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Understanding 'Price' and the Environment: Exploring Upper
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Editorial Assistant:

Simon Niklas Hellmich

Editorial Office:

Journal of Social Science Education
Bielefeld University
Faculty of Sociology
Postbox 100 131
33501 Bielefeld
Germany
E-Mail: info@jsse.org
<http://jsse.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/index.php/jsse/index>

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Reinhold Hedtke

Editorial

1 Introduction

Elections are seen as a core element of all understandings of democracy and most conceptions of citizenship education aim at fostering competent participation in elections. States and governments are interested in high levels of voter turnout as a symbol of political legitimation. Most of them launch educational policies for securing and increasing political participation. In the recent past, however, many old and new democracies witnessed a slow but constant decrease not only in electoral participation but also in their citizens' interest in politics. Apparently, a growing part of them was discontent with the perceived outcome of their political system, the responsibility and achievement of the ruling political classes, and with their own socio-economic situation. In the opinion of others, elections didn't change much more than an exchange of personnel within the political classes which had no or little impact on their own conditions of living and future expectations.

This rather sceptical picture of the state of political participation is very popular. At present, however, the gloomy painting seems to need some brightening – paradoxically against the backdrop of challenges to democracy and democracies due to the coincidence of a complex of disturbing collective experience within a rather short period of time:

The surprising results of the presidential elections in the US and of the Brexit referendum in the UK, the long-standing “guided democracy” in the Russian Federation and the upcoming autocracy in Turkey, the installation of illiberal democracies in Hungary and, more and more, in Poland – all of them supported by a big part of the respective population –, the increasing support for illiberal, xenophobic and hyper-nationalist movements and parties in many countries and the feared success of right-wing politicians in the presidential elections in France and parliamentary elections in the Netherlands and Germany. Core countries of Europe are expected to fall prey to populist politicians, authoritarian and isolationist policy and illiberal conversion of the polity.

2 Counteraction from the electorate?

However, the impression of an alarming accumulation of severe threats against an accustomed understanding of political and societal democracy seems to trigger some

counteraction from the electorate, expressed, for instance, in the Dutch election returns, a relatively high voter turnout, the astonishing success of a pro-European presidential candidate in France or the recent pro-European movement “Pulse of Europe” in several countries of the European Union.

Although the Dutch case may create a certain feeling of relief, liberal democracies in Europe and beyond continue to be challenged. Some European democracies display deep political antagonism and their societies seem to be more or less divided, not only into a number of parallel societies or even tribal islands, but also in terms of socio-economic class, inheritance of socio-economic status and extremely unequal distribution of risk, uncertainty and insecurity. In times of economic globalization, the principal tension between capitalism and democracy has become more obvious than before.

Moreover, in some countries a considerable part of the population is formally excluded from political citizenship. Socio-economic and political disadvantage especially applies to the migrant working force and their families and to refugees and asylum seekers. Parts of the autochthonous population – among them past immigrants living in a country for generations –, perceive themselves as disadvantaged in terms of income, wealth, status and influence. Against this backdrop, everybody who speaks about citizenship and citizenship education must not remain silent on economic and political inequality.

Citizenship education is confronted with perturbing evidence indicating that parts of the youth show a tendency towards radical nationalism, illiberal politics and authoritarian leadership. Moreover, in some countries, governments or the ruling political and economic classes misuse formal and informal citizenship education for securing support for the prevailing power relations and ideology and for minimalizing criticism and opposition. From studies we know that sometimes teachers' attitudes, beliefs and classroom practices are not so close to a democratic education which should foster an independent and critical thinking of the students. This applies even to the field of civic and citizenship education. Empirical evidence, however, is mixed. Some studies are to be found in the Journal of Social Science Education (see e. g. [Margarita Jeliakova in JSSE 1-2015](#), [Georgi Dimitrov in JSSE 1-2008](#)).

In this situation, the editors of the Journal of Social Science Education are happy to contribute to the current debates by publishing some topical papers “just-in-time” in this issue. We will continue our efforts in this regard in the next edition of the JSSE. It will present papers dealing with the problem of inequality and democratic attitudes, mock elections and critical democratic citizenship, the contribution of young migrants to teaching politics and

Reinhold Hedtke is Chair of Social Science Education and Economic Sociology and editor-in-chief of the JSSE. Research interests: philosophy of social science education, socioeconomic education, theory of socioeconomics, sociological market theory. *Bielefeld University, Faculty of Sociology, Postfach 10 01 31, 33501 Bielefeld, Germany.*
Email: reinhold.hedtke@uni-bielefeld.de



country reports on citizenship and economic education in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Italy.

3 Failure of citizenship education?

We start this issue with a provocative question: Are the educational outcome of social studies and the political outcome of the US presidential elections two closely intertwined phenomena? In his essay *American Democracy in Distress: The Failure of Social Education*, Richard Neumann argues that the crisis of democracy in the US not only originates from a range of severe political and economic problems, but also from the political and public marginalization of social and participatory education in schools. He criticizes the deterioration of civic mindedness and citizenship literacy and the dominance of an “education for conformity and control”. In his opinion, a shift towards a culture of research oriented learning and critical thinking in Social Studies could contribute to democratic change (for papers on critical thinking see [JSSE 4-2011](#), [1-2015](#), [2-2016](#), [3-2016](#) and [Laurence J. Splitter in 1-2011](#)).

The commentary of Isabel Menezes, *The Failure of Social Education or Just Going Down the Road of Post-Democratic Politics?*, emphasizes the experimenting of young people with new participation practices. She questions whether committed democratic action really stems from instilled information on citizenship or rather from an emotionally driven decision to take sides and to intervene. Hence, citizenship education should go beyond merely preparing the youth for postponed political participation and acknowledge children and the youth as citizens here and now.

Fostering a “thick type of engagement” may be one of the ways how to achieve this (see [Isolde de Groot and Wiel Veugelers in JSSE 4-2015](#)). In addition, the interested reader may refer to French educational policy in times of crisis as presented in “*Mobilising for the Values of the Republic*” – *France's Education Policy Response to the “Fragmented Society”* from [Matthias Busch and Nancy Morys in JSSE 3-2016](#). We will take up this topic in the next number of JSSE.

4 Political education and political biography

Much too often, research on citizenship education narrowly focuses on schools, curricula and classroom teaching and its short-term effects on knowledge, attitudes and reported behaviour. The paper *Political Youth Education in Germany: Presenting a Qualitative Study on its Biographically Long Term Effects* of Nadine Balzter, Yan Ristau and Achim Schröder presents individual case studies of former participants of extra-curricular forms of political education who are interpreting their own political biography. In educational practices, as they observe, the traditional triad of imparting knowledge, enabling judgement and encouraging participation is complemented with the dimensions of emotions, personal development and adolescents’ identity.

To systematize the effects of political education, the authors deduct a typology from the interviews made: political commitment, occupational orientation, poli-

tically enlightened attitude and acquisition of basic activatable political skills. They observe that political education can support personal political development in progress, work as significant instigator or as a first opener to the political field. Moreover, the findings highlight the impact of key persons in the education process on the political judgement and the important effects of distant or unfamiliar learning venues. The authors further stress the relevance of starting the learning process from the adolescents’ experience, of organizing options of experience and of establishing networks of local organisations of political education for the youth.

5 Advise applications and adolescents’ political identity

Normally, elections are thought to be a rather conventional experience of political participation. This does, of course, not apply to young voters. Their experience is addressed by Niels Nørgaard Kristensen and Trond Solhaug in their paper *Students as First-time Voters: The Role of Voter Advice Applications in Self-reflection on Party Choice and Political Identity*. In a study with a qualitative design, students in Norwegian schools were interviewed about their individual reflections on experience made with these applications for relating a party to the political self. The theoretical frame draws on identity theory, theory of society, practice theory and the concept of political identity.

The authors distinguish three types of making use of the voter advice applications (VAA): a sceptical, a confirmationist and an explorationist approach. They were surprised about “very little instrumental reasoning among our respondents” who, instead, grounded their reasoning “in altruistic arguments rather than in interest maximisation” and in value based reflection. VAAs work as tools of reflection, they help clarifying the political identity of the young voters the most of whom are taking voting very seriously and using it for finding their political identity. As a main conclusion from the research, the authors argue that “the goal of finding an identity should be more emphasised in political education at the expense of formal institutional knowledge”.

The next issue of the JSSE will continue the topic of young voters with a paper on mock elections. The reader may also be interested in a look back and browse past papers, for example on a tailored campaign for young voters in Germany or the impact of early social media on the youth in electoral processes (see the papers of [Patrick Rössler](#) and [Diana Owen in JSSE 2/1-2008/09](#)).

6 Inequality and political literacy

Socio-economic inequality affects a democratic polity in general as well as its educational system. Carla Malafaia, Tiago Neves and Isabel Menezes assume that participation is closely related to socio-economic class and status. Their article *In-Between Fatalism and Leverage: The Different Effects of Socioeconomic Variables on Students’ Civic and Political Experiences and Literacy* applies capital theory of Bourdieu to explain the differences of political literacy and participation patterns of

the Portuguese youth along the dimensions of cultural capital, economic capital and private or public school.

The findings from a multivariate analysis of data gathered by a self-report questionnaire confirm again that high cultural capital fosters political knowledge. But the political literacy of public school students is higher than of those from private schools – except for those who enjoy a high level of cultural capital. It may be that private schools are less successful in this respect because of avoiding a politicisation of school life. Interestingly, economic capital plays a crucial role for the level of political activism, as students experiencing private financial problems participate more often in diverse forms of political activism, especially in online participation or demonstrations. The study shows that socio-economic inequality has a clear impact on unequal political literacy and participation, which, however, depends on the organisational context and the specific situation of severe societal and economic crises.

Further papers on the impact of the social background on citizenship education and participation are to be found in JSSE 3-2014 (see for instance the papers of [Onken/Lange](#) and of [Jover/Belando-Montoro/Guío](#)).

7 Tensions between teaching and testing

Democratic citizenship education aiming at a *personal* political identity of young people and preferring pupil-centred and problem-oriented learning on the one hand, new public management policies which standardise purpose and outcome of social studies and govern educators and the youth by numbers on the other hand do not seem to be a good match. How do social studies teachers react to the local implementation of outcome-oriented modes of being governed? In *Constraints and Meaning-Making: Dealing with the Multifacetedness of Social Studies in Audited Teaching Practices in Sweden* Ola Strandler presents the results of a study based on classroom observation and interviews with experienced Swedish teachers. Are the extrinsic dimensions of social studies like generic aims, student-oriented approach, developing an “individual understanding of oneself, life and society” able to survive the outcome-oriented reorganisation?

Transparency to external stakeholders, a key feature of new public management, pressed teachers to reorient their teaching toward of “the measurable, reportable and evaluable”, to marginalise the extrinsic dimensions and to concentrate on the disciplinary intrinsic dimensions of the subject like scientific content, concepts, assumptions and models. They experienced tensions between teaching and testing, in a process of self-regulated assimilation they reacted by shifting the content towards “well-delineated, well-defined and assessable content”. Teachers, however, also appreciated the clarity of the new approach, the weight added to soft subjects like social studies through grading and examinations and the predictability of the learning process. Nevertheless, the policy change and its technical instruments challenge the traditional aims of social studies by reversing the culture of teaching and learning. More papers on output

orientation and testing in social science education are to be found in [JSSE 4-2010](#).

8 Understandings of prices and environment

The next paper does not discuss the impact of educational political change on teaching, but the impact of teaching on the conceptual change of students. Caroline Ignell, Peter Davies and Cecilia Lundholm focus on what Ola Strandler calls the intrinsic dimensions of social studies. In *Understanding ‘Price’ and the Environment: Exploring Upper Secondary Students’ Conceptual Development*, they present a qualitative longitudinal study on changes in Swedish upper secondary students’ conceptions of environmental issues in pricing (environmental externalities). They approach students’ conceptions of how prices actually are determined and judgements on how they should be determined as multiple alternative frameworks, not as scientifically deficient misconceptions. Everyday thinking of students in these issues is fragmentary and experience is missing or misleading. Although all students attended a course in business and economics, the changes observed were “tentative and transitional at most”, “no evidence of consistent change in conceptions” was found.

Students’ changes concerning the relation of pricing and environment turned out to be very diverse, their utterances on the perception of actual pricing and normative ideas of pricing were rather inconsistent. Consistent cumulative learning in the sense of moving forward from basic over partial to complex understanding over time was not observed, but students made progress toward partial conceptions explaining the relationship of environmental impact and price with reference to production costs and production externalities. A further important finding is that individuals operate with several aspects of conceptions at the same time. The authors also highlight that the students’ incoherent way of thinking about supply, demand and price hinders a differentiated understanding of environmental policy issues and limits the knowledge necessary for effective citizenship. Economic conceptions of young people are also discussed in [JSSE 2-2013](#).

9 Book review

Last but not least the reader may enjoy Ian Davies’ review of Joel Westheimer’s book: *What kind of citizen? Educating our children for the common good*. It is a promising read for those who like clear and engagingly written books on a key issue of citizenship education.

Richard Neumann

American Democracy in Distress: The Failure of Social Education

The primary purpose of this essay is to further understanding of the relationship between social education programs in public schools in the United States and the health of its democracy. A secondary purpose is to encourage reflection on the condition of democracy in other countries and the adequacy of social education programs in these countries in preparing youths for democratic citizenship. Extant data on social education in American public schools are analyzed and discussed in relation to selected social and economic conditions and the health of democracy in the United States. The conclusion is that social education programs in the United States do not adequately prepare young people for political participation and this deficiency has contributed significantly to distress in American democracy.

Keywords:

Democratic citizenship education, democracy and education, social education, preparation for political participation

1 Introduction

Most readers would probably agree with the diagnosis presented in the main title of this article and only dispute the degree of affliction. Although fewer would likely concur with the subtitle, particularly social studies teachers and those who prepare them, skeptics would be more than hard-pressed to locate evidence of success in democratic citizenship education beyond the isolated innovative educator or program. Drawing from research in political science, economics, social education, and other investigations, the diagnosis submitted here identifies symptoms of democracy's dysfunction in the United States and examines evidence linking social education as a causal factor. While the failure of social education is not solely responsible for democracy's distress, since ultimate power in a democratic republic resides properly with citizens, it is central. When citizens lack sufficient knowledge, skills, and virtues for political participation, the vitality of democracy is at risk.

The distress in American democracy is complex and comprehensive analysis is obviously not possible in these few pages. There is value, however, in highlighting some of the more salient symptoms of democracy's deteriorating condition, which receive little attention in mainstream educational literature and that for many are often more psychologically comfortable to suppress or deny. More important to the discussion here is the connection between democracy and social education. While democracy's dependence on an educated citizenry has long been affirmed, desired outcomes of social education, particularly the preparation of young people for political participation as democratic citizens, continue to be marginalized in policy discourse on educational goals and student achievement. Although the thesis presented here—failure of social education has contributed significantly to deepening distress in American democracy—is not novel, re-presenting it in a somewhat

different analytic framework and with analogy to medicine may serve to better illuminate the situation and generate deeper reflection, dialogue, and action toward improving the quality of social education in public elementary and secondary schools, particularly the preparation of young people for political participation.

2 Symptoms of distress

Most Americans even moderately attentive to politics would likely acknowledge the base structure that is perhaps most problematic to the vitality of American democracy: a political system reliant on campaign contributions. When the architecture of this system and its implications are contemplated deeply, relations of power become clearer. Clarity of this sort is not uncommon among readers of academic journals in social science, and most probably do not require validation by political scientists from Princeton and Northwestern of the pernicious effects of money in politics: "The central point that emerges from our research is that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while mass-based interest groups and average citizens have little or no independent influence" (Gilens & Page, 2014, p. 565). But do high school students need to be informed of this research and challenged to analyze the structure of the American political system, forces effecting initiation of policy, and motivations in policy decision-making? For most Americans, the highest level of formal social education obtained is high school (Ryan & Bauman, 2016), and therefore, high school graduates' understanding of their country's political system and the adequacy of their preparation for political participation is crucial.

Thus far this century the most disastrous economic consequence of policy established at behest of business is the Great Recession. The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission (2011) provides pointed comments on the calamity:

"More than 30 years of deregulation and reliance on self-regulation by financial institutions, championed by former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan and others, supported by successive administrations and Congresses,

Richard Neumann, Ph.D. is Professor and Chair at the Division of Education, San Diego State University, Imperial Valley Campus, 720 Heber Avenue, Calexico, California 92231
Email: rneumann@mail.sdsu.edu

and actively pushed by the powerful financial industry at every turn, had stripped away key safe guards, which could have helped avoid catastrophe (p. xviii).

Another major disaster of this young century attributable to government compliance with industry demands is the massive oil spill by British Petroleum in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. Glickman (2010) explains:

“Over the course of several administrations, the MMS [Minerals Management Service] was “captured” by the oil industry, and came to see industry, rather than public, as its constituency. That made regulators particularly subject to pressure and influence from industry, and led to appalling lack of energy in its effort to protect against industry excesses (p. 3).

The National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling (2011) provides a similar analysis of regulatory failure: “The rig’s demise signals the conflicted evolution—and severe shortcomings—of the federal regulation of offshore oil drilling in the United States and particularly of MMS oversight of deep water drilling in the Gulf of Mexico” (pp. 55-56). Some may recall that Secretary of the Interior James Watt created MMS in 1982. As the Commission notes, “[f]rom birth, MMS had a built-in incentive to promote offshore drilling in sharp tension with its mandate to ensure safe drilling and environmental protection” (p. 56).

A far greater crisis of global warming threatens devastating changes to our world. Fossil fuel consumption is central to the crisis (National Research Council, 2011). In the interest of maximizing capital accumulation, many with substantial holdings in fossil fuels attempt to influence government policy on these commodities. A key piece of this effort is a network of advocacy groups backed in large part by billionaires Charles and David Koch, principal owners of Koch Industries, one of the largest privately held corporations in the world and second largest in the United States employing 60,000 workers with annual revenue of \$115 billion; petroleum refining and distribution is a major segment of this diverse multinational corporation (Lewis, Holmberg, Fernandez Campbell & Beyoud, 2013). The Koch brothers, who’s combined worth is more than \$82 billion, have amassed a political machine that has more than three times the staff of the Republican National Committee. The brothers personally intended to spend approximately \$900 million on the 2016 presidential and congressional contests. One Koch-funded political advocacy group has asked politicians to sign a pledge to oppose any legislation relating to climate change that includes a net increase in government revenue. Fifty-seven of the 76 new freshman Republican members of the House of Representatives in 2010 who signed the pledge received campaign contributions from Koch Industries’ political action committee. Included among the 140 House members, 26 senators, and 8 governors who signed the pledge are recent presidential hopefuls Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Scott Walker (Gleckman, 2015; Mayer, 2013).

The Koch brothers together with a group of billionaires that includes Mellon banking heir Richard Mellon Scaife, chemical industry magnate John M. Olin, and electronics moguls Harry and Lynde Bradley have promoted the rise of the radical right in American politics (Mayer, 2016). With regard to climate change, one measure of their success is the proportion of members of the United States Congress who deny or question the science that attributes global warming to human activity: 56% of Republicans in the 114th Congress (Germain & Ellingboe, 2015).

A large-scale study by the Pew Research Center (2015) found that “Americans’ political leanings are a strong factor in their views about issues such as climate change and energy policy” (p. 6). For example, 71% of Democrats and 27% of Republicans say the Earth is warming due to human activity. A similar survey by Gallup (2015) found that 40% of conservative Republicans believe effects of global warming will never occur. In short, Republicans typically espouse views on global warming expressed by party leaders, most of whom align with Koch Industries’ position on the matter. Among these is President Donald Trump: “I’m not a big believer in man-made climate change” (Denis, 2016). Another high-profile party leader is recent presidential hopeful Ted Cruz, who in August 2015 denied the existence of climate change and claimed that federal agencies lie to the public about research on global warming:

“If you look to the satellite data in the last 18 years there has been zero recorded warming. Now the global warming alarmists, that’s a problem for their theories. Their computer models show massive warming the satellite says it ain’t happening. We’ve discovered that NOAA, the federal government agencies are cooking the books (Kaplan & Uchimiya, 2015).

If money expended on political campaigns and promotion or condemnation of politicians and policy ideas is a valid indicator of capacity to influence governmental policy, then economic elites and organized groups representing business have massively increased their capacity in the past two decades. The increase was accelerated by Supreme Court decisions in *Federal Elections Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life, Inc.* (2007) and *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (2010), which loosened restrictions on corporate and personal spending in politics. In the 2012 election cycle the top ten individual disclosed donors to outside spending groups—super political action committees (PAC) that can raise and spend unlimited funds, regular PACs that raise contributions capped at \$5,000 per election, hybrid PACs, groups formed under section 527 of the Internal Revenue Code and 501(c)(4) organizations—gave a total of \$210,680,952; some categories of outside spending groups such as 501(c)(4) organizations are not required to disclose contributors. Of this amount, 20% was given to liberals, 80% to conservatives (Opensecrets, 2016a). Excluding party committees, total outside spending increased over 500% from the 1992 election cycle to the

2012 cycle, wherein spending reached \$1,038,736,997: \$720.4 million (69%) from groups aligned with a conservative viewpoint, \$292.9 million (28%) from groups aligned with a liberal viewpoint (Opensecrets 2016b). Total spending on the 2012 election amounted to a record breaking \$7.2 billion (Bartolomeo, 2013; Beckel, 2013; Parti, 2013). Although accurate data on total spending in the 2016 election cycle is not available at this time, the Supreme Court's decision in *McCutcheon et al. v. Federal Elections Commission* (2014), which allows unlimited aggregate contributions to federal candidates and parties, will likely have contributed to increased spending and may make officeholders more indebted to wealthy contributors.

