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# Democratic education in Sweden

A study of democratic values in Swedish elementary schools

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## *Content*

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	3
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
1.1 The field of education: linking educational theories, ideologies and thoughts to the notion of democratic education/Defining democratic education.....	4
1.2 Historical overview of democratic education .....	7
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
Globalization and education: the consequences to democratic values in public schools.....	11
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
Democratic education in Sweden: the Swedish reality, previous researches.....	15
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
Theoretical framework: the criteria and factors that can make teaching democratic (indicators).....	23
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
Research problem-questions. Methodological concerns.....	28
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	
Interview as the research method: design and analysis .....	31
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	
Results	
Introduction.....	36
7.1 Research diary: approaching the field and field notes.....	37
7.2 Thematic Analysis: the method.....	38
7.3 Thematic analysis-Results.....	40
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	
8.1 Discussion.....	48
8.2 Evaluation: Limitations and difficulties of the research.....	53
<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	
Future studies.....	54
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	55
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	58

## *INTRODUCTION*

Education is a basic welfare pillar. Education in schools influence and is influenced by society and politics. Democratic education is the alternative that the students seek in many countries where there is an authoritarian education system like Greece my country of origin.

The idea of the present Master thesis topic emerged out of my studies in the Master program of Global studies at Lund University. The research is about democracy in education. The aim of the research is to trace democratic values in primary schools in Sweden through in depth semi-structured interviews with the teachers. The region that the research was conducted is Lund city. The method of analysis is thematic analysis and various previous researches, Swedish and international have been used throughout the thesis especially in the part of the discussion. The results include all democratic values traced in primary schools, examples and applications of them by the teachers, the inspiration of these democratic values in an individual basis (experience or training) and the connection of education with the phenomenon of globalization. After reading the present thesis one can learn the basics on democratic education and the status of democratic values in Sweden (2010). Many questions and further research emerge for future studies.

Chapter 1, gives an introduction to the field and a historical overview of democratic education. Chapter 2 and 3 consist of the background of theories that are used when needed in correlation with the results. In chapter 4, the core of the theoretical framework of the thesis is included and indicators of democratic values in schools are analyzed. In chapter 5, the research problem and research questions introduce the reader to the research part. Although the part of methodology is discussed in chapter 5, the design of the method used (semi-structured interviews) is discussed in chapter 6. In chapter 7 the results of research are given and a final discussion is made in chapter 8. Finally, in chapter 9 ideas for future research are included.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **1.1 The field of education: linking educational theories, ideologies and thoughts to the notion of democratic education/Defining democratic education**

There are many issues to consider when writing on a subject as the above since there are many factors influencing a sector such as education. It has been said that there is no pure educational science. Education can be approached interdisciplinary meaning that it can be analyzed through the scope of other pure sciences such as: sociology, psychology, political science and pedagogy. It can be also formulated by various actors (state, market, industry and other). "...educational planning is actually a series of untidy and overlapping episodes in which a variety of people and organizations with diversified perspectives are actively involved-technically and politically" (Haddad, 1995, 17 and Mc Culloch cited in Bartlett et al, 2007).

On the other hand Bartlett and Burton (2007) argue that while there are influences from other disciplines towards education studies there is a pure science of education that has given the central contributions to education studies.

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2000) states that education studies field is investigated through the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, sociology and history although it is an official and independent area of studies. The definition of education studies given by QAA: "Education studies are concerned with understanding how people develop and learn throughout their lives. It facilitates the study of the nature of knowledge and a critical engagement with a variety of perspectives and ways of knowing and understanding drawn from a range of appropriate disciplines" (QAA, 2000,4 cited in Bartlett et al, 2007).

It is interesting to approach education through the disciplines given by QAA and then capture the notion of democratic education with the information given. Philosophy of education is a discipline which analyzes the nature and purposes of education and it includes the different beliefs, the morals, the values etc. Sociology of education is a field which refers to various social influences upon education and the process of socialization. Also it analyzes education with regard to social class, ethnicity and gender. The discipline of psychology of education involves both philosophical and sociological issues and analyzes the process of development and learning of people taking in account notions such as: maturation, intelligence,

personality and motivation. History of education focuses on displaying key dates and analyzing causal explanations through social and political changes. Finally, the economic sector is a new way that education can be approached through and is related with studies on skills needed to cover the available places in the labour force.

(Bartlett, 2007)

The question that arises is: Which of the above disciplines can the notion of 'democratic education' be approached through the best? In my opinion, there is a clear answer on that. It can be said that democratic education has been created through philosophy and psychology of education in the first place with sociology of education to follow. Democratic education is a way (and the only right way according to me) to educate students according to specific criteria and embedded values which are basically drawn out by the disciplines of philosophy and psychology of education.

Democratic education is concerned with the purposes of education, what society wants to achieve through its education sector. Is education just a mean that leads us to our future profession? Is it just a strategy to make money or keep a healthy economy? Or is it just a way to create an interest for knowledge to the people, give them all the supplies to be able to be critical, have a realistic view of the world and satisfy their needs for knowledge and self-fulfillment? Democratic education is also interested in the development of the individual, its personal characteristics, its way of learning. Through this scope education is seen as a mean to self-determination and mean of learning having self-awareness that represent the personal needs of every individual and are the factors that lead to set of values, healthy minds and satisfaction with life.

In both philosophical and psychological dimensions of democratic education, there are sociological dimensions as well. Democratic education promotes the integration of the individual in society without considering in economical terms and social order. Every person finds its place in society according to ones' needs.

Educational typologies and ideologies is another important chapter of the education field in which we will be able to trace democratic education. Nowadays, writings about democratic education are not just an analysis of the relationship between education and democracy. Democratic education has gone much further than policies, planning and reforms, curriculum and in-class environment and has become an idea based on a specific ideology that many independent institutions and schools

follow to cover the gaps of state/public education. The analysis of this solid ideology of independent democratic education institutions is going to be referred (through other ideologies of education) and be avoided at the same time as in this paper the focus will not be to alternative-democratic schools but to the democratic values in Swedish schools in general.

Ideologies of education are “a set of ideas and beliefs held by a group of people about the formal arrangements of education, specifically in schooling and often by extension or implication, also about informal aspects of education e.g. learning at home” (Meighan, Siraj-Blatchford, 2003, 191, cited in Bartlett). Typologies are the generalization of ideologies.

The first ideology of education is the dichotomous approach where there are polarized types of education. (child-centered and teacher-centered, democratic and authoritarian, etc.). Other ideologies emphasize on the individual (progressivism, romanticism, child-student centered). According to these beliefs on education individual development is prioritized, the students are encouraged to discover knowledge and there is no concept of failure. Other ideologies of education emphasize on knowledge and society. Ideologies with a focus on knowledge (humanism, conservatism, traditionalism) use traditional methods of teaching, have the concept of success and failure and place discipline as an important part of studies. Ideologies with a focus on society have two segments. On one hand there is instrumentalism, revisionism and economic renewal where the aim is to improve the economy. On the other hand, there is ‘democratic socialism’ and ‘reconstructionism’ where there is a general wish of development of all the sections of society and give an opportunity to all. (Bartlett, 2007).

It can be observed that the ideology of democratic education belongs to the dichotomous approach where it is theorized that students should be helped to find their interests and experiment to learn. The development of the student is the priority in democratic education practices.

Until this point, theories, ideologies of education and more were analyzed and have given us valuable views of the concept of democratic education. Since the research of this thesis will happen at school classrooms there is a great need to make a reference to pedagogy.

Pedagogy can be defined as the science of teaching and learning. It analyzes

the learning environment, the methods used to teach. Also, pedagogy is involved with the way that people learn. There are many traditions of learning. The methods of teaching and learning question the notions of autonomy and authority. (Bartlett, 2007). In my opinion, pedagogy nowadays should go over reforms not only with regard to democratic values and how those can be transmitted first to the teacher and then to the students, but also with regard to global studies and how the students nowadays can be informed and consciously involved in global issues.

## **1.2 Historical overview of democratic education**

People say: “To understand what is happening today, you need to look in the past”. For this reason a short historical overview on democratic education is needed.

The link between democracy and education was first made by the Greek philosophers, Plato and Socrates. The concept of democratic education was referred for the first time in Rousseau’s and Dewey’s writings. Rousseau belongs to the ‘romantics’ of education (18<sup>th</sup> century) whose idea was to fully educate all citizens to be able to take part in the society. He introduces the concept of ‘social contract’ that assures ones’ freedom and the right of others. According to him, if everyone is involved in the society, there is state of true democracy.

Rousseau’s and Plato’s analysis focus on politics of education and policies in the education sector. Rousseau is influenced by Plato but Rousseau’s position contradicts Plato’s view. Plato claims that the main aim of education is to find the skills of every person and place them in a profession and in a position in society that each one deserves. Therefore, he seems to be in favor of meritocracy, stratified classes according to the nature of each person and social stability. Plato stresses that people should be provided with all information (knowledge) necessary to integrate and be useful to society. Rousseau believes that democracy in education can help to personal development and liberation and to the creation of a democratic society. People should be free to understand their potential and social mobility is an indicator of democracy. Rousseau’s view contradicts Plato’s who sees social mobility as a danger to social order caused by the selfishness of the human nature. He claims that this disturbance of social order can lead to a lack of discipline and disrespect to authorities which will lead at the end to a chaotic situation (Curren, 2007).

In my view, democratic education adopts and takes in account both of the

philosophies mentioned above. The application of elements of the philosophy of democratic education in primary schools aims to integrate and pass democratic values to its students using two ways. Firstly, by making sure that the curriculum includes modules that promote the interest of the students in public issues and social problems, citizenship issues and intercultural subjects and secondly, by implementing democratic values in teaching and all processes in the school. School community is a micro-community that should be characterized by democratic values so that the students learn in practice to live in a democratic environment and be ready to find their way in their future. Of course, this does not mean that there should be no discipline or that the teacher should have the role of a member that let the students helpless to experiment without any direction. There is a balance between the views of Plato and Rousseau to be found.

Moving on to Dewey, the father of the American philosophy of education and a philosopher that described a completed concept of democratic education and in continuation applied these democratic ideas and theories in schooling in practice with success. Dewey's writings focus on educations' different aspects keeping the idea of a fair education throughout his texts which among others are: "The Child and the Curriculum" in 1902, "Interest and Effort in Education" in 1913, "The School and Society" in 1915, "Democracy and Education" in 1916, "Experience and Education" in 1938, "The School and Society" in 1963.

Dewey theorizes two elements of the democratic constitution in a society (democratic ideal) which are: "not only numerous and more varied points of shared common interest, but greater reliance upon the recognition of mutual interests as a factor of social control" and "not only freer interaction between social groups but change in social habit" (Curren, 2007, 48). He explains how democracy in politics and democracy in education are interconnected and influence its other, a fact that is also supported by Amy Gutmann who argues that a democratic government and a democratic education belong in a reciprocal subordinated relationship. However, Dewey in his texts emphasizes how democracy is something more than its definition in politics and in education. Democracy is a way of living and a way of communicating in everyday life. He underlines that we cannot have a view of the education that we wish to have unless we have a view of the kind of society we would like to have.

Dewey claims that education based on the ideal society (interests of a group

that express all members and members of the group to be free to react with other groups) should provide the interest to knowledge to its students and give them the control to social changes without causing a chaotic situation. As mentioned above, Dewey also applied his democratic theoretical ideas and established the John Dewey's laboratory school at the university of Chicago (Dewey J., 1916, Democracy and Education, Free Press/Macmillan: New York, 81, 83, 86-99, republished in Curren, 2007, 47-54).

