in dialogue is often overstated in theoretical prescriptions of deliberation to imply a change in core beliefs. First, the evidence is weak that participants change their core beliefs. At the ACP, even when some participants were strident about particular proposals gaining assent, there was
reluctance across the room to be unduly influenced by them. I am more certain in a
claim, as demonstrated by the CPs, that participants relax their resistance to alternative
options once they learn and accept that the ramifications do not contradict their beliefs.
They also step back from the promotion of populist or “silver bullet” solutions not
because they change their beliefs about them, but because they turn out to have
unacceptable consequences. Secondly, people identify with their beliefs and generally
have little desire to expose themselves voluntarily to transformation or personal
improvement. In their common expression of “wanting to be heard,” participants Gather
more as agents rather than as subjects of change, and that power should be reinforced.

In conversations when CPs did change their minds about certain positions or
Judgements, it was in re-evaluating the relation of the issue to their prevailing values
and beliefs in light of new facts and perspectives that the change occurred. This is not a
picture of deep preference transformation, as is often reported, but of making sense of
the world and of each other in a more coherent and consistent manner. In some
episodes, it was evident that CPs were trying to articulate a sense of value or belief about
a situation for the first time. Deliberation helped them connect their compulsions
towards choice and action to their personal motivations and goals, and to gain insights
into those connections in others.

While some CPs altered their views on proposals, there is little evidence in the
conversational record that fundamental beliefs were changed regarding political
perspectives. Nevertheless, there is evidence that their regard for public engagement
was lifted and many CPs were deeply affected by the experience. Many came away
realising they had been engaged in a genuinely transformative adult learning experience
(Brookfield, 2005).

In Vygotskian terms, this is a demonstration of socially and culturally mediated
learning, which should be a normal part of life. The social activity of deliberation is the
site for internalising more coherent and civil conceptions for shared action. Therefore a
more formal arrangement like the ACP, as a collaborative project in the manner suggested
by Activity Theory, presents as a much less threatening frame for deliberative activity
that invites constructive participation with respectful learning about relevant
perspectives. The situated experience of learning in deliberative activity is re-
considered in the final section of this chapter.
3. What should the project of deliberative activity be?

During the Australian federal election campaign of 2010, Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard proposed a Citizens’ Assembly to help guide policy in response to climate change. However, in the lead-up to the election the Australian Labor Party had been inconsistent in its proposals and actions. The Prime Minister portrayed the convening of an assembly inappropriately as an instrumental method to win the public and commentators over to the necessity of putting a ‘price on carbon’, which had been met with strongly divided public opinion. Commentators and journalists lampooned the proposal, but based their arguments primarily on misunderstandings of the process, suggesting that an uneducated, politicised rabble would ultimately determine policy (Lubensky, 2010). Since an advisor to Gillard had previously headed an NGO in the United Kingdom\(^3\) that understood and promoted well-designed public engagement, it is likely that the Labor election campaign team appropriated the opportunity more strategically than had been advised. It would have been much better for the Government to first introduce an initiative to formally support public participation in a general shift towards a more deliberative democracy (Mansbridge et al, 2012). Then, within a participatory framework that would become more fully understood by the public and commentators, specific forums could be assembled to address polarised issues. But for the deliberative movement, the electoral blunder tarnished the prospect of any further proposals for a citizens’ assembly (Carson, 2011) and left deliberative practitioners in Australia despondent.

The cruel irony for the organisers and participants of the ACP is that the Citizens’ Assembly proposed by Gillard appears to have been inspired by the ACP. The proposal was for 150 participants drawn across every federal lower house electorate, unprecedented before the ACP. So the ACP did indeed have influence (Hartz-Karp, 2007; Carson & Hartz-Karp, 2005), but it was taken up poorly.

More than ever, and in Australia especially after that debacle, deliberative activity can benefit from a fresh story told at a national level. The analysis of the Australian Citizens’ Parliament in this thesis points to how that story might be told. A narrative rather than propositional concept of public deliberation could be presented. This study adds to growing calls that projecting the story of deliberative activity for external appreciation would assist in raising public confidence in it (Ferejohn, 2008: 209). It could be revealed as stages like those presented here that include Gathering to collaborate, sharing Hopes, Inquiring about what is important for everyone, making

3 Tom Bentley, formerly head of UK think-tank Demos, then policy advisor and Deputy Chief of Staff to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard.
responsible Judgements in the interest of all, and seeing to influential take-up of actions. A voter, for example, would gain an appreciation of the value of public engagement through an opportunity to empathise with the participants as if they too had been invited.

