

Democratic ideals and practices; utopian dreams or what?

School effects on political attitudes among upper secondary school students in Sweden

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Introduction

Promoting active citizenship is a common challenge in western societies, highly ranked on the Swedish political agenda and one of the core subjects in the Curriculum. Clearly, when the goal is fostering democratically minded citizens who are willing to take an active part in civic life, there is no single approach to recommend for school of today. This study shows the democratic consequences of insufficient democratic knowledge as being closely connected to negative learning experiences. Negative learning experiences are in their turn connected to the choice of study programme, general cognitive capacity, socio-economic background, ethnicity and gender. These results call for more attention to disparities among students in different study programmes, and point to the need for a continuing development and adjustment of both teaching methods and resource allocations.

Swedish upper secondary school has, according to the Curriculum, two main tasks, which are to prepare students for active working life and for active citizenship. The democratic assignment of Swedish school consists of teaching democracy and fundamental values and having a democratic organisational form that empowers students. What more, a deliberative classroom-climate is given a priority among pedagogical methods. Almost all young people participate in three year upper secondary education, either in academic or in vocational study programmes; other educational alternatives do not exist and the labour market is practically closed for persons under 18 years of age.

This paper deals with upper secondary school education and political socialisation, posing three main questions. Firstly, why are students at vocational study programmes so negative in their attitudes towards future political participation? Secondly, what ways of citizenship activities attract young persons with differing learning experiences, social background and gender? Thirdly, does the Swedish upper secondary school manage to prepare all students for active citizenship?

The analysis is based on the Swedish data on 18-year-olds of the year 2000 IEA Civic Education Study, (n=2645). Data was collected in a representative sample of 88 upper secondary schools. Student participation rate was 76 percent. The forms of citizenship activities covered are future voting in national elections, party membership, participation in legal demonstrations, participation in illegal actions like traffic blocking and voluntary social work (see table 5 in the appendix). Effects of democratic learning environment and student

participation on students' civic knowledge and political efficacy are examined across academic and vocational programmes. In the second move the effects of students' democratic competence is tested towards attitudes on different forms of citizenship activities. Students' gender, ethnicity, general cognitive capacity, political interest and parents' socioeconomic status (SES) are the main control factors.

Educational practices - the democratic task of Swedish upper secondary school

From an educational perspective, the 1990s may be characterized by both an extension of years spent in education and a broader supply of individual choice in the Swedish school system. The upper secondary school has 17 national programmes, all of which are three-year in length. All programmes provide a broad general education and eligibility to study at the university or post-secondary level.

Besides the purely educational goals, Swedish schools were given an explicit role in reproducing democratic values in the 1994 Curriculum. The National Agency for Education (Skolverket) describes it as follows:

The democratic assignment of schools is threefold. The first part of their task is to teach the student democracy and fundamental values, which is to a large degree done in conventional teaching of the school. The second part is that schools shall themselves operate democratically. (...)The third part of the democratic assignment is the responsibility of schools to foster democratic members of society able to live and function in a democratic society. This involves working with the fundamental value system, i.e. democratic values such as solidarity, equality between people and equal opportunity. In general, it can be said that these parts that make up the democratic whole contribute to the development of democratically aware children, youths and adults. The fundamental value system shall permeate all activities in schools (Skolverket).

The democratic goal of school education is well expressed even in the Curriculum: young men and women who leave upper secondary school should all have such civic knowledge that enables their future participation in the society. Obviously, there will always be differences between individuals when it comes to democratic competence and activity, but as the educational policy clearly stresses equal opportunities, the initial differences caused by social class, gender and ethnicity should deliberately be counteracted during both primary and secondary education.

The concept of equality can be interpreted both as equality in chances and equality in results. In the Swedish case the emphasis is on the former: every young person is guaranteed a

three-year secondary education, all upper secondary students take same obligatory course in social sciences (different books and teaching methods may though be used) and the structures for student participation are alike throughout all programmes. The question is whether this great investment in equal opportunities does pay of. Does it lead to more equal citizens, who are all well prepared for an active citizenship? Or does school only reproduce the existing, unequal patterns of citizen activity?

