Chapter 1

Young people's influence and democratic education: Introduction

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This book is in large part about the ways that young people are able to act in school in order to raise discussions about and influence their schooling. It is based on a research project in the Swedish upper secondary school with the title *Active citizenship? On democratic education in the upper secondary school*, funded by The Swedish Research Council (VR 2006-2694). The project started in 2007 and is now drawing to an end. In this first chapter we present the background of the project and provide a brief outline of its focus, theoretical starting points and methods.

The research was prompted by our interest in democratic education and power relations (e.g. Beach, 1999b, 2003; Öhrn, 2001; Lahelma and Öhrn, 2003; Dovemark, 2004a, 2004b; Hansson and Lundahl, 2004; Arnesen and Lundahl, 2006), particularly in processes related to democracy in school which students themselves actively drive (e.g. Öhrn, 1998, 2009; Nyroos, Rönnberg and Lundahl, 2004). However, whereas contemporary research focusing on democracy in formal schooling is largely separated from analyses of young people's initiatives, the project set out to develop knowledge about the content and organisation of teaching and learning, as well as attempts by students to actively discuss and influence their schooling. The latter has sometimes been seen as an aspect of 'active citizenship' or 'living democracy' (OECD, 2005). In the project we were interested in investigating the rules and the social, cultural and material resources that young people apply when they behave as active, democratic citizens in the upper secondary school context.

Our research has been conducted with a special focus on gender in relation to social background as these relations appear to be highly relevant to processes of democracy and student influence in school. Accordingly, students from differently gendered and classed upper secondary programmes have been examined in the project. More detailed descriptions of the Swedish upper-

secondary school, including its policy history and programme construction, are given in the next chapter.

Academic, vocational and individual programmes (see chapter two for definitions and discussion of these programmes) have been analysed in the project, using ethnographic approaches, including participant observation, discussions and formal interviews with five groups of students.

The principle research questions addressed in the project were:

1. What values and understandings of citizenship and democracy are expressed in the researched education processes?
2. How is the education organised with respect to influence from the students? What possibilities do they have to discuss issues related to democracy, to challenge the teaching content and to articulate criticism?
3. Do students act in relation to democracy issues and conditions in the classroom and the wider school context and, if so, in which contexts? How does the school relate to this?

Questions such as these are primarily concerned with young peoples' experiences of, attitudes to, and practices of democracy in formal education spaces. We hold that they are particularly important in the present era, not least because young people are spending increasing amounts of time in formal education. Almost all young people in Sweden today continue to study after compulsory school in upper secondary school, and universities have become more common post-school options than conventional workplaces for young adults; about forty-five per cent of a cohort begin higher education by the age of twenty-five (Eriksson**,** 2009). Thus, the experience of democratic participation among the young (including young voters) is strongly related to education spaces. This underlines the importance of the ways in which democratic issues are treated and respected in schools and other educational settings.

Previous research of relevance to the project

Research on democratic education versus youth and power
The project is related to two research fields: one focuses on democratic education and the other on the positions of power available to young adults and how they mount initiatives that affect schools. Swedish policy texts hold both as highly important. The Swedish national curriculum for upper secondary schools emphasises that the schools should both communicate democratic values to their students and teach in democratic ways that create possibilities for student influence (Ministry of Education and Research, 1994; see also chapter two).

Empirical research projects to date have tended to focus on one or the other of these aspects rather than their interrelations.

With respect to the teaching of democratic values, international research has shown that some change has occurred in school practices in recent years. The very meaning of democracy is said to be changing and to refer, increasingly, to 'unregulated business manoeuvres in a free-market economy' (Apple and Beane, 2007, p. 150). Education policy analysis has suggested that this is due to an input from a contemporary neo-liberal approach to education that emphasises individual freedom of choice and individual rights, at the expense of collective justice and equality, with a shift in focus from democracy in society to individual choice (Englund, 2003; Gordon, Lahelma and Beach, 2003; Beach 2008c, 2010). The main issues stressed in teaching are the individual's rights as an autonomic actor in relation to the State and the communication of factual knowledge; much less attention is paid to political criticism and reflection.

This pattern can also be observed at the Swedish upper-secondary level in the use of individual teaching materials that emphasise factual knowledge of formal democracy and formal democratic influence (Bronäs, 2003). Collective action (e.g. demonstrations and other forms of public protest available to sections of the population that lack voting rights) that youth has typically engaged in, has been marginalised in teaching.