For many members of Congress, campaign fundraising on the telephone amounts to more than a third of their daily activity: The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee advises them to spend 40% of their workday on "call time" (Grim & Siddiqui, 2013). For presidential aspirants, solicitation is more narrowly focused as former President Obama explained to a select group of potential donors in Medina, Washington in 2012: "You now have the potential of two hundred people deciding who ends up being elected president every single time. I mean, there are five or six people in this room tonight [who] could simply make a decision 'This will be the next president,' and probably at least get a nomination" (Cockburn, 2016, p. 63).

Wealth as a resource for power to impact government policy is well recognized: campaign funding; support of political advocacy groups; procurement of lobbyists and arrangement of lucrative lobbying positions or other employment for government officials when they leave office; among other mechanisms. Wealth can also be used to effect social consciousness through donations to universities and other organizations for research, educational programming, and dissemination of information and ideas.

The media is central in shaping social consciousness to influence policy and conditions of social life. In his plenary speech at the National Conference for Media Reform, respected journalist Bill Moyers (2007) called attention to "[t]he lobby representing the broadcast, cable, and newspaper industry [that is] extremely powerful, with an iron grip on lawmakers and regulators alike. Both parties bowed to their will when the Republican Congress passed and President Clinton signed the Telecommunications Act of 1996."

According to media critic and scholar Robert McChesney (2004), the Telecommunications Act of 1996 created conditions for the greatest corporate concentration of media in the history of communication. Six corporations presently own 90% of media, and five dominate the industry. The late Ben Bagdikian (2004), Pulitzer-prize winner, former dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of *The New Media Monopoly* characterized the five media giants as a "cartel" that exerts enough influence to shape politics, social attitudes, and values in the United States (p. 3).

One measure of media influence is campaign coverage. For instance, 2016 presidential campaign coverage by ABC, CBS, and NBC on weekday nightly newscasts for 2015 reveals vast difference in the amount of minutes allocated to candidates: Donald Trump 327, Jeb Bush 57, Ben Carson 57, Marco Rubio 22, Ted Cruz 21, Hillary Clinton 121, Bernie Sanders 20 (Tyndall, 2015). Another example is what Thomas Frank (2016) described as the "media's extermination of Bernie Sanders," which interestingly was orchestrated in no small part by the liberal-leaning *Washington Post* through negative editorials and op-eds that outnumbered positive five to one among those that took a stand on the candidate (p. 26).

"Fake news" or deliberately published hoaxes, disinformation, and lies in conventional publications and social media garnered considerable attention in the 2016 election cycle. Among the most widely proliferated fake news stories of 2016 is "Pope Francis shocks world, endorses Donald Trump for president;" others include a secret underground human trafficking and sex abuse operation involving members of the Clinton campaign (Ritchie, 2016). Frank Huguenard, a freelance contributor to the *Huffington Post*, published a fake news article titled "Hillary Clinton to be Indicted on Federal Racketeering Charges" that went viral on social media. President Trump has expanded the definition of fake news to include investigative reporting that is critical of his activities and has called the news media the "enemy of the people." (Grynbaum, 2017). Americans trust in mass media is at its lowest level in polling history according to Gallup (2016), with only 32% saying they have a fair amount or more of trust; 64% of American believe fake news causes "a great deal of confusion" about basic facts of current events (Gallup, 2016). For those Americans who do not trust the news media and are confused about basic current events, one cannot help but be concerned about their understanding of forces shaping governmental policy and their ability to participate critically in the political process.

Efforts of economic elites, corporations, and organized business groups to impact government policy often concern regulation or deregulation favorable to an industry, industry subsidies, increasing corporate market share, tax rates, tax codes, and other policies that ultimately contribute to improving wealth accumulation for economic elites. One indicator of the success of these efforts is the increasing concentration of wealth in our society and globally. From 1978 to 2012 the share of wealth in the U.S. held by the richest 0.1% of society increased steadily from 7% to 22%; for the bottom 90% of families, wealth did not increase at all from 1986-2012 (Saez & Zucman, 2014). Total wealth owned by the top 1% of U.S. households in 2013 was 36.7%. Combined with the next 4%, the top 5% of American households owned 64.9% of all wealth in the country; the bottom 40% of households had negative wealth (Wolff, 2014).

For planetary perspective on wealth concentration, a recent Oxfam (2017) study revealed "eight men own the same wealth as the poorest half of the world" (p.1). An earlier investigation (Oxfam, 2016) reported that the

wealth of the richest 62 people has risen by 44% in the five years since 2010. . . the wealth of the bottom half fell by just over a trillion dollars in the same period—a drop of 41%” (p. 2). As Thomas Piketty (2014) argues, increasing concentration of wealth is a feature of our economic system that threatens democracy. The threat, of course, concerns supplanting popular sovereignty with indirect governance by economic elites. Georgina Murray (2012) explains that power and control is concentrating in a transnational capitalist class created by the merging of factions of various national capitalist classes that are interdependent in their objective of greater capital accumulation.

One apparatus for capital accumulation is tax havens. In 2013 approximately 4% of household net wealth in the United States was held in offshore tax havens (Zucman, 2014). The share of wealth held offshore has been increasing in recent decades and income generated by offshore assets is not reported to the Internal Revenue Service (Saez & Zucman, 2014). For the transnational capitalist class, offshore financial centers enable tax avoidance on a massive scale and provide a resource for advancing their interests. In the progression of transnational capital accumulation “the rise of offshore tax havens is one of its most important (but largely unrecognized) features” (Van Fossen, 2012, p. 99). As the *Panama Papers* reveal, wealthy individuals, corporate persons, prime ministers, presidents, drug traffickers, and other criminals commonly hide their wealth in a shadow world of corporate-financial entities that exists because of government policies and practices of ignoring fraud that have been successfully lobbied for by economic elites (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, 2016). Internationally, the amount of hidden wealth exceeds \$7.6 trillion or approximately 8% of the global financial assets of households (Zucman, 2015).

However valuable tax havens may be, a central feature in the progression of transnational capital accumulation has been establishment and maintenance of a shared ideology or common world-view conducive to capital generation for economic elites. While an overview of ideological hegemony is beyond the scope of this discussion (Gramsci, 1971; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Giroux 1981), one instrumental outcome of hegemony is a criminal justice system that provides differential treatment for elites (Garrett, 2014). Like the public’s resignation to wide-scale tax evasion by economic elites, acquiescence to a differentiated system of justice is another indicator of democracy’s distress. Former Attorney General Eric Holder’s testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee exemplifies the justice divide in the United States (Gongloff, 2013):

“I am concerned that the size of some of these institutions becomes so large that it does become difficult for us to prosecute them when we are hit with indications that if you do prosecute, if you do bring a criminal charge, it will have a negative impact on the national economy, perhaps even the world economy.

Difficult indeed, in the eight years after the financial crisis that initiated the Great Recession no major financial executive has gone to prison for fraudulent activity. Only one trader at Credit Suisse, Kareem Serageldin, is serving a thirty-month sentence for inflating the value of mortgage bonds in his portfolio (Cohen, 2015). Across town from Wall Street during those same eight years, police vans patrolled with a big net gathering suspicious-looking persons and connecting them with the criminal justice system. Thousands were detained and charged in this volume-arresting law enforcement technique that damaged many lives; a record 684,724 people were stopped and searched in New York in 2011. One man was sentenced to 40 days in Rikers Island prison for public display of a marijuana cigarette, which occurred when he emptied his pockets to comply with police demands (Taibbi, 2014). In 2012, Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation, better known as HSBC, settled with the government for \$1.92 billion to avoid indictment for illegal money laundering for nations like Iran and North Korea, and Mexican drug cartels. Among these is the Sinaloa Cartel, which is feared for its horrific torture videos, and public chain sawing and dismembering of its enemies (Protest & Silver-Greenberg, 2012; Taibbi, 2014). Since 2008, twenty global banks have paid more than \$235 billion in fines and compensation for breaking financial regulations (Dzimwasha, 2015). In 2013 wealthy sixteen-year-old Ethan Couch was sentenced in Texas to 10 years probation for several counts of intoxication manslaughter and intoxication assault. He avoided incarceration for the four people he killed because of “affluenza,” a condition that manifests lack of personal responsibility and unawareness of consequences resulting from a privileged, wealthy life (Wang, 2016). In New York in 2014, Eric Garner, on suspicion of selling loose cigarettes and after stepping away from handcuffs, was thrown to the ground by police officers and put in a chokehold, whereupon he died of asphyxiation gasping “I can’t breathe” eleven times (Baker, Goodman & Mueller, 2015).

The disparity in American justice and ascendance of transnational capitalists sketched above reflect a wide and increasing divide in wealth and power that is debilitating democracy and fostering plutocracy. While American democracy has always been at risk, advancements in the past have nurtured optimism about its viability: direct election of senators; establishment of Social Security and Medicare; expansion of civil rights, voting rights; dismantling of impediments to voter registration; broadening of political leadership—women and minorities; and efforts to reduce money in politics; among other democratic improvements. Deflection of this trajectory is indicative of a distress that has been metastasizing for quite some time: increasing amounts of money in politics (Kuhner, 2014; Lessig, 2011; Mayer, 2016); new restrictions on voting—photo identification and other constraints in 21 states since 2010 (Brennan Center, 2016); gerrymandering to enable minorities to defeat majorities in elections (McGann, Smith, Latner & Kenna, 2016).

Other distress signals are clear. Most Americans do not think wealth should be as concentrated as it is in our society but elected officials sustain policies that contribute to even greater concentration (Newport, 2015; Norton & Ariely, 2011; Scheiber & Sussman, 2015). In 2008, over 90% of Americans said the United States should act to reduce global warming, even if it has economic costs (Leiserowitz, Maibach & Roser-Renouf, 2009). As noted above, most majority party members of the 114th Congress deny or question the science that attributes global warming to human activity. In February 2016 the Supreme Court issued an unprecedented stay on the Obama administration's Clean Power Plant rule (Meyer, 2016). President Trump has indicated he may withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement, the first global treaty to attenuate climate change (Chestney, 2017).

Distress is also evident in healthcare. Most Americans (78%) are dissatisfied with the total cost of healthcare in the country and most (51%) think it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that all Americans have healthcare coverage (Gallup, 2016c). Although the Affordable Care Act has reduced the number of uninsured, about 35 million are still without coverage and many middle-class Americans have been burdened with higher premiums and higher out-of-pocket expenses as the healthcare industry transfers the cost of care to patients with high deductibles, coinsurance, copayments, and limited provider networks (Lieberman, 2015). The majority of Americans think government should take action to lower prescription drug prices (DiJulio, Firth & Brodie, 2015), but costs continue to increase and none of the proposals in Congress to address the matter has come even close to passage.

Another healthcare issue with serious consequences is high anxiety resulting from the precariousness of employment. According to sociologist Amitai Etzioni, findings from a study on job security "support our hypothesis that the majority of Americans have a wide spread sense of economic insecurity" (Greenburg Quinlan Rosner Research, 2015, p. 1). As managers and spokespersons for the national economic/corporate elite and the international capitalist class attempt to induce American production workers to accept job insecurity, low wages, and wage stagnation as the natural order of the global economy, they are finding acquiescence somewhat difficult to achieve (Mishel, Gould & Bivens, 2015): Public approval of Congress in early 2016 was 13% (Gallup, 2016d); anti-establishment candidate Donald Trump was elected president. Still, a political system anchored even more securely to money and the absence of effective large-scale educational programming to develop citizens' knowledge and skills for political participation provides reassurance for the economic elite.

If the United States is not yet a plutocracy, signals that it is becoming one are unmistakable. Democracy has always been a serious threat to aspiring plutocrats and oligarchs, and they do their best to suppress it. Explicit political education is required to prepare democratic

citizens who can participate critically and effectively in shaping the direction and quality of social life. A century ago John Dewey (1917) counseled wisely on this matter: "Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife. Moreover, it is only education which can guarantee widespread community of interest and aim" (p. 223).

3 The failure of social education

To recall conditions of increasing wealth concentration and machinations of power capacitated by wealth seems idle were it not for the tendency to forget this knowledge and its significance when the topic of educational goals and achievement in public schools are under consideration. While major educational policy documents occasionally allude to the school's obligation to prepare thoughtful democratic citizens, the focus is development of communication and calculation skills, the most basic human cognitive requirements for industrial work. Subordinate to this requisite common core of human capital is content knowledge and skills in the sciences and technology, which are commonly valued by educators and educational policy-makers in terms of their instrumentality in the workplace. Discussion or promotion of basic skills development and academic discipline knowledge in relation to preparation for political participation is extremely rare in educational policy discourse and the media. Politicians, education officials, and the media seldom decry shortcomings of schools in preparing young people for political participation: Preparation that includes students' understanding of how the power of wealth is employed to influence social attitudes, values, and government policy; their ability to critically analyze social issues and engage effectively in the political process. There is little concern that high school students are not often asked to critique the structure of society and its institutions, and imagine other possibilities.

The inability of the public to arrest and reverse the increasing concentration of wealth and power in society and significantly mitigate, let alone eradicate, pernicious conditions of social life described in the preceding section attest to the failure of social education. One of the more salient metrics of failure is the dismal rate of voting in the United States: 31st among 34 countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (Silver, 2015). Voter turnout for presidential elections in the United States has declined from the 1960s; as American society has become more educated, its citizens vote less (United States Elections Project, 2016). The segment of the electorate that most recently experienced our social education programs, 18-24 year-olds, vote the least of any age group in the nation: 38% in the 2012 election compared to 63.4% for those age 45-64 (File, 2014). While increasing voter turnout expands the voice of the people, even a significant upsurge would not likely cure our democracy's distress if a substantial portion of the electorate has poor understanding of social issues, relations of power, and weak critical thinking skills. Perhaps, as Jason Brennan (2012) argues, our democracy



would be better off if uniformed, irrational, immoral voters stayed away from the polls. It is troubling to consider the extent to which these voters are relied upon.

Another related indicator of the ineffectiveness of our social education programs in recent decades is a decline in political knowledge among young people: Americans aged 18-29 years in 1964 had much more political knowledge than their counterparts in 2000 (Wattenberg, 2002). Similarly, a survey of college freshman in 2002 found only 26% said that “keeping up with politics” was important to them compared to 58% in the class of 1972 (Wattenberg & Lineberry, 2002). These declines are also reflected in the broader population: The proportion of adults who “follow what’s going on in government and public affairs most of the time” decreased from the late 1960s and early 1970s—1966/35%, 1972/36%, 1974/39%—where in 2004 and 2008 the proportion was 26% each year (American National Election Studies, 2008).

Most would probably agree that effective social education programs should cultivate virtues of concern for justice and the public good that are emblematic of democratic character. Research, however, shows that Millennials, far from being civic-minded, are the most narcissistic generation in recent history. They are less likely to think about social problems and to be interested in politics than Baby Boomer and Generation X youths (Twenge, 2006). With the promotion and proliferation of neoliberal ideology it is perhaps not surprising that today’s youths evince extreme individualism and materialism, often do not feel a need to help others, and have little civic engagement (Smith, Christofferson, Davidson, & Snell Herzog, 2011). To what extent are ideologies examined and critiqued in social education programs?

Declining civic engagement has been documented for decades: Between 1973 and 1994 civic engagement involving work for a political party, service on a committee, or attendance at a public meeting on town or school affairs declined by over 35% (Gould, 2011). In the 1990s books with portentous titles such as *The Public Voice in a Democracy at Risk* from the Eisenhower Leadership Group explained how too many of us are leaving the work of civic engagement to others (Salvador & Sias, 1998). William Greider’s (1992) *Who Will Tell the People: Betrayal of American Democracy* reported on the public’s surrender of power to corporations and the wealthy. A few years later, Noam Chomsky (1999) provided a broader analysis of neoliberalism and the global order, and the depoliticized public that goes along with the economic elite’s program. Warnings continued as the new century unfolded. Henry Giroux’s (2006) *America on the Edge* told of an insidious neoliberal ideology permeating our culture and its schools, replacing concern for community with narrow self-interest. Foreshadowing the 2016 presidential race, Sheldon S. Wolin’s (2008) *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* explained the public’s complacency with theatrical, symbolic, managed democracy where economic elites have conjoined with the state to shepherd a distracted,

politically addled electorate to a promised-land of market bliss. Currently, 71% of Americans aged 18 to 29 describe themselves as not “politically engaged” or not “politically active” (Institute of Politics, 2016, p.4).

Other evidence on the failure of social education may be found in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results for civics and history. Following initial administration of the civics assessment in 1969, scores declined for several decades. For students aged 17, scores on citizenship knowledge in 1976 were significantly lower than 1969 (Stedman, 2009). The decline corresponded with a back-to-basics conservative restoration in schools in the mid-1970s and a shift away from issues-centered social studies of the late 1960s and early 1970s, the last period when issues approaches to social studies were popular (Evans, 2011). One interesting finding from the early civics assessments was a change in seventeen-year-olds’ sense of political efficacy: In 1969 73% reported they thought they could have influence on decisions of local government; in 1976, significantly fewer, 56%, thought they could have influence (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1978).

NAEP civics scores for students in grade 8 and 12 remained stable from 1988 to 2006 (Stedman, 2009). For perspective, on the 1998 civics assessment, 35% of public school 12th graders scored *below* basic while only 26% scored at or above proficient (Lutkus, Weiss, Campbell & Lazer, 1999). Among a selected sample of 38 questions provided by the NAEP from the 1998 civics assessment for 12th graders, the one most frequently answered incorrectly was “explain two ways democratic society benefits from citizens actively participating in the political process”—only 9% of test-takers provided a “complete” answer to the question (Johnson & Vanneman, 2001, p. 5). The 2010 civics assessment revealed that 12th graders scored significantly lower than 2006: 36% scored *below* the “basic” level, which is the lowest level and denotes only partial mastery of knowledge and skills fundamental for proficient work at a given grade (Institute of Education Sciences, 2010a). Students in grade 12 did not participate in the 2014 civics assessment due to lack of funding; a telling indicator of the value assigned to civics education.

Scores for 12th graders are worse on the NAEP United States history assessment: 59% scored *below* basic in 1994; 58% were *below* basic in 2001 (Lapp, Grigg & Tay-Lim, 2002). Scores improved on the 2006 assessment with only slightly more than half (53%) of 12th graders scoring *below* basic; 13% scored at or above proficient (Institute of Education Sciences, 2006). The average score for 12th graders on the 2010 assessment was lower but not statistically different from the score in 2006: 55% scored *below* basic in 2010 (Institute of Education Sciences, 2010b). Students in grade 12 did not participate in the 2014 United States history assessment due to lack of funding.

Although higher education is not the focus here, investigations of this population’s capacity for informed political participation are discouraging. A large-scale

study by the Intercollegiate Study Group (ISI) (2006) surveyed 14,000 college freshman and seniors on their knowledge of United States history and institutions. Both groups scored very low. The ISI report, *The Coming Crisis in Citizenship*, concluded “if the survey were administered as an exam in a college course, seniors would fail with an overall average score of 53.2 percent, or F on a traditional grading scale” (p. 6). It is surprising that at 16 of the 50 colleges in the study, including Yale, Brown, and Georgetown researchers found that seniors knew less than freshman, a phenomenon the investigators described as “negative learning” (p. 12). An even larger survey by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that only a third of 24,000 students queried felt strongly that their civic awareness had expanded in college (Dey, 2009). Another national study shows only a quarter of college seniors report that their understanding of social problems and knowledge about people from different cultures and races was much stronger than when they were freshmen (Finley, 2012).

It is reasonable to argue that knowledge of specific facts that appear in civics and history assessments mentioned above is not necessarily indicative of person’s civic engagement or disposition thereof: How would Cesar Chavez, Pete Seeger, and Rosa Parks have scored? Objections to banking methods of education often associated with depositing official facts and information in the minds of students also seem reasonable when development of thoughtful, reflective citizens is a goal. Nevertheless, NAEP scores provide some indication of high school seniors’ capacity to engage critically in the political process. Despite the positive spin in NAEP civics and history reports, it is difficult to conclude from students’ scores that schools have been preparing young people adequately for democratic citizenship: approximately 75% of high school seniors do not have knowledge and skills to perform civics school work proficiently let alone undertake the civic responsibility of informed, critical, judicious participation in politics.

