

# To educate democratic citizens:

An overview of the current research situation about  
democracy & education, with focus on student influence.

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# Abstract

I have in this essay looked at the current (2008) research situation in Sweden on education and democracy, with focus on student influence. My aim is **to make a brief overview of the research done about democratic education with focus on student influence.**

The essay begins with a short introduction and background before discussing the primary methods used by the researchers; these include questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and observations. I then discuss the Lpo94, democracy, education and student influence in detail. This leads me to the conclusion that there is very little said about the teachers – it is primarily the students' perspectives that are considered. Most researchers tend to assume student influence is positive for education and therefore a lot of focus has been put on to what extent the students possesses influence. Also, it is widely believed deliberative democracy is the key to improve student influence. Finally, the field is lacking an, at this moment nonexistent discussion about what concretely can and should be done to reach the goals set by Lpo94 and the school committee about student influence in the schools.

*Key words:* research overview, democracy, education, student influence, deliberation.

Words: 9132

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Problem and Aim

There is a massive amount of literature on education and there is an even greater amount of literature dealing with democracy. However, the combination of the two is not as common as one would think, especially not within political science. Instead the combined topics have been something for pedagogies and sociologists to study<sup>1</sup>.

Nonetheless, researchers within the political science departments, such as Ellen Almgren, have done research on, and different thoughts have been put forward on the topic. As participation in the elections decreases I find it important to put light on education in relation to politics as I strongly believe it is in the schools a large part of our political interest is initiated. These are broad topics and with this essay I wish to make a small and more narrow overview of the research situation today (2008). **The aim of this essay is to make a brief overview of the research done about democratic education with focus on student influence.** More concrete, how the research field in Sweden, on how to educate democratic citizens through, or with the help of, student influence look at the present moment. As someone who has been taking part of the educational system for almost 19 years now and been very dedicated, interested and participating during the majority of those years it is difficult to not let my own opinions and ideas take over in abundance. However, even though my own thoughts are very much visible I have still tried to keep the essay as objective as possible. Also, because of the broad topic and lack of space and time I have been very much forced to limit my paper, thus far from all aspects are being brought up and discussed in any length. However my goal has been to bring up as many important and varied aspects as possible to get the best possible overview of the current, 2008, research situation.

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<sup>1</sup> Englund, Thomas. (2006): Demokratifostran som forskningsobjekt ur statsvetar- och sociologperspektiv. *Utbildning och Demokrati*. Vol 15, nr 3. p.113

## 1.2 Background

There are theoretical, practical and empirical approaches to education. The different theories on education in turn are many and differ greatly from one and other. There are theories on education that takes on conservative approaches, liberal approaches and functionalist approaches.

*“Whereas liberal and conservative political theories assume that the best educational policies must be implemented, functionalist theories assume they cannot be, regardless of the results of democratic deliberations”.*<sup>2</sup> Not only have different authors and researchers different definitions of what influence is (and what it is not), which obviously creates problems when analyzing different researches, but they have also chosen diverse areas to focus on. For example some, such as John Dewey, Klas Roth and Amy Gutmann have theory developing attentions. Most of the authors that will be mentioned here have focused on education from the perspective of the students (which is also my focus throughout the essay). Eva Forsberg does however also include an investigation on influence situations in school from the perspective of the teachers in her research.<sup>3</sup> Personally I was surprised about the lack of research on the teachers and school boards aspects of democratic teaching in the Swedish school system, something I would have found interesting to see more research on. Among all those whose focus is on the perspectives of the students several differences can be found, - anything from various age groups to the students expectations of and their right to democratic education. There are questions of what the students can have influence over, what they should be able to influence, to what extent they can/should influence and in what forms it can take place.<sup>4</sup> Also the methods of investigation vary although the majority of the research has been done by interviews, observations and or with questionnaires. I will not evaluate the individual person’s research method; I will however give a brief summary of these most common methods used. Almost, if not all, of the researchers mentioned here does, even if not to the same extent, bring up the importance of deliberation in the classroom to be able to produce a healthy environment for democratic education and the possibility to create democratic citizens (see for example Klas Roth, Ellen Almgren and Christer Fritzell). Therefore I have included a section about democracy where I discuss different theories and aspects of political participation, including deliberative democracy.

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<sup>2</sup> Gutmann, Amy. (1999): *Democratic Education*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, cop. p.8-10

<sup>3</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Univ.-bibl. [distributör], (Stockholm: Elander Gotab). p.64

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.127

### 1.2.1 John Dewey

John Dewey (1859-1952) has to all the included researchers been the front figure for work and theories on democracy and education. Whether agreeing with him or not, his ideas represent the basis and serve as their starting point. He was a strong pragmatic and he is said to be the founding father of progressive education.<sup>5</sup>

He worked for what he called “*intelligent action*” where mind and action is seen as one. His focus was on the individual and its place in and part of the social life. His thinking is holistic in that he always analyzed everything as a whole and never as parts, separated from each other.<sup>6</sup> While working in Chicago he, together with his wife, started an experimental school in 1896. Dewey saw the school as an instrument for development (for the individual) and also for the future of society<sup>7</sup> and pedagogy was its tool.<sup>8</sup> I will not discuss Dewey’s theories in detail since my aim is to look at *contemporary* research<sup>9</sup> but I find it valuable to mention him briefly as his work<sup>10</sup> has been so strongly influential to the ideas and discussions of the researchers.

## 1.3 Disposition

Now my problem and aim has been introduced and also a short background of the subjects that will be discussed further. In chapter two I will then talk about the different research methods used as they all have both pros and cons that one has to keep in mind when analyzing the results from the researchers.

The methods I will discuss are questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and observations. Chapter three, first talks about the Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-time Centre (Lpo 94) and some problems with its implementation. I then go about discussing different theories on democracy in chapter 4. In chapter 5 I talk about education (in relation to democracy) and chapter 6 brings up the concept of and different problems related to student influence. Chapter 7 is my conclusion and final chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> Dewey, John.(2004): *Individ, skola och samhälle*. (4e uppl). Stockholm: Natur och Kultur. p.13, 22

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.16-18

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.19

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.24

<sup>9</sup> Not saying John Dewey’s work is still not highly relevant!

<sup>10</sup> See for example: *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916; New York: Free Press / London: Collier-Macmillan, 1944) or *Individ, Skola och Samhälle* (2004) for an anthology of his works.