It is hoped that the public comes to accept that a legitimate microcosm of the population is diligently attending to the full range of public interests in recommending public policy. This was also affirmed in a study of public confidence in the British Columbia Citizens’ Assembly for Electoral Reform (see Cutler et al, 2008). In that study, researchers also assert that many among the public, especially those who claimed knowledge in the deliberated topic, looked for evidence of the emerging content expertise of deliberating participants for confidence in their recommendation. While this was demonstrable in the limited domain and protracted process of the BCCAER, there was much less evidence of substantial content expertise rising in CPs in the limited time allowed, and specific instances can be traced to the direct advice of the expert panel. Rather than discount the deliberative activity at the ACP on these grounds, it would be useful to step back and question what the expectations of deliberating participants should be, and whether other features besides the technical expertise of participants can bolster public confidence in deliberative activity. Participants should be asked to do more than just replicate the prescriptions of experts. They should be making judgements about what the experts recommend, especially when there are multiple, disparate claims. What resources can typical citizens add to public policy decision-making that experts and stakeholders may lack?

The deliberative challenge for participants is in comparing the value or importance of disparate ideas, which may refer to private, community or administrative interests. But before that can be achieved, individuals need to share the criteria that they will apply in their evaluation of options. Relevant conflicts and differences have to be explored through protracted and concerted dialogue. During table conversations at the ACP assembly, such intense dialogue only occurred when individuals expressed extreme views (such as vilifying refugees). It was a rare occurrence that contrasting nuances of participants’ conceptions of democracy were acknowledged. The construction of the two main attributes of a healthy democracy went too quickly, and the manner in which they could weigh the proposals went largely undisclosed.

I now advance the suggestion that the project of deliberating participants should be more about exploring the normative aspects of policy options than about becoming surrogate experts on policy detail. Ideally, participants should be involved in the protracted development of policy options in co-operation and partnership with
experts from the start. It should be a requirement that participants gain working concepts of the available options. But when only short-term engagement is possible due to budget or logistical constraints, then the object of deliberative activity should be normative evaluation and the determination of possible unacceptable consequences of a range of options recommended by expertise. The Citizen’s Initiative Review in Oregon does perform in this manner, identifying the pros and cons of each referendum ballot (Gastil & Richards, 2012). Several scholars are moving towards this more courageous form of public deliberation:

Unless conflict is structured into the deliberation, therefore, a deliberative group may well try to avoid difficult trade-offs altogether, preferring to find a consensus on easily available common ground ... In deliberation, it is certainly possible to clarify conflict at the same time that one forges common understandings and even common interests (Karpowitz & Mansbridge, 2005: 8).

In this thesis I have been edging towards a recommendation that deliberative activity should facilitate more than is offered by Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Even by its name, AI feeds the perception by much of the public and authority that public participation processes are not politically serious or relevant. The strength of AI is that it avoids the emotional traps of dwelling on existing constructions of 'the problem'. But AI presumes a unitary and coherent community that can be improved. For organisational change issues, processes that draw on AI work very well. However, for intransigent issues beyond organisational boundaries, it is the disunity of communities and cultures which feeds disagreement due to their conflicting motivations. Everyone may be aiming for social happiness but that means different things to different people. AI does not facilitate the means to explore those differences to expand tolerance and co-existence as a worthwhile end in itself. AI may sidestep the problem, but it is still aimed at an objective solution.

I am not alone in questioning the application of appreciative approaches to deliberation. Associated research conducted at ANU (Batalha et al, 2012) is suggesting that an appreciative framing of the activity at the ACP hindered critical dialogue about the state of Australian democracy, and led at least in part to positively-biased results and an overly optimistic evaluation of the process. They also put more empirical conviction in the group identity formation of the CPs as a national microcosm. While that research proceeds in an empirical framework that is more concerned with epistemic grounds for deliberative progress than the normative concerns that I entertain in this thesis, I agree with their conclusion that there should be more attention to affective aspects of deliberative norms in the design of a project.
A more salient story about public deliberation can be presented if we acknowledge and show some of the emotive aspects of dialogue, which help bring to the surface the repressed or forgotten cultural and historical antecedents to the activity without necessarily dragging it down. Facilitators are skilled in helping participants learn constructively from emotional storytelling, for example, and can shift the dialogue forward quickly.