There has always been debate over social education in American public schools. In the first half of the last century much of it focused on whether social education should be comprised solely of instruction in history or include social studies courses such as civics, geography, economics, and psychology. In either case, traditional instructional methods of transmitting facts and information dominated. Early last century, challenges to cultural transmission models came from George Counts and other progressive educators who argued that schools have a mission to improve society. Social studies educators such as Harold Rugg in the 1930s and others in the late 1960s and early 1970s attempted to move the field toward more critical, issues-centered instructional approaches to strengthen students’ preparation for reflective, engaged democratic citizenship. These approaches promote student investigation, analysis, and deliberation on important social issues. Other new, non-conventional approaches in the Sixties era sought to emphasize understanding and development of inquiry skills in the social sciences, and asked students to draw

their own conclusions from data—Man A Course of Study. All these efforts to transform social education through emphasis on development of critical thinking and analytical skills, and challenging students to examine underlying causes of serious social problems and to critique society were effectively suppressed. Historically, conservative forces have secured the dominance of a social education form that focuses on transmission of official knowledge and emphasizes social control and socialization, particularly to the norms of corporate capitalism (Evans, 2004, 2011).

A key element of social education for conformity and control is the textbook, which has long been recognized as the central instructional resource and *the* source of knowledge (Shaver, Davis & Helburn, 1979; Cuban, 1991, 1993; Wade, 1993). Studies of social studies textbooks from the 1960s through the 1980s found them generally dull, biased, superficial, and uncritical (Sewall, 1988; White, 1988). In the 1990s, an analysis of 12 leading high school United States history texts by James W. Loewen (1995) concluded “[i]n short, textbook authors portray a heroic state, and like other heroes, this one is pretty much without blemishes. Such an approach converts textbooks into anti-citizenship manuals—handbooks for acquiescence” (p. 210). A more recent review of popular high school history textbooks found that “[n]one is distinguished or even very good. . . [t]he best are merely adequate” (Ravitch, 2004, p. 8).

Other studies of high school social studies textbooks provide evidence of hegemonic ideology functioning in schools (Apple, 1979). Jean Anyon’s (1979) analysis of seventeen high school United States history books illustrates that the “symbolic legitimation of powerful groups in the textbook version of economic and labor history . . . indicates that school curricula can lay a subjective basis for social control” (p. 385). According to Anyon, “[t]he textbooks provide an invisible means of soliciting their [students’] support” of the powerful groups that influence the economic and social system (p. 385). Similar findings come from a study of the treatment of corporate influence on government by leading high school United States history and American government textbooks: “ideological judgments and beliefs embedded in selectivity of the information provided . . . lend support for corporate activities and economic arrangements conducive to corporate interests. This bias renders these textbooks inadequate for developing students’ understanding of corporate involvement in the electoral process and policy decision-making” (Neumann, 2014a, p. 66). A study of the eight economics textbooks used in contemporary American high schools found that seven do not address wealth distribution, a fundamental measure for evaluating the economic system of a given society (Neumann, 2014b).

When dull, superficial, uncritical, biased textbooks are combined with a pervasive conception of instruction as knowledge transmission and dictates to address massive sets of facts and information, and maintain order in classrooms of thirty to forty students, it is perhaps understandable how preparation of young people for



critical, contested political participation gets short-changed. Ironically, social studies teachers see the goal to “prepare good citizens” to be their top priority, but the most frequently reported instructional strategy for high school social studies teachers is to have students “listen to lectures” (Theiman et al., 2013, pp. 52-53). As Larry Cuban (2016) reports on his return to high school history classrooms, instruction in many schools has not changed much in the past half century: teacher-centered lecture; reliance on textbooks, worksheets, and tests. Ronald W. Evans (2011), drawing from Tyack’s and Tobin’s (1994) “grammar of schooling” construct—splintering of knowledge into departments, classification of students, divisions of space and time, awarding of grades and credit—characterizes the endurance of teacher-centered methods focused on lower-level cognition as the “grammar of social studies” (p. 196). The grammar of social studies is reinforced by standardized testing that emphasizes recall of facts; curriculum and textbooks that are not conducive to inquiry, diverse perspectives, controversy, judgment of policy, and that have minimal attention to contemporary issues; and a system with few incentives for teacher innovation. Evans (2015), recipient of the prestigious 2015 Jean Dresden Grambs Distinguished Career Research in Social Studies Award, captures the nature of contemporary social education in the title of his most recent book: *Schooling Corporate Citizens*.

4 Hope?

However entrenched the grammar of social studies may be, possibilities for change exist. Conceptual insights may be found in critical theory. Instruction on critical pedagogy by teacher educators in social studies methods and social foundations of education has transformative potential. Historians of social education such as Evans shine light on latent possibilities of once-popular issues-centered approaches to preparing young people for political participation. Other ideas from the past also hold promise. Resuscitating inquiry approaches of Sixties era New Social Studies methods, Sam Wineburg and others in the Stanford History Education Group (2016) have developed instructional strategies and document-based lessons that develop students’ research and critical thinking skills. Disciplined inquiry within an issues-centered framework and context respectful of teacher professionalism and autonomy could be a powerful and effective amalgamation for improving social education. Although Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are part of a larger structure of reform for social efficiency and are focused on preparing young people for the workforce or higher education that leads to more technical, professional, and leadership positions in the global economy, the attention to development of inquiry and critical thinking skills in CCSS for literacy in history/social studies, and implied teacher autonomy in the standards could be a lever for creating a form of social education with features mentioned above.

Even as distress in America’s democracy appears to be deepening, certain conditions offer hope that that all

may not be lost. Freedom of speech remains a powerful dynamic and numerous forums for communication are available. Sympathy and mutual reliance reflected in social groups organized to reduce hunger and poverty, improve human rights, promote peace and other human welfare causes represent possibilities for reviving civic engagement. The environmental movement has considerable potential as a galvanizing force for democracy, particularly its causes of arresting climate change and transitioning to sustainable forms of energy. Another example is the Occupy Wall Street movement that arose in Manhattan in August 2011 and spread to more than 80 countries by October reveals potential for large-scale activism against anti-democratic corporations and economic elites intent on undermining the will of the people to accelerate their accumulation of capital. Supporters of presidential hopeful Bernie Sanders, whose platform included campaign finance reform, tax reform, greater equity in income and wealth, and improvement of social security, healthcare, and other social welfare programs constitute a significant mobilizing force that could reinvigorate democracy.

America is at a critical juncture. Other western countries may also be approaching that point. Is the strength of democratic character reflected in the groups and activities mentioned above a sufficient catalyst to eventually put democracy’s distress in remission? Should we count on it? Or do educators and citizens need to work toward reorganizing the educational reform agenda to prioritize transformation of social education and establish the preparation of young people for political participation as the primary obligation of public schooling?

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Isabel Menezes

Commentary: The Failure of Social Education or Just Going Down the Road of Post-Democratic Politics?

Keywords:

Democratic citizenship education, democracy and education, social education, preparation for political participation

The paper “American democracy is distress: The failure of social education” presents several “symptoms of democracy’s dysfunction in the United States”. These include the extreme reliance on campaign contributions, giving the donors – economic elites and groups representing business, frequently operating at a transnational level – an excessive power in determining government policy in areas such as the environment, media or fiscal regulations, as profusely exemplified in the paper. At the same time, policies impose restrictions on citizens’ rights in areas such as voting, healthcare or employment. In this sense, the power gap between citizens and economic elites in the form of a global capital is growing and, as it goes undisputed and unchallenged, menaces the core of democracy itself.

On the second part of the paper, the author rests on the classical assumption of “democracy’s dependence on and educated citizenry” but also on the recognition that this is a marginal concern in educational policy, discourse and practice. The need for a political education that will “prepare democratic citizens who can participate critically and effectively in shaping the direction and quality of social life” is therefore seen as an essential role of public schooling. However, “there is little concern that high school students are not often asked to critique the structure of society and its institutions, and imagine other possibilities”. In the author’s opinion, this has been contributing to a decline in voter turnout, but also to a deficit in political knowledge, political interest and civic engagement, that substantiate the vision that “Millennials, far from being civic-minded, are the most narcissistic generation in recent history”.

Finally, schools appear to be overwhelmed with other concerns – standardized testing or the emphasis on employability skills – and political education is not really a priority:

“When dull, superficial, uncritical, biased textbooks are combined with a pervasive conception of instruction as knowledge transmission and dictates to address massive sets of facts and information, and maintain order in classrooms of thirty to forty students, it is perhaps understandable how preparation of young people for critical, contested political participation gets short-changed.

Nevertheless, the author concludes with a discussion of reasons to be hopeful that rest both within and beyond the school. Within school, the transformative potential of critical pedagogy and theoretical debates within the areas of social studies, history and civic and citizenship education; beyond schools the resisting vitality of demo-

cracy as revealed by social movements such as Occupy Wall Street, but also poverty, human rights or environmental activist groups.

This is a paper worth reading. Not only does it present an argument – and this is something to be praised and cherished –, but it also sustains its argument on a sound and systematic analysis of documents and research. As such, this is not a trivial paper. The data, analysis and argument the author develops call for our attention and challenge us to reflect on whether and how the situation described for the US resonates with the situation we are currently living in Europe. It is my strong belief that, apart from apparent differences, the problems that the author discusses articulate at a deeper level with phenomena we are witnessing in democratic regimes across the world, and particularly in Europe.

In fact, the paper shows, based on profusion of official reports and research, how political decision-making has become the *land-where-politics-is-a-stranger*. The foundations of political decisions are more and more determined by the interests of economic groups, financial institutions or industries generating a *corporate-led-politics* that undermines any hope for real politics. Real politics is the inevitably messy and conflictive land of pluralism and diversity in the discussion of opposing visions of the common good, the good of the “people” – that mythical collective and diverse “us” that we are continuously redefining. Corporate-led-politics is the land where decisions are made without even trying to consider any idea of the common good, as they are intrinsically and openly connected to the good of only a few.

This approach is clearly in line with Crouch’s vision of post-democracy (2001, 2004, 2014) who argues that a combination of factors such as the lack of a distinctive political identity of existing political parties, economic globalisation, and the growing direct influence of economic elites and lobbyists on politicians led to a situation where formal democracy has grown apart from citizens control:

“while elections certainly exist and can change governments, public electoral debate is a tightly controlled spectacle (...). The mass of citizens plays a passive, quiescent, even apathetic part (...). Behind this spectacle of the electoral game, politics is really shaped in private by the interaction between elected governments and elites that overwhelmingly represent business interests. (2004, p.4).

Crouch admits that this might be an exaggeration, but that the ways democracy works is moving clearly in this



direction. His more recent analysis of the Eurozone crisis (2014) is a blatant demonstration of the process:

“The banks, having been deemed ‘too big to fail’, were given privileged treatment in setting the terms for rescue from the disaster to which their negligent behaviour had brought us all. Rescue packages placed the burden on the rest of the population through cuts in public spending, especially therefore on those most dependent on help from the welfare state, people far poorer than the bankers whose incomes and institutions they were now helping to stabilise. In the process, the crisis was redefined by political and corporate leaders as having been ‘caused’ by excessive levels of public spending. The crisis has therefore now been used to achieve permanent reductions in the size and scope of the welfare state in many countries. (p. 72).

In Portugal, Ireland and Greece this resulted in the intervention by a joint group involving the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank. This group controlled the policies of national governments and insisted on the implementation of austerity measures that resulted in growth of poverty and unemployment. The discourse “there is no alternative” was used to legitimize such policies and still persists as a menace, even in countries like Greece and, more recently, Portugal where left wing coalitions tried to invert the austerity diktat. So, there are reasons for hope, also in Europe – I am also writing this in the aftermath of the elections in Holland where the Groen Links had a significant growth.

To make education accountable for this decline in democracy is the point where the author and I start to draw apart. Parallel to the situation described in the paper, since the mid-nineties, European countries became unanimously concerned with youth civic and political engagement and participation and promoted education reforms to foster what was then called citizenship education. For education policymakers across Europe, citizenship education became a central goal of education systems – that more and more pictured young people as irresponsible, ignorant and detached, and therefore the growing emphasis in the need to promote active but yet informed and responsible citizens. As in the US, however, this does not mean that the political rhetoric turned into a real priority of educational policy or practice (vd. Ribeiro, Caetano & Menezes, 2016).

I do follow the vision of Amy Gutman (1987), among others, that schools are co-responsible for the survival of democracy. And I even go further, valuing the point made by James Beane (1990), more than 20 years ago, that public schools in democratic regimes are institutions small enough to really guarantee a democratic experience, and therefore have a particular responsibility to function in order to provide such an experience, which implies putting into practice the principles of democracy, dignity and diversity. This implies, as John Dewey (1916) did, recognising that education is not ‘preparation for life’ but life itself. This experiential, hands-on perspective has significant implications in the vision of education, schools and children and youths.

However, this does not mean agreeing with the assumption that children and youth are ignorant, immature or unprepared for citizenship, an assumption that underlies many of the educational initiatives in this domain. On one part, because it enables policymakers, educational authorities, teachers and parents to assume that they should approach democracy and politics in a ‘simpler’ way, without the inevitable tensions, conflicts and antagonism that ‘come with the territory’ – as Chantal Mouffe (1996) clearly demonstrates. In a way, this vision of citizenship education proposes to address politics leaving the political outside (Monteiro & Ferreira, 2011), that is, without considering the political and moral conditions of children’s and young people’s everyday lives in- and out-of-school – and denying them the opportunity to acknowledge their ‘political existence’ both inside and outside schools as Gert Biesta (2016) would say. In fact, the paper’s call for a social education that approaches the dysfunctions of democracy echoes some of these concerns.

Nonetheless, on the other part, this also implies recognising children and youth as citizens in their own right – not as citizens-in- the-making, to use Marshall’s (1950) formulation. This questions the whole idea of education as preparing for ... well demonstrated in Reinhold Hedtke’s (2013) criticism of the paradoxical nature of guidance for political autonomy (see Simonneaux, Tutiaux-Guillon & Legardez, 2012 for another thoughtful discussion). This is also in line with the work of Biesta and Lawy (2006) and of Tristan McCowan (2009) who challenge us to consider the significance of lived democratic experiences, in- and out-of-school, as nurturing the continuous personal and collective construction of what it means to be a citizen, here and now.

The implication is overcoming a vision of a narcissistic generation that is not committed to civic and political participation: in fact, several theorists have emphasized that instead of a citizenship deficit we might be witnessing a participatory revolution (Kaase, 1984) with signs of a strong vitality across Europe and the world (Berger, 2009; Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Haste & Hogan, 2006; Morales, 2005; Norris, 2002). Nevertheless, many of the emerging forms of civic and political participation are surely in line with the individualistic utopia (Lipovetsky, 1986) and the liquid (Bauman, 2000), self-expressive and anti-hierarchical (Beck, 2000) nature of our societies – and might even comply with Innerarity’s (2016) cautionary note that “indignation is a necessary but not sufficient civic virtue” (s/p). But to disregard these novel forms of civic and political participation is surely to discourage their participatory potential and the genuine will they might entail to become more active in the political realm. Children and young people, as narcissists as the rest of us, are experimenting with being citizens, but on their own terms, not ours. In my view, we should not minimize the political significance of these phenomena.

Additionally, I strongly believe that it is essential to contest a vision of “informed”, “active” and “responsible” citizens – by which the legislators probably imply



that “you can be active citizens, as long as you do it the *right way*”. Across time and space, from the American Revolution to the Resistance to fascist and autocratic regimes across Europe and beyond, individuals who have actively assumed their rights of citizenship have, at the same time, demonstrated a complete irresponsibility regarding both the existing status quo and their own personal safety. In fact, the discussion around the need for an unpolite (Monteiro & Ferreira, 2011) or non-conformist (Hedke, 2013) citizen comes from a similar reading. In most cases, knowledge and information were certainly not a pre-requisite for political action. In fact, political action frequently emerges from the gut reaction that underlies, as Walzer (2002) would say, the decision of ‘which side are we on’ – and therefore, the tendency to reduce political action to a rational, literate and informed positioning contradicts the affects, irrationality and frequently the irresponsibility that motivates political action in the real life. Emotions are a powerful way of knowing the world and their role in politics should not be denied but valued (Nussbaum, 2013).

To deny this is to limit the political to the educated citizens who are informed or competent enough to have a say in the definition of our common good. This is problematic not only because it corresponds to yet another elitist conceptions of citizenship, that disempowers those whose knowledge and competencies are not recognized as good enough. It is also problematic because, as Gert Biesta (2016, p.103) stresses, “it relies on the idea that the guarantee for democracy lies in the existence of a properly educated citizenry so that once all citizens have received their education, democracy will simply follow.”

Finally, it can also be problematic because it entails a vision of education as both redemption and remedy. This is, in a way, an easy solution, as education, schools and teachers are powerless enough to be easily regulated. What involves a significant political challenge and confrontation is the regulation of global capitalism – the economic elites, the transnational corporations – that flourish in our democracies governed under a model of corporate-led-politics. In order to achieve this, I do believe that we need both traditional and emerging ways of civic and political participation (Innerarity, 2016), that involve both engaging with and resisting formal politics (Crouch, 2001). My hope comes, now and again, from Hannah Arendt’s conviction that politics resists, always emerging in the “space-between-[inevitably different] people” as a relationship between equals in their diversity (1995 [1950], pp. 40-43). And it is through the resistance of politics as a plural, conflictive, emotional and rational discourse and action that the possibility of reinventing democracy, in- and out-of-schools, does exist.

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Nadine Balzter, Yan Ristau, Achim Schröder

Political Youth Education in Germany. Presenting a Qualitative Study on its Biographically Long-Term Effects¹

- The impact analysis generated a typology of biographical sustainability and shows the effects of extra-curricular political youth education in Germany.
- We identified four typecasts for biographical sustainability of political education: political commitment, occupational orientation, politically enlightened attitude and acquisition of basic activatable political skills.
- In this process political youth education has three functional differentiations of effective directions: political education can instigate further engagement with politics, has a strengthening or supporting function or can show the other.

Purpose: There is an impact analysis presented, which explores the long-term effect of extra-curricular political youth education from the perspective of participants.

Methods: The former participants retell their own education and life stories about five years later. Life stories were then interpreted in the course of research workshops and reconstructed as individual studies.

Findings: The impact analysis generated a typology of biographical sustainability and shows the effects of political youth education by means of single case analysis and case comprehensive topics.

Keywords:

Political youth education, extra-curricular, impact analysis, adolescence, sustainability

1 Introduction: Political youth education in Germany

1.1 Post-war history

Government-funded extra-curricular political youth education in Germany can be looked at as a special achievement of post-war Germany. The reeducation program of the allies, and in particular of the United States, initiated offers for adolescents to overcome their involvement in an authoritarian following and to start a democratic process bottom up. This took place during seminars for adolescent team leaders or pupil representatives during international encounters, such as one organized by the educational institution Jugendhof Vlotho taking place in Great Britain 1948 with 300 team leaders. The agenda of the program included the direct confrontation of experiences during fascism, and it succeeded in bringing together “young fascists and anti-fascists” at conferences. Sometimes even “former

National Socialists” were involved in the discussions (Lorenz, 2003, p. 93-95).

The Federal Youth Plan, which was first started in 1950 with the relatively high sum of 18 million DM as annual budget was aimed at supporting a democratic attitude. The Federal Youth Plan was thought of as a counter-project to the totalitarian and centralistic youth organizations of the Third Reich. At its beginning, the project supported mainly ideologically independent providers of youth work. Also at the beginning of the 1950s, providers of professional extra-curricular education joined at a national level, and the first programs for youth educational teamers were started (Schillo, 2011, p. 10). In the early 1950s, many people took part in educational tours to the United States, to learn about American ideas regarding democracy. Among these was even Jürgen Habermas, the protagonist of ‘ideological criticism’, who called himself a ‘product of reeducation’ (Widmaier, 2012, p. 11).

Although the post-war period in Germany was marked by substantial social and material hardship, the initiative of the Allies to provide guidelines and the ensuing government funding succeeded in establishing political youth education with a higher degree of institutionalisation in comparison with other western European countries. Government-funding for professional organizations providing political youth education outside schools is unique to Europe, and has sometimes been considered a ‘prototype for export’ (Schröder, Balzter, & Schroedter, 2004, p. 190).

During the 1970s and 1980s political youth education experienced profound upheaval and expansion with the emergence of new activists (mainly from the student movement) and also from changes in government programs and funding. The concept of “political education”

Nadine Balzter, M.A, is research associate at the Institute of Pedagogy, Technical University of Darmstadt. Her main topics are: Political Education and Participation, Adult Education, Gender Studies and STEM, Theory-Practice-Transfer and Professionalism.

Email: n.balzter@apaed.tu-darmstadt.de

Yan Ristau, M.A., is sociologist and social worker. He works as the head of an institution for open youth work in Cologne, Germany. His main topics are: Youth Education and Social Work with migrants.