## 2 Methods

What are the methods used when studying democracy in the schools? How does the researcher go about when trying to ‘measure’ student influence? One should be aware of the fact that the greater majority of the research (thus also the results) have been based on empirical data and not so much on a theoretical basis. Some have used qualitative and others quantitative methods.

There are four research methods that definitely stand out. First, most of the researchers have used questionnaires to collect data. Secondly they have made interviews, some have interviewed the teachers but the majority has focused on the individual student and some have had a more focus group type of interview (focus groups will be discussed as its own research method). Finally, some have made observations. The combination one or more of these research methods, for example questionnaires followed by observations, focus groups or interviews is not uncommon. As with all methods for collecting empirical data, these four also have both pros and cons. Sarah Delamont is critical to the educational research methods and argues that “*qualitative methods have been much more intensively used on some topics than others*”<sup>11</sup> I will not go into any greater detail and criticize or comment on the individual researcher and their work. I will however try to give a summary and a picture of the advantages and disadvantages of the four methods.

Before continuing I would like to emphasize that all research and research methods have ethical aspects that needs to be considered. However I find the discussion about different ethical aspects strongly disregarded in more or less all of the literature I have read. This is disturbing as these should never be overlooked (note that I am referring to the absence of *discussions about* the ethical problems of interviewing children etc. it might very well [hopefully] be that the researchers have had ethical aspects in mind when conducting their research but just chosen not to discuss them any further, which I still find problematic). Particularly so when dealing with children who cannot defend themselves to the same extent as adults. The only ethical aspects mentioned by the researchers deals with anonymity, but even that is not discussed to any greater extent. Also, as the researchers are forced to narrow down their research, a lot of important aspects and combinations are not taken into account.

As no method is perfect obviously the results might not be one hundred percent accurate either, and its validity and reliability can be discussed and analyzed. In some cases it is hard to make generalizations and get the broader

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<sup>11</sup> Delamont, Sara. (1996): *A woman's place in education: historical and sociological perspectives on gender and education*. Aldershot: Avebury, cop. p.5

picture while it in others is difficult to apply them to all cultures (if that is even desirable and/or possible!) As Eva Forsberg points out; “*resultaten från studierna bör betraktas som antaganden snarare än slutsatser.*”<sup>12</sup>

## 2.1 The Familiarity Problem

It is (naturally) impossible for the researcher to include all levels of education in relation to all levels of society, may it be on an individual-, community-, regional- or state bases. Sara Delamont talks about the “familiarity problem” which can easily be explained by researchers taking “*too many features of schooling for granted.*”<sup>13</sup> This suggests that the results might not be as valid as one would think. She gives four solutions to this problem of familiarity. First, we should study “*unusual classrooms in our own culture*”<sup>14</sup> Second, researchers should study “*schools and classrooms in other cultures.*”<sup>15</sup> Thirdly we should study non-educational settings and finally, which is her own focus, researchers should “*adopt gender as the main focus.*”<sup>16</sup> Whether or not gender should be the main focus or not is however, I think, up to the individual researcher to decide. Nevertheless gender is, and has during recent years become even more important as woman (and men) demand greater gender equality in society. As the feminist approaches are growing, I would not be surprised if we within a few years will find a lot greater focus on the gender aspects within educational research.

## 2.2 Questionnaires

Using questionnaires is a quantitative method that allows you to, in a fast and easy way, gather large amounts of data. This however has resulted in student influence mostly being analyzed from a quantitative perspective and not from a qualitative view which I think is just as important. It is a written communication form (i.e. non-verbal) where the person answers standardized questions with most often predetermined answer alternatives.<sup>17</sup>

Because of this, it is not *actual* student influence that is being measured but instead the students *perceived* influential situation,<sup>18</sup> which very well might be different from one and other. Hence we do not get “*tillgång till det levda* [cursive

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<sup>12</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. p.31

<sup>13</sup> Delamont, Sara. (1996): *A woman's place in education*. p.6

<sup>14</sup> She gives examples such as a men's cookery class or an industrial training unit of slow learners

<sup>15</sup> Here her example is how Islamic scholars learn in Koranic schools and universities

<sup>16</sup> Delamont, Sara. (1996): *A woman's place in education*. p.7

<sup>17</sup> Esaiasson, Peter., Gilljam, Mikael., Oscarsson, Henrik., Wängnerud, Lena. (2007): *Metodpraktikan. Konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*. (3e uppl). Stockholm: Norstedts juridik. p.258

<sup>18</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. p.47.



in original] *demokratiska livet*”<sup>19</sup> and as Michael Tholander states, it is “*hur elever gör demokrati snarare än om hur de är som demokratiska varelser*” that is of interest.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, it is a good idea to combine questionnaires with, for example, observations to see whether the perceived and the actual situation correlates with one and other or not. In other words, the use of questionnaires here gives highly subjective results.<sup>21</sup> So while questionnaires are a good way of getting a lot of data without too much of a cost or effort it can only give us that much information. They are individually oriented and they do not in any way portray the actual work of the teachers, or the processes behind student influence. There are many things to think about when making questionnaires but one of the most essential ones is the complexity of the questions. It is important that they are not too complicated in order for everyone to understand and being able to answer properly.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.3 Interviews

With interviews the researcher can catch aspects that do not appear on questionnaires or on observation tapes which makes it a very deep and thorough source of information. Thus it is primarily a qualitative research method.

Aspects, topics and so forth that would not come up on a questionnaire might be analyzed and discussed in an interview. Often it is the ideas and opinions we are after when performing interviews and it can be difficult (if even possible at all) to judge whether or not these opinions are true or false.<sup>23</sup> As interviews take place face-to-face (personal interview) the interviewer can more easily than with questionnaires control the situation.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless there are many things to consider when making interviews. These include: where the interview should take place. It is important that the person being interviewed feels totally relaxed and comfortable with the situation in order to get as good results as possible. How long time should it take?<sup>25</sup> What kind of questions should be used (the degree of structure): semi-structured or open questions? The interviewer cannot be subjective, leading or revealing in the interview and Peter Esaiasson et al. also brings up “*vetenskaplig distans*”, which of course is important for the researcher to remember.<sup>26</sup> Finally one has to keep in mind that different answers will be given depending on *who* asks the questions and *how* the questions are being asked.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tholander, Michael. (2005): Värdegrund, demokrati och inflytande ur ett elevperspektiv. *Utbildning och Demokrati*. Vol. 14, nr 3. p.23

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p.13

<sup>21</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): Elevinflytande många ansikten. p.16

<sup>22</sup> Esaiasson, Peter et. al.(2007): *Metodpraktikan*. p.266, 275

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p.291

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.265

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p.302

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p.292

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p.301

## 2.4 Focus Groups

Focus groups are planned and structured group interviews; the topic discussed in the group/s is focused on one specific theme only. Similar to direct observations, focus groups give excellent opportunities to study the social interaction between the participants.