Research on student influence shows from its perspective that the possibilities young people have for making a difference in school today are limited, and tend to concern the basic organisation of day-to-day learning plans (Dovemark, 2004a). Issues related to more fundamental, collective issues, such as the unequal distribution of rights in society and the situations of subordinate groups and struggles against oppressive practices, both in and outside schools as institutions, such as racist acts, are less common (Öhrn, 1998).

Classroom discussions on such issues might help to contest teacher positions, as they raise a variety of opinions, and those held by the teacher are not necessarily accepted by the students (Liljestrand, 2002). Some studies (e.g. Davies, 2002) suggest that Swedish classrooms are relatively open and more readily promote deliberative conversations than counterparts in many other countries. However, as noted by Arnot and Reay (2007, p. 322), having one's say in class by no means implies influence; it may simply obscure power relations and school stratification.

Research from Scandinavia and other parts of the world call attention to gender and class relations as central issues in all aspects of democratic education.

This is manifested, for instance, in often voiced concerns about the democratic vision and conduct of young people, particularly young men from low-income, marginalised and territorially stigmatised areas (Bunar, 2008). Both the Swedish media and politicians have recurrently drawn attention to violence and racist acts by these groups and in these areas, and there has been an upsurge of anti-immigration sentiment in society. As problems of racism and violence become more severe, there are increasingly urgent demands for schools to take measures by tending more specifically to the education of these boys (see Öhrn, 2001).

Research on gendered and classed school practices

The report of the Swedish Democracy Survey (Demokratiutredningen, 2000) describes a lack of democratic schooling and signs of reduced involvement in political parties and electoral participation amongst young people. It also refers to investigations showing that youngsters today experience a large measure of powerlessness in relation to politics, despite having significant interest in political issues. These issues have also been examined through questionnaire surveys to upper-secondary students and they report of considerable variations in the knowledge about democracy held by these young adults (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2003). For instance, the young men surveyed showed more competence in addressing questions relating to the economy, whilst young women addressed questions about equality and human rights better than young men.

Differences between students from different kinds of upper-secondary school study programme were also noted. One point of particular interest was that knowledge about formal democracy was most limited in students taking the male-dominated vocational programmes. Another was that young men commonly discuss politics with their peers, whilst young women do so with their teachers. This indicates that the schools' discussion of these issues may include girls to a greater extent than boys.

Occasional studies suggest that girls in Swedish secondary schools have developed greater social and moral understanding than boys (Svingby, 1993) and, hence, there is a great need to develop the teaching of boys in these respects (Swedish National Agency for Education, 1999). However, no research supports the idea that schooling promotes girls' development of democratic values more than that of boys, or indeed that boys in general should act in less democratic ways. If anything, contemporary research rather suggests that issues such as these have a weak position in general (Dovemark, 2004a). They are not given much

attention in teaching, and they tend to become gendered through marginalisation effects; social and democratic issues are separated from the common, general education as private projects for girls and at best peripheral projects for boys (Öhrn, 1998, 2001). This does not provide the girls with an influential position to act on such democratic issues, rather it reflects the traditional expectations of female responsibility in school (cf. Walkerdine, 1990).

Furthermore, studies of young people's attempts to influence the educational context do not lend support to notions that school environments generally favour girls' understanding and behaviour more than those of boys. Instead, most research related to these issues suggests that they are more orientated towards groups of boys and certain masculinities. For instance, course content is said to relate more to traditionally male than to female practices (Paechter 1998), citizenship to be constructed more often as masculine, and Eurocentric, than as feminine (Gordon and Holland, 2003) and groups of boys are described as influencing teaching more than girls through their dominance of public speech and space (e.g. Wilson, 1991; Lynch and Lodge, 2002; Lahelma and Öhrn, 2003).

There are some exceptions to the above points. For instance, some investigations indicate that middle-class girls can act as individualised learners by managing to construct dialogues with teachers, and thus communicate their opinions and concerns, better than other groups (e.g. Arnot, 2006). In addition, some studies of processes in comprehensive schools have indicated that girls try to influence classroom practices via collective actions more than boys, and thus are more able to act as motors of change (Öhrn, 2004).