Amy Gutmann a theorist of the younger generation has written various articles and books on democratic education. She embraces Dewey's work and theories and stresses that the scope of democratic education is to create democratic citizens that can contribute to society. She notes that the important issue is not only for the citizens to behave democratically but to be able to understand the democratic values that they follow. (Curren, 2007)

So, which are the education aims and pedagogical goals students should reach to be able to say that they have undergone a democratic education? Gutmann answers to that in a direct way: "veracity, self-discipline, nonviolence, toleration, mutual respect for reasonable differences of opinion, the ability to deliberate, to think critically about ones' life and ones' society...moral character, capacity for moral reasoning" (Gutmann A., 1993, Studies in Philosophy and Education, Springer Verlag, 1-9, reprinted by Curren, 2007, 164).

Another theorist who made a contribution on the democratic education field is the Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire. Freire analyzed the banking model<sup>(1)</sup> that exists in traditional schools and made a comparison with the problem-solving model which is basically based on the general idea of democratic education and more specifically in deliberative democracy.

Freire examined the teacher-student relationship in traditional schools and observed that teachers are passing the knowledge to their students in a static, repeatable way with no connection to the reality of the students. Teachers are trying to make the students learn by "putting the knowledge in their heads" without creating any interest for it. The banking model is called as such, because students are seen as depositories and the teacher is the depositor who is making the deposits of knowledge to the students. The teacher by using narration is trying to make the students receive the knowledge and store it in their minds without using communication but by making deposits. Also, the banking model describes a situation where it is taken for granted

that the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing. The teacher having the status of the knowledgeable person is the master and the students should listen to the teacher and learn. Students from their side feel that they do not have the authority of anything because they do not know anything and in no way they could be also the ones who could educate the teacher.

Problem solving model (or problem-posing education) contradicts the banking model and proposes the changed discussed below. Teachers should get to know the deposits made to the students and change their methodology of teaching. Students are not pathetic listeners but active pupils who consciously want to learn and investigate the given knowledge. Of course, to achieve the conscious will for learning by students, teaching should be close to the students' reality and should pose problems and analyze topics related with their world giving them educational challenges. Problem-posing education sees education as "a practice of freedom" and displays teaching as a promoter to real issues, critical thinking and creativity aiming to self-determination of the students. Freire denotes that the relationship between the teacher and the student is of high importance. Pupils should not be ordered by the teacher because this situation leads them to become future citizens that can be manipulated easily by anyone. Communication is the basic element of methods of teaching (pedagogy) and the teacher and the students have both the roles of the teacher and the student. Meaning that not only students are taught by the teacher but also the reverse situation is happening. Freire refers to authority in schools as: "authority must be on the side of freedom and not against it" (Curren, 2007, 72).

At this point in order to have a clearer view of the pros and cons of the notion of democratic education, criticisms should be mentioned and analyzed. The first criticism concerns the lack of discipline in democratic schools. Supposing that the pupils do not want to take part in courses and do their homework and just want to play. According to the democratic education ideology followed today by the alternative schools students should be free to play. Is not this a social danger for students? Are not these students going to regret not having studied the time suggested when they are grown ups and have not accomplished the skills that most of the other children have in his age? Is not the responsibility of the schools to make sure that all students progress or should they just let them to decide the time they want to start learning? (Barlett, 2007).

Other critics claim that the 'progressive' approach used by the democratic

schools internationally leads to the decrease of academic standards. Cox and Dyson (1969, cited in Bartlett, 2007), argue that we can observe this situation in the '60s and it should not be repeated. "A period of full employment and increasing affluence led to the indulgence of the individual and the development of a more 'permissive society' which allowed the social and economic problems of the 1970s to occur?"

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Globalization and education: the consequences to democratic values in public schools**

"Globalization is today a buzz word used in various contexts to explain the wide range of changes occurring in all countries as a result of the interdependence of the countries' economies...it is presently employed in regard to social, political, moral, cultural and educational changes occurring in different nations as a result of global pressures on local policies" (TjeldvollA., Holmesland I.S. , 1997, 4).

It is true that globalization has changed the way of life of people around the world in many sectors (economic, cultural, educational, political) and the way they perceive meanings such as production, relations, work and evaluation. "Globalization is understood as a process of change in economic, political, and cultural arenas and is characterized by an increasing world-wide interconnection that is seen as alternately beneficial and harmful" (Gal in Baker and Wiseman, 2005, 259).

Globalization in a short view is connected with various kinds of reforms. Nowadays, the main factor that is scientifically accepted influencing educational reforms and policies is the phenomenon of globalization. Educational reforms include educational structure core changes. The way of making that possible is by policy and planning<sup>1</sup>. In my view, educational reform is very much connected with educational transfer/borrowing/lending and the phenomenon of globalization but it can be as well a result of an educational self-evaluating process of the system. In the next pages educational reforms coming from the phenomenon of globalization will be discussed

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<sup>1</sup> Policy and planning are terms that different from each other although they are connected to the same procedure of policy analysis. According to Haddad (1995), policy is the resolution or a set of decisions that leads us to the implementation of them or to coming decisions. Planning is defined as the full process of the design of the implementation and assessment. The first step of planning is 'policy making'.

resulting to the actual impact that they have to the democratic values in education.

With the economic globalization and the development of technology of communication as main factors of changes, the standards concerning the education sector have arisen. Educational systems have gone under pressure because of the demand to educate individuals who will be qualified to adapt to the new global context. Some educational reform globalization results are: decentralization, privatization, management of education and others. Nevertheless, according to Carnoy (1999) education in a classroom level (teaching methods, etc.) has not been under considerable changes. Main changes are observable in all the levels above micro-level which is the classroom. The question is which are the changes happening because of globalization after all and if there is an influence coming from these changes to democratic values in education. Do these changes create a certain kind of barriers towards the development of democratic education on a class-level?

Education reforms can be classified into three types according to the force that leads to them and the nature of their changes. Reforms that are connected with the labour market needs and the skills required are called 'competitiveness-driven reforms'. Reforms whose aim is to decrease educational budget (public and private sector), are finance-driven reforms. Finally, reforms for social equality that give education a political position are called 'equity-driven reforms' (Carnoy, 1999). The overwhelming majority of the writers discussing the phenomenon of globalization put the reforms coming from it under competitiveness-driven reforms and finance-driven reforms. Analyzing the basic effects of globalization on the education sector will be the illustration to understand why.

The first major change that globalization brought to education globally is 'privatization'. This drastic change which happens all over the world is closely connected in many books with neo-liberalism and capitalistic policies. 'Privatization' comes together with the process of marketizing education and stands for the entrance of private companies into the public education sector and the start point of an endless competition among schools and services in education. "The educational system sustains its economic competition in a threefold process: first by educating the workforce, second by educating and stimulating consumers, and third by opening itself to the markets" (Hill and Kumar, 2009, 9). The role of the state becomes of minor importance and external companies and organizations determine all principles of education. These education markets lead as we can observe today mostly in USA,

Australia and UK in major national and international inequalities as they act for profit (Hill and Kumar, 2009). Students have the “choice” to choose the school they wish to study from a wide range but they also have no real choice of receiving a free education for all as state subsidies are slowly eliminated in many countries. Hill and Kumar (2009) see a vague future concerning education where market will conquer education services and they will run them according to their own interests. Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006) and Hill and Kumar (2009) place the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank as the main actors of the educational reform of privatization. OECD whose members are the leading industrialized countries has been accused of trying to achieve an economic development by leading to education reforms that undermine the democratic values of education and by transforming education into a preparation stage which leads us to the second major change that globalization has brought to education, the carrier direction reforms.

More and more, students are provided with an education whose main principle is to find a place to the workforce for them. The main priorities of education have been reclassified from the development of the individual and the study of democratic values to acquisition of employability skills and a carrier placement service that will give to the students certain skills that can be transferred among different jobs. According to Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006), these carrier education policies are a threat to democratic education as they ignore democratic values and prioritize transferable skills such as ability to adapt in different environments, critical thinking and problem solving. Nevertheless, Hill and Kumar (2009) see that critical thinking is an element that is offered only to the wealthiest students that can afford the best private schools.

Some examples that show the privatization and commercialization of education is first the use of McDonalds as an investor in education in USA and second the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) that has been used as a guide to rank universities. To begin with, PISA has been accused of being led by private companies, neo-liberal policies and other (Hopmann et al, 2007) leading to list of the best universities according to their contribution to the economic development. This is a pressure to numerous other universities who in order to get in the ranks have to reform their programs and way of teaching. McDonalds’ operations manual can speak for itself: “Schools offer excellent opportunities. Not only are they a high traffic

(sales) generator, but students are some of the best customers you could have” (Hill and Kumar, 2009, 22). It is true, that nowadays in the global education sector OECD, World Bank and World Trade Organization are some of the main theorists causing educational reforms and theorists like Dewey, Gutmann, Freire have been left behind (Hill and Kumar 2009). The new emerge of numerous alternative schools seems to be the answer to this reality. “The increasing privatization of education and the subsequent loss of democratic control over schools is another reason why in many countries questions about the relationship between education and democracy have become prominent again” (Englund 2004, 89).

Another important education reform is the concept of decentralization. Schools have been given responsibilities not only to deal with their financial issues but also to formulate their programs with less and less centrally given directions and controls. Decentralization is often presented as a highly democratic reform as it gives away central power to the ‘people’. However it is claimed by Hill and Kumar (2009) that the concept of decentralization is far from being a democratic procedure and it can be described as a top-down approach of governance. Decentralization was primarily supported by the World Bank and the United Nations agencies.

Other important educational reforms caused by globalization is the massive introduction of information and communication technology and multiple decreases of funding to research programs and social and global studies.

In the case of democratization of education, the institutionalization of democracy is being discussed in the framework of equity-driven reforms since the main goal is to increase equality. Putting globalization and equity-driven reforms side by side one could argue that their goals are conflicting. Social mobility and equity are seen as boundaries to economic growth which is the main direction that the phenomenon of globalization has had. In the frame of globalization and educational reform of any kind, most of the scientists, analysts, citizens, students and other specialists on education meet the point where the ideals of how education should be, get distinguished from the political/economical and other discourses of education policy. I would like to question that. Why should those issues be apart? Why should we put education for economic growth versus education for socio cultural development and democratic values? Why should we choose either to be more ethical and give the student the education they should have (participation, democracy, critical thinking, etc.) or aim to the states’ economic growth (ex. PISA, ‘managerization’)

putting aside those ideas that many people even consider utopian? Why freedom and democracy in education should not lead to economic growth?

Some people have a very positive attitude towards globalization and believe that the economic growth will benefit them on an individual level, that technological development will be boosted and that everything will become easier in a globalized world where time and space constraints are eliminated. Other people have a negative view of globalization as they see economic inequalities make their appearance, educational opportunities being given to the few and cultural minorities to be wiped out. I believe that at this fragile point comes Swedish education system to give us a successful example of how to combine the above aims and show us that a capitalist country can be fair with its citizens.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **Democratic education in Sweden: the Swedish reality, previous researches**

The Swedish education of teaching as all over the world have been through major struggles to gain the right to be called a ‘discipline’ and have a place in the universities. Fridtjuf Berg and Emil Hammarlund were the ones who proposed the establishment of a university position of teaching in education in 1905. Struggles continued later and were related to the nature of education and its static character that it had been given that time. Lessons at that time, were prepared in a strict formal way, teaching was happening in a narrative way and students were questioned for things they should have learned to give an answer to. Attention was paid to the text that was taught. The in-class participation of the student and other child-centered ideas developed many years later. The first Swedish university position of curriculum studies was bestowed in 1996 at the Stockholm Institute of Education. At the same time, slowly women accessed the pedagogic field. Anna Sandstrom, Hedwig Sidner, Ellen Fries and Anna Sorensen were the first women with an active role in the field of pedagogy around 1900. Throughout history many teachers, philosophers and other made their best to change the repressive education system of that time with result the modernized education system of today. (Englund, 2004).