Some of the positive aspects with focus groups are that it is relatively cheap and simple to carry out and, dissimilar to individual conversation groups, the 'ruling' role of the interviewer is less significant.<sup>28</sup> There are a few important things to keep in mind when conducting research with this method. First one should have fewer topics so that there will be a real depth in the discussions of the topics being brought up (quality instead of quantity). Second, the whole idea with focus groups is to get a good conversation going where all participants are active and partake and where different aspects of a topic are considered and discussed.<sup>29</sup> Therefore it is of great importance to think strategically when selecting participants. Too many people can easily result in not everybody getting a chance to say their thing. It can also be difficult to get all members of the group to feel comfortable with and trust each other, or as warned for in *Metodpraktikan*, subgroups may develop. With too few people on the other hand the conversation run the risk to subside.<sup>30</sup> Finally one should keep in mind that the results do not give a general answer applicable to all groups but instead one focus group can increase the understanding for different reasoning and helps to "*kartlägga förekomsten av olika förhållningssätt.*" Most commonly is it to combine focus groups with some other material or research method, for example questionnaires.<sup>31</sup>

## 2.5 Observations

Here the researcher is where the action is and performs "*uppmärksam iakttagande.*" Emphasis lies on how people behave and interact – most often in groups but also individually. Observations are often a mix between quantitative and qualitative data collection.

There is a focus on trying to find structures and processes, to make visible established behavioral patterns (within a group). Also it can be of particular interest to observe and compare what people say and what people actually do. Most observations take place in their natural environment (here in the schools) but of course there are situations where this is either not possible or not wanted. As

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<sup>28</sup> Esaiasson, Peter et. al.(2007): *Metodpraktikan*. p.361

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p.362

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p.365-366

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p.363-364

with focus groups observations are often combined with other research methods. Esaiasson et. al. states that we cannot tell what a person's intentions are with a certain action and we cannot by observing someone say anything about the reasoning behind his or her actions.<sup>32</sup> While some researchers have been silent observers, trying to be as invisible as possible, others have had a more intervening part in their observational process. Esaiasson et.al. gives six different variations of observations; active vs. passive participation (1), short vs. long contact or research period (2), none vs. a lot of manipulation of the situation (3), the extent of openness regarding the aim of the research/observation (4), artificial vs. natural environment (5) and standardized vs. open data collection (6). These are different aspects one should take into account when performing observation research.<sup>33</sup> Observation methods can be problematic when we talk about validity. How can we know what we *really* see? It can be recommended to do the observations together with someone so that there are at least two different aspects of one situation.

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<sup>32</sup> Esaiasson, Peter et. al.(2007): *Metodpraktikan*. p.344-345

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p.346

## 3 About Lpo94

### 3.1 Lpo94

The curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-time Centre from 1994 (Lpo 94) resulted in a multitude of research and inquiries being set forward. The curriculum states that *“the school has the important task of imparting, installing and forming in pupils those fundamental values on which our society is based.”*<sup>34</sup> Can we, looking at the research done, conclude that the school is fulfilling these requirements?

In the 90<sup>s</sup>, when we went from Lgr80 to Lpo94 this symbolized a decentralization process where the main responsibility of the schools shifted from the state to the communes.<sup>35</sup> Since the shift to Lpo94 a lot of research has been done on student influence and common principles and it is not only *“in itself sufficient that education imparts knowledge of fundamental democratic values. It must also be carried out using democratic working methods and prepare pupils for active participation in civic life.”*<sup>36</sup> In other words, it is not enough to *teach* about democracy in the schools, it is also necessary to *practice* democracy. As Gert Biesta states, *”skolor må ha exemplariska kurs- och läroplaner för undervisning i demokrati och medborgarskap, men om skolornas inre organisation är odemokratisk så kommer detta tveklöst ha en negativ påverkan på de studerandes attityder och värderingar gentemot demokratin.”*<sup>37</sup>

Klas Roth in his doctoral dissertation from 2001, *Democracy, Education and Citizenship*, with the subheading, towards a theory on the education of deliberative democratic citizens, presents to us his theory of Eddemcit.<sup>38</sup> The theory acknowledges the multicultural society found in many cities today by asking: *“How is it theoretically possible to educate deliberative democratic citizens in a multicultural society such as Sweden?”*<sup>39</sup> This is an aspect not considered by any of the other researchers. It is, according to Roth questionable

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<sup>34</sup> Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-time Centre. Lpo 94 p.3 [www.svenskaskolverket.se](http://www.svenskaskolverket.se) Visited 2009-02-02

<sup>35</sup> Almgren, Ellen. (2006): *Att fostra demokrater: Om skolan i demokratin och demokratin i skolan*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Univ.-bibl. [distributör], (Stockholm: Elanders Gotab), p.11

<sup>36</sup> Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-time Centre. Lpo 94 p.5

<sup>37</sup> Biesta, Gert. (2003): Demokrati: ett problem för utbildning eller ett utbildningsproblem. *Utbildning och Demokrati*. Vol. 12, nr 1. p.62

<sup>38</sup> Eddemcit = education of deliberative democratic citizens

<sup>39</sup> Roth, Klas. (2001): *Democracy, Education and Citizenship –Towards a theory on the education of deliberative democratic citizens*. Stockholm: Institute of Education Press. p.1

whether there are universal common values and “*unvarying forms of knowledge*”, as is stated in the Lpo94, that can be taught in the schools and accepted by all citizens in a multicultural democracy.<sup>40</sup> He continues and argues that “*the idea of a homogeneous curriculum does not seem consistent with a theory of multicultural education.*”<sup>41</sup> With this statement he challenges “*predominant ways of understanding and practicing democratic education in Sweden.*”<sup>42</sup>

### 3.2 Why Student Influence?

In 1995, on demand from the government, a school committee concerned with work in the schools with focus on student influence was established. In their reports it is over and over again stated how important it is to *increase* students influence in education.<sup>43</sup>

