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Justice in and Through Education? Students' Participation in Decision-Making

Drawing on one year of ethnographic work in three Swedish lower secondary schools, this article problematizes students' participation in decision-making in everyday school life in the perspective of social justice. In order to extend the traditional liberal understanding of justice and include also relational, procedurial, social and cultural aspects of justice, the analysis focuses on the range, depth and breadth of the participation. The analysis highlights how students' participation in decision-making was curtailed and restricted in ways that referred to both the range and the depth of the participation. There were also deficiencies as regards the breadth. The analysis indicates inconveniences as regards students' participation in decision-making in the perspective of social justice. At the same time it raises questions about social justice in educational contexts – to what extent is it possible to reach a social just school and classroom culture? Based on this analysis, it is argued that school actors need to be more explicit about the institutional frameworks and boundaries that regulate and frame students' participation in decision-making in school. Such an approach might facilitate for students and staff to negotiate within the frameworks to a greater extent than was the case in these three schools. It is also argued that more students need to be involved in decision-making.

1 Introduction

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child, the so-called participation article, states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives. This refers to decision-making within the family, the community and the school. By emphasizing children's participation rights, the convention links participation to citizenship and gives expression to a model of citizenship that includes children. Participation is in this sense about being counted as a member of the community; about governing and being governed (Roche 1999).

The complexity that lies within the idea of children as citizens becomes apparent when problematizing processes of participation – and citizenship – in practice. This applies not least to participation in decision-making in educational contexts (e.g. Öhrn et al. 2011). One complication regards balancing student participation in decision-making as a children's right with the fostering and educating task. To what extent can students exert influence in school without jeopardizing educational goals? Another complication regards understanding participation as an individual right issue, but also as relational, and as socially and culturally related. 'The children's rights movement' presupposes and encourages children's agency and advocates a view of a competent and autonomous child (Reynaert et al. 2009,

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521). But highlighting individuality, competence and autonomy risks obscuring the social and cultural aspects of participation. Being autonomous and 'participative' are expectations that young people, depending on social class, gender and cultural capital adapt differently to. The discourse of the autonomous and competent child, tends to emphasize the children's rights perspective and make the individual child responsible for to what extent participation in decision-making is realized or not, without recognizing differences in children's social and cultural backgrounds (Reynaert et al. 2009).

In this article, children's participation in decision-making in educational practices is problematized in the perspective of social justice. Drawing on one year of ethnographic work in three Swedish lower secondary schools with focus on students' participation in collective decision-making with the underlying understanding of decision-making as a process (Rönnlund 2011), the aim is to highlight the complexities that lie within students' participation in decision-making in everyday school life, and to discuss these in relation to the concept of justice. In order to extend the traditional liberal understanding of justice that permeates many studies on children's participation, and include also relational, procedurial, social and cultural aspects of justice, the analysis focuses on three dimensions of participation: the range, depth and breadth of the participation (Young 1990; Cohen 1971). In my analysis, the range refers to the scope of issues being the subject of the decision-making processes; what issues are discussed? The depth refers to the quality of the participation in relation to opportunities for real influence; to what extent does the participation refer to actual negotiations respectively giving-voice situations? The breadth of participation refers to the amount of participating individuals; how

many of the students participate and who do participate? With references to the work on justice provided by political scientist Iris Marion Young, the article closes up by discussing how social justice can be attained in and through education.

2 Participation in European, Nordic and Swedish contexts

Promoting student participation in decision-making has long been an important issue in international and national education policies. As the European Union regards, the promotion of active participation has been a central issue in European education policy since the 1990s. In 2005, the European Commission identified students' active participation as a priority area for the European education policy, and the same year was proclaimed by the Council of Europe as the European Year of Citizenship through Education (e.g. Birzea 2005; Eurydice 2005; Kerr et al. 2010; Nelson, Kerr 2006).