Swedish Constitution (Grundlagen) reassures security to the right of education and states the compulsory character of ‘grundskola’ (7-16 years old). From

grundskola and on education becomes voluntary. A 92 percent (%) of all students continue to gymnasieskola which lasts 3 years. It is interesting to know that in the beginning of grundskola there is one teacher for all main subjects and other teachers for special subjects. As students go on with their studies subject teachers are introduced. A school leader exists (rektor) who manages everything within the school (Blossing and Eklholm, 2008). The Swedish Education Act (1985:1100/ ch.1 section 2) states: "Education is to provide pupils with knowledge and skills and working together with their homes , promote their harmonious development towards becoming responsible human beings and members of society...All activity in schools shall proceed in accordance with fundamental democratic values". Also, according to the National Agency of education changes of curriculum have been discussed so that subjects related to democratic values can be included. Sweden has also signed international agreements including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration of Human Rights (Skolverket, 2005).

As mentioned in chapter two, globalization has influenced highly educational reforms in every way. Sweden is not an exception. "The reforms taking place in recent years have dealt with 1) decentralization, 2) choice, 3) use of market forces and 4) privatization (Tjeldvoll, 1998, 153). According to Blossing and Ekholm (2008), one of the most important reforms happened at the past highly centralized Sweden is the decentralization of education. Politicians in favor of decentralization in Sweden argued that this change provides a status of democracy as it transfers the power of decisions from the state to the community (kommun). The state has the role of giving general directions to the schools and the schools have the freedom to choose the way to get to the goals set. The Swedish National Agency for Education administrates municipalities by inspecting and evaluating the schools making sure that the educational goals set are reached. This agency is responsible also to set the curriculum, the grading criteria and the national examinations (Skolverket, 2005).

Along with the educational reform of decentralization and its core changes, there were other minor changes as well concerning democracy in class, (such as the creation of groups among teachers, changes of role of the school leader, school evaluation) passing greater responsibility to teachers and pupils (Blossing and Eklholm, 2008) Student unions and councils were formed in order to give an authority to the students and teachers were authorized with greater responsibilities.

Privatization, the entrance of market forces and the widen of education choices

are interconnected under the umbrella of globalization in Sweden. Although education in Sweden is still fully subsidized by the state and is therefore free, the entrance of private forces has changed the Swedish education sector. Major education competition has been developed and students have numerous choices of schools which try to gain their attention and preference. Sharma claims that this is the reason (rise of independent schools and competition) that the Swedish education system has failed to handle socio-economic differences the recent years.

Roth (2001) in his doctoral dissertation on democracy education and citizenship presents the Swedish reality on education. He stresses that although students should be taught through a democratic educational process, this is not the case of the Swedish education of today. The missing characteristics from the Swedish education system is the participation of the students in how the lectures are being held, the possibilities they have to share their experiences and opinions and in continuation of that the overall possibility that their participation will be acknowledged. The usual method of teaching that determines the classroom climate in Swedish public schools is described as a series of lectures, followed by specific questions that the students should answer. Teachers have the total responsibility of the material of the courses and there is no place for discussion or evaluation of the lessons by the students. Roth (2001, 80) elaborates the situation existing in Swedish public schools with a quotation from the Swedish curriculum where students are asked to become members of the Swedish society by accepting “common values” and “unvarying forms of knowledge”. The question that arises is: Is an education that promotes the adoption of common values and a stable form of knowledge democratic in an age of multiculturalism? Roth considers that sentence from the Swedish curriculum a violation of rights of the individuals to choose the way they want to live and proposes that the Swedish curriculum should clearly state the right of deliberation of the students. Habermas (in Roth, 2001) sees the present Swedish curriculum also as a barrier to democratic deliberation.

Deliberative education is a new term added to education studies to reinforce the democratic way of teaching. The idea of democratic deliberation is based on communication and group work in class, giving the students the opportunity to make decisions and teachers to have an ongoing communication on their field by exchanging ideas. Jurgen Habermas is considered the father of deliberative democracy in schools which was based on his idea of “ideal speaking situations”.

Tomas Englund (2004) at his lecture at Orebro university noted that one couldn't say that deliberative education is something that is applied in Swedish education of the present time. He underlines the great importance of communication in education and addresses his strong belief to Dewey and his book "Democracy and Education" (1916). According to Roth (2001), deliberative education and democracy supports the exchange of knowledge and values among students, promotes the dialogue in class and gives space to discussions on different ways of understanding the world. In that way, even teaching methods and old methodologies can be revised and changed.

Concerning the concept of democratic deliberation in education, various approaches have been developed: the exclusion-of-independent schools approach, the civic value approach, the tourist approach and the sameness and/or difference approach. In addition, a debate has taken place with regard to the principles that make an education deliberative. Roth suggests two terms: opportunity and freedom. Gutmann criticizes terms already proposed (neutrality, opportunity, freedom) and suggests the notion of conscious social reproduction (thoughts between a good life and a good education) analyzed in chapter one. Roth finds weaknesses on Gutmann's suggestions and the notion of conscious social reproduction. He emphasizes on the importance of intersubject understanding and rejects extreme stability. He proposes instead the concept of mediation which "focuses on both communicative understanding and the intersubjective legitimation of knowledge, values, meaning and norms...young people...collectively re-creating society that we share" (Roth, 2001, 89).

Another term discussed in Swedish pedagogy related with democratic education is "Bildung". "Bildung" is interpreted in many different ways. The word is connected with the meaning of education and it has basically two meanings or dimensions. The first one is subjective and personal and it explains the way people use knowledge focusing on their personal ability to conceive it, interpret it and see the world. The second one is objective and it explains the content of knowledge received as it is and what is going to be learned. Although "Bildung" is an old used term, it has been used recently (1999 by Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway) (Roth, 2001). "Bildung" nowadays is related with the connection of enlightenment and romanticism.

As mentioned in chapter one where various theories, typologies and approaches were discussed, there are two different ways of implanting democratic values in compulsory education (micro-level: in-class). The first one is the content of

the curriculum used and the second one is the way the teaching is being held. These two ways of 'institutionalizing' democracy in education in a micro-level are referred by Gert Biesta in a collection of lectures edited by the Swedish professor Tomas Englund (2004). *Education for democracy and education through democracy* is his way to explain that democracy can be taught in schools and can happen in schools. *Education for democracy* is a way to promote democracy by having modules about democracy, by teaching to the students how to make decisions, deal with differences, how to be able to be active citizens in a democratic society in the future. This idea is also expressed by Giroux, a very important educational thinker of recent times. *Education through democracy* is a way to give to the students an active role, to create an internal class/school structure that is democratic as Dewey has mentioned "a miniature of a democratic community". Apple and Bean [(1995) cited in Englund, 2004, 92] claim that "the best way to educate for democracy is through democracy". Englund also reinforces this approach by giving a definition to democracy (2004, 94): "Democracy is the situation in which all human beings can be subjects". By this definition Englund does not limit 'democracy' as a term used in politics but broadens its meaning by putting every individual in a position where everyone has the right to be heard and participate in common issues. He is also suggesting that education is a central issue directly connected with the understanding of democracy. The position of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA, 2001) enhances this point of view. SIDA sees education as a place where democratic values are active in two meanings: in the content of what is being taught and the way that the content is being taught (pedagogy).

Above we had independent data concerning democracy and education in Sweden coming from various researchers and philosophers. To continue the investigation and have a more holistic view of what is happening in Swedish education system with regard to democratic values, we should take a look at the latest presentation made by Skolverket (2005), the National Agency for Education in Sweden. The data of this presentation are gathered after studies conducted in 1999.

In general, Skolverket (2005) provides a more positive view of what is happening in childcare institutions and schools. It is noted that one can observe considerable differences among schools as some are progressing slowly and other have had major changes. Skolverket denotes that democracy in education is needed as it fights many undemocratic behaviors such as violence, bullying, racism and

harassment. The government and the national authorities have proposed ways to integrate democratic values in schools but it is not mentioned when these suggestions happened for the first time, how did they happen: if they included simply some measures or activities, seminars, etc. and if their impact was traced afterwards (evaluation). Also, Skolverket's presentation underlines the importance of informal environments who play an evenly important role as formal (in-class) environments to the development of democratic citizens. Children, teachers and management are presented to be open to integrate democratic values in the education sector. Children are found to request a closer relationship with their teacher(s) and teachers admit that to be able to have a deliberative communication in the classroom they need more time. But how is the deliberative democratic education going to be developed according to Skolverket? The most important factor is the dialogue. Students should have the opportunity to exchange their views and participate in in-class discussions. A second way is to give the students the right to express their opinion about their own education (school, lectures, teachers, bibliography etc.) and evaluate the work being done in school, their literature, the class/school environment etc.

Parents seem to give the total responsibility of their children to the school placing it as the key-factor of the development of their democratic or undemocratic behavior. Another important point and potential problem is the way policy documents and instructions are being applied in the education sector. Teachers and students have stated that they feel powerless to coming changes from the state. Also, especially in multicultural environments attention should be paid to mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance of differences.

**Intergrading democratic values in schools is a change that Swedish schools should complete. The aims given are three:**

- “a) to conduct activities in a democratic way**
- b) to help children and young people develop into democratic citizens**
- c) to give children and young people an insight into the forms and substance of democracy” (Skolverket, 1999, 13).**

As mentioned above, the two most important terms seen as vital to have a democratic education are dialogue and teacher-students relations. But are these enough? And should not they be more precise? Bulling and other non-democratic behaviors are presented to take place in non-formal places, meaning outside of the classroom where there is no control and outside of school. Does this mean that

democratic values in school are not being fully implemented or that students learn about and live in a democratic educational environment that functions only on the 'surface'?

In the presentation by Skolverket it is claimed that a deliberative approach is promoted more and more in education in Sweden and pupil participation has increased the last decade although students are expressing their disappointment on the extent that they can participate and their opinions are counted. The majority of the students would like to have contributed in a way to their studies (curriculum, teaching methods, etc.). Many pupils express distrust in democratic values in school and notice that most of the times decisions taken by student councils are being neglected by the teachers. On the other side, the majority of the teachers feel that they influence school work and they have responsibilities for the in-class environment but they can still not control everything they would like such as the number of students in class, the school environment and the school resources.

To sum up, two are the main factors that the smooth development of a democratic environment depends on. This is the dialogue and the relationships, according to Skolverket. Therefore, students should have the opportunity to express their opinions and feelings freely, reflect on issues that are connected with school structure and administration, and have discussions on democratic values. Through dialogue students are creating bonds of trust and mutual respect. Relationships are also of great importance. Studies have shown that pupils would like to have a closer relationship with their teachers and feel comfortable enough to talk to them about different matters in a more personal basis. This argument is also supported by the Department for Democracy and Social Development Education Division of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA, 2001). Relationships between learners and teachers also encourage tolerance, equity and non-discrimination. Non-discrimination, a main prerequisite of democratic education given by Gutmann, is claimed to be a main principle by SIDA as well, leading to inclusive education and a democratic climate in classroom. Non-discrimination can be achieved by the way that teachers are behaving to the students and by the way students are behaving to each other. Also, the language that is used for learning, the content that is taught and the way the study material is produced and designed can promote or block non-discrimination in school.