Note how there is already an expectation and understanding that students *do* (and should) influence their environment, thus the committees focus is not to *install* but to *enhance* student influence. They emphasize, as quoted in Eva Forsberg (2000), “*att skolan ska vara en demokratiserande kraft i samhället*”<sup>44</sup> and she gives three main reasons for increasing students influence in school. Because it is a human right to be able to influence your own progress and development (i.e. education) (1), because it is an obligation to educate democratic citizens (2) and because involvement and participation is crucial for learning (3).<sup>45</sup> Bernard Crick writes:

*Plainly, nearly all educational progress makes people able to contribute more to the aggregate of social wealth and skills, but it also makes them less easy to be led by the nose, less respectful of authority – whether in politics or in education – simply by invocation of its name. [...] nearly all would recognize that our world culture or style of life is less rich, that is less various and shapely, and is less strong, that is less adaptable to change and circumstances, if people of any age group believe that they should not or cannot influence authority.*<sup>46</sup>

Biesta identifies the important opinion “*att utbildningen ses som något värdefullt för samhället och därmed som tillhörande den civila sfären, snarare än något som enbart är den enskilda medborgarens privatsak.*”<sup>47</sup> Democracy

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<sup>40</sup> Roth, Klas. (2001): *Democracy, Education and Citizenship*. p.80

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p.106

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p.3

<sup>43</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. p.107

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p.108

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p.116

<sup>46</sup> Crick, Bernard. (2000): *Essays on Citizenship*. London and New York: Continuum. p.14-20

<sup>47</sup> Biesta, Gert. (2003): *Demokrati: ett problem för utbildning eller ett utbildningsproblem*. p.59

therefore needs to balance the rights of the individual and the individual's responsibility towards the community or society.<sup>48</sup> When we through education want to create democratic citizens we need to look not only at education for democracy but also through democracy. Thus a focus on the individual only is not possible as we are all part of (the democratic) society. Education is a way of preparing the child/student for a democratic life.<sup>49</sup> Amy Gutmann states that *"democratic education supplies the foundations upon which a democratic society can secure the civil and political freedoms of its adult citizens without placing their welfare or its very survival at great risk."*<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Englund, Thomas. Skolan och demokratin –på väg mot en skola för deliberativa samtal? i Jonsson, Britta., Roth, Klas. (red.) (2003): *Demokrati och lärande: om valfrihet, gemenskap och övervägande i skola och samhälle*. Lund: Studentlitteratur. p.51

<sup>49</sup> Biesta, Gert. (2003): *Demokrati: ett problem för utbildning eller ett utbildningsproblem*. p.61-62

<sup>50</sup> Gutmann, Amy. (1999): *Democratic Education*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, cop. p.289

# 4 About Democracy

## 4.1 Theories on Democracy

Since 1921 when Sweden introduced general and equal voting rights it has been considered every humans right to express himself/herself in public debate.<sup>51</sup> Theories about and characteristics of different (and better?) forms of and ways to perform and look at democracy has been put forward, scrutinized and analyzed – not seldom criticized, revised or even banned. Naturally certain theories have been more successful in some countries at some times while others have been more applicable in others, “*demokrati är således en ständigt pågående process.*”<sup>52</sup> Dewey, quoted in Biesta, argues this is the actually idea of democracy, that it needs to “*ständigt upptäckas och återupptäckas, omskapas och omformas.*”<sup>53</sup>

Often democratic theory can be divided into elitist and pluralistic alignments<sup>54</sup>, the first begin represented by Weber and Schumpeter while Dahl is foreman for the latter. The main difference between the two theories lies in the way they view the role of the citizens. For pluralists there are a broad number of interest groups, networks and organizations who take part in affecting and competing about the political influence that are not considered in the elitist view. The elitists, Thomas Englund talks about elitism as a functionalistic understanding of democracy<sup>55</sup>, advocate a distance between the governing and the ones being governed and justify this by arguing the commonalty is not capable of making educated decisions.<sup>56</sup> Some theoretical perspectives mean that it is not, as citizens and part of society, enough to vote and participate in elections. Englund’s second way of understanding democracy is through a normative perspective which is build upon the thought that the people take part in the political decision making. He argues that the normative understanding not only sees democracy as a way of governing but also as a way of living and all members of society should take part in this through different institutions, for example through education in the

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<sup>51</sup> Bengtsson, Åsa (2008). *Politiskt deltagande*. Studentlitteratur, Lund. p.11

<sup>52</sup> Tholander, Michael. (2005): *Värdegrund, demokrati och inflytande ur ett elevperspektiv. Utbildning och Demokrati*. p.25

<sup>53</sup> Dewey cited in Biesta, Gert. (2003): *Demokrati: ett problem för utbildning eller ett utbildningsproblem*. p.61

<sup>54</sup> Bengtsson, Åsa. *Politiskt deltagande*. p.46

<sup>55</sup> Englund, Thomas. *Skolan och demokratin – på väg mot en skola för deliberativa samtal?* i *Demokrati och lärande: om valfrihet, gemenskap och övervägande i skola och samhälle*. p.51

<sup>56</sup> Bengtsson, Åsa. *Politiskt deltagande*. p.49

schools.<sup>57</sup> Thus, in contrast to the functionalistic or elitist theory, it brings democracy to a higher level and ties education closer to society as a whole. To maximize democratic quality it is necessary to have citizens who engage on a broader and/or higher level.<sup>58</sup> Another researcher who like Englund talks about functionalistic respectively normative understandings of democracy is Hans Albin Larsson who writes that “*man kan tala om dels en funktionalistisk demokratiuppfattning, som ser den formellt demokratiska beslutsprocessen som tillräcklig, dels en normative demokratiuppfattning, som realiseras i den mån folket deltar i beslutsprocessen.*”<sup>59</sup>

As Dahl points out, there are certain groups that will not be fully represented in a democracy as powerful, resource-strong groups, more easily can make themselves heard and push forward their wishes and needs.<sup>60</sup> I would argue that children and teenagers almost always can be classified within this less fortunate group. Dahl also states that even though this may be the case, the core of democracy is that all people should have the same *opportunities* and *possibilities* to take part of political processes, not necessarily have equal influence in practice.<sup>61</sup> This can be related to Ludvig Beckman’s discussion about young peoples’ right to vote. Not being allowed to vote automatically means not the same opportunity to take part in political life. Increased student influence in education can enhance the interest and knowledge of politics thus, when allowed to vote at age 18, being able to partake on the same premises as the people who have been able to be participate in the political life for a longer time.

## 4.2 Political Participation

There are three main approaches to democracy: election-, participation-, and deliberative democracy. Englund puts participation and deliberate democracy as subgroups within the normative perspective. Election-democracy (we vote and elect our rulers) represents the most basic way of political participation.