Promoting student participation has historically been particular characteristic for the Nordic countries. As regards participation in decision-making processes, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland have distinguished themselves by highlighting and seeking participation and student participation not only in special committees, but also in the classroom. Student participation and student influence in everyday decisions, has in a Nordic perspective traditionally been viewed as a prerequisite for a democratic school, and as an important part of students' democratic education assuming that young people will grow as citizens through active participation in school (Arnesen, Lundahl 2006; Mikkelsen 2004).

Schools shall model the kind of society in which active citizenship is encouraged, by providing all young people with opportunities to participate in decision-making and influence in school. This applies not only to councils and committees, but also to the everyday school life. By participating in the planning and evaluation of the daily teaching, the students are supposed to develop citizenry competence. Through this process they are expected to become active citizens who participate in joint decision-making when they become adults. Similar expectations are linked to the ability to formulate opinions and to participate in discussions. By participating in discussions and conversations, students are expected to develop a future active citizenship. Citizenship education in the Nordic countries is thus characterized by its emphasis on a participatory and democratic culture in the classroom, with the central premise that students learn democracy, participation, and citizenship by practicing or 'living' it (Arnesen, Lundahl 2006; Eurydice 2005; Mikkelsen 2004).

In Sweden, students' participation and influence has been stated in educational governmental documents and curricula since the 1960s. During the 1970s and the 1980s students' right to influence and participation was as an important issue in Swedish educational policy. In policy documents from that time period, student

influence was given a rather formal and collective character; formal councils such as student and class councils were required in order to meet students' right to influence and participate in decision-making. Overall, student influence was presented as a common, collective task of a political nature and emphasized that students, as a collective, had the right to influence in the school. The issue was given further attention in 1990, when Sweden, like many other countries, ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since then, the convention, which addresses children's right to express their views on matters that concern them in different social and institutional settings, has had great impact on Swedish curricula. The present curriculum for the nine-year compulsory school states for example that students have the right to "influence over their education", and should be encouraged to "take an active part in efforts to further develop education" (Lgr 11 § 2.3). However, what issues this influence specifically concerns is not made clear. Neither does it provide explicit information about how the influence shall be organized and stimulated. Furthermore, and a difference in relation to curricula from the 1970s and the 1980s, is that students' participation is mainly described and depicted as an individual capacity or capability, based on a particular set of individual knowledge, skills and dispositions (Skolverket 2001; Rönnlund 2013). This implies also an emphasis on the students' individual responsibilities (c.f. Reynaert et al. 2009).

3 Theoretical framework

Within the framework of modern liberal democracies, justice tends to be identified with the social order that follows the principle of equal rights of all individuals. Linked to this definition is the right to equal protection before the law; that individuals are equals in relation to the law, and shall be impartially rewarded or punished for their acts. The right to equal protection before the law without discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, color, ethnicity, religion, age or other characteristics, makes the concept justice merge into the concept of social justice (Young 1990).

The concept of 'justice' is also commonly defined and discussed in terms of values such as equality, solidarity, human rights and dignity. The many and different understandings or 'kinds of justice' (Budd 2013), emphasize different aspects and dimensions of what is considered to be moral right. These understandings can be categorized into two contrasting approaches that have polarized the debate on justice: One focuses on distribution, the other on justice as a process. Within the distributive paradigm, the access to material and immaterial goods, and/or the proper allocation of social positions, welfare, power, reward, respect among different people indicates whether the situation is "just" or not. Within the process paradigm, justice relates to the various and ongoing power relations that affect the everyday life. Depending on the chosen approach, justice

is mainly defined and evaluated from "results", or as a process.

Political scientist Iris Marion Young was one of the postmodern political philosophers who in the late 1980's and 1990's challenged universal theories of justice within the distributive paradigm, by claiming that the call to be 'just' is procedurial and always situated in concrete practices. In Justice and the politics of difference (1990), she argues for a "reflective discourse" useful to discuss and make claims about justice in practice. Starting from claims of excluded groups in decision-making procedures in US in different historical times, she criticizes critical theory for its unifying discourse regarding justice and its inability to grasp differences. She sympathizes with the postmodern turn on this matter, arguing that an enlarged and flexible conception of justice is needed: justice is procedurial, relational and situated (Young 1990).