Email: YanRistau@web.de

Dr. Achim Schröder, PhD, is professor for youth work and cultural pedagogy at the University of Applied Sciences in Darmstadt (emeritus). His main topics are: Adolescence, Youth Work, Political Education, Professional Relationship, Youth Violence, Youth Cultures. Email: Achim.Schroeder@h-da.de



and of youth “politicization” included gradually more aspects of life. The women’s movement in particular put private issues into a political context. The idea of ‘democracy as a form of life’ spread almost to the level of the classical understanding of democracy in Athens where ‘the whole material-spiritual life context’ is affected (Negt, 2010, p. 321). Even in the 2000s, this experience of politicization of everyday life and its closeness to the classical concept of democracy can be used as reference for a concept of the political sphere. It represents a common thread of humans (Arendt) without a previously fixed aim of political education heading for a narrowed-down target of particular interests (Brumlik, 1997).

In the mid-1970s, many federal states passed legislation concerning the funding of political youth education and paid release from work for educational leaves. On the basis of extra-curricular initiatives, an educational movement founded new training institutes, independent education clubs, self-organized conference centers and educational institutions. Conceptual debates and experimental testing were common during this period. Notions of political education changed markedly from one of knowledge transfer and teacher-led instruction to others of self-activated learning, project learning and action orientation. The hallmark of the new forms of learning is to seize upon experience as a site of learning, and to emphasize the social experiences that are furthermore gained from participation in social and political movements. Social experiences are seen as flowing and merging into educational work; educational work offers the opportunity to reflect on experiences in the new social movements. The movements into which education flowed were many – the youth, ecological, women’s, peace and alternative movements –, and education workers developed manifold activities involving different strata of the population. The overall *action orientation* of these two decades changed the self-concept of political education permanently. In hindsight, it can be considered a ‘silent triumph’ (Behrens, Ciupke, & Reichling, 2003, p. 296).

A new reckoning of time began with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), and has continued through the more than two decades of subsequent regime collapse throughout Eastern Europe and the Middle East. The view that ‘there is no alternative’ [to the market economy], first articulated by Margaret Thatcher, has been taken up by Angela Merkel. From the 1990s, funding for political youth education decreased as the social future became thinkable only in the context of capitalistic production methods. But in the wake of rising xenophobic and extreme right-wing tendencies (e.g. leading even to violent attacks on asylum seekers’ homes) political youth education has received new attention in the form of short-term projects since the early 2000s (Lynen von Berg & Hirsland, 2004, pp. 15-18). A series of special programs has been initiated by the government setting new tasks to political youth education through the funding of programs like: Xenos, CIVITAS, entimon, and others. Political youth education has been

considerably re-empowered through this social countermovement to right-wing extremism and the related creation of new jobs and funding. In particular, current concepts are revised and new ones developed in order to enable staff with different attitudes and approaches to work with a right-wing oriented target group, whose attitudes and positions differ significantly from their own.

During the past one and one-half decades, approximately since the year 2000, political education has met new challenges by the turning away from politics of vast groups of the population and other post-democratic trends (Crouch, 2008). At the same time, powerful transnational citizen and protest movements have evolved like the “movement of the globalization critics,” originating in the G8 meetings from Genua 2001 to Heiligendamm 2007, or “Occupy” which started as a reaction to the global economic crisis. Other movements have developed out of local protests against large-scale public construction projects (Stuttgart 21) or nuclear waste disposal (Gorleben).

In the early 2000s, political education scarcely profited from these movements’ and experiences in activation. It had been in a defensive position since the 1990s as the neo-liberal mainstream leveraged strong pressure for political education to economize and demonstrate its effectiveness. Neo-liberal thinking edged people into more self-regulation and self-responsibility in nearly all domains. In Germany’s public discourse, voices could be heard against the necessity of political education. In this neo-liberal wave, political education struggled to find a contemporary profile. For example, it tried to become more distinct from social education, and to move closer to political science. Through this orientation, a “gutting” of political education should be avoided, because a number of socially committed projects had been run under the label of political youth education. Other discourses claimed that a concept of political education which is closely connected to the everyday life of young adults asserts a connection between social and the political issues (Schroder, 2008, 318). Today, in the professional training of future pedagogical staff studying social work, pedagogics, sociology or political science a connection between social and political issues is created more often (Hirsch, 2014, p. 62).

In Germany, political youth education is legally incorporated in ‘youth work’ according to Article 11 of the Children and Youth Welfare Act (KJHG 2014) as its first central theme. Though the Act is new, it has its origins in and reflects the wording of earlier legislation passed in 1990, when youth work was still largely synonymous with political education. While during the 1970s and 1980s nearly all youth work was centered around demands on political education and was thus politicized completely, nowadays we have to deal with the contrary effect. Political education has been drawn into the wake of professional applicability. This tendency reveals the neo-liberal aspects of nowadays education. Staff has turned to everyday pragmatism and no longer takes part in local youth political debates (Scherr & Sturzenhecker 2014, p.



374). In the following part the contemporary concept of political youth education will be displayed.

1.2 Knowledge, judgment, action as the triad in political youth education

Knowledge, judgment, action – the so-called triad of political youth education – refers to its sub-goals: to impart knowledge, to enable judgement and to encourage participation. This triad can be found in relevant theoretical literature and is also prominently placed in the Children and Youth Plan of the German government (BMFSFJ, 2012):

“Political education shall impart young people’s knowledge about society, state, European and international politics including politically and socially important developments in the fields of economy, culture, technology and science. It shall enable forming judgement on social and political events and conflicts, enable one to claim one’s rights as well as to discharge one’s tasks, assume responsibility towards fellow citizens, society and nature and encourage participation in the creation of free and democratic social and state order (BMFSFJ 2012, p. 141).²

Political education only takes full effect when the opinions and judgements of participants are developed or changed, supported by the newly gained insight and on the basis of already existing competences. This kind of positioning to selected political questions intends to encourage the participants to action and to intervene in political – that is public – space. This does not only refer to political committees or forums but to any kind of public expression of opinion.

Though the triad is claimed to reflect consensus, at least the hierarchy of the components has to be looked upon as out-dated. The current approach in seminars and projects prioritizes action, accompanied by the acquisition of knowledge and judgment. Particularly action-oriented media relations show ways to encourage youths to address a topic, outline their position and put it forward to a limited public via their interest in media and technology. Biographically acquired opinions and judgements often form the initial point or “fish hook” for seminars if firm attitudes and prejudices are questioned and screened.

At the same time three more aspects need to be emphasized which are not conveyed in the wording of the triad. To start with, judgment is still often reduced to a cognitive process even if the *inclusion of emotions* is inevitable – as well in its collective dimension. Judgment is accompanied and interspersed by emotions. Secondly, the former distinguishing lines between *personal development* (social education) and political education are not maintained in practice, as the personality of participants is strengthened in order to encourage their political engagement. Thirdly, dynamics of the phases of youth and the results of research on *adolescence* have to be taken into account in professional political youth education. Namely, we know that adolescents’ political positioning is infiltrated by their identification with (and distinction from) persons who are important to them,

and particularly those who introduce them to political positions.³

In conclusion, political youth education can be characterized as following. Political youth education entails support and encouragement for independent thinking, and it does so through pedagogically-informed opportunities to engage with matters of democratic communities and finding one’s position in the political. Successful political youth education builds on the lifeworld of its participants and anticipates the inclusion of emotional influences on the formation of positions and attitudes. Moreover, it addresses the specific status of adolescence as one of transition with particular needs for identification and distinction. The relationship between one’s self and the world can only be understood and acted from and upon if it has been penetrated in a cognitive, emotional and social way.

2 Initial situation and case history of the impact study

The effect of educational processes is a very important subject in pedagogical debates (Ahlheim, 2003, p. 5). Supporters and organizers of political education, and especially pedagogues, are interested in knowing how pedagogical arrangements and personal interventions in the educational setting are effective, so that they know, how to stimulate and motivate participants for action. The effectiveness (and hence validity) of political education is broadly supported in professional discourse, but exact measurements of effect and success have been so far considered impossible (ibid.). Some authors even argue against attempting to make such measurements. Faulstich (2007, p. 100), for example, sees a danger of empiric reductionism if the success of political education is gauged in terms of being able to ‘command’ participants, to ‘achieve’ a desired political perspective and to ‘measure’ this process. Impact research in the humanities too oscillates within this area of tensions, and should be aware of its opportunities as well as the challenges and limits. Bourdieu emphasized this contradiction:

“If you want to see the world a bit like it is and want to talk about it like it is one has to accept that one will always be in the complicated, vague, impure, diffuse etc., thus in opposition to ordinary concepts of strict scholarship (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 34).⁴

In other words, it is not fully possible to measure educational effects on human beings; any attempt to do so must also incorporate rather messy descriptions of the uncertainty of the educational process.

On the one hand, during the past two decades, such debate in Germany has not been restricted to pedagogy, as government funding has been connected increasingly to evaluations. Evaluations are expected to prove the effectiveness and effects of funding as well as to assess innovative concepts. The support program ‘Political Education’ of the Children and Youth Plan (KJP), through which the federal Ministry for Children and Youth funds personnel and administrative expenses of extra-curricular political education of adolescents and young adults



up to the age of 27, was likewise evaluated (see Schröder et. al., 2004). The evaluation included a quantitative research with questions about the whole program, supplementary interviews, and an analysis of references, looked upon as first nationwide survey within (German-language) professional literature. It examined the actual target groups, methods and content, the role and the impact of staff, and the learning that was achieved (Schillo, 2011, p. 13). Student participants, it should be noted, were not questioned in the survey.

On the other hand, few efforts have been made to synthesize the data from evaluations. In this respect, Helle Beckers' work (2011) can be seen as the next important step towards a substantial impact research. She systematized all available evaluations from German-speaking countries dealing with empirical research on political education during the years 2000 to 2010, to provide the first synoptic view and overall assessment of research on political education during this decade. She concludes that the state of research regarding extra-curricular political education can be described as 'desolate'. What studies do exist offer only a fragmented view: they were carried out from the perspective of different scientific disciplines, in the context of different professional discourses, and the evaluated periods and subject areas clearly depended on the various conditions for funding. Long-term or coherent studies were scarce (ibid., p. 161). Becker claims that longer-term and systematic funding of research on effectiveness are necessary. Regarding political education, she notes: "Many questions concerning the logic and methodology of research are still to be dealt with. Up till now there is no convincing and transferable research design for extra-curricular political education" (ibid., p. 165).⁵ Furthermore, she claims the lack of differentiated and necessarily complex considerations on possible methods reconstructing educational processes and results (ibid.).

Hedtke, Zimenkova, and Hippe (2007) published a similarly critical assessment of survey data on democracy education in Europe. To-date, most results are passed on indicators of the popularity of European politics as a subject matter for youth, but the authors argue that research should be organized as an interactive process. That is, research should include case studies that capture local diversity, result in a dense description of the context, and through which stakeholders (both teachers and pupils) contribute their opinions. Furthermore, enlarging the viewpoint to institutions of extra-curricular education would also mean that "youth workers" could be considered such people who address the concerns of youth not only at school but in all aspects of their adolescence.

3 Research design of the impact study

Some of these recommendations were incorporated into the methodical design of the study to be presented in the following pages (see also Balzter, Ristau, & Schröder 2014). Firstly, the youth (now young adults) get a chance to speak, thus enabling the reconstruction of educational processes and the preparation of case studies. Secondly,

the study was nationwide and included respondents from various social backgrounds and with various educational experiences. Finally, the project examines the long-term effect of educational impulses and thus the sustainability of the educational experience.

Normally, the only evaluation that students make of a political education course or event occurs immediately at its conclusion. This procedure leaves little room for the participants to reflect on complex educational processes; nor do they have the opportunity to consider the effect of these educational experiences on their personal biographies. Thus, the idea was born to conduct later interviews in which interviewees look back to the seminars. This approach creates the possibility to process and reflect on the character of the education received, something that often takes full effect only after some time, perhaps months or years.

Furthermore, our choice of the age-group to interview was shaped by a consideration for the developmental capacities of self-reflection. As a developmental stage, adolescence is characterized by contradictory dynamics, which can cause great variation in their short-term assessments of educational effect. Adolescents are strongly present-oriented, and do not pose to themselves the question of how educational activities will benefit their biography. Their attitudes are rather more influenced by changing mental states and behavioral patterns. Comparatively, young adults are more able to perceive and describe effects from their educational experiences.

On this basis, an interview design was developed to target young adults from the ages of 18-27 who had taken part in an episode of political youth education at least five years previously, between the ages of 14-18.

At this point, the question arises as to which methods would enable past educational experiences to be decoded and reconstructed. The most adequate method for investigating biographical sustainability seemed to be the biographical-narrative interview, a technique which activates the memory to place, link, and relate the self with its experiences. Subjects were asked to tell their whole life story, thus opening the opportunity to place their experience with political education in a broad stream of memories concerning education and authorities (such as those related to family, school, peer-groups or clubs). In this way, we sought to capture a view of the biographical sustainability of political youth education. Life stories were then interpreted in the course of research workshops and reconstructed according to Rosenthal (2011) as individual studies.

Access to survey participants was gained through educational institutions and former youth educational teamers. The selection of interview partners was guided, apart from methodical criteria, by the aim of reaching the widest possible heterogeneity in terms of a sample of theoretically relevant categories (Rosenthal, Köttig, Witte, & Blezinger, 2006, p. 20). Gender, regional origins, social status, ethnic and other elements of cultural background, and the range of providers (who offer extra-curricular political youth education) were all taken into



view. Contrary to the presumption that it would be difficult to find interviewees – considering limitations on accessing personal data through educational institutions and the geographic mobility of young adults – we fortunately found many interested persons. On the whole, 23 interviews and four group debates took place. About 50 young people took part in the study. The analysis of the data followed the interpretive paradigm and the six steps of the interpretative procedure according to Rosenthal (2011, p. 187): “The aim of the reconstruction is, to analyse the biographical meaning of the experience of the past as well as the meaning of the self-presentation in the present”.⁶ Important for this kind of analysis is the preliminary postponement of the key question while the structure of the case is worked out. We outline below the resulting typology of biographical sustainability. The typology gives some indication of the long-term effectiveness of extra-curricular political youth education.

The biographical-narrative interview, as a very open-ended and explorative method, seems to be well-suited to elicit the meaning of political education for young adults. The researchers got deep insight into life stories, the complex ways in which political youth education and educational authorities cohere in the experiences of young adults, and into the various perceived functions of political education. The research workshops with students, educators and other scientists provided a circle of intersubjectivity that was crucial to the qualitative research process and helped to control for blind spots.

4 Typology of the long-term effectiveness of political youth education

A typology of cases deducted from the individual interviews is used to organize the resulting data. Furthermore, sorting the interviews according to the typology helps to depict the context and the relationship to the research question. Therefore “similarity relations in surface characteristics” are irrelevant compared to “similarities in deep structure” (Kreitz, 2010, p. 99).⁷ Which social cases are structurally similar or belong to the same type is determined by the configuration of the components and their functionality for the whole (Rosenthal, 2011, p. 24). Thus, we identified four type-casts for biographical sustainability of political education and three functional differentiations of effective directions in the empirical material.

The key question we asked was:

In what way have the impulses that began in a political education seminar or project found subsequent expression in further life?

Moreover, the following questions were of special interest:

How do the influence of political youth education relate to former knowledge and attitudes, which are affected by family or other biographical influences?

And, how do subjects deal with the contradictions and conflicts between different spheres of influence in their life?

We labelled the first type in our typology, *political commitment* and included in it the stories of adolescents who became politically active because of the impulse they received in a seminar. The process of politicization triggered by the extra-curricular education was obvious to the subject and could be described in terms of the trinity (knowledge, judgment, action) of goals and methods ascribed to political education.

More surprising was the discovery of an *occupational orientation* that resulted from extra-curricular political youth education. Occupational orientation – the second type – is neither amongst the core targets of political education nor obvious on first sight. It can be counted as a hitherto mostly unnoticed side effect. Subjects with stories of this type recounted that they had been led to pursue employment in the political field following their exposure to political education.

The third type, *politically enlightened attitude*, can be ascribed to education’s immanent political impact as such. In this case, political education stimulates the individual’s critical engagement with society. The primary effect of political education is described as a challenge to previous patterns of thought and action and an enhanced development towards a politically enlightened (and sometimes enlightened acting) citizen. Subjects in this category reported their interest in gathering information on political events and developments, critical consideration and discussion of social issues, and (last but not least) the use of their right to vote.

The fourth type, *acquisition of basic activatable political skills*, is characterized by the development of specific abilities which form the basis for political action. Amongst them are empowerment of self-confidence, the experience of self-efficacy, the acquisition of social skills (e.g. communication, interaction, ability for conflict and consent), as well as skills in presentation and rhetoric. These abilities which are trained in political education are so far mainly used for private purposes and in the field of work.

There is, moreover, a great affinity between the first two typecasts. In many stories of the adolescents both effective directions play a biographically major role or are collateral. Furthermore, it can be assumed that the politically active as well as the one working in the political field have acquired respective basic activatable political skills and a politically enlightened attitude.

While outlining the four effective directions the question arises as to whether responsibility for these effects lies only with political youth education, and (if not) the degree of responsibility that should be assigned to other socializing factors. Further analysis of the interviews led to the extraction of three different ways of referring to the function of political education. This so-called functional differentiation gives some indication of whether and how political education is linked to former political experience or whether the adolescents were faced with an entirely new perspective. As the data verifies, political education can support already initiated developments; give significant impulses; or open up the political field for the first time. The functional



differentiation of effective directions can be conceptualized in three categories:

First: The interviews indicate that events of extra-curricular political education can *instigate* further engagement with politics. Political education is often described as being a key event contrasting with past experiences.

Second: On the other hand, the *strengthening or supporting function* is built on former biographical experiences outside of political youth education. In such cases, political youth education could have led to a decision for action or a change of attitude; or could have awakened interest and motivation for further examination. When participants had previous political exposure, they often deliberately used political education and their already existing competences were intensified and differentiated by the educational experience.

Third: The functional differentiation – *showing the other* – focusses more on domestic socialization. It refers to a discontinuity during biographical development in which events of political youth education are described as having allowed adolescents a basic enlargement of their horizon of previous experience. Unlike in their normal social environment and background, they come into contact with political questions and critical perspectives during seminars. They can enlarge their knowledge of political context, sharpen their judgement and gain insight into possible (political) fields of occupation and participation. Adolescents are offered a realm of experience where they can try out themselves and gain access to the political field.

Comparing these results with other studies, there are some interesting parallels. The type *political commitment* resembles the type *participatory citizen* developed in the US American study “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Nevertheless, the methodical approach and target group (practitioners and scholars) of the American study are very different from ours, and therefore the results are only contingently comparable. In the American case, three conceptions of the “good” citizen emerge – the personally responsible, the participatory, and the justice-oriented – to the question “What kind of citizen do we need to support an effective democratic society?” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 239) The first type, *participatory citizen*, means an active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts (ibid., p. 240). Certainly, the concept of “political commitment” in our study is defined much closer to the political field.

Another German study focusing on long-term effects in international youth work came to a quite similar result concerning the functional differentiation. Thomas et al. (2007) worked out four different processes to integrate the experience biographically. First: *nice to have* – the exchange experience did not leave any noteworthy traces in the biography. Second: *mosaic* – the exchange experience contributes to a certain development to lead a participant to other events. It fits in as a ‘tesserae’ into one’s entire biography. Third: *domino* – the exchange experience is a trigger for a string of follow-up events

and activities. Fourth: *turning point* – the exchange experience initiates a turning point in one’s biography (Thomas, Chang, & Abt, 2007, p. 7, English Summary).

The typology will be illustrated with a case study in the following section, exposing its in-depth structure by way of example. For this purpose, the case study of Mareike will be introduced representing the third type: development of an enlightened political attitude.

5 Summary of Mareike’s case reconstruction: “To be able to shape one’s own life even concerning computers”

The case of Mareike – against the backdrop of her biography – is an example of how the impulses of a political youth education seminar further the development of an enlightened political attitude (type three) and its transfer to other areas of society.

Mareike, aged 23 during the interview, grew up with her two younger brothers in socio-economically difficult circumstances because her father was frequently unemployed. Thus, the family can only dispose of limited economic capital. The mother – the key power in the family – cared particularly about the best possible support and schooling for her children. She saw to it that all three of her children attended grammar school (grades 9-12) instead of pursuing technical education. Mareike, being the first-born, took responsibility for herself and her two brothers to whom she is very close. After her parents separated, the difficult economic situation escalated, especially because the father did not pay any alimony. Mareike’s single mother lived with her children in a 3-bedroom flat, and eventually took in a fourth child as a foster child. In the orbit of her strong mother, Mareike developed a pragmatic way of dealing with limited economic resources and at the same time achieved high responsibility for family solidarity.

At the age of 17, Mareike learned about open youth work (called info-café) through information at school and about political youth education directly from a teamer at the café. The pleasure of playing computer games, the personal atmosphere, and attractive terms at the café enticed Mareike to take part in her first seminar. The topic was (according to Mareike’s narrative)

“... making a film, I still remember it was about media addiction, a topic which was not yet popular in 2005. [The discussion was about] whether that is something one has to be aware of or an illness which has not been noticed by society so far (Transcript lines 69-73).