Means: democratic competence

The primary task of schools is to educate competent citizens. I use the concept *democratic competence* for discussing knowledge in political and democratic issues. In this study, democratic competence has two dimensions: *civic knowledge* and *political efficacy*. The idea behind this distinction is that *civic knowledge* refers to an objective judgement that may be based on cognitive tests or the like, while *political efficacy* refers to a subjective judgement over one's capacity to understand political issues. Although both dimensions are key concepts in political participation studies, not many researchers have focused on how these two dimensions co-operate at the individual level. The way these two dimensions relate to each other reveals that there are interesting phenomena left to explore in the domain of democratic competence. I will, however, not go further with that question, but just emphasise that a high level of civic knowledge does not necessarily lead to solid political self-esteem – and, vice versa, persons who see themselves as competent political actors do not always have a cognitive base for that feeling.

Table 1. The relation between civic knowledge and political efficacy

Political efficacy	Civic knowledge		Total
	Low	High	
Low	29	21	50
High	16	35	50
Total	44	56	100

N=2645

The assumption that one's subjective judgement of political competence is a prerequisite for political participation originates from the 1950s, first introduced in a comprehensive study on voter behaviour (Campbell et al. 1954) and then used by a number of researchers. Rosenberg found in the early 1960s that young people with low self-esteem are less interested in politics, pay less attention to political matters in the media, are less likely to discuss politics and to have much political knowledge (Rosenberg 1962; Rosenberg 1981/1992). This finding was

extended by Carmines, who examined this relationship between self-esteem and political attitudes, and controlled it on political interest. He found that among politically interested persons, those with high self-esteem were more likely to have a good knowledge about political issues and how democracy works, be less cynical and feel more politically efficacious, even when controlled for intelligence, socioeconomic status, sex and grade (Carmines 1978).

The self-efficacy theory, primarily associated with the work of Bandura (Bandura 1986; Bandura 1997) provides a general explanation for the underlying mechanism. According to the theory, people who strongly believe in their personal capabilities tend to perform better and achieve more, whereas people who doubt their capabilities avoid difficult tasks and tend to achieve less. My use of the term political efficacy is in accordance with Bandura's theory, leading to the assumption that persons with high level of political efficacy are more positive towards political participation of different kinds, compared to others.

The Curriculum points out several ways for schools to operate in order to fulfil their democratic assignment. According to these, schools should:

- use pedagogical working methods in order to increase democracy in the classroom; for example plan the education together with the pupils,
- operate as democratic organisations, allowing and promoting student participation,
- advance civic knowledge and democratic values, and
- reinforce the pupils' self-confidence as well as their willingness and ability to learn.

These tasks correspond well with the state of the art in educational research, which has shown the positive effects of deliberative pedagogical methods and participatory experiences to students' democratic knowledge and engagement. For example, student participation in school councils has been found to improve civic knowledge (Amadeo et al. 2002; Sora 2005; Torney-Purta et al. 2001; Torney et al. 1975; Verba et al. 1995). Deliberative teaching methods, which create a classroom climate where students feel that their opinions are met with respect, improve students' civic knowledge (Amadeo et al. 2002). Education in general has a positive effect on democratic knowledge and contributes to deeper understanding of the conditions under which democracy operates (Nie et al. 1996).

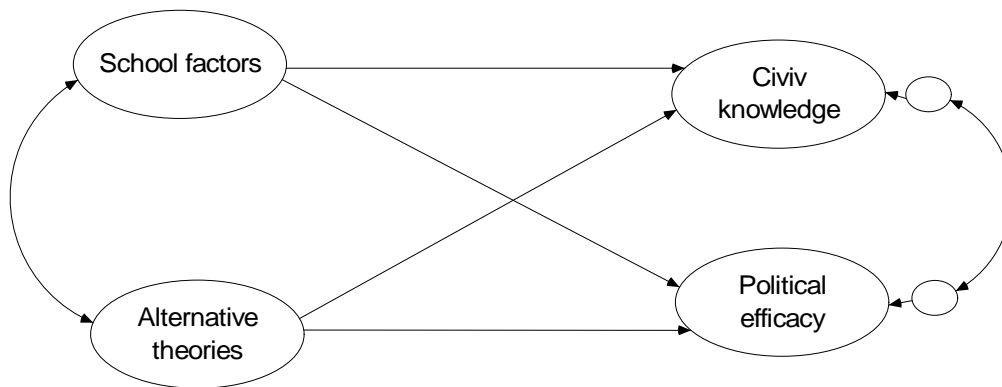
In spite of these results, it is not evident that school itself is the main determining factor for students' civic knowledge. Studies have shown that upper secondary education functions as a sorting mechanism, and that omitted factors such as a person's intelligence, parents'

social class, parental engagement in children's schooling and parents' political interest have a major effect on students' political knowledge (Luskin 1990; Niemi and Junn 1998; Teorell and Westholm 1999; Westholm et al. 1990).