Within this procedurial and wide perspective (in relation to the traditional liberal conceptualizing of participation), Young sees participation as a key component of what constitutes justice: Participation in joint decision-making processes is a fundamental prerequisite for a socially impartial, democratic and just society. When theorizing participation in relation to justice, Young highlights the range, the depth and breadth of the participation. The three dimensions do not appear as explicit as when for example Cohen (1971) elaborates on them in relation to democracy. Still, they permeate her theorizing in Justice and the politics of difference, pointed out as participatory dimensions that should be satisfactory provided for in order to strive for – and attain – social justice. The range refers to the scope of issues being the subject of the decision-making processes, and whether the issues are experienced to be important. The depth refers to the degree of real influence. A qualitative strong and deep participation with a high degree of real influence refers to participation in direct negotiations, representative systems included. A qualitative weak participation refers for example to consultations – a kind of participation where participants are supposed to give voice to their opinions but not to participate in actual negotiations where decisions are taken. The third dimension, the breadth of participation, refers to the amount of participating individuals – how big part of the population that takes part in decision-making processes – and to participation patterns in relation to social and cultural factors. Young's argument is here that justice requires that everybody, regardless of gender, social background, age and colour of the skin, do participate in decision-making processes of importance for their own actions and influence the preconditions for this (Young 1990).

This last dimension, the breadth of participation, and its close relationship to social justice, is further elaborated and discussed in Inclusion and Democracy (2000). In this volume Young advocates the idea that a strong democracy requires inclusiveness:

The normative legitimacy of a democratic decision depends on the degree to which those affected by it have been included in the decision-making processes and have had the opportunity to influence the outcomes (Young 2000, 5-6).

Striving for inclusive decision-making processes means enabling a wider range of social groups to have access to decision-making processes, and also adapting the decision procedures to meet the needs of a wider range of social groups. Young's argument stems from the perspective of social justice, but also from a deliberative influenced theoretical thinking. The emphasis on decision-making as communication and deliberation links her theorizing to deliberative democracy theories. Although she enters in controversy against some of Habermas' expositions, the "communicative democracy model" which she elaborates in the essay Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy in Intersecting Voices (1997), has many components in common with deliberative democracy attaching great importance to specifically deliberation and exchanging of experiences. By including a wider range of social groups in decision-making, she argues that a wider range of perspectives is included in the political process, something that contributes to deliberation and qualitative well-grounded decisions, but also to individual participants' knowledge and insights:

Not only does the explicit inclusion of different groups in democratic discussion and decision-making increase the likelihood of promoting justice because the interests of all are taken into account. It also increases that likelihood by increasing the store of social knowledge available to participants (Young 2000, 83).

The theories on justice and participation, and how they are linked together in the work by Iris Marion Young, provide the theoretical framework for the analysis that follows. But first some words about the methodological framework and the data collection.

4 Method, data collection and process of analysis
The analysis draws on ethnographic work (Hammersley, Atkinson 2007), conducted over the course of one school year (2007/2008) in three Swedish lower secondary schools (Rönnlund 2011). The schools were located in ethnically homogeneous and socioeconomically middle-class areas. Thus, the large majority of the students, participating in the study had middle-class backgrounds and were ethnically Swedish.1

In general I spent one or two days a week at each school. At these occasions I conducted classroom observations (I followed one class at each school; one grade 8 class and two grade 9 classes) during as many lessons as possible, taking notes by hand but also tape recording some of them. The fieldwork also included

observations of class- and student council meetings with students in grade 7, 8, and 9. The observations focused decision-making processes that involved both students and teachers with special attention to how decision-making was initiated, the issues in focus and whether they were brought up by students or by teachers, what kind of decision-making and participation that took place in relation to real influence, and finally the amount and selection of students that participated.