The risk in designing the exploration of difference into deliberative activity is that aggressive emotion may take hold. Fortunately it has been demonstrated repeatedly, as with the ACP, that participants gather with a positive outlook and a willingness to tackle difficult issues in a positive and constructive manner. When the situation becomes too hot, skilled facilitation is able to resolve conflict and shift the dialogue forward.

There is also the risk that facts are received selectively or in a manner styled or biased to a particular perspective, leading participants to more polarised attitudes. Participants should be made aware of this tendency, and accept the facilitative move to direct participants to extend their range of attention to alternative facts and to be curious about all perspectives. Facilitators of deliberative processes are ready to help participants in this manner, as illustrated in mini-story A, but it must be done carefully so as not to stifle participants who hold strong beliefs.

The online phase that preceded the face-to-face gathering of the ACP could have provided an opportunity for participants to explore more deeply the meaning of democracy and their expectations of a government. The purpose would not be to coercively alter their beliefs, but for participants to appreciate that others come to their understandings in quite different ways, using different vocabularies under different ethical frameworks. Moderation might be necessary to encourage participants to consider minority standpoints. Some participants might believe they know what is “good for us,” not realising that goodness means different things to different folks and a unanimous “public will” is a chimera. The challenge for government to form unitary policy in the face of such diversity becomes apparent. Participants might also not realise that issues can be framed in the media or by stakeholders in ways that constrain consideration and judgement (Simon & Xenos, 2000). They might not recognise the complexity of rhetoric. So some moderated exercises might be useful to help participants apply logic and learn to deliberate more effectively. They could also approach meta-consensus: a growing understanding about the conditions around which a deliberative agreement could be forged (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2007). That may appear overly academic for a citizen forum, but in dialogue it can follow from straightforward
facilitated strategic questions (Peavey, 1993) directed at participants in the context of the overall remit, such as “what’s important to you?”,”what do you care about?”,”how do our needs compare?” and “how should minority interests be treated?” amongst many other critical-thinking queries that invite thinking-aloud of relations that may not have been articulated well previously. This would be an open-ended rather than goal-centred exploration, not about decision-making but rather about laying out a tolerant and respectful conversational landscape on which subsequent decision-making could proceed more easily. Strategic questions should not be directed at any particular kind of action or change, but should challenge tacit acceptance about how concepts and commitments are constructed.

It would take considerable time for participants to name and categorise the relevant moral dimensions that would construct the evaluative criteria necessary for the ensuing face-to-face assembly (Button & Mattson, 1999). No consensus agreement is required about the criteria, as individual participants can accept and adapt them as they wish. The categories would help characterise the reception by the public of the policy options from which the assembly makes its recommendation. Importantly, they would help to identify the unintended consequences (e.g. victims) of certain policy options.

Other scholars, including Dryzek and Niemeyer, are also in favour of focussing deliberative attention on the moral dimensions of a contested issue, and what it would take to generate policy that better accommodates a diversity of positions:

Normative meta-consensus implies reciprocal understanding and recognition of the legitimacy of the values held by other participants in political interaction … normative meta-consensus not only promotes the ability of different groups in a plural society to coexist in civility and recognize their joint membership of a democratic polity, but also the likelihood that they will engage in a creative search for outcomes that respect the basic values of all parties, however different these values remain. Of course, this search will not necessarily prove successful, but collective choice does become more tractable (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2007: 642-643).

They warn that deliberative activity should neither expect consensus about normative concerns, nor let difference lie as inevitably intractable—a sweet spot between coercive over-specification and agonistic under-specification of normative meta-consensus should be sought, such as in third-way formulations.

Other face-to-face engagement formats such as citizens’ juries or consensus panels could also benefit from an online preamble to present evaluative criteria on which instrumental policy deliberation should be founded. The suggested alternative takes advantage of the time offered by the online phase for participants, with the help of

4 Peavey’s method of strategic questions is applied mainly in situations of activist deliberation, where there is an overt agenda for a particular kind of change.
moderation, to carefully reveal and unpack tacit values and beliefs, and also to get used to the deliberative ideals. This sets up the ensuing face-to-face meeting to quickly drill into the overall value of proposal options in a meaningful way through collaborative table work.