Swedish schools have the task to promote democratic values as a foundation

of school education and some of them have been done progress on that. Teachers on their side have been requesting time to reach that aim and less repressive environment for themselves (size of the class, number of subjects, etc.) Another issue that should be solved in Swedish education to ameliorate the connection of democracy and school is the role of the parents. Parents in Sweden seem to be distant from their children's education and what is happening in their school in general. Teachers claim that parental cooperation would be a factor towards the democratization of school education. At last, difficulties have been faced concerning the Swedish curriculum which is considered by teachers and staff as not helpful. It is argued that Swedish national curriculum is very general and democratic values are not embedded as they should according to the expectations by the National Agency of Education.

It is obvious that for democratic values to be passed to the pupils, the first prerequisite is the teachers' holistic knowledge on this matter and teachers' knowledge on how to transmit that to students. Some of the schools' low progress has been addressed to staffs' failure to implement democratic values. A teacher questions: "We are trying to find common norms at school but this is difficult as you have different types of teachers, profile subjects and core subjects, and we can never agree on what the norms should be. The question then arises: should this be done democratically via the teachers or should management decide? And should different schools have different norms or should all school have the same norms?" (National Agency for Education, 1999, 57). An answer on that would be "teachers' education", the quality of the training that teachers receive throughout their education and profession. The implementation of democratic values in school can have various but still limited forms. Teachers, in my opinion should be informed of these forms through intensive compulsory seminars. In addition, "Teachers who are trained for all learning needs, are usually better teachers and may develop a more democratic approach in classroom" (SIDA, 2001, 37). The general idea of democratic education and the number of paths through democratic values can be implemented in school classrooms should be decided centrally, passed to the teachers and staff so that in-school discussions can take place. Details and special arrangements should be done democratically among teachers of various disciplines. However, the main directions is proposed to be given by the agency. In Swedish reality the integration and promotion of democratic values in the first place happens directly in school with the support of the National Agency for Education (booklets).

The role of Swedish National Agency for Education is stated that includes: support towards the promotion of democratic values, promotion of the link between learning, democratic skills and health, reminder of the importance of the environments outside school to the development of democratic skills by children, evaluation of local education.

After all these sources of analysis of democratic education, approaches, views and opinions, one thing is for sure, that education in schools are influenced and influence society and the political situation of a country (SIDA). Thus, in our modern/post-modern societies there is an urgent need to provide schools with a wide range of democratic values which through deliberation will become the basis and starting point of the education sector globally. “The ongoing challenge...what prospective teachers must need to know and do in order to teach in changing, diverse communities...how best to prepare teachers” (Gal in Baker and Wiseman, 2005, 260)

Other previous researches on democratic education in Sweden were difficult to be found because of language barriers. A research that is more relative to the present project is the research on democracy in schools in Sweden held by Persson (2010). It was conducted with the aim to display the way that democratic assignments are handled by the teachers and the circumstances under the teaching methods were applied by them.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Theoretical framework: the criteria and factors that can make teaching democratic (indicators)**

The article that is going to be used as the main theoretical framework of the research analysis and the basis of the criteria indicating the existence of democratic values in schools is the one written by Perry Laura in 2009 with the title “Conceptualizing education policy on democratic societies”. In this article Perry denotes five key concepts of democratic theory in education: equality, diversity, participation, choice, and cohesion. Although the aim of the article theorizes democracy in education in a broader level than the one that exists in the present research, the outcomes/theories of it can be useful in all levels of educational research. Perry (2009, 426) argues: “The article is limited to education policy in

democratic societies. Although the model could potentially be used to analyze other aspects of education such as classroom teaching". Perry suggests the five concepts of equality, diversity, participation, choice and cohesion to be used as criteria of designing, analyzing, evaluating and comparing different education policies according to the democratic values integrated in those. Below, there will be an explanation of the terms given by Perry followed by the way that the same criteria can be used in the specific level of this research. These criteria are mentioned and based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) by the General Assembly of United Nations.

Explanation of criteria of education policies in democratic societies (Perry, 2009) and of the democratic education criteria for in class teaching:

*Equality* in education is very important as it is claimed to be the way to keep social mobility active. On education policy level is referred to the opportunity given to the people that wish to study and equality of outcome which refers to the procedure of education and how the academic level is kept the same during teaching and evaluation among the people participating.

Equality in the micro-level can be is a very important criterion as well. Students in class should be treated in equal terms by the teachers disregarding its student's nationality, gender, religion etc. This practice should be also be apparent in between students' relations and could be seen as a way to see the status of the teacher and the status of the students and how they should not differ from each other (meaning that the teacher does not have a higher status than the student and should not force students study or follow his rules). Equality in class can be also seen in terms of the knowledge being offered. Knowledge should be available and offered to all under the same terms and students should be taught about the equality value.

*Diversity* in education is an underlined notion as it is a central issue that many societies who have faced and are facing immigration deal with. Diversity stands for the variety of opinions, lifestyles and ways of thinking in societies. In education there is diversity among students and their interests and academic characteristics. Also in education policy there is a tendency to have continuous diversity in education services as there is a constantly activity towards the entrance of market forces at the same time when freedom of choice is given by the state.

In a micro-level, diversity in education exists since students have different cultural backgrounds, different academic needs, different personal interests and

should be promoted in class by the teacher who should make sure that all different opinions are counted and heard on one hand and no different opinion to be treated as outsiders or “weird” and every difference among students is treated with respect. Diversity in class can have the meaning of richness academically and increase the academic standards compared to one-dimension learning. In order to achieve that, teachers must have been trained on those matters.

*Participation* in education is a term that shows the importance of other factors than the state in education. In education policy participation happens when parents, teachers, students and other stakeholders are involved in funding and formation of education. Different unions and councils of teachers, students, parents etc. are created and get involve in school decisions with the prerequisite that there is no discrimination and no repression in their decisions.

Participation is a term that has a very important role in class as it helps to the decision making methodology of education and the self-determination process of the students. Children can participate in class and express what they want, what they like, which their interests are and which are the things that they don't like or activities that bore them etc. They can evaluate the teaching process so that the teacher learns what their wishes are and how the teachers can ameliorate their pedagogical methodology. They can also learn by participating to their learning and not by just listening to what the teacher has to say and save knowledge in a passive way. Active learning or learning by experience is a way of participation in class as well as evaluation by the students.

*Choice* in education can be explained as the right of the parents and the students to choose the school they would like to attend. Opponents of this education system argue that this situation weakens the sense of solidarity and public good. In some cases the education policy allows the schools to select their students, something that is theorized by many social scientists as undemocratic as it promotes inequality and lowers academic achievements.

To specialize the term of choice in class, it could be defined as the right of the children to choose what they want to work with in class, which subject interest them, with which game they would like to play, where they would like to seat etc. Children learn from early age to respect their own preferences and choose the topics that interest them in class and express which are those that bore them. The fact that children are given the freedom to express themselves and choose is closely connected

with self-determination in their future life.

*Cohesion* in education is related with the strong relationships among individuals in the society, the notion of solidarity and trust, the creation of groups and communities with strong bonds among their members, with the concept of inclusion, the public good and the trusted nation figure. In education policy, different programs and ways of construction of the education system lead to the cohesion among the students and future citizens and to the inclusion of different kind of minorities in the society. Cohesion creates a common point of reference for all the people living in the society through their education.

In class, cohesion should be created by the teachers in practice by teaching in an inclusive manner, giving the chance to all the students to participate and trust each other, have a common goal. Here attention should be paid to the word common which does not mean that the children have to find something in common to group in together but to be able to embrace differences among them and feel united by respecting each other. To teach about the concepts that lead to cohesion in a group for example about solidarity, trust, toleration and other terms is also included in the promotion of cohesion in class and the responsibility of the teacher.

All concepts mentioned above are interconnected with each other. The criteria are not only related to each other but they depend on its other. For example there can be no right of choice by the students without the right of participation in class. How it is possible to have cohesion without equality? Also, Perry notes that it is needed to integrate all five concepts with no exception into a whole to be able to achieve a democratic education scheme.

The present research although it is general and not focused on alternative schools or/and democratic independent schools, takes in account the critics made upon them, criticism is considered useful in providing the 'negative' view of the implementation of democratic values in schools because it helps to create a balance on how democratic values should be applied to public schools and realize limitations and difficulties.

Criticism (Curren, 2007, Barlett, 2007) that has been mentioned on the theoretical part of this thesis is going to be codified in this section. Critics are going to be used as theoretical criteria in later discussions of the results.

Critics claim that some democratic values implemented in school such as the

right of choice can be a break to the children's academic progress. Children may choose not to study specific subjects or decide to play all day. Children according to the critics are not in a position to take decisions for themselves or choose what, how and with who they want to study because if their decisions put limitations to their studies and academic progress they will be the ones who will have problems considering the level of their education in their later lives.

On the other hand, if we examine how much from what we study in under an authoritarian way or without our will is gained as an academic asset maybe all these critics will not stand anymore. The important question is: Is all these academic credits of knowledge gained in this education level helpful for later? Which experiences leave a mark after all? Nel Noddings (2008) with her article entitled "Schooling for Democracy" claims that " An enlightened school would spend time finding out what the students are interested in and providing relevant courses" From my personal experience –according to the memories I have from primary school- my studies were more related to the way that my classmates and I had been treated by the teaching staff (authoritative teachers, sometimes violence, the set of a hard competition among the classmates, the unfair practices between the two genders etc.) than the knowledge we studied itself. It is worth mentioning that in an authoritarian education system country like Greece democracy is very much advertised as the concept that determines every aspect/section of the country. An ironic reality.

Other critics, besides the lower of academic standards, claim that the increase of democratic values in schools lead to non-self-disciplined citizens who lead to the construction of a 'permissive society' which in its turn lead to various social and economic problems.

At last, others claim that to establish democratic values in schools, seminars are needed for teachers' education on implementing democratic values in class. In addition, special labs are needed for the students experiments and active learning education. Thus, the cost of education increases and makes in class democratic reforms difficult to be accomplished.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Research problem-questions. Methodological considerations.**

The present research project can be characterized as pre-planned and traditional according to Werdelin (1982) and the different types of researches that exist in social sciences. It is a traditional research because every phase of the research is followed and programmed to achieve a certain goal and results in a specified field at the end of the project. Contrary to action-related research, traditional research has a start point of specific research questions and hypothesis who lead to a specific research design. In traditional and pre-planned research there is a theoretical problem or issue that is planned to be investigated.

In this case the research problem concerns democratic values existing in primary schools in Sweden. The goal of the research is to trace democratic values in education and is addressed to teachers of students aged 5-13 years old. Teachers are interviewed on democratic education and related topics. Through this research, a clear view of the indicators that make primary education democratic in Sweden is to be achieved. Teachers are called to give their perceptions on democratic education in theory and practice. The whole research hypothesis concerns Sweden but the research in field is limited to Lund city because of time, cost and purpose (completion of Master thesis) limitations. After the analysis of the results of the present research it is expected to have a view of how democratic education is conceived and which democratic values are applied in Swedish schools today. Also, it is expected to have an overall view of the teachers' profiles and their perceptions of democracy in Swedish primary schools and its relation with globalization. After the analysis of the results, it should be also possible to display the teachers' perception of democratic education in comparison with the guidelines given by the National Agency of Education (Skolverket) and the theoretical framework chosen.