These results could be seen as conflicting with the assertions about boys' prominent position in school. However, they might also be interpreted as meaning that boys—given their position as a group in class—have less reason to take action to adapt school routines and content to their own interests as these interests are already those that are mainly represented. Another interpretation is that active change requires positive school engagement, which seems to be more unusual amongst boys as a whole than amongst girls, and deemed to be more compatible with accepted femininities than masculinities (cf. Epstein, 1998). Similarly, Davies (2002, p. 47) suggests that arenas of formal student influence, e.g. class and school councils, might be associated with caring, and may thus be stereotypically related to female involvement in contrast to the public image traditionally associated with wider politics. Research showing that both genders initiate, take a lead in, and participate in acts of public collective

resistance against targets outside school in local politics appears to support this interpretation (Öhrn, 2004, 2005).

Research on masculinities, femininities and sub-cultural formations
Previous research indicates that school involvement of various kinds is at odds with dominant youth masculinities, particularly those associated with migrant sub-cultures and the working class (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman, 2002; Archer and Francis, 2005), and that boys tend to distance themselves from the school's theoretical orientation and develop alternative masculinities to those valued by the formal institution (e.g. Kryger, 1990; Smith, 2007). This understanding is not new, but it has new connotations in the present age, associated with issues related to de-industrialisation in Western societies. Due to de-industrialisation, extended contact with educational institutions has become a new norm for young men who in previous eras would have made an early transition from school to work as an alternative to unemployment. This is assumed to have affected constructions of masculinity; as paid manual labour disappears, so too do the foundations of conventional working class masculinities as a basis for social influence (Weis, 1990). For the same reason, collective action based on a male sub-culture connected to labouring, as often occurred in the 1970s (Willis, 1977), is now less likely (Öhrn, 2002b; Willis, 2004).

Through their historical relationship to schooling girls can be imagined as having been able to develop better collective understanding of how to deal with relative subordination of the kinds embedded in de-industrialisation than young men have. Girls with a working-class background in Sweden have often needed educational qualifications to find work and seem partly to have adjusted to this. However, there are also other developments that may have assisted them. Parallel to the changes in labour processes in western society there have been changes brought about through social movements such as feminism, which have provided young women with more powerful platforms than previously available to them from which to develop their views and actions (Arnot, David and Weiner, 1999). Berggren (2001) shows, for example, how the secondary school transition of working-class girls is characterised by the development of networks that give them some space to act in school. Such networks appear to be essential in classroom practice in order for the girls to establish positions of influence (Gordon, Holland and Lahelma, 2000), pursue political interests (Öhrn, 1998) and challenge any actions that may deny them their full rights (Skeggs, 1991).

Research has provided few examples of boys establishing these kinds of networks. Theoretical explanations for this lack have already been mentioned, but it should also be noted that boys and masculinities have been less heavily researched than girls and femininities in Scandinavian contexts. Scandinavian research on these issues differs from other, for instance British, research where boys and masculinities have been the focus for decades (see Öhrn and Weiner, 2009). However, the larger body of research on males/masculinities in Britain has not focused on their networking and attempts to exert influence in school, hence there is a lack of knowledge about the collective influence of boys and their relationships in school (Öhrn, 2002a). Indeed, there is not much knowledge about any collective actions to influence education. As noted by Hatcher (2002, p. 63 in Davies 2004, p. 54) there has been a general lack of discussion of collective resistance in the academic debate on education in Britain, and the same could be said about Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries.

Project theory, methods and analysis

Theory

Gender emerges in the discussion above as a major division in relation to schooling about democracy, but in conflicting ways. Understandings of various aspects of citizenship appear to be constructed largely as masculine in school, and both old and recent studies indicate that the school is an arena where traditionally male activities and male players dominate. However, some overviews of democratic aspects of schooling indicate that boys perform at a lower standard on democracy-related issues than girls, and are less likely to be engaged in democracy-related activities and issues in school.

The two research fields discussed earlier—i.e. research on teaching and research on students' actions in relation to democracy—are quite distinctly two separate fields. Consequently, we have limited knowledge about how student influence relates to the teaching of democracy, and a major aim of the project this book is based upon was to address this lack of knowledge. Moreover, given the indications that processes and practices in education are gendered, classed and raced, the empirical parts of the project were largely developed from pertinent gender theory and feminist perspectives on citizenship and democratic education (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Arnot and Dillabough, 2000; Gordon and Holland, 2003; Arnot, 2006; Gordon, 2006). In addition we initially took on board Giddens' theory of structuration (1984) in our analyses of the rules and resources that are used by (or are potentially available to) students wishing to influence schools

and schooling. These served as general theoretical starting points for the project and provided initial foci for the data production. However, as will be discussed below, we also took an ethnographic approach. This involved the production and analysis of materials developed from multiple sources and perspectives, and led us to experiment with and find value in other theoretical perspectives (see also Willis, 2000; Willis and Trondman, 2000; Trondman, 2008).