Although general and equal rights to vote is a relatively new phenomenon, an increasing amount of people seem to be less interested in exercising this right,<sup>62</sup> which emphasizes the importance to increase democratic education in the schools. This to open up for discussion and make people interested in and wanting to participate in the political life surrounding and affecting them. Personally I believe it is a responsibility as a citizen and part of society to vote – it is the least one can do.”*Genom att medborgarna aktiverar sig i olika sammanhang förväntas*

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<sup>57</sup> Englund, Thomas. Skolan och demokratin. i Jonsson, Britta., Roth, Klas. (red.) (2003): *Demokrati och lärande: om valfrihet, gemenskap och övervägande i skola och samhälle*.p.51

<sup>58</sup> Bengtsson, Åsa. Politiskt deltagande. p.45

<sup>59</sup> Larsson, Hans Albin. Från illusion till konkretion. Om förutsättningarna för demokratifostran i skolan och i lärarutbildningen. i Jonsson, Britta., Roth, Klas. (red.) (2003): *Demokrati och lärande*. p.159

<sup>60</sup> Bengtsson, Åsa. Politiskt deltagande. p.50

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.50

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p.13



*de bli mer politiskt mogna, få mer och djupare kunskap om politik och samhället, ett större politiskt förtroende samt inte minst en mer utbredd känsla för det gemensamma bästa och en ökad vilja att arbeta för kollektivet.”*<sup>63</sup>

To stress active participation is extra important as there has been a strong shift towards more individualistic thinking. At some places in the world (especially in the western world), we see the individual working for his or her own survival while at some places the focus is still on the survival of the group and the community; here the individual cannot survive on its own. On this topic Alexis de Toqueville had an important theory, often referred to as the equality- and freedom paradox. He argued that “jämligheten kan leda till att ingen längre ansvarar för någon annan än sig själv[individual]. Intresset för att hjälpa varandra [community] försvinner när rättigheterna blir individuella. När var och en tänker på sin egen situation leder det därför i förlängningen till mindre frihet.”<sup>64</sup> Both Rousseau and Mill also recommended active participating forms of democracy: ”det är genom deltagande som aktiva, kunniga och moraliska medborgare fostras.”<sup>65</sup> Carol Pateman also argues for this, saying that possibilities to partake in decision-making at ones workplace (I consider school to be the child’s workplace) results in greater engagement within the traditional political institutions.<sup>66</sup> Thus again, participation for the students can (and should?) lead to more democratic (democratically involved) citizens.

### 4.3 Contradicting Results: do we really want increased student influence?

Ellen Almgren’s findings from her study on how to educate democratic citizens, where she looks at the school in the democracy and democracy in the schools, are especially interesting here. She is investigating how the schools with democratic measures manages to educate students in political knowledge and to what extent it is equally taught.<sup>67</sup>

She uses material from the IEA Civic Education Study from 1999, which included 6098 Swedish 14- and 15 years olds who got to fill in questionnaires about society, politics and democracy.<sup>68</sup> Her results indicate, surprisingly, that participation as in the shape of student influence, is affecting the students political and democratic knowledge negatively. On average the students got lower results on the test on political knowledge the more partaking in the formation of their educational situation (such as schedule, material etc.) they had had. Deliberative, or communicational, democracy in the classrooms on the other hand had positive

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<sup>63</sup> Bengtsson, Åsa. Politiskt deltagande. p.45

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p.23

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p.58

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. p.59

<sup>67</sup> Almgren, Ellen. (2006): *Att fostra demokrater*. p.9-10

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p.201

effects; the greater the openness to discussions in the classrooms the greater the political knowledge (on average) of the students.<sup>69</sup>

These results are not coinciding with the other researchers' results and a number of things to think about arises. First of all to practice (any form of) influence seems relatively easily done, as long as it is organized properly, but to practice "good" influence seems to be a lot harder to accomplish. Especially maybe so when dealing with children and young adults. What are the goals for 14- and 15 years old students? Is it obvious that they all share the same goals and that these goals are the same as the goals set by the teachers and school committee? What responsibility can we, reasonably put on the students?<sup>70</sup> Her results may also be explained partly by the fact that the theories on democracy do not have children or students as benchmarks.<sup>71</sup> Therefore we might not be able to expect, the otherwise generally believed, strong relationship between political activity (participation) and political knowledge at that young age.

Gunvor Selberg, who's studied 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 1<sup>st</sup> year secondary students 'in action', finds that the students who had greater chances to influence their situation and were given more responsibilities were also the most engaged and enthusiastic students. Selberg also has a power related focus where she argues that the only way for students to become more influential is to receive more responsibilities, which in turn is established when there is some form of power sharing between teachers and students.<sup>72</sup> This however, contradicts Almgren's results of negative political knowledge in correlation to increased influence. According to those results, it might not be desirable for the students to have too much influence on their education. When reading Selberg there were a few words that were repeated regularly and therefore 'caught my eye'. These were: motivation, activity, consequences, interests, needs, involvement and confidence. All these words symbolize how wide and complicated the question about student influence really is. There are so many different things to take into account when dealing with students rights to influential education. Different students have different needs and interests. The teacher has to create confidence in and motivation for the students to get involved and different decisions and activities they make bring different consequences to and for the students thus the final result is very much unknown.

## 4.4 Deliberative Democracy

As for deliberative democracy, which is very much related to participation democracy, its focus lies on discussion, argumentation and conversation between

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<sup>69</sup> Almgren, Ellen. (2006): *Att fostra demokrater*. p.191-198

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* p.201

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* p.198

<sup>72</sup> Selberg, Gunvor. (2001): *Främja elevers lärande genom elevinflytande*. Lund : Studentlitteratur. p.33

individuals and groups. "*Genom att ställa olika åsikter mot varandra kan man nå fram till en mer insiktsfull slutsats, byggd på ett upplyst och rationellt samtal.*"<sup>73</sup>