Methodical implementation skillfully wove the interests of adolescents together with a critical inquiry (and competency) into the topic. Mareike experienced a strong (and favorable) public reaction by taking part in a youth-media-festival, at which her seminar group showed their film about the computer game fair. More seminars and projects followed and even led to a prize. Mareike received a fresh impetus from political youth education; political education encouraged in her a different self-determined point of view and a critical



attitude, which she transferred to other social areas. She described this transfer as the ability “... to know and to watch advertisements on TV more consciously, or to watch films more consciously, as you have already learnt something about it (Transcript lines 1795-1797)”.

The transfer achievement is further shown by Mareike in another example during the interview. She described an advertisement about child and youth protection which ran as a trailer in cinemas. Mareike explained that this trailer shows the importance of parents for their children: parents have to take an interest in their children and start talking with them at an early age about the internet and computer games. As she spoke, she remembered that the info-café had even offered counselling for parents.

The fact that she took over responsibility from an early age, skillful pragmatism and her experience in political education – said Mareike – encouraged her at her first job to stand for elections for the company’s youth representative a few years later. After being elected, she is convincing from the very beginning and becomes politically and unionized active. The collective striving for better working conditions for young employees gave Mareike an important feeling of belonging, and as time passed she became active also against the ‘right-wing’ groups.

It is important to note that the personal address to Mareike was crucial moment to her decisions – both to take part in the seminar of political youth education, and to stand for election as youth representative. Thus, it is a personal relationship with a political education teamer that drew Mareike to access political education, and it was a personal commitment to union work that drew further into the political field. The importance of a personal relationship exponentiates with adolescents who have not had such input at home because the personal address arouses a feeling that one is entitled to be concerned with politics. We assigned Mareike’s case to the category of politically enlightened attitude. In her biographical narration, the experiences she gained during seminars of political youth education helped her develop a critical perspective.

6 Significance of pedagogical persons and learning venues – Selected comprehensive topics

The empirical material showed topics with a more general importance beyond the individual case studies. Below, the two topics of learning venues and pedagogical persons – both being central factors of extra-curricular political youth education – will be introduced by way of example.

6.1 Pedagogical persons

The personal dimension in extra-curricular political youth education is particularly important for at least two reasons. On the one hand, under non-formal conditions of learning, ‘learning from others’ can be used in a wider range than in formal conditions of learning. Furthermore, new and sometimes unfamiliar worlds of experience can be facilitated by learning venues and methods. Pedagogical staff accompanies participants on this exploration

and often seem to be *key persons*. In general, adolescents are responsive to accessing new things via extra-familial persons. These other adults offer them the chance to get to know and experience a critical attitude. Thus, they are encouraged to question their received opinions and gradually develop their own attitude; that is, they develop the power of judgment. The judgment that occurs through political education entails interaction with others, and can therefore be described as *related judgement* (Schröder, 2005).

Testaments to the importance of pedagogical persons are manifold in the interviews. Aspects which are mentioned repeatedly concern their expertise and the student’s encounter with the teamer’s attitude.

For example, Sandra confirmed “*that particularly the people who ran the seminars* (Line 1518)”, shaped her a lot, “*as they are in a good mood, ... absolutely involved in the topic* (Line 1529)”. She was particularly impressed by their expertise and the ways they structured debates and formed arguments. The pedagogues succeeded in encouraging her to contemplate, precisely because her opinion differed from the ones they expressed. Chafing at different opinions was an essential learning experience for Sandra and significantly influenced her access to the political field.

Likewise, for those with a big distance between their parental home and politics, persons working in political education loom large in influence. It is they who discover the interest and potential of adolescents, and support them to gain access to the political field. This often leads to educational success, sometimes to an occupational orientation towards political education or the political sciences, or to a political commitment. Even in the biographies of subjects who specialized in fields far from political education, those who came from circumstances with little economic or socio-cultural capital identify the personal influence of supportive adults such as school teachers, private music teachers, or staff in open youth work.

6.2 Learning venues, distant and close

Learning venues have come into focus as a dimension of education during recent years. Political education has numerous and diverse venues. In the following section, we will distinguish between approaches that are ‘distant’ and those that are ‘close’. In distant learning venues, the distance from the living environment itself provides new realms of experience and learning for adolescents. Close learning venues offer good links with their familiarity and simplify the transfer of new knowledge to a familiar environment.

6.2.1 Distant: educational institutions, memorials, journeys, excursions

By their very distance from everyday life, “distant” or unfamiliar learning venues simplify access to new topics and contents, to the extension of present attitudes, and to the reduction of prejudices. Esthetic experiences as well as group dynamic processes outside the ado-



lescents' normal environment can contribute to the effectiveness of these venues. Educational institutions can turn into places of exceptional and sensual experience by spatial charm, joint meals and playful adventures. At places with a direct connection to the topic – i.e. memorials and museums – access occurs primarily through the participants' emotions and proves successful. During educational journeys and excursions, participants profit furthermore by their 'dynamic' character: being on the way and having to adapt continually to new situations stimulates learning processes, as one is led out of current patterns of behavior and thought.

The empirical material proves the effectiveness of distant learning venues. Statements on educational institutions, memorials, excursions and journeys are to be found in many of the interviews with descriptions such as that made by Mona *"that the educational institution was something special, thus making everybody present feel to be part of something special (Lines 154-155)"*.

Members of one project group with adolescent migrants were interviewed during a group discussion. They had visited a concentration camp in Eastern Europe as part of their analysis of the Holocaust. They described this visit as an impressive and formative experience. The group took subsequent journeys to other memorials and even to the Middle East. The participants described these excursions and journeys as *highlights* (Line 271) of the project, due to their high information content. *"Particularly in this country (in the Middle East) we met with a group of adolescents, there was communication and ... this exchange of information ... is something really great (Lines 281-284)"*.

Another interviewee, Paul, noted the social contrasts from his journalistic exchange seminar to Eastern Europe. For him, it was encounters and direct communications with people through which he had learned new and unknown things about the country. Direct experience of cultural difference and social imbalance impressed him a lot, and he found it more formative than the theoretical debates held during the project's seminar sessions. This impressive experience was crucial, he recounted, to his eventual decision to take up sociology at university. He wants to study people's differences in order to understand them better.

6.2.2 Close: on site, in the living environment

"Close" learning venues show their advantages if the barriers for taking part in an event are to be kept low. The familiar setting offers possibilities to connect. Fears and worries concerning distant, unknown and foreign places can be excluded. In this way, events of political youth education are easily included in normal living environments. Thus, one can reach especially those young people who do not have the resources to tolerate feelings of "foreignness" outside their familiar living environment; this lack of resources can be general or temporary. "Close" venues are also favorable for transferring new knowledge and experience into everyday life.

These aspects of "close" venues also come up repeatedly in the interviews. Thus Ann-Kathrin and Alexander

were both active in Children and Youth Parliament. Ann-Kathrin mainly saw it as *a good opportunity to do something locally* (Lines 37-38), and to affect changes in her own environment. Alexander pointed out that he could establish relationships and build up local networks through his activities in Parliament. He also came to know more about his hometown, and could identify more easily with others around him. In addition, belonging to the Children and Youth Parliament was of vital importance to him for getting in contact with politics on a local level. Local issues and initiatives appealed to him because they were closely connected to his living environment, and he could experience immediately the effects and consequences of political action.

Marianne, Susanne, Manuela and Esra took part as guides in a travelling exhibition on the persecution of Jews during the Third Reich in their hometown and its close surroundings. According to their statements, they were fascinated by their role in passing on to other adolescents an understanding of an unknown and difficult topic. With this alienation effect, they could also reflect on themselves and learn.

Marie, Cem and Mario took part as "ambassadors" in a program for voluntary work, recruiting pupils locally for volunteer projects on Volunteers' Day. The program's local reference made it easy for them to gain access to their commitment and to link it to their own sphere of everyday life. They identified highly with their position as ambassadors. Interestingly, the political education seminars they attended took place in a distant educational institution, which – as mentioned above – had its own appeals. Marie enjoyed attending the seminars *"as they formed a highlight amongst the ambassadors. You could learn a lot and above all get to know a lot of people (Lines 1306-1308)"*. Getting in contact with like-minded people and group dynamics during seminars were facets of interest to which Mario also pointed. Thus, we see in this project that close and distant learning venues may correlate favorably: access to the everyday environment and life which enabled action was coupled with possibilities to learn and reflect with like-minded people at a distant learning venue that was juxtaposed to everyday life.

7 Quintessence of the impact study

Political youth education in extra-curricular settings has been state-funded in Germany since 1945 and has been evaluated also in a nationwide survey in the last decade (Schröder et al., 2004). In the present article, a new impact analysis is presented, which explores the biographically long-term effect of political youth education (Balzter et al., 2014). In the framework of this impact study, former participants were asked to retell and to reflect on their own education and life-stories some five years after their participation in political youth education. The impact analysis based on such biographical-narrative interviews was able to generate valid results regarding the biographical sustainability of extra-curricular political youth education. The qualitative research methods established access to young adults



(aged 18-27) and their reflections on the biographical benefit of their previous educational activities at the ages of 15 to 18. Based on the interpretation of these life-stories, the direct and indirect effects of political education on the formation of social and political identities could be documented. The impact study of Balzter, Ristau, & Schröder (2014) generates a typology of biographical sustainability and shows the effects of political youth education both by means of single case analysis and case comprehensive topics. The main findings of this study are summarized in the following nine statements.

1 The impact study shows again clearly that there is no *simple cause-effect-scheme* concerning educational and developmental processes. The presented impact study clearly shows that one cannot predict in a general way which learning methods will be most effective for which participants. Thus, only beneficial factors can be named, particularly regarding politically distant target groups.

2 The implementation of a *variety of teaching methods* is important as each method can take various effects depending on situation and context. But all methods chosen should stimulate action above all. Furthermore, it is important that the pedagogical staff acts self-reflexive and is able to reconsider and change methods – often developed by the middle-class shaped civil society – by an interactive dialog with the target group. This is especially relevant in those cases, in which the target group is not middle-class oriented.

3 *Pedagogically active people* working in political education have to help adolescents understand how life conflicts which are often perceived as being private and individual are political. Their support and encouragement, in their role as counterparts and models, help adolescents to feel entitled to interfere politically. The interviews have shown that often other *extra-familial adults* offered essential mediation and support at the right time (Hafener, 2009, p. 269).

4 *Learning venues for political education* bear a special importance, too. Educational institutes are often experienced as places leading out of everyday life and familiar learning experiences, thus opening up new experiences. This is true for sometimes very distant venues like memorials which can trigger new levels of controversy. Close learning venues, on the other hand, facilitate access and have a positive influence on transfer to the living environment of the adolescents. Nearly half of the interviewees took part more than once in offers of political education. They often chose different offers in the same place, continued their intercultural encounters or entered a long-term project.

5 *To take part in experiences* of private, public or professional life must be of utmost concern. In order to get to know, take up, and be able to interpret dialogically, one needs methods which are oriented biographically and environmentally (Negt, 2010).

6 Part of these experiences and dispositions form *adolescence*. Intertwined with adolescence are changes, new chances and re-allocations in all areas of life. This topic still leads a shadow existence in the discussion

about political youth education. But adolescence is situated at the seam between continuity and discontinuity, between stability and change. Here we find connecting points for political education (Schröder, 2012).

7 Regarding *the content of political education*, current questions or experiences in the living and working environment must be the starting point. It remains important to target connections starting from specific topics, because political education is primarily *joining the dots* (Eis, Lösch, Schröder, & Steffens, 2015).

8 As interviews in our study proved, commitment and political awareness can only develop if the various areas of action are complimentary and augmented. From the viewpoint of providers and organizers, special attention should be given to *working in networks or linking competence* between youth organizations, clubs, institutions near schools, and youth educational centers (Schröder 2014).

9 Obviously, *social activities* are more easily entered into by young people with educationally distant backgrounds than are overtly political activities. These adolescents are particularly dependent on social approval, as it has been hitherto more or less denied to them because of their origins. Political education must strive for and support *the bridging between the social to the political*, again and again (Balzter & Schröder, 2014).

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Endnotes

¹ In this article, we use the expression “political education” because of its specific history in Germany, as explained above. The concept, however, is similar to those of “civic education” or “education for civic citizenship”, as used throughout European professional discussions.

² This wording can be found in the directives of the original KJP program since 1993; it has endured despite several changes of federal government and revised versions of directives.

³ Regarding all three aspects see Balzter, Ristau, & Schröder (2014, p. 23-27); for the relevance of emotions in political education see Schröder (2016); for theory of adolescence see Schröder (2012), and in English language see Schröder (2006).

⁴ Translation of the quote by the authors.

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Niels Nørgaard Kristensen, Trond Solhaug

Students as First-time Voters: The Role of Voter Advice Applications in Self-reflection on Party Choice and Political Identity

- There is an absence of instrumental reasoning in students' reflections on party choice.
- All students seem dedicated to the process of finding a political party for which to vote.
- Students vary strongly in their willingness to adopt advice from Voting Advice Applications (VAAs).
- We argue that student reflections on their party choice on VAA sites is best characterised as political self- and identity development.
- We suggest that political education of elections and voting should address greater reflectivity in support for students' political identity. -

Purpose: This article analyses what characterises first time voters' self-reflections on party choice as they use voter advice applications.

Method: This study is based on interviews of 28 Norwegian students (age 18-20) preparing themselves for their first election.

Findings: Finding a party to vote for is primarily characterized by a process of matching a party to students' political self, which we see as steps toward a political identity.

Practical implications: Teaching politics should allow for students' reflections on self and their political preferences.

Keywords:

Political identity, first-time voters, Voter Advice Applications (VAAs), participation, social studies, voter education

1 Introduction

Citizens' right to vote is at the heart of democracy. Finding a party to vote for has, since the Michigan school (Belknap & Campbell, 1952), been regarded as influenced by the process of identification with collectives. Though party identification has declined somewhat in recent decades, it may still be important (Holmberg, 2008). In particular, young, first-time voters are in a process of developing their political selves and identities. Finding a party to vote for is a central part of political identity formation, and voter education is a major issue in schools' political education (Børhaug, 2008).

The political process of party choice (and identification) has, over the years, become more complex, particularly in multiparty systems. First, fission processes in multiparty systems such as Scandinavia's, as well as new political cleavages, have resulted in a growth in the number of parties and thus have provided a wide range of political options. Second, the 'catch-all' orientation among parties has blurred the distinction among them. Third, new party alignments have arisen, like the Red-Green coalition in Norway, which confirm that the left/right scale still exists, but has become more flexible and blurry. Fourth, class-based voting is declining (Knutsen, 2006; 2008), which has reduced social class belonging as a guide to voting. Furthermore, social and

political processes such as urbanisation, secularisation, and globalisation, including the spread and use of information technology, have implied pluralisation as well as new alliances and distinctions among people (Castells, 2009). All of these changes have increased the complexities in voters' decisions, and the growing need for voter information.

Historically, the development of party identification was seen as an outcome of (political) socialisation through family, friends, school, and other sources (Holmberg, 2008). A political party reflected (and still reflects) the interests of social groups and was/is also a sign of social/political identification. In recent decades, modernity has led to differentiation in society and numerous possible life courses. Growing wealth gives young people more options, and the development of a popular culture encourages young people to reflect upon questions such as 'who am I?' and 'who do I wish to be?' (Giddens, 1991; Krange & Øia, 2005). While in early research partisan identity was seen as a consequence of social identity, perspectives from the theory of individual life projects suggest that people may question their early socialisation (Beck, 1992), and are especially prone to do so as they reach the age of the first-time voter (Abendschön 2013). The growing complexity might therefore further complicate young people's processes of finding a party that 'fits'.

A further sign of modernity is the profusion of voting advice applications (VAAs), which have become very popular heuristics for a significant number of voters. These VAAs present questions from party platforms to which voters are supposed to respond. Based on voters' responses to a number of questions, these applications suggest a party choice to the voter. Thus, VAAs may become important guides in an increasingly blurry

Associate professor Niels Nørgaard Kristensen
Aalborg University Denmark. Fibigerstræde 1
Bygning: 18, 9220 Aalborg Ø, Denmark
Email: nnk@dps.aau.dk

Professor Trond Solhaug, Norwegian University of
Science and Technology (NTNU), Jonsvannsvg. 82.
7491 Trondheim, Norway
Email: trond.solhaug@plu.ntnu.no



political landscape characterised by the strategic communication favoured to attract voters (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; Coleman & Blumler, 2008). The fact that the VAAs are popular 'sites' used voluntarily by first-time voters makes it particularly interesting to obtain first-time voters' reflections at these sites. In our approach to this study, we therefore used open-ended individual interviews to ask students in school, who also were first-time voters, for their reflections when using VAAs. In our view, the individual reflections indicate how those voters' experiences are used to fit a party to the political self. This seemingly unavoidable process of reflections on political identity, when using the VAA, directed our attention, not least because the process of finding the political self is very relevant to the issue of 'voter education' as part of the political education. We therefore addressed the following research questions:

What characterises young, first-time voters' reflections on their party choice when using VAAs during the 2013 parliamentary elections in Norway? What implications may these findings have for political education in schools?

In the following, we offer a short description of the educational context in Norway and a sample description of VAAs, as well as sections on the theory of identity formation, previous research, methodology, and empirical results/discussion and implications for political education.

1.1 The educational political context and description of a Voter Advice Applications

Norway's democratic political system has regular parliamentary elections in September every fourth year and local municipal elections every fourth year (Aardal, 2007). The Norwegian party system, as in other European systems, is historically rooted in historical social movements, and school in Norway (as well as in many European countries) teaches the political system, elections, and parties as important parts of a compulsory course in social studies in both primary and secondary school (Rokkan, 1987). Also, mock elections and school debates are arranged in lower and upper secondary school, and these events are heavily cited in the media as attempts to promote voting among young people (Ødegaard, 2015). VAAs are increasingly used by voters, particularly young ones.¹

A VAA is a brief questionnaire based on an analysis of party programmes. Questions are mainly issue oriented, and VAAs are generally based on the conceptions of Anthony Down's proximity model (Andreadis & Wall, 2013). The VAA says about itself that it 'does not provide answers but tries to be a sound basis for reflections. A particular aim of the content "validity" is to reveal differences between political parties' (NRK, 2014). It is precisely its intention of being a site that provides a sound basis for reflection that makes the VAA experience interesting for young voters exploring political identity formation.

Technically, the political parties have validated the VAA items and have given their policy scores for them, which serve as the baseline for statistical estimation and recommendations. Four elements are significant for the algorithm and final score of the user: 1) the distance between political party score and user score on single items (political issues); 2) the fact that up to five items may be singled out as particularly important to voters and thus weighted twice; 3) the users' selection of a candidate for prime minister; and 4) the users' initial choice, which is given 1 point. Favouring certain issues should logically mark a preference for a particular political party. Based on a summary of scores of distance (agreement and disagreement) from political party policy, a final party is suggested by the VAA. In 2013, the NRK made a two-stage model in which the second stage is a choice between the two parties that are closest to the users'/voters' preferences. This second stage concludes with a final suggestion of party choice to the voter. There are a number of VAAs in Norway, which may yield different results because of differences in their items, as well as differences in how the items are weighted and how party policy is scored.

2 Previous research

Several fields of research, such as partisan identity formation, the use of VAAs, political socialisation, and political education are relevant to the current analysis. A decline in loyalty to political parties has led to a situation where many voters make their final decision close to the election. In a summary of voter volatility, Bernt Aardal (2007) concluded that 40 % of voters decide immediately prior to an election or on the day of the election. Only one-third of voters find choosing a party easy. In the four most recent elections (after 2000), 40 % of voters changed their party preference, and only 38 % of the voters really cared about the election outcome. 'Voters are uncertain, but dedicated', Aardal (2007) concluded. Voters who decide during the election campaign are on average younger than voters who make an early decision (Karlsen, 2011).

The popularity of VAAs has been steadily growing, and they are among the most commonly used internet applications during elections in most European countries. In some elections, as much as 50 % of the electorate has used them (Ladner, Feldner, & Fivaz, 2008). In the 2009 Norwegian election, 38 % of the electorate used a VAA (Karlsen, 2011). The use of VAAs was greatest among young age groups (aged 17-24); 64 % claimed they had used them and 35 % reported some influence (Karlsen, 2011). Only 27 % in the group of 45- to 67-year-olds had used a VAA. The VAAs were also an important determinant of party choice in the youngest group of voters. This reflects earlier studies showing that young voters are more insecure and are more easily influenced during election campaigns (Karlsen, 2011).