Method

This paper outlines two causal links, the first being *School factors* → *Democratic competence* and the second *Democratic competence* → *Attitudes towards active citizenship*.

Figure 1. The conceptual model



The first dimension of democratic competence, civic knowledge, is measured by the year 2000 IEA Civic Education cognitive among Swedish 18-year-olds. The test consists of 43 multiple-choice items, aimed to test student knowledge about democratic institutions, principles, processes and economic literacy. A sum-variable scoring from 0 to 43 for each student's test result is used in the following analyses.¹

The second dimension of democratic competence, political efficacy, is measured using a three-item scale. A latent variable for political efficacy is constructed out of the three items, by using the factor-score method.

The political efficacy items are:

- a) I know more about politics than most people my age,
- b) I am able to understand most political issues easily,
- c) When political issues are being discussed, I usually have something to say.

¹ The test items were developed by the International Steering Committee of the IEA Civic Education Study. The first step was to conduct national case studies in order to investigate what national experts believed students should know about topics related to democratic institutions. The national case studies resulted in 140 items being developed and tested before the task of developing the final instruments on civic knowledge was completed.

In the analysis, effects of different school factors on democratic competence are tested stepwise. The plausible school mechanisms are first tested one-by-one in simple regressions models, in order to check whether the effects are significant in the first place.² Then, a structural equation model including all school factors is tested in different programme environments, in order to prove whether equal opportunities for learning democracy is provided for all students or not. In the next move the model is completed with a number of control variables for key characteristics. As earlier research clearly shows, social background, general cognitive capacity, gender, ethnicity and political interest are strongly related to civic knowledge, so there are good arguments for picking up these issues in order to validate the influence of the school factors.

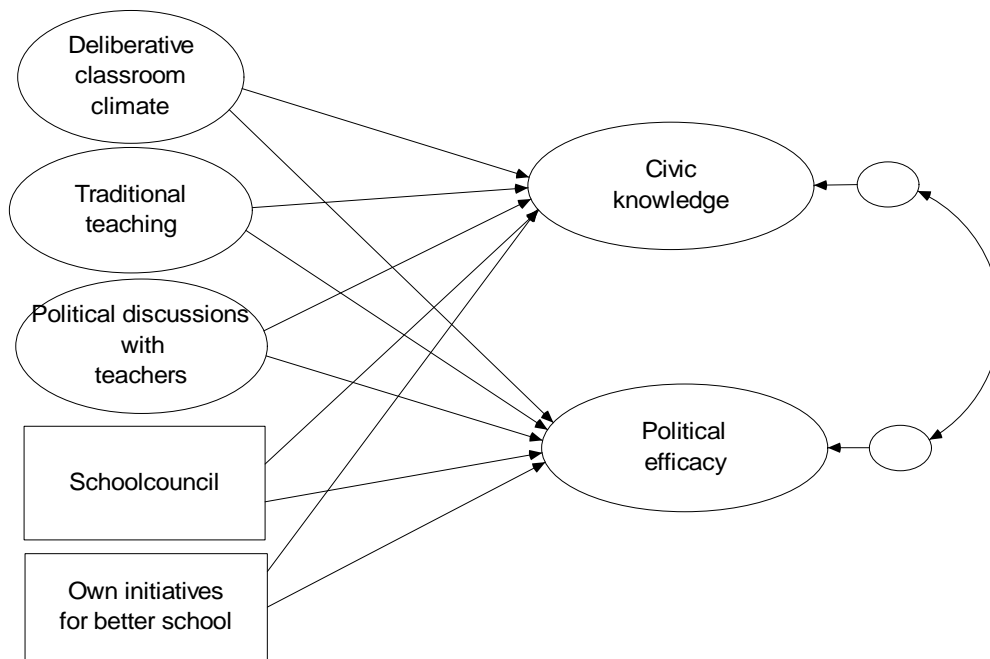
The second causal path, *Democratic competence* → *Attitudes towards active citizenship*, examines how the two dimensions of democratic competence affect attitudes towards different kinds of political activities. These analyses give the necessary framing for the last move, where a structural equation model is set to predict attitudes towards voting by including the whole battery of previously tested predictors, in programme-wise analyses.

School contributions to democratic competence

The ideal citizen, according to the Curriculum, is a responsible person who actively participates in and contributes to vocational and civic life. The task of school is to pass on values to pupils, impart knowledge and prepare them for work and participation in society (Lpf 94). In this chapter I will study whether this is done in an equivalent way in all study programmes in upper secondary school.