The fieldwork further included interviews and informal conversations with students, teachers, and headmasters. The student interviews, representing the main source of data for the analysis outlined in this article, focused on the students' experiences of participating in decision-making in school – how did they see their role in decision-making, what issues did they find important etc. In total, the data consists of 217 participative observations covering various participation situations and 72 interviews.

The ethnographic work enabled me to explore the everyday practices of students' participation in decision-making over time – to grasp decision-making as a process (c.f Young 1990; Thomas 2007). Spending time in the schools and following decision-making processes over time, made it possible to understand how decision-making processes were initiated, and to get sight of their outcomes. It also enabled me to talk to students and teachers about ongoing decision making processes, and get to know their views and thoughts while being involved.

The process of analysis involved identifying critical moments within decision-making processes; situations that highlighted deficiencies and complexities related to the range, the depth and breadth of the participation. As regards the range, the process of analysis involved separating out the issues that teachers and students brought up and to check for correspondence/non-correspondence. Further, the issues being subject for decision-making were categorized as important respectively non-important according to the student interviews. As regards the depth, the process involved distinguishing between direct negotiations and consultations – where the former refers to a higher degree of real influence than the latter (Hart 1997, 40-45). To this last form of participation I referred situations where the students were invited to give voice to their opinions, but not to participate at the stage where decisions actually were made (c.f. Shier 2001). As regards the third dimension, the breadth, the situations were categorized by how many of the students that participated in decision making processes – distinguishing between situations where a majority of the students in the group/class participated and situations where only a minority participated. In this part of the analysis I also looked for the selection of participating students and selection patterns in relation to gender, social/socioeconomic background, ethnicity etc. However, the homogeneous data regarding socioeconomic and ethnic background came to limit the analysis in this regard, and gender alone was highlighted when looking for participation patterns.

When selecting quotations, the ambition was to highlight situations that reflected common patterns within the data, but also to give account for divergent patterns. The interview notes as well as observation notes have been translated by the author. In order to improve the readability, they have been adjusted to remove repetitions, mutterings, and mumblings. The participants have been given fictitious names.

5 The range of participation
In all three schools, students were invited to participate in decision-making processes in the classroom and through formal councils of different kinds (c.f. Davies 2002; Davies, Kirkpatrick 2000; Torney-Purta, Barber 2005; Öhrn et al. 2011). In class, the general pattern was that teachers invited the students to participate in discussions about the teaching by presenting their teaching plans and asking the students to comment on them. By doing this on regular basis, the teachers showed an ambition to involve the students in the planning and to invite them to participate in decision-making that concerned teaching and learning. When presenting the plans, they talked in a way that indicated an understanding of planning – and teaching – as a common concern between themselves and the class. On the other hand, the plans were presented in a rather finished state. In the following situation, the Natural Science teacher presents a plan of the term's Natural Science courses to the students:

> The natural science teacher: As you can see, the first course is 'the sound'. I have decided that we will have a written assessment at the end of this course. I have also decided in which order we will take the courses, as they build on each other. Martin: Do the assessment need to be individal? Can't we have a group assessment? Teacher: We will have to decide on that, when we get there. (…) (Observation January 2008)

As the excerpt shows, the plan was presented without direct questions from the teacher; i.e. it was not specifically stated what the students were expected to comment on and give opinions about when teachers presented plans to the class. However, when they asked for the students' opinions by posing direct questions about the plans, their questions concerned a rather narrow scope of the teaching process, like for example the structure of the teaching and the order of the course elements. When the students themselves asked questions and commented the teaching, this included a wider spectrum of the teaching. In the situation below, a group of students with Siri as their spokesperson, brings up what the class experiences as an unbalanced assessment-schedule.