This project except of having a specific aim, following the traditional research style, it can also be characterized as a mainly deductive theory research project. It is called deductive because the research problem is based on the theory of the specific topic already existed. The research problem of democratic education and the hypothesis are inspired and based on ideas, theories and concepts already inducted by other social scientists into the field approached. Then to continue, the deduced problem is "tested" or in other words the research process starts. Brymans' argument

that the deductive relation between theory and research includes an induction step, stands out. If the research conducted is successful, it is of course expected the theory and research relation to be turned into inductive style using the data collected and results. This is a part of the project that also indicates the success or failure of the research together with the concepts of validity, reliability and the possibility of generalization of the results.

The first idea of this project emerged from an assignment of a course I attended during my studies at the university. It was related with education and globalization. After having completed an assignment and read many books, my choice of the next open topic assignment was related with education and democracy, two concepts that I had found very vital to exist in every democratic society and school today. After having decided the general field of my Master thesis, the formulation of the research hypothesis and other details came after studying theories on democratic education and democratic values in schools. With these theories as a starting point, it is expected through data collection to get findings that will complete and take further existing theories and researches on this topic.

Another categorization of the research field and problem chosen focuses on the wideness or level of the research. Lawton (1992) cited in Barlett et al (2007) notices different levels of education research focus according to the field that the hypothesis and research questions are raised. These are:

- *Broad level*: where there is an exploration of the nature of education and its purposes from a wider view (society)
- *Less broad level*: where the research focuses on how the education system should be organized
- *Specific level*: where there is a research on different ways of teaching, pedagogical methods, in-class education delivery, organization and curriculum in classroom

The field of democratic education that is going to be examined in this paper belongs to the less broad level of education, the teaching and pedagogic level. The present research belongs to the “specific level” since the field that interests the research is the field of primary school education in the theoretical part and the classroom environment in its practical/research part. In addition, the paper is going to focus on ways knowledge should be transmitted, and let what should be taught open

(meaning the content of the curriculum).

Having defined the research design of the project in different ways according to how it is formulated, it is necessary to highlight the most important element of the project, the aim of the research. The main aim of the research is to trace democratic values in Swedish primary schools and realize the status and use that these democratic values have in Swedish education reality.

The methodology that is going to help the research to achieve the aim mentioned above is qualitative interviews with the teachers of the schools visited. The methodology is going to be extensively analyzed in the next chapter. The theoretical framework and various texts mainly coming from the Swedish National Agency of Education (Skolverket) will be used in further analysis and discussion of the results coming from the interviews, the main data collection methodology of the project.

In the beginning of the design of the project there were other methods-candidates appropriate to achieve the research goal but they were rejected for various reasons. Some of the candidate methods were: non-participant observation and ethnography. Both of them were rejected.

Non-participant observation would take place in the classrooms of the teachers that were going to be interviewed. The method would aim to observe the human behavior (students and teacher) in each classroom and find out democratic values existed. It was considered obsolete and not useful to observe some lessons in-class. In addition, the language barrier would be an important limitation in collecting the data and on the top of that the attitudes of the students and the teachers maybe influenced by the presence of the researcher in the classroom.

Ethnography is a commonly used way of research by social scientists which presupposes full involvement of the researcher in the field and that is why, it could not be used. In ethnography the researcher is entering (by participating or not) the life of a group of people and tries to understand their way of life and their behavior by using different kind of methods. Ethnography includes interviews, observations, text analysis and more. Particular groups must be studied and the researcher focuses in their culture, behaviors, values, special characteristics etc. Ethnography would be very useful to be used in exploring democratic values in primary schools but the main barrier was the time limitation (Beach D. et al, 2003, Werdelin, 1982, Silverman D. 2001).

Nevertheless, it is noted that a part of the observation will be covered by the

research diary that the researcher has kept from the schools visits where the interviews took place. In the field research diary, a field description (brief description of the environment of the schools including the school building the school classrooms), a non-verbal recording of the interviewees and the other people met in the field and an analytic recording of the personal experience of the researcher -not only as an interviewer but also as an international student in Sweden who accessed Swedish primary school for the Master project in a non official language: in English-will be included.

The research questions that follow are the main hypotheses that develop the research aim of this project. These questions emerged by the theory already existed and the scientific and personal interest of the researcher on the project. These questions are also going to be used as a guide to the analysis of the data (interviews) using thematic analysis. The method of analysis is going to be further developed in chapter seven (7). These questions is expected to be answered by the findings of the research and set also a starting point to the emerge of other research questions and to the motivation to further research activities on this field.

*Research questions/hypothesis:*

1. Which are the democratic values embedded in primary schools in Sweden according to the teachers?
2. Which democratic values have no place in Swedish primary schools and why?
3. Which are the teaching methods used and to which extent are they related to democratic education?
4. Which are the types of communication between the teachers and the students? How can they be described and interpreted?
5. How is globalization influencing primary schools in Sweden according to the teachers?

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Interview as the research method: design and analysis.**

Semi-structured interview is the main method of this project. It was chosen as

the best possible method to trace democratic values in primary schools in Sweden within a Master thesis time framework and conducted by a non-Swedish speaker. The choice of semi-structured interviews was made by taking in account the pros and cons of interviewing as a research method.

As every research method, interview has its strengths and weaknesses. Interviews' advantage is that it adapts in different situations and respondents and non-verbal data are meaningful and can be registered. Data are detailed and expressed in the respondents' own words. Unexpected issues are possible to arise since qualitative interview has a high level of flexibility. The most important disadvantage of the interview method is the influence that the interviewer may have towards the respondents. Also, more time is needed to gather the data since interview lasts longer and needs the full attention of the researcher. Moreover, the variation of the responses makes comparison and analysis more difficult (Flick, 2006). In semi-structured interview, there is a guide of topics and questions that is to be followed by the interviewer. Nevertheless this is happening in a flexible way. Questions and topics are constructed to be helpful for the interviewer but they are not a guide that should be strictly followed (Berg L. et al, 2004).

Using the interview method to investigate the status of democratic values in primary schools is very useful as it is flexible enough to go in depth into the topic and analyze the values used in primary schools nowadays by the teachers and other related issues. Having chosen semi-structured interview means that, there is a guide of prepared questions to be followed at the same time that there is space for follow up questions, and flexible shift of subjects that will lead to an open and in depth discussion. The respondents can underline any of the values they wish, analyze the democratic perspective that is clearer for them, talk about the origin of the democratic values they practice etc. In general the interview is designed in a way that respondents can get in detail and underline anything that they feel like within the framework of the topic. Weldelin (1982) also proposes to adjust the research emphasis according to the emphasis given by the interviewees something is going to happen within the limits of the topic and the semi-structured interview. This will make the research more inductive than deductive.

At this point it should be noted that the role of the interviewer is of high importance as the interview and its content is based on the way that the interviewer will be able to make the interviewees feel comfortable enough, present the topic of the

discussion clearly, lead or change the direction of the discussion when needed, explain unclear terms to the participants and achieve to get an in-depth interview with data that can be analyzed afterwards. Some criteria of a good interviewer are given by Bryman (2008, 445) and these are: “knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering, interpreting, balanced, ethically sensitive”<sup>(2)</sup>.

The questions of the interviews are based on the research questions and have been conducted on a one to one person basis. Although there were specific questions used, these were only used as a guide. Interviews were chosen to be semi-structured so that the discussion with the teachers would be informal and in-depth without a strong strict structure throughout the interviews. A natural, explanatory and wide discussion was planned to take place with the end to be determined by the time limitation (10-15 minutes). The time limitation was a set needed to encourage teachers to participate to the research not being afraid that it will take too long and they will miss their class or their full lunch break. The structure of the questions was designed in such way that the topics are flowing thematically into each other and help the conversation to be vivid and interesting.

The questions of the questionnaire are divided in three parts (questions initiating the discussion to the subject, questions concerning democratic values integrated within class and general questions on democratic education in Sweden).

*Questions of semi-structured interviews:*

1<sup>st</sup> part: Questions initiating the discussion to the subject.

- a. How do you define democratic education? Which are the positive and negative aspects of it?
- b. Do you consider the school you are working a school with a democratic “character”? (a school where many democratic values have been implemented).

2<sup>nd</sup> part: Questions concerning democratic values integrated within class.

- a. Could you name some pedagogical ways/methods/practices that you consider democratic? (in class).
- b. Which democratic values should not be implemented in class and why?
- c. How could you describe your relationship with your students?

3<sup>rd</sup> part: General questions on democratic education in Sweden

- a. How intensively did you study democratic values during your training as a teacher?
- b. Which is your opinion about the concept of democratic education in Sweden today?
- c. Do you think that globalization has an impact on democratic education and if yes what is that?

As analyzed before, semi-structured interviews addressed to the teachers have been chosen as the main research method to trace democratic values in primary schools in Sweden. The area covered is the city of Lund of the Lund community (kommun). Lund community includes other regions/villages like Genarp, Varpinge by, Dalby and Sodra Sandby which are not included in the research because of difficulties in accessibility (far from Lund, only public buses used for the research). The choice of the city of Lund was made because of high convenience of the area since it is the region that the university is located and where the research studies are being held. Moreover, the size of the city corresponded with the design of the research. The time available for the completion of the interviews was one (1) month. The expenses include only the photocopies of the necessary papers for the interviews (certificate of Lund university about the research<sup>(3)</sup>, blank papers, interview questions paper).

At this point three key concepts related with methodology should be mentioned. These key concepts should be clear to the researcher and followed carefully. All concepts help in having scientific acceptable findings that will contribute positively to the topic selected.

*Reliability*: it shows if the results can be repeatable using the same methodology. If the results differ every time that the democratic values research is being held in primary schools in Lund, then the interviews and results of the material are not reliable. There are two versions of the concept of reliability depending on the ideological direction. According to Barlett et al (2007), positivists see reliability as the repeatable results to a large number of respondents while interpretivists see reliability on how detail data of each respondent are repeatable or not. It is noted that a reliable result does not have to be accurate. Bryman (2008) also notes that reliability is more referred to quantitative research and less to qualitative.

*Validity*: it shows the ‘truthfulness’ or accuracy of the data coming from the research and research results. The research method should measure what the research designer claims that it is measured. According to the positivist approach standardization of data should happen using a pilot. Interpretivists claim that validity is shown when looking at the strength of the ability to defend the interpretations coming from the data. To have high validity the research project should give extensive explanations on how the data were gathered, how they were checked for mistakes etc. Another way to increase validity is triangulation which is the use of more than one research methods which results to a combination where weaknesses of methods do not overlap and strengths complement each other. In this way the topic is being viewed from different angles and results can be or not confirmed (Barlett et al, 2007, Bryman, 2008).

In this project, triangulation is not going to be used. The main research method is semi-structured interview. Texts and other material (Skolverket guidelines) that will be used are not considered another method because there is not going to be an extensive analysis on them. Instead they are going to be used as a theoretical framework material to the data collected. The validity of this research is heavily based on the research diary and detailed explanation of the research process and research field.

*Ethical considerations*: All scientific researches should be conducted within the ethical framework of the respect of the participants and the potential use of the research conducted. The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2003a) suggests some ethical considerations related with the respect for all participants in the research project, the knowledge, the democratic values and the quality of educational research. The interviews that took place in primary schools are totally anonymous and neither the names of the interviewees nor the names of the school are referred in the thesis. The schools that participated will receive the research results and the final Master thesis by e-mails that anonymous. All data collected and field and draft notes have been secured by the researcher and the outcome of the research is handled in a way that the scope of the research and results are clear and they could not be used in different ways. It is also ensured that the effects of this research on the participants will be null.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Results**

#### *Introduction*

As it has been written before the region target of the research is Lund city of Lund community (kommun) excluding other regions that however belong to Lund community. Before having a look to the quantitative data collected, it is important to have brief information of the region where the research took place, to be able to evaluate the results the best way and have an objective view of the project.