Decisions that spring from communication are often considered more legitimate and are also believed to enhance the communicator's tolerance, interest and knowledge of political dealings.<sup>74</sup> Although deliberative democracy with no doubt is the most favored method to educate democratic citizens it has been, as all the other forms, criticized. Especially about the idea that people, after discussion and considerations of different arguments, shall come to a conclusion that both (or more) parts can agree upon. "*Att man i pluralistiska samhällen, där olika intressen ställs mot varandra, skulle kunna komma fram till en syn på det gemensamma som alla kan omfatta har i många sammanhang betraktats som orealistiskt eftersom det ger en falsk föreställning om att demokrati är möjlig utan politisk maktkamp.*"<sup>75</sup> Klas Roth means that as it is important that the students (or children) get to deliberate as much and often as possible this can be hindered by time and opportunity to deliberate. Either due to the class getting disrupted by other lessons or students being passive as they are waiting for the teacher to introduce new subjects or organize. Furthermore, Roth argues that deliberation fails if people are shouting, refusing to talk to each other (there may very well be power-structures within the class) and "*it can also break down if people's needs, interests, motives, intentions, social, political and cultural conditions are not being recognised and reflected upon.*"<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Bengtsson, Åsa. Politiskt deltagande. p.60

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p.62

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p.61

<sup>76</sup> Roth, Klas. (2001): *Democracy, Education and Citizenship*. p.141

# 5 About Education

## 5.1 Democratic Education

Amy Gutmann is another name often referred to by almost all of the researchers, she wrote *Democratic Education* in 1987. Gutmann talks about democratic education and democratic theory and tries to develop a theory that combines the two. She argues that “*education not only sets the stage for democratic politics, it plays a central role in it.*” Herein lies a major moral problem for politics, “*who should share the authority to influence the way democratic citizens are educated?*” It is this question Gutmann tries to answer as she develops her democratic theory of education.<sup>77</sup>

Her work has been done on different educational stages throughout childhood and she writes “*childhood is a natural place to begin a discussion of education: good habits and principles are easier to install in children than in adults.*”<sup>78</sup> Thus, this would be a good argument for the significance of democratic education in schools. My first thought here is, what are good habits and principles? This can be seen from the perspective of Klas Roth, who discusses education in a multicultural society, as good values and principles may not be universal values, and also they will most likely change over time. So for what societies is she considering her theory? Although not discussing it further she does acknowledge the problem: “*an education adequate to democratic participation will vary over time as well as among democratic societies.*”<sup>79</sup> She distinguishes between a student participatory approach and a student disciplinary approach for teaching in the schools. Not only does it seem more democratic to engage in a more participatory approach but students generally become more “*independent, reflective and insightful about their education.*”<sup>80</sup> Also, a more participatory education might very well result in improved disciplinary qualities in students. Furthermore she does talk a lot about the significance of children having to learn both “*how to behave [cursive in original] in accordance with authority*” and how “*to think [cursive in original] critically about authority if they are to live up to the democratic ideal of sharing political sovereignty as citizens.*”<sup>81</sup> Gutmann is

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<sup>77</sup> Gutmann, Amy. (1999): *Democratic Education*. p.3

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p.50

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p.170

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p.90

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p.51

well aware that there is a strong need for more empirical evidence before drawing any final conclusions about in what way and how much democracy is wanted (alt. needed) in the education systems. Ellen Almgren continues on this idea and points out that *”även om nivån på politisk kunskap anses viktig för att demokratin skall fungera väl finns inget entydigt svar på frågan om hur mycket kunskaper som faktiskt krävs. När är, så att säga medborgarnas kunskaper tillräcklig?”*<sup>82</sup> Gutmann also writes a lot about morals and moral teaching, emphasizing the importance of teaching and learning morals as even though family might have the largest impact here, *“children do not leave their souls behind when they go to school.”*<sup>83</sup> The discussion of moral education is both interesting and of great importance but too large for me to go into any detail here. However, I do find it important to mention as it is part of the discussion about democratic education and closely related to student influence. Christer Fritzell also emphasizes development of socio-moral competence and does so in relation to deliberate education.<sup>84</sup> In this way Fritzell combines pedagogic and communicational acting in the process of developing democratic citizens.<sup>85</sup>

What might be Guttmann’s most interesting point in ‘Democratic Education’ is the problem she points out about *“the professional autonomy of teachers stands in tension with democratic education to the extent that teachers invoke their professional competence to deny students any influence in shaping the form or content of their own education.”*<sup>86</sup> This is one of the few comments considering the teachers’ aspects of student influence.

## 5.2 Conceptions of Education

Thomas Englund discusses differences in the educational processes and argues that these processes are changeable. He stresses the idea that education is understood and looked upon differently by different people as our aims and purposes are not the same. Therefore the educational system has a number of different choices and possibilities to consider when educating young citizens.<sup>87</sup>

He talks about a rationality where one (the student) wants to *”successivt växa in i en medborgarroll som innebär ett potentiellt deltagande i kollektiva strävanden och prioriteringar. Varje uppväxande medborgare uppfattas här som en potentiell politiker.”*<sup>88</sup> Englund gives three different conceptions of education to which the rational idea can be applied.

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<sup>82</sup> Almgren, Ellen.(2006): *Att fostra demokrater.* p.81

<sup>83</sup> Gutmann, Amy. (1999): *Democratic Education.* p.53

<sup>84</sup> Fritzell, Christer. (2003): Demokratisk kompetens. *Utbildning och Demokrati.* Vol. 12, nr .3. p.35

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p.22

<sup>86</sup> Gutmann, Amy. (1999): *Democratic Education.* p.88

<sup>87</sup> Englund, Thomas. (2006): Demokratifostran som forskningsobjekt ur statsvetar- och sociologperspektiv. *Utbildning och Demokrati.* Vol. 15, nr 3.

p.49-50

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p.55-56

The different views symbolizes various ways of understanding basic terms such as society, democracy and equality, and they have dissimilar aims for education. The first, the patriarchal view, believes in a higher dimension where according to Englund “*den lärandes, barnets rätt och möjligheter att utveckla en självständig uppfattning nekas.*”<sup>89</sup> The second view is scientifically-rationally based with primary focus on the individual, “*utbildningens huvudsakliga funktion är att bidra till den ekonomiska tillväxten och därför betonas individuell kompetens*”<sup>90</sup> The students should learn scientifically based knowledge, -which in turn needs to be related to areas of political science.<sup>91</sup> This positivistic view has been dominant in Sweden but lately a third view has been getting a lot of attention. The democratic education conception, where emphasize lies on the schools role of preparing the students for citizenship<sup>92</sup>, has a stronger orientation towards building knowledge through communication than the scientific-rational perspective.<sup>93</sup> Students should partake in such a way that it enhances his or her knowledge about the processes of society and how it should (best) be formed. By discussions and arguments the students should learn that there is more than one possible opinion existing on ways of understanding the world.<sup>94</sup> Englund advocates an increased educational form based on the democratic education conception, where deliberative rationality is central for education.<sup>95</sup> Finally, Englund argues that the scientific-rational conception and the democratic conception often can be regarded as linked as the scientific-rational conception, “*genom att ta fasta på förekomsten av skilda vetenskapliga perspektiv, på skilda (vetenskapligt baserade) sätt att närma sig förklaringar och förståelser av bestämda fenomen [kan] närma sig och ge den demokratiska utbildningskonceptionen dess nödvändiga kvalitet.*”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Englund, Thomas. (2006): Demokratifostran som forskningsobjekt ur statsvetar- och sociologperspektiv. p.61