Methods

Previous research indicates that urban working class and migrant sub-cultural masculinities particularly tend to oppose academic learning (e.g. Epstein, 1998; Phoenix, 2004). For the project, this underscored the need to include different contexts**,** particularly those that are less academically and more 'vocationally' or 'practically' oriented in the research. Theoretically, one could postulate that environments with clear links to influential forms of traditional male working-class organisation, such as trade-unionism, party-political affiliation, or local health and work-safety activities could provide more favourable conditions than traditional academic classroom activities for working class boys to exert influence. As mentioned above, the ability of these boys to establish a strong counterculture in today's extended academic schooling is questioned (Weis, 1990; Öhrn, 2002b). However, this does not mean that traditionally male-profession-oriented courses (such as construction or car-maintenance) cannot provide forms for facilitating such organisation.

In the research we have included both vocational and academic programmes, centred in both traditionally male and traditionally female domains: the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences Programmes from the academic domain and the Vehicle and Child and Recreation Programmes from the vocational domain. We also investigated the Individual Programme. These programmes are described in more detail in the next chapter.

Analysis

When analysing the impact young people may have on school practice an initial focus was, in line with Giddens (1984), on the rules and resources used in schools when teaching about democracy-related issues or encouraging students to engage in democratic action. In Giddens' work resources refer to capacities to influence the physical and social environment**.** These resources can be provided in school practice, but they may also emanate from, for example, the political experiences or social networks of young people outside the school. The concept

of rules refers to spoken and unspoken expectations of behaviour in social life, and hence what one might expect from one's social environment. In this manner, rules provide tools to orient interpretations and actions.

We have examined forms of teaching in Swedish upper secondary school, in relation to the issues described above, in terms of two fundamental dimensions: (i.) ways in which the formal organisation of the education encourages (or hinders) young people to express criticism and develop strategies to influence their schooling, and (ii.) informal processes that encourage or hinder relevant conduct.

Previous investigations suggest that teaching forms that aim to activate student influence, such as the use of deliberative conversation, create spaces for various arguments and elements of 'collective will-formation' (Englund, 2000, p. 6), as does regular political education in which teachers and students develop strategies for change (Öhrn, 2005). However, of particular interest in the analysis of teaching in our research is Gordon's (2006) distinction between education for *future or present citizenship*, that is whether pupils 'are encouraged to act '*like*' citizens whilst their duties are emphasised more than their rights, or whether they are allowed and encouraged to '*act*' citizenship in everyday life in the present' (p. 3). Gordon emphasises the particular importance of being active, i.e. of students being 'agentic individual citizens' (2006, p. 1).

Gordon also highlights the problem of the focus on individual aspects of citizenship in schools, i.e. the concentration on autonomy and individualism rather than collective action. In the project we have been particularly interested in whether different groups of young people themselves are challenging such an understanding, and the objectives and forms of change that they may formulate. This has been investigated in previous studies of both public education and informal peer groups. The latter are essential for analysing the development and positioning of various kinds of masculinity and femininity within an institution (Connell, 1987; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Therefore, in the project fieldwork we have paid attention to processes both during lessons and in other parts of the school day, focusing on both targets for change and processes of negotiation.

Complementary theoretical perspectives
As mentioned above, feminist perspectives (especially on citizenship)**,** and Giddens' theory of structuration, served as general theoretical starting points for the project and provided initial foci for the data production. However,

in accordance with the methodological approach chosen, a need for other theoretical perspectives was identified during the fieldwork and analyses. Bernstein's theory of pedagogical transmission from his work concerning pedagogical modalities and communication, was one of these. In particular we have used his concepts of classification and framing, and visible and invisible pedagogy. The classification and framing concepts we applied were those formulated initially in Bernstein (1971, 1975 and 1990), in which the following sets of principles are said to regulate most communicative contexts in education (see also Beach, 1995):

1. Interactional principles, which regulate the selection, organisation, sequencing, and pacing of communication.
2. Locational principles, which regulate the physical location and form of realisation (i.e. the range of objects, their attributes, their relation to each other and the space in which they are constituted)

The relationships between these two sets of principles constitute the *classification* and *framing* of pedagogical discourse and instruction insofar that the stronger the tie between the interactional (temporal) and locational (spatial) features of the communicative context, the stronger will be its classification, and the stronger the classification the more likely that the array of objects, attributes represented and their relations within the communicative context will have a fixed relation to each other and will be highly specific to that context. In this sense the term classification refers to the level of specialisation in terms of the degree of insulation between categories of discourse, agents, practices and contexts and provides rules for both transmitters and acquirers for the recognition of the degree of specialisation of their texts and their contextual (pedagogic/educational) legitimacy. Academic disciplines like physics are said to provide examples of highly specialised discourses and (thus) highly classified educational content according to Bernstein (1990, p. 34).