A protracted online phase appears well-suited to help open participants to each other’s interests and values. Participants can come and go from online dialogue as they feel comfortable, especially when the topic is emotive. They can do so from their own homes, interspersed with discussion with their families and friends. In the absence of well-developed critical thinking skills by participants, moderation may be crucial to seed the conversation, keep it on track and free of conflict. By carefully moderating the dominance of particular participant standpoints, mutually acceptable patterns of deliberative interaction can be established (Gastil & Dillard, 1999).

Facilitators perform admirably as part of a growing community of practice in deliberative settings. Their primary aims relate to maintaining a civil climate (Mansbridge et al, 2006). They are explicitly instructed not to engage in matters of content. In fact, passive facilitation is often encouraged. In this inquiry, with hindsight from an analyst’s perspective, opportunities were missed to help participants make key conceptual gains and articulate their beliefs publicly through their communicative exchanges. The mini-stories and episodes demonstrate that participants were willing to explore their differences openly, but opportunities were lost due to limited time and lack of constructive mediation. Participants often did nor realise that they were using words that meant different things to different people. Often they would talk across each other, but did not have the right question or vocabulary to link their dialogue together. Summary for the purpose of central aggregation tended to reduce and simplify issues before a full investigation of shared conceptions was complete. Whether conducted online or face-to-face, an emphasis on normative exploration in deliberation will be more demanding of facilitators, who would benefit from training to assist others to learn critical thinking skills, philosophical approaches and reflective practices. Such encouragement for active facilitation is occurring in some quarters. The design of deliberative activity should also include more in-depth exercises for the discovery of normative differences, with guidance for facilitators to encourage questions that point to some of the fundamental philosophical divides in society that are relevant to their project.

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5 For example, by practitioners who subscribe to the methods of CMM (Coordinated Management of Meaning, Pearce & Associates), see Pearce (2007).
In exploring the normative aspects of policy formation across a diverse society, the project of deliberating participants becomes the exploration of themselves and their interrelations. This was evident across all the mini-stories and episodes as participants listened intently to each other and revealed aspects of the topic of conversation from various perspectives. They identified similarities and differences across states of Australia, and of other comparisons related to their institutional affiliations, jobs, education and other life experiences. Deliberative activity provided the opportunity for participants to bravely extend their understanding beyond their local situations. Deliberators were willing to escape their insularity.

The story of deliberative activity is ironically of an ante-narrative (Boje, 2001) of participants tentatively making sense of each other and safely exploring and envisioning their experiences of life in light of various policy options. They are cautiously and sincerely acting into each other’s determined social worlds, of speaking in terms that are hoped to be understood, yet simultaneously allowing the dialogue to take unexpected turns which then shapes their future dialogue together. This dialectic constitutes an \textit{immanent development} as the activity unfolds which,

\begin{quote}
provides us with the usually unnoticed background of expectations and anticipations we arouse in each other by our responsive expressions, the spontaneous expectations and anticipations in terms of which we all ‘go on’ with each other in our everyday practical affairs (Shotter, 2006a: 22).
\end{quote}

This joint re-construction of perspectives is generally not the activity of people sitting in their lounge-rooms watching commercial current affairs television programs, reading commuter-oriented newspapers, monologuing at the local pub, listening and responding to talk-back radio, sending flaming comment posts to online media articles, marching in demonstrations, making submissions to task-forces or attending public hearings. Those are communicative actions into bleak and agonistic social worlds. Instead, public deliberation constructs a communication space where calm, stable and collaborative relations are nurtured. Through witnessing the conversational transcripts at the ACP, the cohesion and mutual understanding can be seen to emerge in various ways that manifests in the \textit{deliberative confidence} of the activity to generate a worthwhile product that most can endorse.