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p.62

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p.63-65

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p.62

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p.60

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. p.67

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p.68

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p.66

## 6 About Student Influence

### 6.1 The Right to Political Influence

Ludvig Beckman looks at political influence in a way not brought up by any of the other authors. He deliberates an extremely interesting (and important) topic concerning children's and teenagers right to political influence. He discusses the right to political influence with the example of voting and he does so by looking at three different aspects of competence; interest-, expert- and ethical competence. I will not take a stand in the direct question of whether or not children/teenagers should have the right to vote as this is not of direct relevance for the purpose of this paper. I am only trying to make a point to give an idea of the importance of student influence.

Beckman writes, with reference to Dahl's argument that children are not fully qualified to realize their own interests, a quality often considered necessary for democratic participation, that "*skillnaden mellan barn och vuxna är just den att vuxna, men inte barn, kan avgöra vad de egentligen vill och har behov av.*"<sup>97</sup> I do not agree with this statement. I believe it is very much possible to argue that children, *more so* than adults, have a fixed knowledge of what they really want and what they need. Adults on the other hand are often more concerned with responsibility and with what they *should*, in other words what is considered to be 'the right thing' to do, want and need. I am not alone in this reasoning, a lot of critic has been put forward to Dahl's premise<sup>98</sup> and I find it valuable to mention as I strongly consider it a reason for increased student influence. We have to trust in the students' abilities to make decisions, especially decisions concerning their own interests. About expert competence Beckman asks the question of whether or not lack of political knowledge is reason enough to "*undantas från rösträtten*"? Arguing this cannot be a reason (at least not the only reason) to not include children and teenagers in the voting process as it is not an attribute only related to or found in the younger population.<sup>99</sup> Ethical competence on the other hand is about being able to "*sätta sig in i och ta hänsyn till andras intressen*" and children is not believed to be able to fully control their instincts or impulses as they lack a sense of self-control. In this way it stands above the interest- and

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<sup>97</sup> Beckman, Ludvig. Demokrati och kompetenskrav: Barn, ungdomar och rätten till politiskt inflytande. i Jonsson, Britta., Roth, Klas. (red.) (2003): *Demokrati och lärande: om valfrihet, gemenskap och övervägande i skola och samhälle*. p.83

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p.84

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p.85

expert competence. This lack of discipline, according to Beckman, is the only *true* reason one could argue children and teenagers should not have the right to vote,<sup>100</sup> and I am ready to agree on that. Nonetheless, I think there is often a strong belief that children are not capable of making “good” decisions or “the right” decision and therefore their possibilities to influence is often limited by laws and regulations, adults or other authorities who “know better”. Englund also mentions this, saying that *”tron på att över huvud taget betrakta skolungdomar som politiskt bildbara medborgare är idag på många händer synnerligen svag. Infantilisering och tillrättalagda perspektiv dominerar i många kretsar.”*<sup>101</sup> The problematic of this will from my view be one of bigger issues, if not the biggest, to overcome in order to increase student influence in our schools and the educational system. Hence I want to highlight this topic with the hope that it soon will be a more common theme on the arena of political science; as democracy, education and student influence are absolutely, to the highest degree, related!

## 6.2 Student Influence

Eva Forsberg has during the 1990s done several empirical investigations on students’ influence on their education. Most of the work is related to the “Skola 2000”-project.<sup>102</sup> She looks at the actual term student influence and points to the problem of its various definitions. She argues that the term influence can have more than one meaning and student influence does not have one specific nuance or characteristic.

What is clear, as Forsberg also states<sup>103</sup>, is that student influence is bound by several laws, regulations and instructions which complicates the possibilities for influence further. Forsberg also discusses power as means of influence. Interesting in her findings is that the students who feel that they can influence their educational situation the most also are the students who feel most comfortable in school and have better relations with the teachers.<sup>104</sup> This, I believe can be partly explained by students, as well as teachers, having different expectations of what education, and influence, should be and what it really is. Among her conclusions is that students often take on a passive role, while the teachers take on the ruling part and as Fritzell mentions, *”i skolan får man intrycket att det konsekvent är lärarna snarare än eleverna som ska utöva ”påverkan” [cursive in original] så att de mål som till exempel kursplanen anger ska uppfyllas.”*<sup>105</sup> According to Forsberg, these traditions are hard to rupture as the students (as well as teachers) very quickly fall into and adapt to their ‘role’.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Beckman, Ludvig. Demokrati och kompetenskrav. i Jonsson, Britta., Roth, Klas. (red.) (2003): *Demokrati och lärande*. p.87

<sup>101</sup> Englund, Thomas. Skolan och demokratin. i Jonsson, Britta., Roth, Klas. (red.) (2003): *Demokrati och lärande*. p.60

<sup>102</sup> For more information about the ‘Skola 2000’ project visit <http://www.skola2000.se/> Visited 2009-01-28

<sup>103</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. p.45

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p.53

<sup>105</sup> Fritzell, Christer. (2003): *Demokratisk kompetens. Utbildning och Demokrati*. Vol. 12, nr 3. p.15

<sup>106</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. p.44



Michael Tholander, whose research is based on PBL<sup>107</sup> in small groups among secondary-school students,<sup>108</sup> shows that “*elevernas demokratiska rättigheter ofta beskärs av de egna kamraterna snarare än lärarna*”, which suggests that the students don’t take advantage of the opportunities given to them by their teacher.<sup>109</sup> The majority of the students in Forsberg’s studies feel that they do not have the possibility to influence their education to the extent they would like.<sup>110</sup> Older students seem more content with their influential situation but whether or not this is because they are more likely to exercise their power to influence or because they are simply more compliant is not completely clear as her results are not consistent.<sup>111</sup> Why some students feel they do not get the chance to influence their own situation as much as they would like can partly be explained by different communication patterns in the teaching and Forsberg argues they are used differently in different situations.<sup>112</sup> In some of the studies the students seem to not get enough information about *what* exactly it is they are suppose to learn from a certain class and *why* they need to learn it, thus it becomes learning for short-term purposes instead of lifelong learning.<sup>113</sup>