In their overview of research on VAAs, Garcia and Marschall (2012) expressed that the design of the tool affects the advice outcome. The selection of items that are presented to the voter has a considerable impact on



the 'voting advice' that is produced (Walgrave, Nuytemans, & Pepermans, 2009). Wagner and Ruusuvirta (2012) also pointed out reliability or bias issues in their cross-country study of 13 VAAs in seven countries. Walgrave, van Aelst, and Nuytemans (2008) found that the 'Do the Vote Test' (a VAA) has indeed affected Belgian voters' final decision, but at the same time, these effects were modest. They also pointed out that 'VAAs mostly disregard accountability, salience, competence and non-policy factors; they treat policy positions and not outcomes as paramount; and they can be subject to strategic manipulation by political parties (Walgrave, van Aelst, & Nuytemans, 2008). The above-mentioned critical research indicates that the reliability of VAAs are questionable, and this fact may also influence the voters' trust in them. However, the question of reliability may be a source of reflection in teaching, to which we will return.

Use of internet and recent studies of VAAs confirm that the VAA sites and tools may have a mobilising potential and affect voter turnout (Garcia & Marschall, 2012) (Norris, 2001). Fossen and Andersen (2014) examined the role of VAAs and provided a very interesting discussion from different theoretical perspectives on citizenship and democracy. The discussion on implications for teaching is rooted in political socialisation research from the late 1950s dealing with sources of public opinion, and in which increasing voter turnout through education was a major issue (Jennings, 2008). After a pause in the 1970s and '80s, the field had few publications, but interest in it was revitalized in the '90s (Hepburn, 1995; Niemi & Hepburn, 1995) and has since been steadily growing (Jennings, 2008). The use of VAAs touches upon the issue of citizens' competence, discussions that go back to Plato and continue to develop (Dahl, 1992), including in cross-country studies (Torney-Purta, Lehman, Oswald, & Schultz, 2001; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010) as well as new contributions on competence (Print & Lange, 2012, 2013; Fossen & Anderson, 2014). In Norway as well as in most European countries, voting is at the heart of political education and is highly emphasised in the curriculum. Important findings in the study of political education in Norway show that it often emphasises formal procedures and political parties as participants (Børhaug, 2007; Børhaug, 2008). We have not been able to find studies that report on the use of VAAs in political education. In this study, we use students' retrospective reflections on their use of VAAs, to find out what best characterises the interaction between the first-time voter and the VAA.

3 Theory

3.1 Identity: what and why?

According to Ryan and Deci, identities are first and foremost adopted to serve basic needs in support the individual's need for autonomy, to give people a feeling of *belonging*, and to manage a variety of *relations* (Ryan & Deci, 2003). To put it plainly, 'individuals acquire identities over time, identities whose origins and meanings derive from people's interactions with social

groups and organizations that surround them. 'Once identities are adopted they play a significant role in the organization of life' (Ryan & Deci, 2003, p. 253). People adopt identities, they argued, within which they can confront challenges or acquire skills and knowledge and feel generally effective. Furthermore, people need to acquire roles and beliefs and to maintain and secure their connectedness to the social and political world (Ryan & Deci, 2003). Identity also involves processes of defining *us*, typically in opposition to *them*, a group holding different interests and values. The importance of identity formation in human lives also serves as the theoretical argument for our analytical focus on identity formation and implications for teaching.

We define identity as a set of meanings applied to the self in a specific social role or situation. Several theorists in the vein of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have argued for increased reflexivity in society, in institutions as well as in individuals, which implies that individuals are not able to rely on traditions in the creation of their self-identity. In late modern society, the self is solely a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). According to Thomas Ziehe (1989), cultural emancipation and modernity have caused people to become much less reliant objectively predetermined structures, particularly from the symbolic foundation of tradition. The consequence of this emancipation is primarily an upgrading of the meaning of subjectivity. This altered subjectivity implies, we believe, that political identity is no longer experienced only as something adopted from a group or the immediate social environment, where life as a whole is mapped out in the personal biographies determined during childhood. Identities are, to a large extent, constructed by the individual. The notion of 'self' in the work of the sociologists of late modernity, such as Giddens or Ziehe, however, lacks a profound relation to the notion of 'political identity'. Identity defines what it means to be a particular person in that situation (Burke & Tully, 1977; Stryker, 1980). Political identity can be seen as a subset of social identity. In line with our general definition, we see political identity as entailing how citizens understand and represent themselves in relation to the field of politics. The field of politics may have several aspects, of which participation in elections, party choice, party identification, and social-political relations are quite important signifiers in this study.

The social environment can never be ignored. Bourdieu (1986) offered a dispositional theory of social practice, carried out in the concept of habitus. The idea here is that human individuals incorporate the objective social structures in which they are socialised in the shape of mental or cognitive structures. Therefore, increased reflexivity does not just lead us to reflect arbitrarily. Reflections are shaped by our habitus and by praxis. We therefore take into consideration the role of social environment in our analysis of the reflections of our informants in relation to VAAs, party choice, and political identity.

3.2 Identities and their development

In symbolic interactionism, identity develops in social encounters and environments (Stryker, 1980). Two features that are particularly important in structural symbolic interaction are 'society' and 'self'. Society is viewed as a relatively stable and orderly structure, as reflected in the patterned behaviour within and between social actors. While actors are creating the social structure, they are also receiving feedback from it that influences their behaviour. In this way, actors are always embedded in the social structure that they are simultaneously creating (Stryker, 1980). Voters are typically situated in the dialogue between self, society, and election processes. Media, family, friends, school, workplaces, and other settings all offer information and responses in an on-going social/political interaction. This process is quite clear in Stets and Burke's (2003) 'Cybernetic Model', which is a symbolic, interactionist micro-model for repetitive dialogues and identity development. Stets and Burke (2003) stated it this way: 'The hallmark . . . of selfhood is reflexivity. Humans have the ability to reflect back on themselves, to take account of themselves and plan accordingly to bring about future states, to be self-aware or achieve consciousness with respect to their own existence. In this way, humans are processual entities' (Stets & Burke, 2003, p. 130). The process may be illustrated as follows. According to Stets and Burke, identities are activated when they serve the purpose or provide the background for judgements of situations. Humans (voters) formulate issues, receive responses, and reflect in an on-going process, which involves feedback on how they see themselves (Stets & Burke, 2006). Identities therefore come into play and develop through repeated interactions in individuals' lives. We believe this simple model is particularly relevant to young voters' encounters with VAAs, where relevant information (and identities) is brought forward and serves as the basis for reflections on the process and the advice outcome. As such, VAAs offer a tool to differentiate in politics, and the same reflective process may be repeated continually in school.

3.3 Political identity

In the political behaviour tradition, political identity has primarily been seen as partisan identity (Jackson, 2011). We believe this is too narrow an understanding of political identity. The field of politics is about values, beliefs, and various means of participation, but the dominant political behaviourist tradition illustrates how important voting and partisanship is in democracies after all. The 'Michigan four' invented the term 'party identification'. They characterised it as 'the individual's affective orientation to an important group-object in his environment' (Holmberg, 2008, p. 557). The theoretical rationale for acquiring partisan identity was reference group theory (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960), which later evolved into social identity theory (Holmberg, 2008). The original theory of group identification has been criticised as a result of voter de-alignment. Still, we believe that the process of voting for

the first-timers may be seen as a political rite of passage, where young people are given the role of independent political decision maker. Soon after the release of *The American Voter* (Campbell et al., 1960), Erikson (1968) described the development of political commitment as a key aspect of social identification. The development of political identity (also party identification) is part of how young people imagine their lives and try to develop an understanding of who they are within a social and historical context. As part of these efforts, adolescents reflect on values, ideologies, and traditions and on being part of their community in their struggle to understand their role in society.

Downs (1957) stated that it is not rational for the individual to try to be politically informed because the profit from such an effort is not commensurate with the effort needed. Therefore, voters often need to find a tool to rely on in their reasoning, some of which may be termed 'heuristics'. A heuristic can be understood as a perceptual tool to be used when the world is seen as complex and ambiguous, but when a choice has to be made, and when it is useful or necessary to economise on the mental resources and cognitive investments needed for making the choice (Kuklinski & Quirk, 1998). VAAs may also be seen as heuristic tools, as the efforts to consider, optimise, and decide are included in the use of them, and as the individual uses them in order to find a proper choice of party.

To summarise, we have argued that identity formation serves basic (but also political) needs that support our focus for the analysis of students' reflections that follows. Theories of identity formation and VAAs as heuristics will 'feed' the discussion of first-time voters' reflections on party choice when using VAAs. We have also provided a theoretical rationale for the voters' encounters with the VAAs, where voters' political identity formation is situated in the tension between social structure and individual reflexivity. Furthermore, we aim at showing how the theory and analysis of respondents is important to practices in political education in school.

4 Methodology

4.1 Data collection procedure

This study is based on a qualitative, explorative design (Babbie, 2007). The data were collected by teacher students (hereafter interviewers) specialising in social/political science in their final (master) year of the teacher education programme at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Students were all approached by the interviewers and given an information letter on the topic explaining their rights as respondents. The interviews were carried out in these schools. The interviewers were introduced to the specific theoretical field of approaches to political socialisation and specific methodological considerations. A main target in the interviews was how the first-time voters arrived at their choice at the ballot box and, particularly, their experiences with VAAs. Among the methodological considerations was the conscious development of



dialogue and follow-up questions on the intended research focus. In response to open-ended questions, the respondents were interviewed very broadly on different aspects of political life such as political interest, party choice, engagement, participation, media use, political socialisation, perceived role and influence, and their use of VAAs, etc. Furthermore, an interview guide was developed and discussed by the interviewers. The interviewers were given general selection criteria in order to maximise difference and, more specifically, to

ensure a mixture of gender, political interests, ethnic Norwegians and immigrants, different schools, and school classes, and to avoid interdependence among respondents. Respondents were then selected from 6 different schools and 16 different classes equally distributed among the schools. Schools were located in urban and semi-urban areas. The selected respondents are indicated in the table below.

Table 1: Codes, Gen = gender (M = male F = female), Age, Imm = Immigrant (Y = Yes N = No), P-Int = Political interest (Y = yes, N = No, some), Voted (Y = Yes, N = No), VAAs = participated in VAAs (Y = yes, N = No)

Code	AG1	AG2	AG3	AG4	AG5	BH1	BH2	BH3	BH4	BH5	CB1	CB2	CB3	CB4
Gen	F	M	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	M	F	F	M	M
Age	17	18	18	18	18	17	17	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Imm	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
P-Int	Y	Y	N	Y	some	Y	Y	Y	Y	some	some	some	some	Y
Voted	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
VAAs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

Code	DA1	DA2	DA3	DA4	EK1	EK2	EK3	EK4	FS1	FS2	FS3	FS4	FS5	FS6
Gen	F	M	F	F	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	M	F	F
Age	19	21	20	20	18	17	17	18	18	18	18	17	18	18
Imm	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
P-Int	some	Y	N	some	N	Y	N	N	Y	some	some	some	some	Y
Voted	Y	Y-B	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
VAAs	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y

In the selection of 28 young voters, there are 13 males, 15 females, 6 immigrants, 5 non-interested in politics and 10 somewhat interested, two non-voters, and one 'blank voter' (Y-B); four did not use the VAAs. Such a variety of students strengthens our analysis and our research.

The teacher education students transcribed their interviews and presented their results in a second seminar together with the researchers. In this seminar student independent interpretations and analysis became the starting point of our (researchers) analysis. The interviewers interpretations and discussion of results became later part of the researchers validation of analysis (Tjora, 2009). We argue that finding similarities across such a great variety of dialogues strengthens our conclusions. However, we acknowledge that, as researchers, we were not able to create the lively impressions of a conversation, with opportunities to follow up, and this makes us more dependent on transcripts and text.

4.2 Analytical procedures

All the interviews were read, and the parts that elaborated on VAAs were selected. These parts were reread and a preliminary explorative analysis of students experiences with VAAs was performed. From these first readings, we inductively approached the data in the vein of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We started out with an inductive analysis using tools from grounded analysis, followed by a deductive analysis based on the theoretical framework. We determined that our informants had quite different levels of openness to and trust in the results of the VAAs. Despite this diversity, the students seemed to have important approaches to the use of VAAs in common. Based on the preliminary

empirical analysis we grouped our respondents according to their openness to and trust in the VAAs. In search for and to interpret what students had in common, we went back and forth between different theories to our respondents' reflections. Through this process, we arrived at a theory of identity as the most fruitful approach to develop our interpretation and further analyses of data. In this analysis, we asked ourselves what these groups of students have in common. In the following empirical analysis we display 15 excerpts, which are carefully selected to show the variety of self-reflections on party choice among these students as they use VAAs.

5 Empirical analysis

In the preliminary analysis we experienced very little instrumental reasoning among our respondents. They all took the elections process very seriously, and most of their reflections were about the fit of party choice to their political self. These preliminary findings were somewhat contrary to our expectancies and supported our choice to approach student's reflections from a theoretical perspective of political identity.

5.1 Categorisation of respondents

From our first readings, it seemed that our respondents varied in their trust of VAAs and the extent to which they used the 'advice' provided by the application. It seemed that our respondents could be grouped according to how open they were to the advice provided by the VAAs. Based on these variables, we found three types: 'the sceptics, the confirmationists, and the explorationists'. In the following, we will discuss what characterises these

types. Later we analyse what these groups have in common.

The sceptics

This first, main group of respondents was particularly reluctant to taking the voting advice and approached the VAAs with great scepticism. However, it also seemed important to them to seek validation of their planned party choice. The sceptics displayed a somewhat ambivalent position. On the one hand, they are rather critical of VAAs. On the other, they look for acceptance. This dilemma likely reflects the common doctrine of representative democracy that assumes that voters make an informed choice of a party or candidate on the basis of announced political programmes (Whiteley, 2012). The following respondents (one male and one female, both aged 18) are representative of this group. The male did not vote, while the female did:

Male R: *I don't want to vote if I haven't done the job properly. . . . You should not vote if you don't have a clear picture. I don't think that these tests provide you with a clear picture. You should not vote if you don't acquaint yourself with things.* (FK4-S4)

Female R: *I feel that VAAs are somewhat 'stupid'. You only look at the party you prefer. . . I did a couple, but it did not influence my choice!* (AG1.S2)

The first respondent reveals the general dilemma mentioned above. He displays a political identity based on acknowledging the role of citizenship by taking on the role of voting, *as well as* a desire to justify not voting with reference to insufficient information. The female, on the other hand, refers to 'stupidity' and expresses distrust in the computer tool itself, as this is perceived as mechanical and not based on sound reflections. Both respondents still emphasise independence and control over their decision. The hesitation to rely on the VAA advice is common and is voiced by the next two respondents:

R: *I did take a VAA. I got the 'Conservative Party' as an advice. But I really did not care about many of the questions. They were not relevant to me – and I did not answer them.* (BH4S1)

R: *VAAs may be a good basis for a choice. However, I think it gives a somewhat superficial picture of politics. Even if I arrive at a certain decision on a political party, I would still read some more before casting my vote.* (DA4S4)

The need for information and the reluctance to rely on computerized advice is apparent in the respondents' voices. Some respondents even found that the VAA questions were odd and did not match their political identity. We interpret the fact that a number of the questions were characterised as 'irrelevant' as a sign of the respondents' sense of a political self, signified by a cluster of values and issues of importance to him/her. In the 'dialogue' with the VAAs, the user may be able to clarify which questions are more relevant to him/her. In this case, the VAAs presented a 'satisfactory' outcome,

but, as pointed out above, perceived irrelevance of the VAA questionnaires may cause respondents to doubt the subsequent advice. Still, the VAAs may invoke self-reflection even though the advice as such is being rejected:

I: Did VAAs affect your choice?

R: *No, I just lost my faith [in] the VAAs [laughter]. I got the opposite political advice of what I consider to be my political position! I think the VAAs put an emphasis on very few questions that are very important to a party, which explains that you all of a sudden are given this advice.* (FS6.S7)

The fact that respondents commented on unexpected advice indicates a process of reflection and self-direction with regard to choosing a party, and reveals critical thinking with regard to VAAs. Overall, at the heart of the sceptics' mistrust is a strong need for reflexivity and control over their ballot decision. Scepticism, along with the need for information, seems to posit a need for finding a political self. The sceptics believe that voting is dutiful, which implies that they should be as informed as possible about their choices at the ballot box, and VAAs are used for clarifying purposes. This position truly reflects a strong need for independence and a preference for political values that match the respondents' political identity.

The confirmationists

The next group, the confirmationists, generally had trust in VAAs, and respondents were open to VAA advice, especially when the advice confirmed their choice. Some people even favour VAAs as a source of political information compared to TV debates, and respondents typically make the following argument: *'I took several tests because I thought: "This [the party proposed by the VAA] cannot be true". But it could, cause it was the same result every time'* (FK4-S4). The fact that the VAA delivers a surprising result does not lead to rejection of the advice. Instead, it increases reflexivity and leads a respondent to take even more tests before finally accepting the advice.

Another respondent made this statement: *'VAAs are great for many in order to decide. For me, this is just not necessary. I know whom to vote for'* (A-G2-S2). The respondent used the VAA to confirm his political position, which was common for this group. However, this respondent pointed out that for many people, VAAs might be useful and might work as a support for their decisions. Confirmation is also quite clear in the following response:

R: *It was quite clear what my opinion was. It confirmed my choice!* (E-K2)

Although VAAs in several cases are used as a political heuristic, at the same time, they incarnate the processes of reflexivity as argued by the theorists of reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens, & Lash 1994), and embrace such individual political indications as voting. Whereas the sceptics seem to regard VAAs more or less

as a computer game, the confirmationists put some reflective emphasis on them, like this respondent who claims to be influenced by VAAs:

R: I thought the election was all over the place; it was a lot in newspapers and on TV. It was almost too much in the end. I didn't care to watch. It was just bickering, which I don't understand. I did a lot of VAA tests because the media was so obsessed with it. (A-G3-S1)

This respondent reflects a genuine political paradox: on the one hand, he is sick and tired of politics because the election is 'all over' the place. At the same time, he is disturbed by the media calling upon his individual political choice through institutions and discourses 'hailing' young people in various social interactions to fulfil a duty of citizenship. Hence, he is seeking more information about various candidates and political parties in order to confirm a proper choice.

A common feature of the respondents in this group was their positive attitude to the VAAs 'confirmation' of their choice. This led us to name them 'confirmationists'. They often consulted one or several VAAs to check the outcome, sometimes out of interest, or just for fun, but the outcomes generated reflection. Such a positive, self-confirmatory experience from reflection on recommendations derived from a computer program might help clarify their political preferences. In this way, the VAAs may work partly as a heuristic tool in party choice, but also as signifiers of the respondent's political identity. Despite differences between the sceptics and the confirmationists, they seem to have the process of searching for a political identity in common.

The explorationists

This group of respondents was characterised by greater openness to VAA advice and slightly more trust compared to the sceptics. As pointed out in the theory section, the voters' reflections on the VAA sites are sometimes related to their social background and everyday life, as revealed in the following extract:

I: Did the VAAs influence your voting?

R: Yes, to some extent. That and many other things contributed to my decision.

I: What other things? Do you have some examples?

R: The ways your friends vote. I would not say that I was influenced a lot by my friends; I sort of did agree with them in the first place on how to vote, so it was more like my own personal points of view. My family does not mean [a] lot when it comes to voting. I voted completely differently than my mother and father. And they said it was fine that I totally decided for myself how to vote. (A-G3-S1)

This respondent admits that there was some influence from VAAs on his voting decision. In these reflections, however, the immediate social environment, including the opinions of friends and parents, are all given thorough consideration. He emphasises his autonomy by

saying that he agrees with his friends. We believe this reflects his search for group membership, and also that his process is about constructing a political self. A similar discourse of influence is also apparent in the following woman's statement.

R: Yes I tried VAA . . . I don't know. I did not vote for the party which I was advised to do . . . Actually, I think my mom and dad as well as my boyfriend have influenced me more. (E-K1)

This woman (like several others) seems preoccupied with her social environment as she encounters the VAAs. On the one hand, she is open to exploring her political position, but on the other, the political self seems situated in important social relations, and the complex pattern of influence leads them to ignore the VAAs and to favour the opinions of significant others. Another respondent, a woman aged 17, shows how VAAs may function contrary to a guiding principle:

R: I have always been very fond of 'Arbeiderpartiet' [the Worker's Party, red], and have always been fond of their values and so on. And then I started to become uncertain and insecure. So, I decided that I needed to look for different alternatives. There are extremely many VAAs on the net, and I have probably done about ten of them myself. But, because they just consist of data, they don't extrapolate what is most important for me in the various issues. (B-H1-S1)

We want to point out here that this respondent struggles to fit data from VAAs to her political self. This voter encounters the VAA with newly gained uncertainty in order to find clarity, but is disappointed. Such an unexpected outcome is one of many signs that the focus on issues in VAAs seems too narrow and avoids the important overarching questions that first-time voters struggle with. For these reasons, the VAAs are often regarded as inadequate for the first-time voter. But the fact that the respondent's feeling that the questions are often inadequate could also be interpreted as the voter's sincerity and preoccupation with her political identity, which is also valid for the following respondent:

I: You mentioned, for instance, VAAs on the net; did media influence you a lot?