Siri: How come that all tests are scheduled to week 34? Teacher: You are exaggerating! You know that I have just moved the natural science test. (Observation October 2007)

Other issues brought up by the students that belonged to a wider spectrum of the teaching concerned for example work methods and time limits. They suggested other work methods and asked for more reasonable timetables for each tasks. Issues that often were brought up concerned assessments. In this matter, the students often suggested various and optional ways of accounting for their individual and group-based work. Furthermore, when schoolwork was handed back to students, it happened that they were critical about how their work had been assessed and graded, and argued in order to obtain a higher degree on their work. In the situation that follows, the students Nadja and Birgitta have been informed that their group work has been graded with a "G", a grade which they regard as too low.2 When asking the teacher about the motive to the low grading, the teacher explains that they have not used all the material they were supposed to use, an answer that they object to:

Nadja and Birgitta argue for a higher grade, claiming that they had not been informed about the importance of using all the material. The teacher contradicts, saying that the class had been informed about that, that it was mentioned in the instructions. They discuss for about 10 minutes. Nadja and Birgitta contradict the teacher repeatedly, and compare their work with the work of another group that has got a higher degree, claiming that their work is as good as the other group's work. The teacher stands firm and says that they have learned something [to read the instructions carefully]. (Observation March 2008)

As this excerpt shows, some students were active and took initiative to influence various aspects of the teaching, in a spectrum that extended the teachers' spectrum. Bringing wider issues up in discussion with the teachers, like grading as in the situation above, indicated a low correspondence between the issues that students and teachers found important to discuss. This was confirmed in the interviews; the students argued that many of the issues in focus in decision-making in the classroom, especially those being brought up by teachers, were unimportant and uninteresting (cf. Solhaug 2003). When teaching and learning issues, that the students in general found important to discuss and have an impact on, were brought up by the teachers, the students found that this was done in a too narrow perspective.

Further, bringing wider issues up indicated that the students viewed also these aspects of the teaching possible to influence. In this specific situation the teacher engaged in a discussion with the students, in other

situations they did not. Still, according to the observations, the teachers controlled the agenda, and many issues that students wanted to discuss were crossed out. As a consequence, there were many aspects of the teaching that were not processed in the classroom, a course of events that refers to what Bachrach and Baratz (1970) conceptualize as "nondecision making" – political processes in which key issues are frequently finessed out of the public process. This is demonstrated in the following situation from a class council meeting, Nellie brings up that some lessons begin later than scheduled, because teachers are not in time:

Nellie [to the teacher]: We usually don't start the lessons in time. Teachers need to arrive better in time. You need to be in the classroom at least five minutes before the lesson is about to start. Arriving thirty seconds in advance is not enough. We need more than thirty seconds to get in and have a seat. Teacher: I understand that. Caroline: Some of the teachers even arrive after the scheduled time. Teacher: That's even worse. Caroline: They say they needed a coffee. Teacher: Do they say so? Nothing more is said. The teacher starts the lesson. (Observation October 2007)

This observation, that some issues being brought up by students were left behind without discussion, was also reflected in the student interviews. The students said that there were many aspects of the teaching that they experienced not being able to discuss with the teachers. When they brought up issues that extended the narrow spectrum, this only rarely led to further discussions in the classroom.

The observations further revealed that there were hardly any discussions in the classroom about what issues that counted as relevant for joint decision-making between teachers and students. The teachers did very seldom reject direct questions/proposals from students, arguing that a specific issue brought up by the students was not a topic for joint decision-making. On the other hand, issues brought up by students sometimes were left behind without discussions or further comments. When this phenomenon was brought up in the teacher interviews, teachers expressed that the students sometimes had "unrealistic ideas" about what issues they can influence in school.