\footnote{Shotter (2006a: 22) refers to this dialectic as \textit{developmental continuity}.}
Deliberators as Authentic Inquirers

In recent years, both activity theorists and constructionists have been moving away from the traditional scientific approach that objectifies research and demands that researchers remain spectators to the situation under study. Several constructionist communications scholars (see Pearce, 2009) have shifted their primary attention to public engagement practice where they are fully embedded as advocates not only of deliberative activity, but also of the emerging project of the participants themselves, whatever that turns out to be. (I am not referring to the inverse case of participants recruited to advance a particular change project advocated by the convener.) Activity researchers work with organisations and groups to actively mediate their projects of relational improvement and transformation (see Engeström, 2011). For these scholars, even the term intervention betrays their rejection of the Cartesian divide between research and practice (Hosking, 2008). But these moves are antithetic to the reporting of results to academic, authoritative and popular audiences that perpetuate the traditional scientific “Ritual” (Shotter & Lannamann, 2002) of theory-critique-debate that isolates the retrospective telling from the active performance of constructionist and activity theoretic praxis (the dialectic integration of theory and practice).

It is fine enough to report on “what happened” as in this thesis. But the rendering of such a report is a mediation within a certain language game (Wittgenstein, 1953) that is inevitably tinted by an unacknowledged background. This concept underpinned the methodology of Narrative Inquiry, which encouraged researchers and their subjects to be mindful of the performative aspects of narration to discern how the context of the recollection colours the story. Consistent with the drive to a more complete disclosure, I have revealed more of myself in this thesis than is typical of the Ritual so the reader can be aware and even empathise with my perspective, and couch judgements accordingly.

This concerted push towards a highly reflexive researcher stance calls into question how subjects of study relate to the researcher and develop their identities and status in the activity under study. To date, the deliberative movement has constructed participants, as the name suggests, as part of a larger concern that is in the control of conveners, organisers and facilitators. Participant activity is managed so as to reduce difficulties in behaviour and keep them on topic to finish on time. It is no wonder the distinction between focus groups and mini-publics requires persuasive explanation. It is only through the historical connection with the concept of democratic public
participation that the word ‘participant’ carries a more autonomous connotation than does ‘research subject’. With all the best of intentions, the deliberative movement has constructed a power relation with an expert base that contradicts its devolutionary motivations. Most projects remain invited rather than insisted from the perspective of its participants (Carson, 2008).

In deliberative activity, who is doing the research? If participants can be re-framed as the authentic inquirers in the project, then quite a different construction can be given to their activity and their status as project collaborators. Process design and facilitation can now be seen more clearly as mediating the activity in the Vygotskian sense, rather than managing it. Deliberative activity can be seen as the bottom-up endeavour that democratic theorists prescribe, rather than institutionally-controlled. Research becomes a more reflexive and analytic sub-project motivated to the best interests of all concerned.

I am not suggesting that empirical research not be conducted about deliberative activity itself. But participants should be more involved in that sub-project and drive it themselves with the mediating assistance of scholars. All the arrows of activity should be aimed towards the deliberative project rather than distracting them from it.

The discursive actions of deliberating citizens, through Hope, Inquiry and Judgement, constitute their research towards their project of making sense of each other and making recommendations to authority. That appears as an analogue to the scientific Ritual of theory-critique-debate, replacing an objective determination of truth with subjective collaboration about relations. Another distinction between scientific and deliberative activity is that the former applies inductive logic towards epistemic ends, while the latter applies abductive logic towards pragmatic ends.

Table conversations at the ACP could be viewed as occurring within a collective Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This presumes that the capacity of participants to deliberate exceeds what they are able to do in the moment, on their own. They lack the resources to obtain relevant information, reflect deeply on issues of shared concern, apply philosophical or ethical language that is collectively comprehended, or mutually perceive patterns of similarity or contradiction. This was demonstrated at the ACP. But when facilitation and expertise assists participants with helpful hints or questions, they are able to move forward together in the activity, expanding their collective ZPD and thus in the Vygotskian sense, learn together.
Furthermore, the dialectic approach of analysis demonstrated at the end of each mini-story and episode in Chapter 4, and then more completely in Chapter 5, showed that tensions and contradictions become routinely visible as deliberative activity proceeds, both in the relations of the activity itself and in the content matter of conversations. Facilitators can be trained to take an activity approach and be alert to these differences and assist participants to make sense of them and to consider what to do about them. For example, at the ACP (see mini-story B) the complex contrast between education as institutional provision versus education as life-long learner-centred, collaborative endeavour could have been brought to light with the help of facilitation. This should not be seen as leading them towards a particular consensus or resolution. Facilitators should still be conventionally regarded as neutral mediators to build the conceptual cohesion of the participants. The facilitator helps connect the activity to its social and cultural contexts, and works actively in support of the particular collaborative project in which the participants are engaged.