The city of Lund is situated in Southern Sweden, in Skane and Oresund regions. It is called the 'city of ideas'. It is one of the oldest cities of Sweden where Lund university is located. The city has various business, cultural and science activities and holds an "entrepreneurial spirit" as it is advertised through its official web page. The existence of a big university in the region with various scientific research achievements and the location of Lund in the industrial region of Oresund makes Lund a city of high development with a multicultural character (Official webpage of Lund community, accessed 2010).

The choice of schools in Lund city was made according to their geographical position. It was preferred the schools visited to be as scattered in the region of Lund as possible in order to have a representative sample.

At first, I contacted the school director and introduced myself and my research, showing also the letter from Lund university<sup>(3)</sup> where a certification of my project and my identity was made. After that, a brief explanation of my research was made and anonymity was reassured for the teachers that would like to participate and for the school. The participants (teachers) were not selected but they all volunteered to take part in my project. The maximum number of participants in each school was three (3). If teachers willing to participate were more than three, three of them were selected randomly by the researcher.

The total number of primary schools in Lund city of the Lund community is thirty four (34) according to the official webpage of Lund kommun. The research lasted almost 1 month (26 days) and it started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March and ended on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March. Twenty (20) schools out of the thirty four (34) were approached with thirty one (31) visits to them in order to collect the interviews. Out of the twenty (20) schools visited, only in eight (8) schools, teachers were willing to be interviewed. The

total number of interviews was twenty one (21). In each school three (3) interviews with three teachers of the school were requested but in some schools one or two interviews took place. To sum up, 21 interviews were collected in 8 primary schools in Lund. Three interviews per school were held in 6 of them and 2 interviews and 1 interviews were held at the rest (2) of the schools. Each interview lasted approximately 10-15 minutes. Interviews aimed to answer all research questions. The content of the interviews was written down at the time of the interview.

### *7.1 Research diary: approaching the field and field notes*

The research diary is an evenly important part of the research which includes the experiences' of the researcher during the research, the non-verbal data collected during the semi-structured interviews with the teachers and a brief description of the environment that the interviews took place. Research diary is useful not only to increase the validity of the project by letting the reader know about the details of the research, but it is also a tool that is going to be helpful for further clarification of the limitation and difficulties of the research.

To begin with, the fact that the researcher is a foreigner and studied the democratic values in primary schools in Sweden using English as the language of conducting the research is important. The treatment that the researcher had at the primary schools visited is also an indicator of the democratic values that the schools promote. The fact that I am a foreigner didn't play a positive or a negative role in most of the cases, although I met two negative attitudes in two of the school visited. Negative attitudes meaning that the head masters or teachers showed that didn't like the idea of my research by finding fake reasons to not give me access to their facilities. An example was a teacher after asking me where I come from and why I am doing my research in Sweden told me that she had lessons to do and she was not available to participate. As I was leaving I saw her sitting in the leaving room, relaxing and chatting with her colleagues. This might be a result of the topic of my research or a covered racism reaction.

The number of the schools from which teachers volunteered to be interviewed is a good indicator of the willingness of the school staff to participate in the research. The numbers are quite low as less than the half of the visited schools participated in the research (8 out of 20). Teachers sometimes because of lack of time, other responsibilities, or just because they were not interested in the subject or didn't want

to be interviewed in English or even because of fear to talk about the specific topic were not willing to participate. It is important to note that the willingness of the director/head master of each school played an important role. In cases that headmasters were positive towards the research and wanted to encourage the teachers to participate by introducing me to them, participation was much higher than in cases where they just gave me the permission to introduce myself.

Continuing with the environment of the schools, I observed in most of the primary schools, clean and equipped buildings, colored classrooms, with a front space for the shoes. Classrooms were painted in bright colors and they had tables in a disordered structure and also a room where children could express themselves through art and other activities. I also observed that schools had unlocked doors. Students could leave school at any time of the day, when they wanted to.

Difficulties coming from the language used during the interviews come last but they are of high importance. A lot of respondents expressed their anxiety on how they are going to express themselves in English, if they will use the correct words and if they are going to be understandable.

## *7.2 Thematic Analysis: the method*<sup>(4)</sup>

The analysis method that was chosen to analyze the data collected by semi-structured interviews is thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis supports the division of the most important parts of the data collected, into themes with topics that represent the content of them (Seidman, 2006). Having the selected data divided thematically, research analysis is continuing to the next stage with which the interpretation of these data with the support of the selected literature and theoretical framework set up. Data divided thematically should answer the research question, be compared to each other, be analyzed within the theoretical framework, be critically viewed in various ways to give the highest quality information possible and contribute to the research field chosen as much as possible.

Here, the data collected by semi-structured interviews were firstly carefully read and grouped in categories according to the research questions, the aim of the research and of course according to the content of the data itself. The next phase was to categorize, give labels and set a more specific structure to the selected material by dividing it into themes and in continuation subthemes. The choice of the themes was based on the research questions and the choice of the subthemes was based on the

content of the material. Themes are highlighted with Italian font characters and subthemes are underlined. The words or phrases in bold are the ones that were repeated the most by the interviewees. This on one hand might give a quantitative character to the research but on the other hand all the answers of the respondents are displayed in the categories something that gives a variety and includes in depth collected material. The last step of the interpretation of the data will be supported by the theoretical framework set and other previous researches and texts.

It is worth to mention that as the material of the interviews were collected, it became very hard to resist and not have a first look of the research (first eight interviews) and follow its development as more and more interviews were collected. In the beginning I had the sense that one could almost group all interviews according to the schools taken. It seemed that in each school, the interviewees had similar opinions on the topics discussed and had the same difficulties to answer specific questions, a thought that was falsified with the continuation of the research.

Seidman (2006) also finds difficulties on not processing the material gathered before the time programmed. He claims that most researchers work with the data as they are collected but it should be avoided to proceed to in-depth analysis before all interviews are complete. He also states that during the stage of analysis the researcher should keep his mind open, looking for the most interesting and fruitful data and have a structured plan of what he is looking for. Nevertheless, to avoid any extreme or partial interests on the part of the researcher, the interests on the topic should be stated from the beginning and a self-evaluation of prejudices is needed. As stated before, in this research the main aim is to trace democratic values in primary school. Therefore, during the thematic analysis the goal will be to trace democratic values used by the teachers. To answer the research questions is also another goal that should be achieved but without turning the whole procedure of analysis to deductive. Having looked to the data twice, the researcher can both have an inductive and deductive view of the data. The deductive one aiming at choosing the material that answers the research questions and the inductive one aiming at finding the most interesting material out of the interviews regardless the research questions. An outstanding thought that Seidman shares (by his own experiences) is that when starting the analysis by reading in an inductive way, the researcher is always selecting the passages that attract his interest according to specific patterns that he/she has. Thus, it can not be claimed that a research is objective 100% but it has been tried to be as

objective and reflecting the reality as possible.

### 7.3 Thematic analysis-Results

It is reminded that themes are created from the data collected, the research questions posed and the research problem. There are themes and sub themes when a further categorization is needed for the answers.

**A.** The first theme corresponds to the first part of the interview. Teachers gave their opinion on *which democratic values (theoretically or practically) should be included in primary schools*. The answers are divided according to the population target that democratic values are addressed to. All democratic values that the teachers have referred to in their interviews are theoretical concepts or practices that stand for democratic education applications in primary schools and this will be the second division of the data of the results. The words and expressions in bold have been used as they are by almost all the teachers during their interviews.

**A. 1.** To begin with, the democratic elements that are addressed to the teachers and their responsibility are (in high to low frequency<sup>2</sup> order):

**A.1.1.** Practical or informal way of implementing democratic education:

1. Teachers should **listen** to children's experiences, **listen** to their thoughts of the pupils and everything they would like to express (in other words, there should be a good communication between teachers and students, good relation with the students)
2. Teachers should be flexible with the needs of the students ( to focus on positive elements of the students, to find the strong sides of the personality of each child and enhance and encourage that, help children with difficulties, creation of gender groups to give girls space to express themselves, to give children the space and time to choose and propose)
3. Teacher should create a good relation with their students-**good teacher student communication** (to have discussions with the children, to be honest, to have non-formal status-not act like students' boss, to have a personal relation with students, to treat all the children the same way)
4. Teachers should use a good teaching methodology (to try to teach them in different

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<sup>2</sup> 'Frequency' here does not have the meaning of a quantitative study. 'Frequency' shows the importance of specific answers meaning that these answers were underlined and selected to be analyzed more by the teachers.

ways-try different methodologies, to give children a problem and try to solve it, to create children-teachers groups, to give responsibilities to the students concerning their education)

**A.1.2. Theoretical or formal way of implementing democratic education:**

1. There should be discussion groups among the teachers
2. Teachers should integrate different democratic values in the curriculum

**A.2.** The democratic values that are addressed to the students and their rights are (in high to low frequency order):

**A.2.1. Practical or informal way of implementing democratic education:**

1. Students should **choose** what they want to do (play, read, study) to do and **how they want to do it** (ex. freedom to choose where to sit, choose the rules in class and what someone should do if he/she doesn't follow the rules)
2. Students should be able to make **decisions** and learn how to make those decisions (think critically and come to a conclusion, see what is wrong and not have to always follow the crowd)
3. Students should have the space to **participate** in class (take part in the education process, get involved, let them explore, work and solve problems together)
4. Students should be given time and space to **express** themselves, their interests and feelings (speak their mind, **students' voices should be heard** )  
“...children don't have to produce something to be 'good' they are 'good' already...”
5. Students should learn to **listen to each other** (student to student communication) and accept that they are different (respect each other, work in groups)
6. Continuing evaluation of the lessons by the students in cooperation with the parents (faces paper)
7. Children are getting involved in personnel recruitment

**A.2.2. Theoretical or formal way of implementing democratic education:**

1. Students should have the space to make various **discussions** and learn about UN, global issues etc.)
2. Students have the right to **vote** for different councils (school, class, other).
3. During the specific time period discuss about the **national elections** in Sweden (September 2010)
4. Students should learn about their rights and how the adults-children relations

should be. Also, learn about different status of children's rights in different countries and which laws these countries have decided to follow

5. Students should learn about the concept of democracy

During their interviews teachers made a distinction not only according to the target of the application of democratic elements but also according to the formality and the informality of them. Formal and informal democratic education was explained in two ways by the teachers. The first distinction includes formal democratic education as the creation of different councils and the explanation of the term 'democracy' in different discussions in class and informal democratic education is called the way that the lessons are held, how everyday contact with the students takes place in class-this distinction will be applied on the data as referred above as theoretical concepts and practices (what Biesta had explained as education for and through democracy, Englund, 1999). The second explanation of formal and informal education focuses on the relation between the teacher and the students. Formal is explained as the less democratic where the teacher keeps a distance from the students and informal where there is a friendly and less official environment in class.

In general, teachers expressed the difficulty of application of democratic values on this level of education meaning that the students are very young to understand the democratic concepts. Nevertheless, most of them added that it is from young age that the children should learn about democracy and every school should promote democratic practices. "The term "democracy" can not be mentioned on this level of education but the way that the lessons are held should be done in a democratic way because...the society goes in school and the school goes in society".

It is observed that teachers have a child-centered approach to their answers. They gave more information connected on how students should be educated, and the education conditions concerning the child than give the responsibilities of the teachers and how they should create the appropriate class environment.