6 The depth of students' participation
Even though the students were frequently invited to participate in decision-making processes in the classroom and through councils, their participation only weakly meant impact and real influence. The teachers' invitations to participation, like in the planning procedures, usually concerned consultations rather than negotiations. This applies to the natural science situation mentioned in the previous section. Another situation that highlights this pattern regards a planning situation in a Swedish class, when the Swedish teacher presents a term plan to the students:

The Swedish language teacher, goes through the plan that she has copied and distributed to the students and she encourages the students to comment on it. There are some gaps that are not completed (...). Fanny raises her hand and says that she wants to work with autobiographies and that the class has wanted to do that for a long time. She gets support from some of her friends, among them Kristina and Erika (...). The teacher [to the class]: How many of you want to work with autobiographies? Six girls and three boys raise their hands (…). The teacher: We'll see if we will have time to work with them at the end of this term. (Observation February 2008)

As the excerpt shows, the students were invited to give voice to their opinions in this issue, but they were not involved in direct negotiations with the teacher. The teacher listened to the students' reactions and direct suggestions. However, negotiations did not take place, and decisions were taken later on by the teacher when the students were not present (c.f. Shier 2001).

Still, there were some situations representing a higher degree of influence for the students – situations where students were involved in direct negotiations with teachers. These were often based on a representative system; the class selected one or several students to represent the class' opinion(s) and take part in negotiations with the teacher(s). All though these situations in my analysis represented a higher degree of influence for the student collective, the students themselves did not experience having a high degree of influence in these situations, something that I refer to the representative system these decision-making processes were based on.

One example regards planning a thematic class work, a decision-making process in which the class had chosen representatives who together with teachers should plan the work in a joint team group. The representatives discussed the issue with their classmates in order to get to know their opinions, and then they went to the first meeting in the team group, where negotiations about the work took place. However, the majority of the students (those who were not representatives) did not experience this particular decision process as qualitatively influential. When they talked about the process, they said that they had not being involved in the decision-making. Students expressed this by saying "There is still a lot of things we could not decide on." and "The teachers listen to what we say, still they don't take much notice of it, what we say does not make big difference." One student, Carl, described the process of planning the thematic work as follows:

Carl: When we decide the theme work for example, the procedure is that we, the students, sit down and list what we want to do, and then the team group plan the work, and when the final plan is presented, the things on our list are not there, they have taken away all the things we wanted to do!
Interviewer: You mean that all the students in the class participate in making the list, and then…?
Carl: Then some of us go to the team group where also teachers participate...
Interviewer: And that's when your proposals disappear, you mean?
Carl: Yeah, kind of.

(Interview Carl April 2008)

The interviews clearly showed that the students were dissatisfied with this, and similar, decision-making processes as they felt not being "involved". Even though the process involved direct negotiations with the teachers, the students thus experienced real influence only to a low degree. In the interviews, this and other decision-making procedures of representative character, was described as "non-democratic". The argument was that the students had not been "able to influence the outcome". Disappointment and frustration were also expressed by the students that had been selected to be the class' representatives in these decision-making processes – those who had participated in the team group and in actual negotiations with teachers. Maria, the class' only representative in the team group responsible for planning the thematic class work (a second student representative had left the group), experienced the planning and her role in the decision process as problematic. This is her version of the same decision-making procedure as Carl earlier referred to:

During a lesson we wrote down what we considered to be important as regards this next thematic work. We listed things we wanted to do, and how to do I, and I brought the list to the team group. One thing that everyone in the class wanted to do and that we put on the list, was to involve construction of some kind in the work, we wanted to build or construct something as part of giving an account for the work. In the team group we discussed this. The teachers argued that construction was not possible, that this kind of giving an account of a group project did not suit this particular task, that construction did not merge with the learning objectives or cover the learning outcomes. I understood their arguments, but I got in trouble when I went back to the class to tell them about the outcome of our discussion. They did not like what we had decided, and I was individually held responsible for the outcome (…). I was the only one from our class there and I felt personally responsible. I found it difficult to explain how we had reached to that decision. I do think it is important that students participate in the planning group and negotiate with teachers, but I think it is important to be many students, not only one.

(Interview Maria June 2008)

Following Maria's story, the experienced problem within the decision-making procedure did not refer to "not being involved" but to difficulties in being a representative; explaining and giving details about the negotiations and to account for the decision to her class mates. By her story, you can sense that her classmates were critical when she reported the results of the planning process, and that she personally took on the responsibility for the decision that evoked such discontent among her classmates.