R: Yes, that's how you decide how to vote. When you take a VAA test, you go free from reading all the political programmes and policy agendas, and you get to know what the various political parties stand for. So for me it is a very important tool. When I took these tests, it showed that I'm preoccupied with environmental matters, so I ended up voting for a party that cares for the environment – but not MdG [the 'Green Party', red], because they only think about the environment and not the rest of society, and that's a little too silly. (A-G4-S1)

This particular woman is obviously very fond of VAAs, and she uses them heuristically to achieve balance in her decisions. She spends time taking several tests, and she puts considerable trust in them on the one hand, but in the end, she does not rely on them. It is notable that the



tests made her preoccupation with environmental issues clear to her. In this case, she relies on the VAAs because they seem to fit her political priorities. But her autonomy is apparent, as the Green Party is dismissed in favour of another one. Thereby, she stresses that she takes the needs of the broader society into account. Hence, exploration and political priorities are highlighted. This is also the case in the following respondent's comments:

R: Earlier, I wasn't particularly preoccupied with politics, but I started following the information and debates at this election. I have taken various VAAs and read about the parties, which were suggested by the VAAs' advice. Besides this, we [our class] went to the political stands of political parties at the marketplace [downtown], but I did not reach a decision. (B-H3)

Exploration, information seeking, and considerations of values are evident in this woman's story, which we believe reflects her need for a political decision on voting that matches her political priorities and identity. The comment *I didn't reach a decision* shows how difficult it can be to fit a political party to self. Nevertheless, this process often leads to participation, which is the case for the next respondent, an immigrant woman:

R: I decide independently. No one forced me to vote for any party! I have been reading on my own! There has been some talk on elections in school. I voted for the first time, but I think the labour party is good, so most of my reading has been about them – but no one forced me! (D-A1)

The respondent's strong emphasis on independent decisions reflects a strong need for autonomy, and the right to decide on her personal political party preferences. She is classified as an explorer due to her thorough reading. Her discourse shows her struggle to explore how one party fits her values. Another case of exploration is a young man who ended up with a blank vote. He tells a story of how he tried to explore and match all the parties by excluding the parties he disagreed with. Faced with a group of 'least bad' parties, he decided to vote blank in some kind of protest against political parties (D-A2). The process is clearly a story of reflective matching of parties to the perceived political self – without success.

The last 'explorer' we want to present is a young fellow, who is only moderately interested in politics:

R: I read about them [parties] – their core issues and general issues . . . In fact I did a lot, read a lot, I should say what is best for me. And then I took tests [VAAs]. And then I discussed with many, family, friends, and the like... And we discussed . . . I learn a lot from discussions. (F-S5)

Like the other respondents, this young man tries to do his best to arrive at a decision based on as much information as possible. Like several explorationists, the social environment as well as other available sources of information are all part of the reflection processes.

The explorationists seem to share the goal of finding a political self with the two other groups in their use of

VAAs. This group earned its name, 'explorationists', for personal openness to information, including VAAs, and the less certain approach to party choice that characterise these individuals. More so than the groups of sceptics and confirmationists, the explorationists voice their opinions about past and present social influences. This group most clearly mirrors the theoretical discussion that emphasises the importance of habitus and individual reflexivity.

6 Discussion

The 'sceptics', the 'confirmationists', and the 'explorationists' all differ in their openness to or trust in VAAs and their use of the advice that VAAs provide, but what do these stories have in common? First, there is a notable absence of instrumentalism and selfish motives when accounting for voting decisions. In most cases, the respondents' reflections are related to role-taking, reflexivity, and a prevailing logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 2000), where the reasoning is perceived and expected to be grounded in altruistic arguments rather than in interest maximisation. Second, we see the students' interaction with VAAs as a matching process between the VAA questions, advice, and student's political self. As tools of reflection, the VAAs provide political insights to the users and clarify questions in the identity formation process. In some cases (the confirmationists), the VAAs may be regarded as data support for their own party choice and also support for their political self. When the VAAs provide advice contrary to the respondents' position, the advice is ignored by almost all, and quite a few respondents then become critical of the VAAs.

It seems that for nearly all of our first-time voters, the political act of voting is taken very seriously, and accountability, reliance, and independence appear as important elements of the political self of our respondents. For these reasons, we see no better description of 'the metatext' in the interview transcriptions of our respondents' search for a match between political party programmes and the individual political self than in their *political identity*. Some seem to be quite determined about their positions, while others are more openly searching. In this process, we find that the VAA has become both a confirmer and a moderator of the respondents' political identity. It also seems that finding a party is a signifier of belonging and of identity, and that such serious pursuit may not be left to a computer application to determine. This finding supports the theoretical viewpoint of Ryan and Deci (2003) that identities, and in this case, political identities, fulfil basic needs for connectedness and orientation in the political environment. Several respondents expressed that the VAA questions were irrelevant, or that there was a lack of overarching questions of importance to first-time voters. It seems that the VAAs have important shortcomings, particularly to young people who have a long-term perspective on life. To them, the choice of a party somehow needs to 'fit' their political orientations and social belonging. Respondents who do not find a

reasonable match between self and party choice are reluctant to participate as voters. One of our respondents, an otherwise well-informed young man, voted blank because there was no party that would match his preferences. Although we interviewed students in school, their VAA experiences came from 'voluntary' use during leisure time. We believe this fact makes our data more genuine in comparison with experiences from a teacher telling the students to use a VAA in a lesson. Our discussion of implications for teaching relies on the fact that students display a genuine need for understanding themselves in relation to politics. Although students discuss their experience outside school, the VAA site does not offer a forum for reflection, and we suggest that the aforementioned findings have implications for the political education of voters in school, particularly since a feeling of a political self seems to be a basis for political participation.

7 Voter education as forming political identities

Politics for many is often abstract and difficult to grasp. The fact that students are in need of information and use VAAs makes these sites valuable for learning. This fact, along with our observation that students primarily are identity seekers, suggests the importance of bringing their experiences into school to create an arena for discussion and reflection. Following Stets and Burke's (2006) cybernetic model of identity formation, we argue that the goal of finding an identity should be more emphasised in political education at the expense of formal institutional knowledge. Bringing in these students for 'real' VAA experiences and letting students wrestle with them in an open classroom climate offers a variety of learning experiences on their way to finding their political identities. The question of the reliability of the outcome of VAAs may in itself be subject to important discussions in school. We argue that the feeling of lacking knowledge (about politics) and being subject to unreliable outcomes in voter choice often seems accompanied by feelings of political powerlessness (Finifter, 1970). Discussions of VAA reliability may therefore have the potential to reveal and understand the basis for these sites, which also may lead the students to take control and empower themselves (Shor, 1992).

Another issue is related to the teacher-initiated use of VAAs. Since there is a variety of VAAs, which at times pose quite different political questions to the user, they are important sites for learning and comparison, particularly by recording the questions for reflective use. Along with classroom and group discussions, the use of VAAs in itself offers numerous opportunities for reflections on the political self. School is often regarded as an 'apolitical site' that should not take a stand in political issues. This 'apolitical burden' of school often causes students to think that it has to 'deserve' their personal thoughts and values. Also, a part of the political culture is that personal votes are secret and no one should know for which party the individual will vote. Therefore the classroom climate not only needs to be

open, but also felt to be 'safe' by the students. To move from a traditional teacher-centred approach to handling controversial issues (Hess, 2009; Solhaug & Børhaug, 2012) requires in itself steps of development and positive student experiences to build trust in the classroom as a meaningful political forum.

We have pointed out the absence of instrumental reasoning among our informants, but we acknowledge that pursuit of personal gains is often a part of young people's reasoning. We argue that reasoning in itself might be an issue of consciousness raising and learning from classroom discussions. We have also pointed out that the VAAs in this study are merely issue oriented, but they are constantly developed, and value-oriented VAAs are also being constructed internationally. VAAs are often good at highlighting important dilemmas and issues in politics. The fact that VAAs subject to change, including changes in various political climates, and are situated in the midst of political affairs may work as a bridge between school and the political life outside school. To illustrate, Norwegian broadcasting NRK developed a VAA for all 430 municipalities at the recent 2015 local elections. In Norway, using a specific and local VAA is a significant step further and offers opportunities to engage in local community politics.

8 Conclusions

By looking at similarities among our first-time voters, a common feature seems to be that VAAs serve as a *basis for reflection* on political issues and identity. We therefore conclude that, to our first-time voters, *VAAs are primarily tools for political identity formation, and this process precedes their decision to vote.*

Our second conclusion is that *nearly all of our first-time voters take the role of being a voter very seriously, which to most of them seems to be central to finding their political identity.* This is most apparent in their reasoning and absence of instrumentalism. Nearly all of them are preoccupied with the match between political party programmes and personal values in a process of political identity formation. This finding is the major contribution to knowledge of this article.

A third conclusion is that there seems to be a *mismatch in the design of VAAs, due to their emphasis on issues, on the one hand, and many first-time voters' needs for sorting out political values, on the other hand.* At least our first-time voters are not standard "issue voters", and they appear not to think simply in terms of measuring their distance to certain political parties on specific issues.

The above conclusions lead to this final, fourth statement that political identity *formation* seems crucial to most of our first-time voters. Forming a political identity seems to have consequences for their participation and for important choices regarding political 'belonging', and therefore we recommend political identity formation be a focus in schools' voter education.

Limitations

Some limitations of this study should be addressed. An important question in qualitative studies is whether informants tell the truth and show sincerity. Respondents' considerations and selections of information are quite subjective. To meet these challenges, we stressed the need for good social relations with the respondents in our preparation of the interviewers. Strictly speaking, our findings are limited to the present selection of informants and are only applicable to the group of respondents in this article. Having said this, the study gives good reasons to assume that similar patterns of self-reflection and identity formation, sound scepticism toward VAAs, the sincerity of first-time voters, and VAAs as a heuristic tool may be found in further studies. We particularly call for studies on the use of VAAs in political teaching.

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Endnote

¹ The information for this sample description comes from the VAA at the Norwegian state broadcasting (radio and television) (<http://nrkbeta.no/2013/08/28/slik-funkar-nrks-valgomat/> (28.02.2014). Unfortunately, the site does not have an English version.

Carla Malafaia, Tiago Neves, Isabel Menezes

In-Between Fatalism and Leverage: The Different Effects of Socioeconomic Variables on Students' Civic and Political Experiences and Literacy

- This article explores the relationship between the socioeconomic status and the political participation of youngsters.
- A self-report questionnaire was administered to 732 Portuguese students.
- High cultural capital has a clear effect on political knowledge.
- Economic capital has a relevant effect on political participation experiences.
- Both forms of capital interact with the schooling context (public or private).

Purpose: This article explores the classical relationship between socioeconomic status and political domains, and the need to include different variables (contextual and individual) to measure the effect of economic and cultural capitals on youth participation and knowledge.

Method: A multivariate analysis of covariance was performed on a sample of 732 Portuguese students, from Grades 8 and 11, in order to analyse how different socioeconomic variables related to family and schooling contexts have an effect on their political knowledge and experiences.

Findings: The article highlights the differential role of socioeconomic variables on political knowledge and participatory patterns. Low economic capital instigates participation, while high cultural capital is related with higher political literacy. However, both forms of capital interact with the schooling context, revealing more complex patterns of behaviour and knowledge in students attending public and private schools.

Keywords:

Young people, civic and political participation, political literacy, economic and cultural capital, public and private school

1 Introduction

The topic of social inequality is crucial with regard to democracy's health. When socioeconomic conditions are very unevenly distributed across groups, the very notion of common well-being and the most basic forms of social

Carla Malafaia is currently a PhD student in Education Sciences at the University of Porto. Her research has dealt with conflict mediation, youth civic and political participation and citizenship education. She is co-author of two books and has published several articles.

Email: carla.malafaia@hotmail.com

Tiago Neves is an Associate Professor at the University of Porto. Since the mid-1990's, he has been involved in a number of studies on criminology and social and educational inequalities. Tiago has authored three books and several articles. Currently, he coordinates the participation of the University of Porto in the YOUNG_ADULLLT project, funded by the European Commission, Horizon 2020.

Email: tiago@fpce.up.pt

Isabel Menezes is a Full Professor in the University of Porto. She has been working in the areas of educational research, educational and community intervention, and citizenship education. Currently, she coordinates the Portuguese participation on the CATCH-EyoU project. She has published several papers in international journals (JSSE, JME, JYS, BERJ, ...) and edited books and special issues for inter/national journals. *Centre for Research and Intervention in Education (CIIE), Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal, Email: imenezes@fpce.up.pt*

bonds are put in jeopardy, as severe wealth gaps generate a decrease in social trust (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). An unequal distribution of resources and power entails different abilities of influencing political institutions (Cabral, 1997) and an unequal distribution of interests in the public sphere (van Deth, Montero, & Westholm, 2007). The groups that enjoy higher levels of economic and cultural capital are more likely to be acquainted with the most effective means to have their interests represented and to shape the social structure in ways that suit them better. Civic and political participation and the perception of the ability to make one's voice heard are, then, very much dependent on how well endowed with socioeconomic resources citizens are.

Inequalities in socioeconomic resources tend to be reproduced in civic and political participation (Badescu & Neller, 2007), even if the effects of this relationship are complex and multidimensional. People in the margins of society may feel particularly propelled to political involvement (Kornhauser, 2010) or, contrariwise, have their participation hindered due to the perception that society is too unequal and they do not fit the way the political system is organised (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). When studying youth civic and political participation, the school and the family are the most influential contexts: they are important socialising contexts and, at the same time, defining environments of socioeconomic status. The families' cultural capital is highly related to economic capital and the way specific groups take advantage of social institutions (Bourdieu, 2010 [1979]), also impacting significantly on students' academic results (Teddlie &



Reynolds, 2000) and on their progress in the educational system (Gorard, 2010). That is, cumulative disadvantages and the reproduction of inequalities are an increasingly serious matter, as social inequality continues to rise. Data from 'Inequality Watch', analysing the impact of austerity in several countries, highlight that in 2011 the disposable income of the richest 20% in Portugal was 5,8 times higher than the income of the poorest 20%¹, and an OECD (2015) report shows that the unemployment rates have been increasing in the last years.

The economic and social crisis around the globe, and particularly in Europe, frames the context in which we collected the data presented in this paper. We will present a multivariate analysis of variance to understand whether and how socioeconomic variables (namely cultural capital, economic capital and type of school) are related to the political literacy and behaviour of 732 Portuguese students from the 8th and 11th grades. In this manner, we seek to better understand how socioeconomic differentiation (measured with variables related to family and school contexts) operates regarding diverse experiences of participation (civic and political, collective and individual, online and offline) and political knowledge.

2 Socioeconomic status and participation: a debate that still matters

Socioeconomic inequalities are a classical, central topic in the social sciences (Weber, 1978; Marx, 1979; Durkheim, 1991; Bourdieu, 2010 [1979]; Giddens, 2013). They are regarded as a decisive organising feature of vast aspects of the life in our societies. Civic and political participation is one of those aspects. It comes as no surprise, then, that the link between civic and political participation and socioeconomic inequalities has also become a well-established research topic (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995; Saeed, 2015; Carvalho, 2014; Caizos & Voces, 2010; Nunes & Carmo, 2010; Nunes, 2013; Silva & Vieira, 2011; Rosenstone & Hansen, 2003; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012). This means that research on civic and political participation needs to consider the individual and socioeconomic conditions that promote or hinder it. The work of Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) is particularly relevant here. They argue that different levels of resources, cognitive involvement and engagement in social networks have a major impact on the ability to influence political processes and institutions.

It is consensual in the literature that the distribution of power across society is largely determined by ownership of and access to a certain volume of resources (be they money, education or social connections), as socioeconomic and political inequalities feed each other (e.g., Lijphart, 1997; Verba et al., 1995; Bourdieu, 2010 [1979]; Uslaner & Brown, 2005). The concept of social class has typically been instrumental in accounting for these processes, as it is a potentially organised way to grasp the complexity and multidimensionality associated with the differential distribution of resources and power, according to different social positions (Bourdieu, 2010

[1979]). Authors such as Carvalho (2012), Caizos and Voces (2010) and Cabral (2000) argue that social class is still a valid sociological tool to analyse phenomena such as participation. However, Pakulski and Waters' work, "The Death of Class" (1996), claims that in post-modern societies the linear and stable correspondence between the objective and subjective features of social classes is gone: identities and social practices are now defined based on specific life-styles and collectively shared values, rather than by one's location in the network of social relations of production. Individualization, globalization and reflexivity render the social organisation more fluid (Beck, 2007), and consequently social classes become less appropriate to understand inequality. The increasing relevance of post-materialistic values in politics (Inglehart, 1997) goes along with the argument about the heterogeneity of social groups and the decline of materialistic cleavages. Yet, in many countries, the Welfare State continues to fall short of reducing income gaps, and access to economic, social and cultural resources is still very unevenly distributed, preserving patterns of inequality based on the distance between classes (Nunes, 2013; Silva & Vieira, 2011). Portuguese research in this field shows that groups with greater resources at their disposal, mostly with higher levels of education, clearly stand out concerning political citizenship (Carvalho, 2012). Caizos and Voces (2010) are quite straightforward in stressing the political relevance of class, considering that "in the field of political participation, class still matters. A significant and substantively meaningful association between class and political action can be observed in most European countries" (p. 407). An uneven distribution of capitals, is, then, very relevant in shaping participatory dispositions (Lamprianou, 2013).

3 The multidimensionality of socioeconomic status and its relation to youth participation

In research about youth civic and political participation, the variables used to measure socioeconomic status differ widely (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). Yet, there is a relative consensus that socioeconomic status is overall well defined by income, education and occupation (Schulz & Brese, 2008). Some authors choose one or two of these indicators as proxy variables for socio-economic status, such as the number of books at home alone (Lopes, Brenton & Cleaver, 2009) or parents' education and family income (Saeed, 2015). In the research field of civic and political participation, the variables most often used are income, education, occupational status and the number of books at home (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). Regarding education and income, studies show that the poorest and the less educated are those who are less likely to be politically active (Nie, Junn, & Stehlik-Barry, 1996; Verba et al., 1995; Van Deth & Elff, 2000; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013; Dahl, 2006; Kay & Friesen, 2011). Along with the occupational status, these variables have a profound effect on the possibilities of individual choice and political behaviour (Adler, Boyce, Chesney, Cohen, Folkman, Kahn, & Syme, 1994; Manza &



Brooks, 2008). Jacobs and Skopol (2005) clearly stressed the political and democratic impact of such disadvantage: “the voices of citizens with lower or moderate incomes are lost on the ears of inattentive public officials, while the advantaged roar with a clarity and consistency that policymakers readily hear and routinely follow” (p. 1).

The elements used by researchers to address socioeconomic status are inextricably linked, often pointing to what has been named a “clustering of hardships” (Pacheco & Plutzer, 2008, p. 577): people with higher incomes are often more educated and vice-versa, and also have more books at home and probably belong to a network that shares high social capital (Verba et al., 1995; Wattenberg, 2007). As a result, they tend to display high levels of political knowledge and interest (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Nie et al., 1996). On the contrary, lower-socioeconomic status elicits beliefs of inability to influence politics: people feel they cannot take advantage of social opportunities nor have the skills to navigate the social institutions and networks that might potentially lead them to success (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006). Krauss (2015) shows that perceptions of low-class rank are detrimental to both political efficacy and political behaviours such as signing petitions and being interested in the Government’s activities. Socioeconomic status – the social, economic and cultural capitals associated to it – is transmitted from parents to children, as they share the same environment (e.g., Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Beck & Jennings, 1982). Thus, the educational level of the parents is highlighted by some authors as a powerful ingredient in understanding the puzzle of cumulative disadvantage in young people (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Pacheco & Plutzer, 2008). Age is, then, another important individual dimension to take into account. Younger people, namely those with low levels of education, participate less than adults (Vecchione & Caprara, 2009; Stolle & Hooghe, 2009). Civic and political participation continues to be a sphere of adults, at least in the youngsters’ point of view, who see themselves as being regarded as too immature to be fully involved in politics (Smith, et al., 2005); this relegated condition is further aggravated by their financial dependency from their parents (Arnett, 2000; Lister, 2007).

It is crucial to recognise that young people, far from being a homogeneous group, are in a situation in which cumulative differences (in contextual background, educational attainment, cultural and economic capital) may predict their political activities (Lamprianou, 2013). Some research suggests that more educated youths, with more economic resources, may replace conventional politics with new ways of engagement (Wray-Lake & Hart, 2012; Syvertsen, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Osgood, & Briddell, 2011). On the other hand, Caínzos and Voces (2010) found that the new forms of civic and political engagement reveal deeper class differences than conventional political action, most notably voting. Nunes and Carmo (2010), explaining collective action in Europe, state that the overlap between different types of capital

(economic, social and cultural) has a clear effect on political behaviour. To be sure, different practices always require different resources, and this may help explaining political activity in a more reliable manner than psychological variables alone.