**B.** The second theme displays the *negative aspects of the democratic values* that teachers have already talked about earlier and the situations that justify the negative view of democratic elements in primary schools. The subthemes are three: the misuse of democratic values in education and the difficulties faced during the integration of democratic values in primary schools.

The negative aspects are displayed together with some quotations from the interviews (in high to low frequency order):

**B.1 The misuse of democratic values in education:**

1. **Fake democracy**, manipulation of democratic values by the teachers: “Tell the children what to do but make them think that they choose to do what they want”
2. **Role of the parents**: parents take advantage of democratic values in schools and they get involved in teachers’ responsibility matters
3. Students take advantage of democratic education

**B.2 The difficulties met when applying democratic values in primary schools:**

1. Difficulty of implementation: “**it is hard to implement democracy at this level of education**” (**children are young**), “It is difficult for children to understand that democracy has two sides: rights and obligations”
2. Absence of discipline: it is **not possible for the children to choose/get what they want everything/all the time**. “Democratic values in Swedish education in my opinion are too much. Students can not recognize when it **is time to stop the discussion and start learning and listen to the teacher...**”
3. The long time needed to develop a relation with the students to be able to work with democratic values in a organized way
4. Lower/or delayed academic achievements: “It slows down things because it takes a bit longer to reach the desirable academic standards”
5. Difficulties emerge when children have too many rights in class which lead to disorganization and disorder. “They [children] don’t know how to behave in certain moments”, “There is a need to have a program and take decisions and run projects without having the children to be involved”, “Teachers need to set the rules and students must listen to people, there must be balance”, “There can not be too much democracy but there can be too much freedom... rules are needed”, “In Sweden the education system adopted in the 90’s based on the implementation of democratic values in schools is seen by many as too chaotic now”
6. “...since democracy is to do what most of the people want...some of them will never get it their own way”

Overall we can notice that the teachers are referring on two negative sides of the application of democratic values in primary schools: the misuse of democratic education philosophy and various difficulties met when applying democratic values in class in primary schools. Teachers find that sometimes discipline and low academic standards are problems faced when applying democratic values in primary schools. Apart from that, there were also some statements that “canceled” somehow the democratic values that teachers had already mentioned earlier in the discussion, a fact that probably shows the difficulty that many teachers confront and maybe a lack in their education. An example is: “There is a difference on what they think they know and what I think they know”. The teacher expressed the difference of opinion between her and her students as a problem of democratic education, but didn’t explain it further. The possible meaning of it is that from the moment that students have the right of decision, choice and other in class democratic rights, the authority of the teacher is limited and teachers and students are more likely to find themselves in disagreements.

C. The importance of the relation between the teachers and the students was analyzed by the teachers. Teachers described their *relation with their students* and the position they have and develop to hold with them as well *problems that may emerge*.

1. Most of the teachers described the environment in class as a **family** one. The reason for that is that children spend a big part of their day in school and the teachers in primary schools teach all the subjects of a specific class.
2. Teachers describe themselves as easy-going “so that students can have trust and feel secure to express themselves” and wishing to have **an informal relation** with the children( open for discussions, equality between students and teachers, have fun together), “sometimes, they see me as a mother”. However many of them note that a balance is needed and regardless the informal status of the relation they are still the **‘boss’** , their leader. “ I am friendly and the boss together”, “I am both a teacher and someone who cares for their welfare”, “if I open myself , they will open up”.
3. Other teachers focused also on another side of their relation with their students. “[I try to] let them be independent so that they will get a high self-esteem”
4. In the student-teacher relation one teacher also noticed the possible closeness that some teachers may develop which leads to a state of manipulation of the teachers by

the students "...teacher working with this age of children is very easy to get fond of them...manipulate him"

**D.** A small number of teachers referred to a *specific methodology* that they use or that it is *relevant to democratic education*: Child-centered approach, problem-based learning and problem-solving learning. No clear methodologies are followed in public (state) schools but teachers are applying individually democratic values coming as they said from the way they are raised, their experiences and their training in less cases.

**E.** This is the only theme that was investigated in a quantitative way. A closed question was posed to the teachers: *how did they their knowledge on democratic values, from their personal experience or from their training?* Some of the interviewees answered both.

According to the answers, eleven (11) people answered experience, six (6) people training and four (4) people both, experience and training. It is observed that experience was the main way of teacher education on democratic values. Some of the teachers explained that they didn't attend any courses exclusively on democratic education but all their courses had democratic education as a part of them.

**F.** Teachers talked about the current *status of Sweden in relation to democratic education and democratic values* in schools, as well as the past and the future of democratic values in Swedish education.

1. Most of the teachers compared the present and **the past** of democratic values in Swedish schools, noticing that in the past democratic values were not a given fact in Swedish schools. "In the past, teachers' word was the law", "50 years ago we could not speak so freely to the teachers"

Most of them agreed that democratic education **has developed** and **is developing** in Sweden.

2. A great number of the teachers referred to the guidelines given by the National Agency of Education in Sweden (Skolveret): **Laroplan LP094. They expressed that**

**Skolveret booklets have given them support on how to make the lessons more democratic.**

3. Almost the total of the teacher talked about the way **that people are raised in Sweden** as the main reason that education in Sweden is considered very democratic from other countries (**values of equality, solidarity, etc. integrated in everyday life and promoted by the family**, Swedish people do not talk about democracy: it is the way of living)

5. Conventions on children's rights and laws to be followed by the Swedish schools

6. **The importance of the informal relation with the teacher** (children are opening up with their personal problems to the teacher, children yell at the teacher, children call the teacher with his/her first name, teacher doesn't keep a status) know their rights.

In general, teachers talked about the present situation of democratic values in Swedish schools with a always a look at the past since most of them had non-democratic experiences when they were students themselves. Most of them believe that there is a good level of democratic education in Sweden ("Sweden is far ahead compared to other countries") which can be explained by two main factors: the way that Swedish people are raised (with democratic values) and the guidelines they receive from their government (Laroplan), although as one of the teachers notes : "...it is very much up to teacher if he/she will implement democratic values in class". However, schools are being controlled by the government concerning the way they function once per year or two years (the most rare).

But how Sweden came to this level of promotion of democratic values on the first place? One respondent claims: "Sweden has been many years a democratic country, there have been no recent wars and Sweden has always kept a neutral position in wars. Democracy moved forward faster in Sweden."

**G.** The theme here is *globalization and democratic education* and is divided in two sub themes according to the teachers' answers: the globalization phenomenon and its *influence in class and the political-education level* of globalization and its impact in primary schools in Sweden.

**G.1.** Globalization as a phenomenon and its influence in class

1. **Global issues** are discussed in class (learn about the world, flea market to raise

- money to sent to Tanzania, pen fiends, discussions on global environmental issues, compare countries by using newspapers)
2. The use of **internet** on an every-day basis (online social networks, media, through internet people fight for their rights easier, they communicate easier and they don't feel lonely any more)
  3. There are **students who come from different countries** (multicultural school environment, different food, various religions, different languages, etc.)
  4. There is education available in English language
  5. Students travel abroad easier than the past
  6. "As a teacher I have to look at other countries...what it is done on a policy level.."
  7. Treatment of students by the teachers on an individual base (according to each ones' needs, greater flexibility)

**G.2.** Globalization and its role on an education policy level and its impact in primary schools.

1. There is **no influence** in education policy in Sweden by globalization
2. There is no influence of globalization in primary education policies. **There are globalization influences on a higher education level**
3. The influence towards Sweden is not global but it comes from specific countries like: **Denmark, Finland, Australia (portofolio), New Zealand** that have a positive influence towards Sweden. "There [is also] an influence coming from U.S.A. towards individualism...something that changes the way that people are raised in Sweden-values of solidarity-equality" Countries that do not influence Sweden because they consist bad examples in education are Germany and England.
4. The influence from Sweden to other countries like: Turkey, Romania, Denmark, Asia, and other European countries especially in gender issues
5. The appearance of schools like Montessori, religious, 'free' and other types of schools. "There is a move from state to independent schools but the independent schools have still to keep the democratic values. In the future of course some schools are expected to be more academic"
6. The competition between the public and the other types of schools
7. Global cooperation among different parts of the world (global discussion, politicians talk a lot about it, democratic values are transmitted faster as there are different influences from other countries)
8. Company schools in Sweden in the future

Discussion on globalization was very difficult to develop as most of the teachers found a difficulty in grasping the concept of globalization and the kind of connection it has with education on which they were asked to talk about.

Most of the teachers do not observe any change happening in a wider level than that of the class. They don't believe that globalization has brought any important change in Swedish education. Some teachers talked about influences coming from Sweden towards specific countries and the reverse. One teacher noticed: "school is a good example of political change". He explained that this is what is happening now in Sweden: "Social-democratic policies have been long in government and people need a change".

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **8.1 Discussion**

Having a first look at the results, one can observe the importance of democratic values for the Swedish culture and education. Results show that democratic values are embedded in everyday life in the Swedish society and families promote equality and solidarity. Nevertheless, problems are faced by the teachers. The majority of the teachers state that got their knowledge more from experiences than their training. Teachers are following the Laroplan (guidelines on education by the National Education Agency), without having any training on democratic values during their own training as teachers.

The main aim of the research has been achieved. Democratic values in Swedish primary schools exist and many of them have been traced. All research questions have been covered by the interviews with the teachers. The results correlated with the relevant research questions are going to be displayed together with other theories, researches and theoretical positions that contradict or confirm the results.

Two are the research question which are answered by the first part of the results (A). The research questions: "Which are the democratic values embedded in primary schools in Sweden according to the teachers?" and "Which are the teaching methods and to which extent are they related to democratic education?"

The democratic values or ways to support democratic values that were referred by the teachers were more child oriented meaning that they explained everything that should be done in class using students as the subject of their sentences.

On a practical/informal way of implementing democratic education, the respondents underlined the good relation between the teacher and the students and how this can be achieved (listen to the students, give them space to express themselves) the rights of the students on their involvement on their education (choose what they want to do and how, make decisions, participate in class), and the good cooperation among students and among the teaching staff. On a theoretical/formal way of implementing democratic education, interviewees highlighted the need of discussion on UN, national elections and children's rights.

All the democratic values recorded covered the criteria of Perry (2009) one by one. *Choice* was the criterion that was registered more and it was the first on the list of the respondents. The meaning of the criterion of choice remained its notion and underlined the right of children to choose what they want to do in class (choose the subject, game, etc.) and how they want to do it. *Participation* was the second criterion highlighted by the teachers. Participation as in Perry, is the involvement of students in their own education, show their likes and dislikes, make decisions and evaluate. The methodology that is extracted by this set of democratic practices is the active learning methodology. *Equality* is the next democratic values that respondents talked about. Respondents set the value of equality as the first democratic value mentioned to be promoted in everyday life in Sweden including among others the equal treatment of students by the teachers in class. *Diversity* was mentioned by the teachers while talking about democratic values and globalization. Diversity in Lund is of high importance as it is a multicultural city of Sweden situated in Oresund region. In class diversity, the criterion of Perry is promoted through global issues discussions and the in some cases the multicultural background of students themselves, an element which is promoted by the teachers with respect in every difference. At last, cohesion was the least recorded value of the interviews. *Cohesion* is the criterion of Perry which presupposes trust in class and the embrace differences among the students at the same time when they feel united by respecting each other. The notion of cohesion although it was not registered as a democratic value in class can be founded when teachers talked about the relations between themselves and the students and among the students.

In addition, the environment of the schools and facilities were promoting democratic education giving students the freedom to choose and be creative (unlock outside doors, in school facilities).