Using Bernstein's concepts

The concept of classification is often used together with the concept of framing. However, framing refers to the order and regulation of control over the selection of sequencing, pacing, and criterial rules of the pedagogic act and describes therefore firstly the communicative relationship between transmitters and acquirers of pedagogical discourses and secondly the knowledge mediated by these discourses (Bernstein, 1990, p. 214). Where the educator's control over framing relations is weak, the acquirer has greater influence over the regulation of

the communicative features that help constitute the communicative context and its legitimate discourses. Where it is strong they do not. Different combinations of classification and framing form different pedagogical codes and constitute different pedagogic forms. Bernstein (1975) developed the terms visible and invisible pedagogy to refer to these different modalities (Bernstein, 1990, p. 53) and are presented in the table below.

The visible pedagogic model	The invisible pedagogic model
1. Comprises a context of reproduction developed around groups which are homogenous in terms of ability. It uses privatised and competitive (individuated) acts of knowledge acquisition and assessment.	1. Is less concerned to produce explicit stratifying differences between learners as it is less interested in external and more interested in internal standards.
2. Involves a progression guided by the logical order of presentation in discipline content, structure and relations.	2. Does not focus on external, gradable performances by the learner. The intention is rather more to shape contexts and environments to enable externalisation-internalisation processes of individual knowledge construction and sharing between people involved in teaching and learning activities in group contexts.
3. Has a pedagogic medium that is characterised by a social relation of superiority from teacher down to learner.	
4. Encourages a learning situation with strong pacing following strict sequencing rules in two sites of learning: the lecture and the home/free-time situation. Text-books and lecture note taking make this possible, instruction pace makes it imperative. The relation between learning in the two sites is regulated by strong framing characteristics in the first.	3. Is contrite to emphasise the development of competence rather than the learning of facts.
	4. Creates spaces in discourse and activities to be filled by learners.
5. Communication between transmitters and receivers of knowledge is constituted by strong classification and framing, even under conditions of surface opposition. Time is treated as scarce and this strictly regulates the rules which restrict what are constituted and regarded as legitimate written and spoken texts, question and answer format, their contexts, their social relations of production and discourse boundaries.	5. Because of its nature, hiding the rules of hierarchy and order which operate within institutions like schools, the model is problematic in practice because many highly motivated learners will always look for the standards by which they are measured and will have difficulties in understanding what is expected of them when they cannot locate these in clear, decisive and concrete forms.
	6. The model does not match what learners expect and are used to because it does not fit the way education is usually organised in schools in societies like ours.
6. There is an emphasis on an economy of transmission, as the students are compacted into mass populated small areas for instruction purposes, and because as much (or more) time is spent learning outside of schedule time as in it.	7. There are thus contradictions created by the distributive rules of the model, such that its (intended) pedagogy does not reproduce desired pedagogic discourses in practice. What is acquired is not usually what is intended.

The organisation of the book

This first chapter briefly presents the research background and the conceptual backdrop to the empirical study. A further contextualisation of the study is

given in chapter two, in which Swedish upper secondary school and its policy history are presented, together with some details about the study programmes it offers. The chapter discusses developments in organisation and policies over the last four decades; and also describes the class, gender and ethnicity characteristics of the cohorts enrolled on the programmes. The book's third chapter introduces the methodology and provides comprehensive descriptions of the design, implementation and analysis procedures.

The next five chapters are empirical. Each is based on fieldwork related to a particular programme and focuses on the book's main questions about young people's democratic education and participation. However, each chapter has a slightly different focus, depending on aspects found to be central through the field work: chapters four and five are most focused on young people's actions to affect their school, while chapters six, seven and eight focus more on the conditions of influence in terms of pedagogical framing, form and content. In chapter nine we attempt to synthesise results from the empirical work, as described in the preceding chapters, under themes relating to central aspects of democratic education and student influence.