The overall pattern as regards the depth dimension was that the students participated in decision-making processes and exerted real influence, only to a low extent. Situations where students participated in real negotiations with teachers were rare, and when they occurred, the students did not associate them with a high degree of influence, something which I refer to difficulties in handling and understanding the represent-tative system that these decision-making processes often were based on.

7 The breadth of students' participation

As been argued in the previous sections, the students' right to participate in decision-making was curtailed and restricted in ways that referred to both the range and the depth of the participation. There were also deficiencies as regards the breadth of the participation. As regards the breadth dimension; i.e the amount and selection of participating individuals, the pattern was that only a few students participated in decision-making processes, and that all decision-making processes (regardless how and by whom they had been initiated and whether they were built on a representative system or not) engaged about the same group of students.

The low interest in participating was according to the student interviews connected to the issues in focus. Many students expressed a low interest in participating, arguing that, which is discussed under The range of participation, the issues were unimportant and uninteresting (cf. Solhaug 2003). Issues that did interest the students, and that they identified as important to influence, were issues related to teaching and learning. Nevertheless, when issues related to teaching and learning were brought up in the classroom by teachers, like for example when plans were presented to the students, these events did not give rise to a noticeably interest and engagement among the students. As been discussed earlier, when teaching and learning issues (that the students in general found important to discuss and have an impact on) were brought up by the teachers, the students found that this was done in a too narrow perspective.

The limited breadth in the participation was explained by the students in terms of something that 'just is'. When students were asked to comment on the fact that only a few students participated, their answers indicated an understanding that being participative or not partici-pative was somehow a 'natural' given; that some students are more participative, active and communi-cative, than others. The phenomenon was commented by students in terms of "just as it is": Some students "are" participative and communicative driven, while some are not.

When analyzing the participation pattern, the homogeneous character of the schools made it difficult to distinguish any strong and reliable pattern as regards social background or ethnicity. However, as regards gender, the pattern was strong: Girls were in general participating in influence processes to a greater extent than boys were (c.f. Davies 2002; Silva 2001; Öhrn 1997, 2005). This referred to teachers' invitations as well as students' initiatives. Something that seemed to strengthen the gendered participation pattern, was the discursively female gendering of the active and participative student role (c.f. Bjerrum Nielsen 2009; Lyng 2004); being participative was mainly talked about as in line with how in particular girls, not boys, were expected to act and perform in school (c.f. Francis, Skelton 2005; Nordberg 2008). As one of the girl students puts it in the interview: "It feels wrong to say this but girls are more engaged."

The teacher interviews revealed that the teachers recognized the low engagement as well as the gender unbalance. Their ambition was to change these participation patterns, and encourage all students to participate. However, they did find it difficult to change.

8 Concluding remarks

Identified critical moments that concerned participatory range, depth and breadth dimensions, indicated deficiencies as regards students' participation in decision-making in relation to justice in the three studied schools. First, the scope of issues subject to the decision-making processes was often narrow. Secondly, the students' participation mainly concerned isolated situations of giving voice rather than processes of negotiations and influence. Thirdly, only a few students, and a certain group of students, participated in the decision-making processes.

The identified moments that referred to the range and depth dimensions, highlight the complexities that lie within carry out student participation in educational communities/institutions where the members/citizens have different positions and where institutional goals and regulations, like for example educational goals and criteria for grading, constitute frameworks for the students' individual and collective participation in decision-making. This framing was somewhat under-communicated in the three schools; teachers and students did not explicitly discuss to what extent the students could expect participating in decision-making with teachers; what issues are relevant for joint decision-making, and what issues are not? As a consequence, students and teachers did not always have the same understanding of students' participation in decision-making. This was reflected in situations when students

took initiatives to influence issues that represented a wider range of teaching and learning issues. Different understandings were also reflected when the teachers invited the students to consultations, and how the students found these consultations meaningful only to a low degree. According to the student interviews, the students expected negotiations and were dissatisfied with the giving voice situations; they asked for authority and impact/influence and wanted their participation to make a difference (c.f. Taft, Gordon 2013). The analysis shows how different understandings of student participation in decision-making caused discontentment at "both sides"; the students thought that the teachers excluded them from negotiations and from discussing/deciding certain issues, and the teachers thought the students were pressing too far. Based on this analysis, I argue that school actors need to be more explicit about the institutional frameworks and boundaries that regulate and frame students' participation in decision-making in school.