² All the tested school assumptions had significant regressions coefficients when tested. The results are not accounted for in this paper, but are available in an earlier conference paper on this theme (Ekman 2006).

Figure 2. School effects on democratic competence



The first test examines the relationship between learning environment and democratic competence. The indicators for learning environment are open classroom climate, traditional teaching methods and political discussions with teachers. A 12-item scale measured classroom climate. Students had a 4-point scale³ to choose their answers from, with an additional “don’t know” option. The items for open classroom climate were:

- a) Students feel free to disagree openly with their teachers about political and social issues during class.
- b) Students are encouraged to make up their own minds about issues.
- c) Teachers respect our opinions and encourage us to express them during class.
- d) Students feel free to express opinions in class even when their opinions are different from most of the other students.
- e) Teachers encourage us to discuss political or social issues about which people have different opinions.
- f) Teachers present several sides of an issue when explaining it in class.
- g) Students bring up current political events for discussion in class.

Presence of traditional teaching methods was measured by following five items:

- h) Teachers place great importance on learning facts or dates when presenting history or political events.
- i) Teachers require students to memorise dates or definitions.
- j) Memorising dates and facts is the best way to get a good grade from teachers in these classes.

³ The scale point labels were ‘never’, ‘rarely’, ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’.

- k) Teachers lecture and the students take notes.
- l) Students work on material from the textbook.

The third assumption examines whether talking politics with teachers affects democratic competence or not. Swedish school has a task to actively build platforms for political discussions, both before national elections and during the periods between elections. This is mainly done in co-operation with political parties, but even teachers should bring in topical societal issues, and in consultation with pupils, choose which issues to study further.

Talking politics with teachers is also a latent variable, summing up two measured variables:

- m) How often do you have discussions of what is happening in your national (Swedish) politics with your teachers?
- n) How often do you have discussions of what is happening in international politics with your teachers?

The next approach relates to democratic school organisation. Participatory governance is one of the prominent features of Swedish school reforms of the 1990's. The new features in participatory governance are related to democratic learning environments; meaning students' right to have an influence on working methods and content in study courses, choice of school and programmes. The traditional part of the participatory governance is measured here with two items. Participation in a student council has a single indicator:

- o) Have you participated in a student council/student government?

Taking initiatives was also measured by a single item:

- p) During the last year, have you done something to improve things in your school?

Earlier research has emphasised the importance of civic knowledge when it comes to political participation, especially voting (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Milner 2002; Verba et al. 1995). In order to evaluate how Swedish secondary school manages to prepare all students for future activities, I analyse the effects of school factors to students' civic knowledge and political efficacy. The first results are shown in Table 2 below.

Tabel 2. School effects on democratic competence. By programme. Two structural equation models calculated with Amos 4.

Standardised path-coefficients. Analysed with Amos 4/Streams 2.													
Indicators	Academic, Natural Science		Academic, Social Science		Vocational, Male dominated		Vocational, Female dominated		Vocational, Mixed		All programmes		
	Political efficacy	Civic knowl.	Political efficacy	Civic knowl.	Political efficacy	Civic knowl.	Political efficacy	Civic knowl.	Political efficacy	Civic knowl.	Political efficacy	Civic knowl.	
School council	+0.17	+0.05	+0.14	+0.06	(+0.01)	(-0.02)	(+0.13)	(+0.01)	(+0.06)	(+0.04)	+0.14	+0.04	
Own initiatives	+0.10	(+0.01)	+0.16	(+0.04)	(-0.01)	(+0.00)	(+0.17)	(+0.10)	+0.19	(+0.06)	+0.14	+0.05	
Talking politics with teachers	+0.24	(+0.04)	+0.26	+0.05	+0.27	(+0.03)	(+0.07)	(-0.11)	+0.20	(+0.06)	+0.23	(+0.02)	
Deliberative classroom climate	(-0.08)	+0.12	(-0.07)	+0.11	(-0.18)	(-0.04)	(+0.09)	+0.31	(-0.05)	+0.16	(-0.02)	+0.17	
Traditional teaching	(-0.01)	(+0.01)	(-0.03)	(-0.02)	+0.50	(+0.16)	(+0.21)	+0.12	(+0.08)	+0.13	(+0.01)	(+0.01)	
R2	.12	.51	.14	.51	.23	.51	.14	.55	.10	.53	.12	.52	
n													
covariance political efficacy & civic knowledge	+0.39		+0.35		-0.08		+0.07		+0.16		.35		
RMSEA .023, chi2=1059, df=435, p<.00 Significance level $t > +1.98$ / $t < -1.98$. Non-significant coefficients in brackets.											Rmse .054, chi2=752, df=87, p<.00		

Comment: Male-dominated vocational programmes are: construction, vehicle, energy, electricity and industry programmes. Female-dominated vocational programmes are health care and child, and recreation programmes. Mixed vocational programmes are: arts, business and administration, handicraft, hotel and restaurant, food, and natural resource programmes.