As mentioned earlier it is important to be aware that questionnaires measure the students experienced influence, which is not necessarily the same as their actual influential situation. She looks at what the conditions for student influence are and here she includes the overall attitude (positive or negative) towards increased student influence among both teachers and students, the relation between different levels of the education system and whether or not the teachers (and other staff) have gotten any competence development and directives.<sup>114</sup> Finally she points out that problems may arise when students get more influence over their education at the same time as the teachers still need them to ‘reach’ certain goals within a certain amount of time.<sup>115</sup> Ellen Almgren also pays attention to this problem saying “*det finns en utbredd uppfattning att demokrati- och kunskapsuppdraget står i motsatts till varandra.*”<sup>116</sup> How to combine the two is of course a gigantic problem with no easy solution. The school committee, which is mentioned in the beginning, has however stated that “*tim- och kursplaners utformning inte får stå i vägen för skolans övergripande mål eller ämnesövergripande arbete.*”<sup>117</sup>

Forsberg does bring up a lot of interesting aspects of democratic education and student influence and it is impossible for me to discuss them all, I do however find some worth mentioning even though I will not go into any further detail. Forsberg argues that “*det inte bara är innebörden för elevinflytande som behöver*

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<sup>107</sup> PBL = Problembased learning p.13

<sup>108</sup> Tholander, Michael. (2005): Värdegrund, demokrati och inflytande ur ett elevperspektiv. *Utbildning och Demokrati*. Vol.14, nr. 3. p.7

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. p.24

<sup>110</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. p.53

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p.46

<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p.59

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p.61, 85

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. P.101

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p.104

<sup>116</sup> Almgren, Ellen.(2006): Att fostra demokrater. p.12

<sup>117</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. p.108

*problematiseras. Även motiveringar för elevinflytande behöver diskuteras dels i relation till varandra, dels i förhållande till skolans övriga uppgifter, dels i bredare samhällsperspektiv.*” She continues and argues that these are aspects, together with a more historical perspective, that are missing in the school committees reports.<sup>118</sup> Forsberg concludes with stating that instead of focusing on whether or not the students *have* influence or not it is of greater relevance to talk about “*elevinflytande med positive respektive negative förtecken.*” Consequently we should ask ourselves if the influence gotten is beneficial or disadvantaged for the students.<sup>119</sup> This is something most researchers do not consider in any detail.

In relation to Forsberg’s wish for a more historical perspective, I would like to mention the work of Sara Delamont. More gender focused research has to this point not been very common thus it was a happy encounter when I got Delamont’s *A woman’s place in education* in my hands. Even though her focus is on Welsh women she still contributes to the research of democratic education in that she gives us a social and historical perspective, to be compared with many other researchers who have not to any great extent drawn their results to these aspects, even less so with a gender focus which actually has been non-existent in all the other researches I’ve looked at. Delamont states it was not only gender but also a matter of class belonging that effected the education of women in Wales. “*Women’s education in Wales was not only an issue of gender, it was also a matter of appropriate schooling for different social classes*”<sup>120</sup> While the academic woman in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were, except from being pioneers, celibate and fought for access to the, at that point male world, the academic woman today is often married, if not she (with excuse to the exceptions) does not live in celibacy and “*challenge the boundaries/foci/and standards of excellence men draw for subjects*”.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Forsberg, Eva. (2000): *Elevinflytandets många ansikten*. p.117

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* p.143

<sup>120</sup> Delamont, Sara. (1996): *A woman’s place in education*. p.122

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.* p.129-130

## 7 Conclusion

To summarize all of the above I can conclude that quite a lot has been written about the conditions and obstacles for democratic education and student influence. Most researchers tend to assume student influence is positive for education and therefore analyzed to what extent the student possesses influence. Research is dominated by, and results are drawn from the students' perceptions of influence and not so much on how it *should* be. This is partly so, as discussed in chapter two, due to the different research methods used.

Almost all researchers mention deliberative democracy as the most effective way to enhance student influence in- and outside the classroom. Hardly any research was done on what actually needs to be done or changed in order to fulfill the goals set by Lpo94 and the school committee about increased student influence. In other words, there are not a lot of *concrete* ideas or suggestions put forward. This can however be due to two different things. First, I have only included a few of the researches in this paper, it may very well be the case that other researchers have this focus and I have simply been unfortunate and failed to notice these. Second, as the above discussions have shown there are a number of different aspects of this and researchers are not in agreement with each other and results show different patterns. Therefore it might be difficult (if even possible?) to actually produce somewhat universal theories about what should, needs and, not to forget, *can* be done in the educational system to increase student influence and at the same time keep, or enhance, the educational standard.

There needs to be more focus on what actually can be done to reach the wanted result(s). This is to me the basis of the whole discussion but hasn't been given any real attention in the literature. I would like to see some answers to the following questions: What can the students (alt. teachers) do to improve the 'influence situation' that according to most research needs serious improvement? How can this be done? What can the students actually expect and maybe most importantly what can they realistically demand? Other important questions brought up by Hans Albin Larsson in his essay "*Från illusion till konkretion*", include, where in the school system the democratic education or training should be placed? On what levels the students should get this education? Who should be responsible for it?<sup>122</sup> He does not answer these questions himself but opens for discussion and debate. Most of other researchers don't even touch upon these questions.

Secondly, focus lies on the students and not so much on the teachers. I would like to see some a lot more discussions looking at the teachers aspects: thoughts,

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<sup>122</sup> Larsson, Hans Albin. Från illusion till konkretion. i Jonsson, Britta., Roth, Klas. (red.) (2003): *Demokrati och lärande*.

feelings and the obstacles facing them to maintain their role as educators, increase their students influential roles and at the same time keep or improve the educational level as there are actual targets that the students need to meet in order to 'climb the ladder' and move on to higher levels.

I will end this by a quote from Roth:

*If democracy is viewed as a way of life, then it cannot be sustained without being practiced by its members and its virtues being acknowledged, reflected upon and criticized by them. And this can be achieved only if the members of a democracy are trained in exercising its virtues and by gaining knowledge of its principles, standards and rules, of its history, institution and practitioners.<sup>123</sup>*

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<sup>123</sup> Roth, Klas. (2001): *Democracy, Education and Citizenship*. p.52

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## Internet Resources:

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<http://www.skola2000.se/> Visited 2009-01-28