I am not suggesting that participating citizens necessarily become transformed into activity theorists or social constructionists. However, they would be invited to apply the methods and language of these approaches towards their project. For a realist, this may be a challenge in a polarised situation dominated by epistemic claims. But this is already the case in conventional approaches to deliberative activity, where the evolving norms of deliberation request respectful recognition of others and their positions. The additional requested commitment is in the collaboration itself in the project and of their role more as empowered vanguards than subjects of the community.

In the following text, Shotter describes academic researchers’ actions, but it can equally describe the activity of public deliberation directed as research inquiry by its participants, with growing deliberative confidence:

In Aristotle’s terms, we are aiming at phronesis, a mode of ethical reasoning conducted from within a practice in which deliberation, reflection, and judgement all play a central role. Thus, beginning with a vague qualitative sense of the particular situation we are in, as we begin to explore it, step-by-step, sequentially, we come to experience more and more fragments of it with each movement of our bodies giving rise to each new fragment. If our bodies and brains are undamaged, we begin (in a way that, clearly, has not yet been well studied) to interrelate them all into a unitary (but still open) whole. Then, as further fragments accumulate, we come to experience the whole in a more detailed, more well-articulated manner, so that eventually, so to speak, we come to know our ‘way about’ within it and are thus able ‘to go on’ within it in a more confident manner (Shotter, 2012: 13).

Ultimately, a mini-public approached as a collaborative project of citizens becomes the unit of analysis, in the Vygotskian sense, for a deliberative democracy. As a microcosm of the population at large, the relevant diversity of ideological and cultural relations can be replicated. At this small scale, direct mediation can be called upon with
purpose and precision to more fruitfully assist deliberators, in co-operation with expertise, to confidently reach understanding and pragmatic agreement in their activity.

This thesis has been entitled, “Citizens Make Sense in Deliberative Activity.” As should now be apparent, this has two meanings. First, it has been demonstrated that participants expend most of their energy in deliberation making sense of their project and of each other. Secondly, the overall project of Deliberative Democracy requires a social movement that promotes more citizens to deliberate about political matters. It is this normative aspiration that I hope is advanced by this thesis.

Coda

The legacy of Barnett Pearce (2007) advises us to be mindful of the social world we are making in our communicative actions. There is a fresh story about deliberative activity as a collaborative project that can and should be told about a microcosm of people articulating their diverse cultural and social relations around intractable issues. They can shine a light on the contradictions that are inherent in that diversity, yet animate their lives around an issue. Once these relations are brought to the surface without injury, the energy behind a joint commitment to well-being can motivate the public through its mini-publics to design workable policy arrangements in co-operation with experts that respectfully reconstruct these relations. That may be a pipe-dream, but the ACP already demonstrated how easy it is to gain participant confidence in deliberative activity and find common ground.

Scholarship about deliberative democracy may have expanded beyond its initial disciplinary home in political science, especially to communications studies, yet it is still held back by an academic orthodoxy that leaves little space for constructionist research practice. I recall one of my first political science seminars when journalism was abhorred as much in academic writing as by politicians. While empirical political scholarship often starts with stories, they are given with authority and a research focus on identifying elite interviewees whose credibility is bolstered by documentary evidence. But in the past decade, scholars have demonstrated how interpretation permeates positivist approaches to political analysis in contravention of its realist claims. They recommend abandoning the pretence and embracing transparent constructionist methods in scholarly work about politics which should treat both it and the study of it as associated cultural practices (see Bevir & Rhodes, 2006).
Shifting the attitudes amongst authoritative power, both within and without academia, remains the largest challenge for the deliberative movement. This inquiry did not ask questions about power, but it has asserted that a powerful story about deliberative activity, and of concrete deliberative projects especially, needs to be told to gain public recognition and acceptance of its potential to raise us from the political quicksand in which we find ourselves stuck. I agree with the co-chair of the ACP, Fred Chaney, who expressed the hope at the close of proceedings that work like this can nudge the movement forward, and help create a new social construction of public engagement.
References


References | Lubensky


References | Lubensky


References | Lubensky


Appendices
Appendix A - ACP Agenda Outline

* Adapted from ACP Handbook (Carson & Blackadder, 2009).