Table 2 above includes results from two separate equation models. One model includes all programmes in a total-group analysis; the other is a multiple-group analysis where separate coefficients are calculated for each programme group. By comparing these results we can discover several interesting phenomena. To start with, the goodness-of-fit index RMSEA is .054 for the total-group model, which indicates that the model has a reasonably good fit. The RMSEA-value .023 in the multiple-group analysis is though considerably better. That value indicates an excellent fit (Byrne 2001), and confirms the assumption that students in different study programmes have different experiences of their learning environment and of democratic participation in school.

There are even other details that are worth a comment. The covariance between the two dimensions of democratic competence differs between the programme groups. Students in the academic programmes show a relatively strong, positive relation between civic knowledge and their own judgement of that competence, political efficacy. That means that persons with high civic knowledge have better self-confidence in that field, compared to their peers with

lower scores in civic knowledge. The relation is weaker, but still positive in female dominated and mixed study programmes. What we should notice is the unexpected negative, connection in male-dominated vocational programmes. Among these students, persons with the lowest scores in the civic knowledge test have the strongest self-confidence in the field of politics. Exaggerating one's abilities may be a strategy for not showing the uncertainty one actually experiences (Rosenberg 1979), and it is probably what we are witnessing here. In practice it is probably these individuals, who hide their insecurity by overacting their self-confidence, that dominate the classroom environment and set the standards for the discussions. That certainly affects the political culture in general and the deliberative classroom climate in particular in a negative way.

Another observation is that school factors explain more of the variance in civic knowledge compared to political efficacy. The R^2 of the former is approximately +.5, which means that around 50 per cent of the variance in civic knowledge is explained by the model. That may be compared to only 12 per cent of the variation in political efficacy being explained by the school model. One explanation to this is that while civic knowledge varies a great deal between the programmes, political efficacy shows quite equal levels. Female-dominated vocational programmes deviate though from this trend, the level of political self-confidence is very low among these students.

The main indicator for civic knowledge is deliberative classroom climate. Participation in school democracy does not affect factual knowledge, but it has a noticeable effect on political efficacy. Participation in a school council, or taking own initiatives in order to improve school, leads to stronger self-confidence in political issues.⁴ Finally, two more comments on male-dominated vocational programmes. Students in these programmes participate in school democracy to a lower degree compared to others. What more, among these students, participation in school democracy does not positively affect their democratic competence. This observation relates to the next one, on teaching methods and the level of civic knowledge. Students in male-dominated vocational programmes have a low level of civic knowledge, as Table 6 in the appendix shows. They also witness of a learning environment that is neither deliberative nor traditional. More research is needed before we can

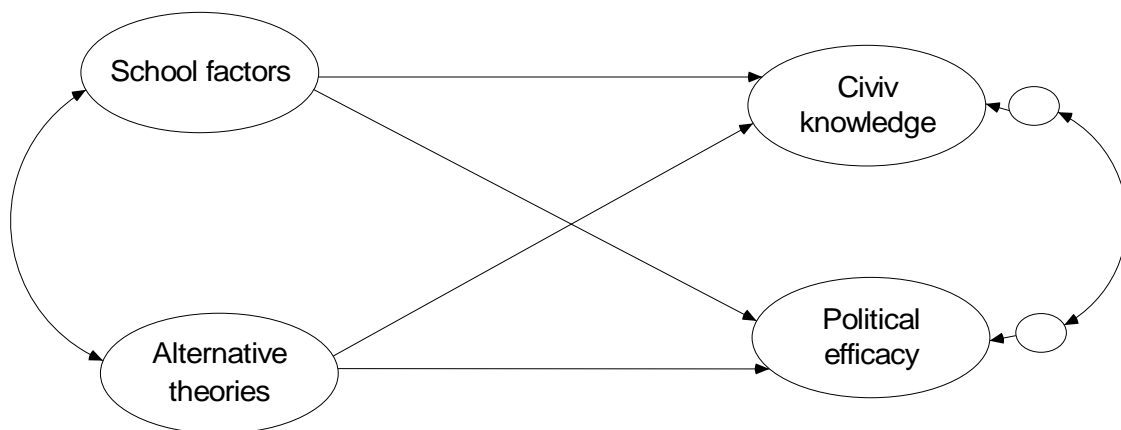
⁴ What we have traced here may in fact be a reversed or a reciprocal connection between participation and political efficacy, but so far I will be content to have established this relation. The question that I aim to answer is whether school promotes political efficacy among all students, and whether political efficacy leads to political activity.