The identified moments also highlight the difficulties that lie within collective decision-making in practice. When teachers, with the aim of involving all students in the decision-making process, organized direct negotiations with the student collective, making use of class representatives, these were not experienced as "democratic" by the students. They found it hard to see how their individual and/or collective ideas came to influence the outcome. The analysis indicates that the students had difficulties to understand and to handle collective decision-making processes based on a representative system. Since such decision structures constitute an important foundation in societal democracy, and are necessary in decision-making processes involving a larger amount of people, young people need to be strengthen in participating in collective decision-making processes with representative structure.

This part of the analysis relates closely to the breadth dimension. The students' experienced low degree of depth in collective representative based decision-making processes systems, referred to experiences of limited breadth in the participation; a feeling of not being involved. The interaction of the breadth and depth dimensions in this situation, reminds us that the three dimensions interact. This specific situation, in which the breadth and depth dimensions interact, highlights the importance that students learn strategies how to involve all individual participants in decision-making processes, regardless if they are built or representative systems or not. Here, deliberation in the form of an internal class discussion between the representatives and the class turns out as important.

In order to strengthen democracy and participation and taking all three dimensions into account, Young argues for the need of finding "systems" in order to include individuals from all social and cultural groups in decision-making processes on different levels. In this argumentation, she emphasizes the need for a democratic structure that combines representative, participatory and deliberative ideals, as these 'mutually require each other' (Young 2000, 124). Representation is, she argues, a prerequisite for an inclusive democratic and a social just practice, as it enables marginalized groups to participate in decision-making. Representative systems need however to be strengthened from a deliberative point of view, something that clearly shows in this analysis. According to the results presented here, there is a need for finding systems to encourage students to say their opinions, both in situations where all students are present and in representative systems. The arguing refers to the students' right to participate in decision-making, but also their right to practice and learn participation. The fact that some students get to practice participation and citizenship in school more than others, creates an unbalance in the citizenry education provided by the schools. From the children's rights perspective, representative participatory systems are of great importance for guaranteeing resources for marginalised groups to make their voices heard. However, in order to encourage all students to participate, and by those means strengthen all students' participatory competence, they need to be combined with participatory and deliberative systems.

Analyses of the range, depth and breadth of the students' participation in decision-making in school can be used to make claims about how this participation needs to be widened, deepened and broadened. My argument is that they can help to formulate more precise and more realistic expectations about what schools actually can achieve in this matter. They can also be used as a starting point for discussions about students' participation in decision-making between school actors – what issues can and shall students have influence on, and what kind of participation is reasonable and just? Such a discussion might facilitate for students and staff to negotiate within the institutional frameworks that regulate and frame students' participation in decision-making in school to a greater extent than was the case in these three schools. Analyses of this kind, can also be used in discussions about how to involve more students in decision-making in their everyday school life and affect decision-making in school, representative based decision-making included, towards a more participative and deliberative democratic process. In order to obtain social justice in education and to promote justice through education, we need to find systems for students to participate in direct negotiations in issues of importance for them, so that their participation makes a difference in the everyday practice. By those means, more students are likely to be involved in decision-making and get their participatory competence strengthened.

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Endnotes:

[1] The intention was to obtain variations among the participating schools. However, this was not possible (see Rönnlund 2011, 74-75), and the analysis must be considered in relation to the strongly middle-class coded schools.

[2] At the time for the study, the grading system in lower secondary school in Sweden consisted of four grades: IG (failed), G (passed), VG (passed with distinction) and MVG (passed with great distinction).