Passing to the negative aspects of the integration of democratic values in schools (the B part of the results) another research question is answered: Which democratic values have no place in Swedish primary schools and why?

Teachers referred to the negative side of integrating democratic values in primary schools in various ways.

They talked about the misuse of the democratic values existing in schools by analyzing various stakeholders (teachers, children, parents) who take advantage of it and try to impose their own preferences in a non-democratic way which nevertheless can appear to be democratic.

Another negative side is represented by various difficulties that teachers mentioned such as the young age of children to understand the concept of democracy, the absence of discipline, the lower academic standards and the time needed to develop the appropriate relation with the students. Most of the teachers agreed that there should be a limit on the rights that are granted to the children otherwise there would be disorganization and a lack of the basic rules. "Teachers need to set the rules and students must listen to people, there must be balance", "Children don't know how to behave in certain moments". Critics of democratic education also focus on the decrease of academic standards as the democratic values in schools go higher. They claim like a part of respondents that children lose their discipline and can not decide for themselves on that age. Looking at the future, critics underline that non-self-disciplined citizens can lead to the construction of a 'permissive society' with various social and economic problems.

In addition, critics claim the high cost of democratic values integrated in schools as a barrier to the realization of such policies. They argue that successful policies on the integration of democratic values in schools, presuppose special seminars for the teachers, labs for the students which makes the policies expensive to be realized. These arguments by the critics are falsified by the example of Swedish reality where the knowledge of the teachers on democratic values is graded to their experiences and everyday way of life than to their training as teachers (11 respondents answered experience, 6 respondents training and 4 respondents both, experience and training).

Nevertheless, this is not the case in other countries where democratic values are not a part of their lives and seminars are needed to guide the teachers. The case of Turkey is an example of the careful design that these policies and plans are needed before the stage of their actualization. The seminars addressed to teachers included include child-centered, active and constructivist learning. The program failed due to ineffectiveness of the seminars (Cimer et al, 2010).

Nevertheless, most of the interviewees also believe that Swedish education is too democratic. “There cannot be too much democracy but there can be too much freedom... rules are needed” An explanation is given by a teacher who says that the Swedish education has integrated democratic values from the 90’s and now most of the people believe that the situation is too chaotic and a change is needed.

Moving forward to the part C and D of the results, research questions on the relation between the teachers and the students and the methodology used are answered. (Which are the types of communication between the teachers and the students observed in classroom? How can they be described and interpreted? Which are the teaching methods used and to which extent are they related to democratic education?)

Most of the respondents describe the in class climate as a friendly-‘family’ one for the children, “sometimes they see me as a mother”. Teachers especially in primary schools develop a very close relation with the children, as they teach all the subjects of one class. The majority of the interviewees aim at developing a friendly and informal relation with the students but at the same time they say that they have the role of the leader “I am friendly and the boss together”.

It is interesting to look at a study held in Israel who is looking at the teacher-students relations by focusing at the boundaries of the authority the teachers have and the reactions of the students to this authority. Through this research and by using interviews with the students, the authoritarian style of education in Israel is uncovered (Yariv, 2009). It is noted that the level of authority that characterises the teacher-student relation is an important criterion of the integration of democratic values in schools according to Knight et al (2000). Knight and Pearl present six criteria of democracy applied to the education sector which are: “a) the determination of important knowledge, b) the nature of educational authority, c) the ordering and inclusiveness of membership, d) the definition and availability of rights, e) the nature of participation, and f) equality” (Knight et al, 2000, 198).

Coming to the second research question, the teaching methods whom a part of was covered in part A. A limited number of teachers referred to methodologies that they use in public schools (Child-centered approach, problem-based learning and problem-solving learning). Most of them described practically the actions they follow that characterize some pedagogical methods. For example, when emphasize participation in class, the typical methodology that is used is active learning.

Passing to the last part of the results and the research question on globalization and education, “How is globalization influencing primary schools in Sweden according to the teachers?”

Some of the respondents had a difficulty in grasping the concept of globalization and its relation with education. The influence of the phenomenon of globalization in class was described with the presence of in class discussions on global issues, the use of internet, the registration of students coming from various countries in Swedish schools and the use of English language. On a policy level the role of globalization was presented less as a global tendency and more as an exchange of education policies among specific countries. Some of the interviewees stated that there is no influence from globalization to the education sector in Sweden whatsoever, and some others answered that an influence may exist in higher levels of education. One respondent answered that there is right now a competition between state and private schools created by globalization and in the future that can take a form of higher academic oriented company schools. In general most of the respondents did not think that globalization plays an important role in the education sector, something that reconfirms Arnesen and Lundahl (2006) cited in Perry (2009) study’s result that while neoliberalism influenced educational reforms happening in Sweden there was no conflict by any political or academic actor. Influences of globalization towards a more competitive educational environment (Viederyte, 2009) and policies-leaders to privatization and marketization of education were not observed by the respondents as phenomena in Sweden.

In conclusion, for sure from the Master thesis research results and the discussion above many further questions emerge. Also, the project can be applied in other regions and the research can be conducted using other methods, addressing to another target group (ex. the students). Questions that may emerge are: How is the situation in higher education and which are the differences concerning democratic values? How is the situation in other regions in Sweden? Which are the opinions of

the students concerning democratic values in schools? Another idea would be a comparison study choosing a city with the characteristics of Lund in another country and conducting the same research.

In general, one observes a correspondance between teachers' opinions on democratic values (in Lund) and the guidelines and evaluations given by the National Education Agency in Sweden. Teachers face problem in the applications of the guidelines a fact that is expressed in the evaluation by Skolverket. This might be solved with the set of seminars for active teachers and better training on democratic values for future teachers.

## **8.2 Limitations and difficulties of the research**

In this section there is a demonstration of firstly the difficulties faced during the research investigation and the writing of the thesis, and secondly of the limitations that the final version of the Master thesis has according to its results and future potential continuation of the study. Also the originality of the research will be explained.

The first and most important difficulty of the present study that was experienced during the research was the fact that the topic chosen concerns the Swedish education system and the researcher is not Swedish speaking. It is true that there was a language barrier while designing and conducting the study. The research design had to be in a way that all part of the research would be possible to be held entirely in English, excluding some interesting methods. In addition, during the interviews conducted there was an anxiety expressed from the participants concerning the English as the language of the interviews. The interviewees were problematized on if they could expressed themselves completely using a language different than their mother tongue, if they will use the correct words, if they will make themselves understandable. In every way, I tried to give them confidence on that by telling them that they are comprehensible.

Another difficulty was the level of accessibility of the schools and the factors that this level depended on. The low of accessibility in most of the schools was relatively low including the schools whom the teachers were not willing to participate at all and the schools where the participants were selected from the directors and staff as the most knowledgeable on democratic education. According to my research diary

data, the schools whom the director had a personal interest on the research topic and was willing to introduce me, present the topic of the research to the teachers and encourage them to participate, had more participations than the schools whom the director had no interest on the research topic, was busy, didn't want to introduce me, and other.

Another difficulty faced can be called a cultural and individual one since a respective number of respondents expressed their concerns on if they are going to give the correct answer or not. They were worried that they don't have enough knowledge to answer the questions and discuss on this topic. Most of the teachers were afraid that they will give incorrect information when the discussion came on globalization and education, the last part of the interview. They also paid attention to not give any political answers and be always objective. The difficulty that most of the interviewees faced to grasp the concept of globalization and its connection with the education sector was a barrier as well concerning their openness and carefulness to talk.

At this point I would like to put a quotation of a part of an e-mail I received from the director of one primary school. The answer was that none of the teachers are interesting to participate in my study and the last sentence had an aim to reassure me that nothing is wrong with the schools' democratic level and that all the teachers are in knowledge of them.

“By the way, all teachers in primary schools are teaching subjects related to democratic education”

At last, it was easier to approach small schools than big schools centrally located with many students. Private and public schools had the same level of accessibility.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Future studies**

- The same study is interesting to be conducted in other parts and cities of Sweden and find out if results can be generalized.
- A similar study to a city with a similar description to Lund can be conducted in another country and have a comparative view of the project.

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## APPENDIX

### Banking education by the oppressive society<sup>(1)</sup>:

- a. the teacher teaches the students and the students are taught
  - b. the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing
  - c. the teacher thinks and the students are thought about
  - d. the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly?
  - e. the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined
  - f. the teacher chooses and enforces his choice and the students comply
  - g. the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher
  - h. the teacher chooses the program content, and the students(who were not consulted) adapt to it
  - i. the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his own personal authority, which he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students
  - j. the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are more objects.
- (Paulo Freire, 1970, Pedagogy of the oppressed, The Seabury press: New York, 57-74, republished in Curren 2007, 69)

### Criteria of a successful interviewer<sup>(2)</sup>

Kvale (1996) has proposed a very useful list of ten criteria of a successful interviewer.

1. Knowledgeable: is thoroughly familiar with the focus of the interview, pilot interviews of the kind used in survey interviewing can be useful here.
2. Structuring: gives purpose for the interview, rounds it off, asks whether interviewee has questions.
3. Clear: asks simple, easy, short questions, no jargon
4. Gentle: lets people finish, gives them time to think, tolerates pauses.
5. Sensitive: listens attentively to what is said and how it is said, is empathetic with the interviewee.
6. Open: responds to what is important to the interviewee and is flexible.
7. Steering: knows what he or she wants to find out.
8. Critical: is prepared to challenge what is said-for example dealing with inconsistencies in interviewees' replies.
9. Remembering: relates what is said to what has previously been said.
10. Interpreting: clarifies and extends meaning of interviewees' statements, but without imposing meaning on them.

Also Bryman (2008) has proposed two criteria more.

11. Balanced: does not talk too much, which may make the interviewee passive, and does not talk too little, which may result in the interviewee feeling he or she is not talking the right lines.
12. Ethically sensitive: is sensitive to the ethical dimension of interviewing, ensuring the interviewee appreciates what the research is about, its purposes, and that his or her answers will be treated confidentially.

(Alan Bryman, 2008, Social Research Methods, Oxford university press: USA, 445)

The framework of thematic analysis: how to search for themes (Rayn and Bernard, 2003) <sup>(4)</sup>:

- a. Repetitions: topics that recur again and again
- b. Indigenous typologies or categories: local expressions that are either unfamiliar or are used in an unfamiliar way
- c. metaphors and analogies: the ways in which participants represent their thoughts in terms of metaphors or analogies (they give the example of people describing their marriage as like 'the Rock of Gibraltar')
- d. transitions: the ways in which topics shift in transcripts and other materials
- e. similarities and differences: exploring how interviewees might discuss a topic in different ways or differ from each other in certain ways or exploring whole texts like transcripts and asking how they differ
- f. linguistic connectors: examining the use of words like 'because' or 'since', because such terms point to causal connections in the minds of participants
- g. missing data: reflecting on what is not in the data by asking questions about what interviewees for example, omit in their answers to questions
- h. theory-related material: using social scientific concepts as a springboard for themes (Alan Bryman, 2008, Social Research Methods, Oxford university press: USA, 555)



February 25, 2010

**LUND UNIVERSITY**  
Faculty of Social Sciences

To whom it may concern,

This is to certify that Miss Theofano Mavrovounioti (1985-08-15) is a Master student at Lund University. She is currently enrolled in the Master's Program in Global Studies and is writing her Master Thesis under the supervision of Anders Olsson at the Department of Social Work. She is expected to graduate in June 2010 and is gathering the empirical data for her thesis through interviews. It would be much appreciated if you would grant her access to your facilities and staff.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lina Mann".



Lina Mann  
Programme Administrator

**LUND UNIVERSITY**  
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