describe their learning environment in correct terms, but until then it may be characterised as being clearly less successful compared to other programmes.

Deliberation aims for a deeper understanding of a complex reality, but it works only when the participants have insights and knowledge in the issues they discuss, and when they pay respect to each other. Where these basic assumptions are not met, deliberation does not lead to any improvement in knowledge, and that is what we observe among the male vocational students. Traditional teaching methods seem to be a better choice to improve civic knowledge among these students, at least when no other pedagogical methods are in the comparison.

All together, Swedish upper secondary school as a whole may be characterized as successful, both in terms of a democratic organisation that promotes student participation, and as an institution that prepares young people to an active societal and working life (for an international comparison, see e.g. Amadeo et al. 2002), but there are major differences between students in different study programmes. The good effects are visible in the academic programmes, but hard to find in many of the vocational. We shall keep this nuanced information in mind when taking the next move, controlling for school effects with an increased model.

Figure 3. Testing school factors by alternative theories



The model above, that includes alternative explanations besides school factors, has a slightly better fit index, RMSEA = .038, compared to the former model (.044). The amount explained variance has increased, but with only one percentage unit. The school-related coefficients are weaker in the model above, especially in estimating political efficacy. For example, the path

coefficient between talking politics with teachers and political efficacy was +.23 in the school model (Table 2), compared to +.01 in the model where school effects are controlled by alternative explanations.

Table 3. Testing school effects on democratic competence by alternative explanations.

		Standardised path-coefficients, Analysed with Amos 4/Streams 2.	
Indicator		Political efficacy	Civic knowledge
Alternative explanations	Gender (1=male)	.14	(+.02)
	Country of birth (1=Sweden)	(-.01)	+.05
	General verbal knowledge	+.07	+.24
	Associative activity	(+.01)	(-.00)
	Socio-cultural background	+.07	+.07
	Welfare level at home	(-.03)	+.19
	Political interest	+.66	+.20
	Media habits	+.04	+.05
	External efficacy	+.06	-.04
	School factors	School council	+.04
	Own initiatives	(+.01)	(-.00)
	Talking politics with teachers	(+.01)	-.05
	Deliberative classroom climate	-.05	+.14
	Traditional teaching	(-.00)	(+.00)
Covariance	political efficacy & civic knowledge		.36
R2 adj		.59	.64
n=2639			

Rmse .038, $\chi^2=2118$, $df=448$, $p<.00$

Significance level $t>+1.98$ / $t<-1.98$. Non-significant coefficients in brackets.

There are two main explanations for political efficacy, according to Table 3, and these are gender (male) and political interest. Bringing in political interest in an analysis of political participation meets often critical comments, because the two phenomena are closely related. In the model above, political efficacy is predicted by political interest, and the path coefficient is very strong, +.66, indicating a close relation. The question whether these two concepts are identical or not is certainly well-founded. After having examined the relationship between political interest and political efficacy, I found that many politically interested persons have low confidence in their own political competence (7%) or, vice versa, persons with low political interest have high political self-confidence (18%), in a total count of a four-field table.

Civic knowledge has four main indicators: general cognitive capacity – here measured by verbal skills – political interest, socioeconomic background and deliberative classroom climate. We can see that the level of civic knowledge is strongly connected to one's general cognitive capacity, here measured by a vocabulary test. Students with good results in the civic knowledge-test are more verbally oriented compared to others; alternatively good verbal ability is a prerequisite for understanding the mechanisms that characterise a democratic society. Besides, I would like to stress the importance of learning environment as an indicator for civic knowledge. Deliberative classroom climate has only lost a minor part of its explanatory power, and is one of the main indicators for civic knowledge in the model. So, irrespective of a person's interest in politics or parents' academic exams, students who experience a deliberative classroom climate have clearly a higher level of civic knowledge compared to others.⁵

That leads to the conclusion that the democratic assignment of school does make a difference. Democratic learning environment gives noticeably better results in civic knowledge, and the effect has passed a very hard control. Even efforts to promote student participation give at least some positive results. Participation in a school council supports political self-esteem. The effect is not high, but it is significant and is not depending on a person's political interest, social background or general cognitive capacity. What more, the number of students that have participated in a school council in Sweden is high in an international comparison (Amadeo et al. 2002), and the variation in participation between students in different study programmes is moderate. That leads to a conclusion that school councils support equal opportunities in school, based on the fact that the positive effects are quite evenly distributed with regard to gender, socio-economic background and general cognitive skills⁶.