Tasks prior to ACP gathering in Canberra starting:

- a) Hand in Additional Proposals Sheet (to be entered on PCs)
- b) Opinion charting
- c) Short survey

Friday (Day 1) 6th Feb 2009

Aim - Understanding what we want to achieve together at the CP

14:30 Welcome (House of Representatives Chamber)
14:50 Official address
15:10 Overview of what we have done already; what we want to achieve and how
15:20 Short presentations outlining the prioritised online proposals
15:50 Afternoon tea
16:20 Small group introductions and dialogue – what we want to achieve together (Members Dining Room)
16:50 Individual/group input to computers; changes to online proposals
17:40 Small group dialogue – how this deliberation could be different
18:10 Closing remarks
18:15 Close and distribution of day one preliminary report

Saturday (Day 2) 7th Feb 2009

Aim - Broadening our perspectives

08:30 Recap of day one and overview of day two (Members Dining Room)
08:40 World Café:
  a) When our democracy is at its best, what is it we appreciate?
  b) How can it be more like this more often?
  c) What can be learnt from this?
09:40 First panel discussion – commentary on proposals – pros, cons, gaps, issues of interest
10:10 Developing questions for panel
10:30 Morning tea
11:00 First panel responses to key themes/questions
11:35 Second panel discussion – additional options to consider
12:05 Developing questions for second panel
12:50 Lunch
13:15 Second panel responds to key themes/questions and additional creative options
14:25 Reflective conversation – overall reflection on proposals thus far
14:50 Selecting options – the issues/ideas we want to develop further
15:30 Afternoon tea
16:00 Q&A (House of Representatives Chamber)
17:30 Closing remarks
18:00 Close and distribution of day two preliminary report
**Sunday (Day 3) 8th Feb 2009**

**Aim - Determining what is most important to us**

08:30 Welcome, recap of day two and overview of day three (House of Representatives Chamber)
08:40 Small group dialogue: progress thus far
09:00 Q&A session on any ideas from the combined list of proposals
09:30 Small group deliberation – has anything been left out, needing amendment, more information? (Members Dining Room)
10:00 What do you believe should be the characteristics of a healthy political system?
10:30 Morning Tea
11:00 Third panel – responds to new ideas, amendments, further information requested
11:40 Prioritisation – selecting the top 10 from our combined list of proposals
12:10 Fishbowl – which of our proposals come to mind as best reflecting our #1 characteristic?
12:35 Prioritisation – which proposals best reflect our #1 characteristic of a healthy democracy
12:55 Lunch
13:40 Small group dialogue – which proposals come to mind as best reflecting #2 characteristic?
14:00 Prioritisation – proposals most reflecting our #2 characteristic of a healthy democracy
14:30 Prioritisation – our most innovative proposals
14:45 Small group dialogue – which proposals would be the easiest to implement
15:05 Prioritisation – our easiest to implement initiatives
15:20 Afternoon tea
15:50 Small group dialogue – which proposals would be the most important in the long term?
16:10 Prioritisation – our most important proposals in the long term
16:25 Quiet reflection / time-out
16:45 Discussion of model of final report recommendations, suggestions and changes
17:20 Eliciting citizens’ parliament volunteers to present the final report recommendations
17:25 Closing remarks
17:30 Close and distribution of day three preliminary report

**Monday (Day 4) 9th Feb 2009**

**Aim - Consolidating and delivering our recommendations**

08:30 Welcome, recap of day three and overview of day four (Members Dining Room)
08:40 Distribution of draft final recommendations report – read/clarify/amend?
08:55 Small group dialogue – highlights, lowlights, insights
09:30 Distribution of final report recommendations – explanation of any changes
09:35 Volunteer representatives practice presentation of final report recommendations
10:05 Morning tea
10:40 Welcome to guests – MPs and media (House of Representatives Chamber)
10:45 Presentation of final report to government representatives and media
11:05 Opportunity for government to respond
11:25 Thank you to guests and citizens’ parliamentarians, and depart the Assembly Chambers
11:40 Small groups – next steps: how we can move forward, keeping ‘we, the people’ at the forefront
12:10 Debrief – expectations versus reality; possible impacts; learnings about self, others, democracy
12:45 Lunch and opinion charting
14:00 Final survey
14:10 ACP performances: poems, songs
14:20 Short video of experiences of the ACP
14:35 Finals words and thank you
14:45 Close and distribution of day four report