The negative message is that there are programmes where only few students witness of a good learning environment during social science classes. These students, mostly from the male-dominated vocational programmes, will leave upper secondary school less well-prepared for an active citizenship compared to their peers. Their level of civic knowledge is

⁵ Translated into unstandardised coefficients, the maximum effect of deliberative classroom climate is 3 correct answers out of max. 43, when controlled to alternative explanations and those were kept constant. As the mean value was 33, and the quartiles 29, 36 and 40, an increase with 3 can be considered as important.

⁶ Participation in a school council is not correlated with gender or ethnicity, and the correlation with socio-economic background is +.1 and with general cognitive skills +.09.

insufficient, and they lack such experiences of a deeper understanding of democratic values that come with deliberation. It is mostly students in academic programmes, with a solid middle class background, that get good experiences of the democratic efforts made in school. That means that the initial differences in democratic competence increase during upper secondary school. We can't see many trends that would counteract the effects of social background, gender and ethnicity on democratic competence. Even if school is successful, to at least some degree, the effects are low compared to the initial differences among students. There is certainly more potential, but what we see in these results calls for more attention to the mechanisms leading towards exclusion that are active at the male-dominated vocational programmes.

Active citizenship

The Curriculum points out several goals for school to attain, among which '*to satisfy the preconditions for taking part in democratic decision-making processes in civic and working life*' (Lpf 94) is about future societal and political participation. When mapping causes for political passivity it is fundamental to understand *why* education matters for political participation. Studies in political behaviour have shown that the length of one's formal education is strongly related to political knowledge. Formal education is therefore even related to political participation, as knowledge facilitates the process by which citizens translate their opinions into meaningful forms of political participation (Campbell et al. 1960; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004; Nie et al. 1996; Niemi and Junn 1998).

This study, focusing on how experiences from student participation and democratic learning environment forward young people's democratic competence, develops this research field by giving a more nuanced understanding of how civic knowledge and political efficacy, seen as two dimensions of a persons democratic competence, relate to different political activities.

Tabel 4. Predicting active citizenship, total effects

Standardised path-coefficients, Analysed with Amos 4/Streams 2.			Total effects			
Indicator		Vote	Party member ship	Legal demonstra tions	Blocking traffic	Voluntary social work
Alternative explanations	Gender (1=male)	-.08	+.00	-.08	+.12	-.22
	Country of birth (1=Sweden)	+.02	-.01	-.07	-.01	-.07
	General verbal knowledge	+.10	+.03	+.04	-.02	-.09
	Associative activity	+.00	+.08	+.11	+.11	+.11
	Socio-cultural background	+.12	+.03	+.02	-.07	+.00
	Welfare level at home	+.06	-.02	+.01	-.03	-.01
	Political interest	+.23	+.32	+.36	+.08	+.20
	Media habits	+.11	+.02	+.01	+.00	+.00
	External efficacy	+.09	+.08	+.01	-.10	+.09
School factors	School council	+.01	+.02	+.01	+.01	+.00
	Own initiatives	+.00	+.05	+.06	-	+.05
	Talking politics with teachers	-.02	+.06	+.00	+.06	+.00
	Deliberative classroom climate	+.13	-.03	+.00	-.11	-.01
	Traditional teaching	-	-	-	+.07	-
Democratic competence	Political efficacy	+.21	+.49	+.16	+.14	-
	Civic knowledge	+.38	-	+.08	-.13	-.06
R2 adj		.35	.29	.17	.09	.12
n=2639		2639	2639	2639	2639	2639
RMSEA		.038	.037	.037	.037	.037

As Table 4 indicates, democratic competence is clearly related to political participation among 18-year-olds. The only exception is voluntary social activities. There are, however, large differences in how much of the variance the two predictors represent. Civic knowledge is the main predictor for future voting, and also significant concerning participation in legal demonstrations. The effect is negative when it comes to illegal actions such as *blocking traffic as a protest*, which means that persons with low level of civic knowledge are more likely to participate in illegal actions compared to others.

Young people with a solid political self-confidence are more likely to participate in all forms of citizen activities, besides voluntary social work. The strongest relation is to party membership. Together with political interest, political efficacy explains most of the variation in young Swedes' attitudes toward party membership.⁷

⁷ Approx. 9 % of the population is a member of a political party, and among youth the interest is even lower, 3 % according to Statistics Sweden (SCB).

Over 90 per cent of the students in academic programmes responded that they probably or certainly are going to vote in future national election, compared to just under half of the students at male-dominated vocational programmes.⁸ The model above shows that civic knowledge is the main determinant for the variance in all study programmes. There are major differences in civic knowledge between the programmes, and besides, knowledge is strongly correlated to deliberative teaching methods, general verbal knowledge and parents' SES.

In contrary, political efficacy does not differ between programmes. Instead, gender turns out to be a powerful predictor; young men are more self-confident concerning their political skills, compared to young women. That is also the main reason behind young women's lower interest in party activities. Participation in school democracy has a positive effect on students' political efficacy, but when controlled for political interest the effect is almost gone. A prerequisite for a participatory effect seems to be that the person has a general political interest. Deliberative teaching methods on the other side make a positive contribution to students' civic knowledge in all study programmes, except on male-dominated vocational, even when controlled for powerful alternative explanations.

Civic knowledge is a strong indicator for future voting and legal demonstrations. Political efficacy is a strong indicator for party membership, legal demonstrations, voting and blocking traffic. Low political self-confidence hinders all forms of political participation, even the basic citizen duty of voting in national elections. My conclusion is that school should pay more attention to such differences in these two dimensions of democratic competence that are caused by gender, socio-economic background and the choice of study programme. The results have shown that equal opportunities for all do not lead to equality in results, something that we have observed both when it comes to democratic competence and attitudes towards active citizenship. Students at vocational programmes are left behind, which leads to widening gaps.

Quite evidently, when the goal is fostering democratically minded citizens, there is no single approach for a school to follow. Depending on the composition of students in different programmes, the main emphasis should be given to different methods. Earlier research has revealed that working class youths – mostly boys – tend to be negative towards theoretical school subjects in upper secondary school (Hill 1998; Tallberg Broman et al. 2002). This

⁸ 70 % of the first time voters participated in 2002 national elections. There are though big differences among young voters, depending on their educational level and ethnicity. Among academically educated citizens below 30 years of age, 87 % voted, compared with 60 % among those without only compulsory school degree (SCB).

study has shown the gap between the rhetoric and the practice in the every day activities in school. Providing equal chances for education may lead to increasing differences among students, if not equality in results is also included as a goal. The results call for more attention to the differences among study programmes, and point to the need for a continuing development and adjustment of teaching methods, besides the need of strategic means in order to achieve more equality in attitudes towards active citizenship.

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Appendix

Table 5. Attitudes to political activities, by programme. Percentage answering “Certainly do and Probably do” to the question *When you are an adult, what do you expect that you will do?*

	Programme				
	Academic	Mixed vocational	Male-dominated vocational	Female-dominated vocational	All programmes
Vote in national elections	91	64	49	60	80
Join a political party	12	9	9	3	10
Participate in a non-violent protest march or rally	47	29	28	36	41
Volunteer time to help people in the community	24	25	16	43	25
Block traffic as a form of protest	6	6	19	2	7
n	1764	404	266	210	2645

Table 6. Predictors by programme. Percentage over median.

Predictors	Programme				
	Academic programmes	Mixed Vocational	Male-dominated vocational	Female-dominated vocational	All programmes
Gender (male)	45	40	83	16	46
Born in Sweden (yes)	92	92	92	90	92
General verbal knowledge	54	28	24	14	45
Associative activity	35	41	16	23	33
Socio-cultural background	62	38	32	24	52
Welfare level at home	69	62	49	53	64
Political interest	57	41	43	18	50
Media habits	54	46	35	47	50
External efficacy	45	38	25	34	41
School council (yes)	49	47	40	41	47
Own initiative(s) (yes)	40	44	33	38	40
Talking politics with teachers	44	52	49	28	45
Open classroom climate	61	47	15	57	54
Traditional teaching	49	52	33	46	47
Civic knowledge	68	25	15	12	51
Political efficacy	56	37	32	21	48
n	1764	404	266	210	2645