Such constructs are not independent of the classical sociological contributions on social inequality. Bourdieu (2010 [1979]) is perhaps one of the most influential sociological authors analysing the way different kinds of resources (capitals) contribute to distinctions between social groups. Economic capital can be directly converted into money, being related to family income and wealth. In its turn, cultural capital, namely its objectified and institutionalized state, is related to cultural goods (such as books) and academic credentials (levels of education) (ibid.). In this article we follow this understanding that socioeconomic status is mainly related to financial and educational resources. We do not refer to social class once we do not have all the indicators necessary for that. Instead, we rest on the comprehensiveness of the concepts of cultural and economic capital to assess socioeconomic status. We adopt the concept of cultural capital because we include the parents’ level of education, the number of books at home and the expected level of education - likewise what De Groof, Elchardus, Franck and Kavadias (2008) have done in assessing cultural capital as a standardized measure consisting of these three variables. The expectations on further education, although a subjective variable, have been proving consistent in explaining political participation (Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013); indeed, they are one of the most powerful predictors of civic knowledge in European countries, alongside home educational resources (Torney-Purta, 2002). Plus, we consider that this dimension adds flexibility to the concept of cultural capital – considering the critiques to Bourdieu’s theory regarding its deterministic nature. Economic capital, which according to Bourdieu may facilitate the acquisition of cultural capital (2010 [1979]), is most often measured through family income and wealth (Schulz & Brese, 2008). However, it is likely that some youngsters lack knowledge about it, which would yield inconsistent data (Torney-Purta et al. 1999). Yet, their perception about financial difficulties in the family context may contribute to a reliable depiction of economic capital, once youngsters short on this type of resource will constrain their attitudes and behaviours. Finally, the type of school, potentially reflecting both forms of capital and, thus, youngsters’ socioeconomic status, is considered an important variable to account for. Young people from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds have different access to the kinds of opportunities usually stimulated in settings such as schools (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Such contexts represent opportunities to learn about civic issues, by discussing them with others, learning different perspectives, and constructing one’s own political views (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

4 Highlighting the schooling context: private and public schools

The school is one of the most important youth socialization settings, and educational attainment impacts students' political knowledge and their civic and political participation. Education can drive the transformation or the reproduction of previous patterns of inequality (Junn, 2000). Its influence on political activity, however, is complex and may not be uniform regarding different political activities. One could argue that accounting for the type of school (public, free or private, fee-paying) in which the student is enrolled in is virtually equivalent to considering the student's socioeconomic status. Yet, this is not necessarily true. Families can try to compensate for their lack of economic and cultural capital by making an extra effort to have their children in a private school, whereas middle/high-status families often have their children in public schools. Still, it is important to take into consideration how the type of school contributes to civic and political participation, as different schools provide different opportunities. However, the type of school youngsters attend is often ignored in the literature that deals with the processes of civic and political involvement (Campbell, 2008; Macedo, 2000). Although the disadvantages related with family background are very important to understand youths' political involvement, such factors can be magnified by unequal opportunities at school, such as community voluntary service or students' assemblies (Flanagan & Levine, 2010).

Many authors would argue that looking at schools is crucial, as it may unveil whether students are learning values of universalism or individualism (Dreeben, 1968), which have a long-term influence on their stances towards public issues (Sikkink, 2013). Emanating from private groups, the curricula and the educational projects of private schools are not subject to the same constraints and uniformity as those imposed on public schools. Some argue that such schools may not be overwhelmingly concerned with taking into account the diversity that always characterizes any given community, thus raising questions about their commitment to democratic citizenship and public values (Gutmann, 1987; Macedo, 2000). On the other hand, there is research showing that students from secondary private schools score higher on political tolerance (Wolf, Greene, Kleitz, & Thalhammer, 2000) and participate more in volunteer services than their public counterparts (Greene, 1998). Likewise, Campbell (2000) found out that, despite differences in family background, private schools are as effective as public schools in conveying civic knowledge. In the same vein, Sikkink (2013) analyses the hidden civic lessons in public and private schools, concluding that private schools display organizational strengths (collective identity and normative climate) that effectively promote students' participation in public institutions. This is in line with previous research that had already pinpointed the hierarchical and bureaucratic traits that often characterise public schools, jeopardizing the creation of a collective identity (Brint, Contreras, & Matthews, 2001). Therefore, relational trust and civic-minded practices

seem to find ground to grow and develop in private schools (Sikkink, 2013). Such findings raise obvious concerns about students' experience of public schools, and call for further research in this field. It therefore appears crucial to include the different types of school, along with socioeconomic variables related to family, in analyses that seek to understand the civic and political participation patterns of youngsters.

In sum, then, our analytical framework, grounded on the classical theme of socioeconomic inequalities, explores the role of socioeconomic status – assessed here through the dimensions of cultural capital, economic capital and type of school - on political knowledge and political participation patterns of young people.

5 The socioeconomic context and the educational system in Portugal

The data analysed in this paper were collected in 2013, during a context in which "Portugal is going through one of the worst economic crises in its long history as a sovereign state" (de Sousa, Magalhães & Amaral, 2014, p.1528). Massive demonstrations – in which young people had a leading role – took place in 2011 and 2012. They were clear signs of rebellion against the Government's political choices, and the austerity imposed by the Troika (composed by the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund) as result of the bailout, and the rises in unemployment, precariousness and social inequalities. Unemployment struck hardest the highly-educated young people and first-time job seekers (de Sousa et al., 2014); and many of those who managed to get a job earned "less than 750 euros per month - with scarce social protection, which contributes to a poverty risk rate of 20% amongst young people" (Estanque, Costa, Soeiro, 2013, p., 35). Increasingly more dependent on their families, young people were forced to leave the country looking for better opportunities, which lead to an emigration rate unparalleled since the 1960's (Docquier & Rapoport, 2011). This 'Desperate Generation' (*Geração à Rasca*) was the main protagonist of the biggest protest since the Carnation Revolution in 1974, which put an end to the dictatorial regime and established democracy (Baumgarten, 2013); this took place in March 2011 and was the first in a series of nationwide demonstrations. Portuguese movements took part in an international wave of protests, linking national-level claims (e.g. corruption, unemployment, tax increases) with the worldwide severe economic situation and European debates about the financial crisis and the dependency of European states regarding international financial markets. In September 2012, the motto "Fuck Troika, we want our lives back" was launched in the social networks, and lead one million people to the streets in several cities throughout the country, protesting against the worsening of life conditions following more than one year of austerity. Our data collection took place in the aftermath of these large protests in Portugal, which were framed by the "global protest" wave in which

online platforms, particularly social networks, played a central role (Estanque, Costa & Soeiro, 2013).

The economic crisis and the reduction in the public financing, including in education led to questioning the very role of the school as a mechanism of social equality and mobility. Education in Portugal is free and compulsory until the 12th grade, which is when students complete the secondary education. The Portuguese educational system is divided into four sequential levels: pre-primary education (optional for children from 3- to 6-year-olds), basic education with three sequential cycles, secondary education with a three-year cycle, and finally higher education. Basic education includes: the first cycle, which comprises 4 years (6- to 10-year-olds), corresponding to primary education; the second cycle encompasses 2 years (10- to 12-year-olds), corresponding to 5th and 6th grades; and the third cycle has 3 years (12- to 15-year-olds), corresponding to 7th, 8th and 9th grades. Secondary education, for 15- to 18-year-olds, takes three years and includes four types of courses: scientific-humanistic, technological, specialist artistic and vocational. Concerning private education, the country's development led to the creation of publicly-subsidized private schools in order to compensate for the lack of schools in some regions (Rosado, 2012). Private and cooperative institutions that are part of the education system comply with the same legislation as State education regarding teaching standards, curriculum, assessment and teachers' qualifications. The private schools in our sample are not encompassed by such contracts with the State, but instead are fully private. In 2015 there were 1498 private schools, of which 1120 offered basic education and 378 secondary education. Regarding public education, there were 6499 institutions with basic education (total number = 5915) and secondary education ($n = 584$). Private schools, contrary to public schools, require to the payment of fees. Moreover, private schools are free to select their teachers, contrary to public schools, in which teachers are allocated by the Ministry of Education following a nationwide competition. Research comparing both type of schools in Portugal – public (free) and private (paid) – indicates a positive impact of private schools on 9th grade students' performance, as private management schemes target successful results in exams and increase the likelihood of finishing mandatory schooling in a shorter period of time (Rosado, 2012). Nata, Pereira and Neves (2014), analysing the Portuguese secondary school rankings, compare the differential between the internal scores and the scores obtained in national exams by students of private and public schools. They show that private schools consistently show higher differential, thereby proving that inequalities in accessing higher education are reinforced through procedural unfairness (that is, grade inflation).

6 Method

In order to understand youth involvement, we seek to analyse how different socioeconomic variables that inter-

sect family and schooling contexts relate with political knowledge and experiences.

Our chief question is: How do cultural and economic capitals – socioeconomic variables associated with different youth contexts (family and school) – relate with political literacy and patterns of civic and political participation? First, through cluster analysis, we looked at how the youngsters in our sample organised around cultural variables (parents' levels of education, educational expectations and books at home). We consider that this procedure adds consistency to the cultural capital variable, since it congregates not only the cultural capital that one holds, but also his/her cultural expectations. Then, we performed a multivariate analysis of covariance in order to explore whether and how cultural capital (held and expected), economic capital and the type of school (often an indicator of both cultural and economic capital) are related to political literacy and civic and political participation (online participation and demonstrations; and civic and lifestyle politics). Gender (female and male) and school year were introduced as covariates – as previous analyses had shown their effect on participation and literacy and we intended to control it – and the socioeconomic variables as differentiating factors². The IBM SPSS Statistics 22 software was used for data analysis.

6.1 Participants and data collection

Participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire during classes, in the researchers' presence. Schools (public and private) and students (from the 8th and 11th grades) were sampled based on convenience. We tried to ensure two criteria: a) diversity regarding the nature and development of geographical areas (urban and semi-rural); b) gender balance. The need for conjugating these criteria proved difficult, mostly due to the fact that in semi-rural areas there are very few independent, fee-paying private schools (indeed, private schools in semi-rural areas tend to be Government-dependent, publicly-subsidized).

Eleven schools located in the north and centre of Portugal (in the districts of Porto, Braga, Viseu and Coimbra) were included in the sample. A total of 732 Portuguese students (53.8 % female) from Grades 8 (47.7%, $n = 349$) and 11 (52.3%, $n = 383$) participated in the study³. Students from public schools: $N = 358$; students from private schools: $N = 374$. Gender distribution is balanced in the Grade 8 subsample (Female = 173; Male = 176), and less so in Grade 11, with more than half of the sample (57.5%) being females (Female = 221; Male = 162). We obtained parental approval from all participants. The average time needed for filling out the questionnaire was approximately 40 min.

The instrument is a self-report questionnaire that comprises a wide set of scales related with political and schooling dimensions. In this paper we will focus on the indicators of socioeconomic status, civic and political experiences and political literacy. Although we mobilised several dimensions already used and tested in previous studies with similar samples, the final version of the instrument was improved by the youngsters themselves,



through the think aloud method: we gathered small groups of youngsters and asked them to talk aloud while filling in the questionnaire, encouraging them to think about the best ways to improve the intelligibility of the items⁴.

6.2. Measures

6.2.1 Political literacy and participation

Political literacy, an important predictor of civic and political participation (Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002), is a competence potentially developed in socialising contexts such as the family and the school. To measure this dimension we adopted a set of questions previously used in an international study on Civic Education (Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999), in which Portugal was one of the participating countries (Menezes, 2002). Our instrument included four items of political literacy that were both easily intelligible and diverse, in order to be adequate for both 8th and 11th grades. Thus, in the four items, we asked the respondents 1) to interpret a political party's pamphlet; 2) to identify the nature of a democratic system, in opposition to a dictatorial one; 3) to identify the function of political parties in democracy; and 4) to identify processes of political corruption. Items were coded as wrong or right answers (0 = wrong answer; 1 = right answer), and were then aggregated into a final variable that gives the overall level of political literacy (1 = one question right; 2 = two questions right; 3 = three questions right; 4 = four questions right).

Experiences of civic and political participation during the last 12 months were explored through the adaptation of the Portuguese version of the Political Action Scale (Lyons, 2008; Menezes, Ribeiro, Fernandes-Jesus, Malafaia, & Ferreira, 2012), measuring a wide range of civic and political behaviours, including direct forms of participation, online participation and civic engagement. The youngsters rated the question "Have I done the following activities during the last 12 months?" from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very often). In this paper, experiences of civic and political participation are a two dimensional construct that results from the exploratory factor analysis: *Online participation and demonstrations* with three items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .61$): "attend a public meeting or demonstration dealing with political or social issues"; "link news, music or videos with a social or political content to my contacts"; "sign an online petition". *Civic and lifestyle politics* with three items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .56$): "do volunteer work"; "wear a bracelet, sign or other symbol to show support for a social or political cause"; "boycott or buy certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons". The first scale entails participation in demonstrations and in the internet, which are often quite intertwined, with the latter serving as a platform for real-world involvement (Castells, 2012); the second scale comprises activities combining a typically desirable kind of civic involvement – volunteering – (Serek, Petrovicová, & Macek, 2015) and the politicisation of individual choices that commonly belong to the private sphere – wearing symbols for political

reasons or practicing political consumerism (Giddens, 1991).

6.2.2. Socioeconomic status

Economic capital is measured through the perception of financial difficulties at home. The effect of family income on political participation is widely reported, and here it is incorporated as a measure of socio-economic status (Verba et al., 1995). As it is likely that young people do not know their parents' income (Torney-Purta et al., 1999), we ask about their perception about the existence of financial problems at home (1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = often).

To assess *cultural capital (held and expected)*, we created a variable that combines the parents' level of education, the number of books at home and the expected level of school attainment. We asked youngsters about the educational level of both mother and father, in a scale ranging from 1 (never attended school) to 5 (attended or finished higher education). We also included the number of books at home, since it is used as an indicator of educational level and social and economic background (Woessmann, 2005). Plus, this variable often works as a double-check of the parents' level of education, as youngsters may not know it but may estimate how many books exist at home (Torney-Purta et al., 1999; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). The scale response has six levels (1 = None; 2 = 1-10 books; 3 = 11-50 books; 4 = 51-100 books; 5 = 101-200 books; 6 = more than 200). Finally, we considered the expected level of school attainment (1 = Basic education; 2 = Secondary education; 3 = Vocational course; 4 = Bachelor; 4 = Master degree; 5 = PhD) as an indicator of success in formal education, which is related to political knowledge and interest (Nie et al., 1996; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). In order to create a variable combining these three dimensions, related with the family's cultural resources and educational expectations, in order to elaborate a more comprehensive cultural capital variable, we performed a clustering analysis, combining hierarchical clustering and k-means clustering, to classify the participants according to their cultural capital (held and expected). The four clusters solution explains about 41% variance for both the 8th and the 11th grades. The final variable has four groups:

1) Low Cultural Capital [N = 100]: youngsters' mothers attended or completed secondary (35%), basic education (34%), primary education (19%), and higher education (10%); the majority of fathers' levels of education are basic (39%) and primary education (28%), with 25% having attended or completed secondary education; 55% of these youngsters expect to achieve the secondary level of education (and 36% expect to achieve a vocational training course); 35% of respondents have between 1 and 10 books at home, 23% have between 11 and 50 and 18% between 51-100.

2) Medium-Low Cultural Capital [N = 135]: the most frequently reported mother's levels of education (attended or concluded) are basic education (40%), followed by secondary education (36%) and primary education

(17%); the same trend applies to father’s level of education (primary education: 21%; basic education: 40%; secondary education: 33%); most youngsters intend to achieve the PhD level (34%), the master degree (33%) or the graduation degree (33.3%); and report having between 1 and 10 books at home (51%) or between 11 and 50 (49%).

3) Medium-High Cultural Capital [N = 67]: the mother’s most frequent level of education (attained or concluded) is basic education (42%), followed by secondary education (31%) and primary education (21%); most youngsters’ fathers attended or completed basic education (54%) or primary school (27%); the majority of these youngsters expect to achieve a PhD (55%), followed by the master degree (31.3%); and they have between 51 and 100 books at home (46%) or between 101 and 200 (31%).

4) High Cultural Capital [N = 430]: most of these young people’s mothers have attended or completed higher education (81%), followed by secondary education (15.3%); 67% of their fathers attended or concluded higher education, followed by secondary education (28.4%); 49% of these youngsters expect to achieve a PhD level, followed by 31% who expect to obtain a master degree (31%); 47% of these youngsters have more than 200 books at home and 21% between 101-200.

Additionally, the *type of school* (1 = public; 2 = private) is considered in this paper, once it may be an indicator of family’s socioeconomic status.

7 Results

Multivariate tests reveal significant effects of cultural capital [Pillai’s Trace = .046, $F(9,1980) = 3.402, p = .000$], economic capital [Pillai’s Trace = .043, $F(6,1318) = 4.881, p = .000$] and type of school [Pillai’s Trace = .015, $F(3,658) = 3.237, p = .022$]. The tests of between-subjects effects showed that cultural capital and the type of school have significant effects on political literacy ($p = .000; p = .010$, respectively), but not on participation experiences. In its turn, economic capital has a significant effect in both dimensions of civic and political participation, “online participation and demonstrations” ($p = .000$) and “civic and lifestyle politics” ($p = .006$).

Additionally, there are also significant interaction effects between cultural capital and the type of school [Pillai’s Trace = .045, $F(9,1980) = 3.318, p = .000$], and also between the type of school and economic capital [Pillai’s Trace = .032, $F(6,1318) = 3.552, p = .002$] in political literacy ($p = .001, p = .010$) and in online participation and demonstrations ($p = .006, p = .010$).

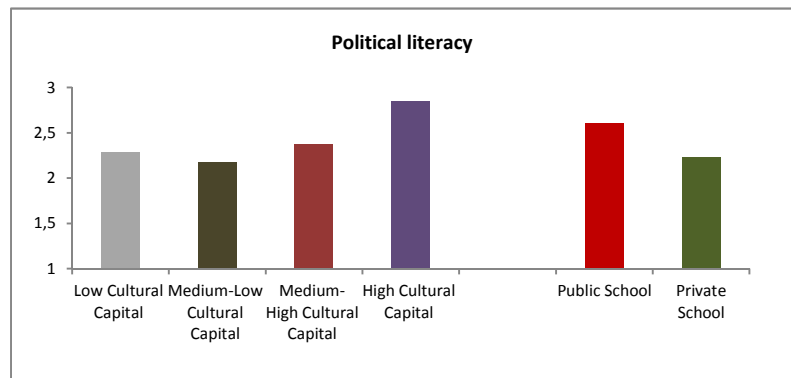
7.1 The role of socioeconomic variables on political literacy

Regarding cultural capital (held and expected), pairwise comparisons show statistically significant differences in political literacy between the high cultural capital group and the groups with low ($p = .003$) and medium-low

cultural capital ($p = .000$), with political literacy being higher in the group with high cultural capital (higher educated parents, more than 200 books at home and school expectations at the PhD level) as shown in Figure 1.

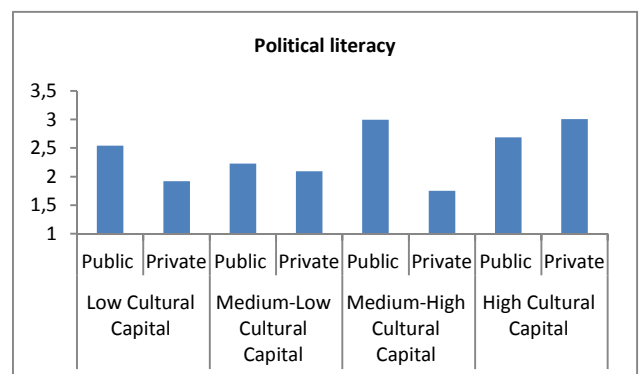
Studying in a public or private school also has a significant effect in political literacy: students of public schools score higher on literacy (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Political literacy – effects of cultural capital and type of school



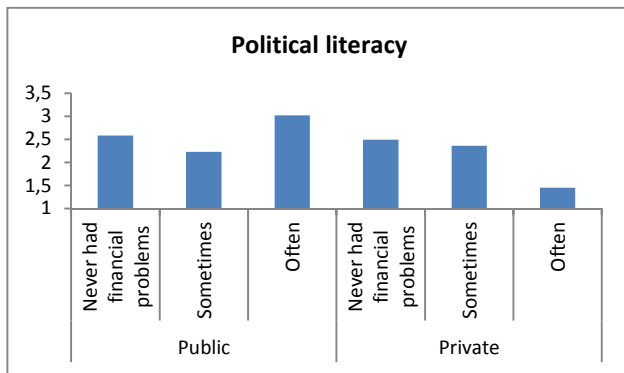
Furthermore, the results suggest that the types of school students are enrolled in present variations concerning political literacy according to cultural capital patterns: overall political literacy is higher in public schools, with the exception of students with the highest cultural capital – see Fig. 2.

Figure 2: Political literacy – interaction effects between cultural capital and type of school



Students from public and private schools also present different levels of political literacy according to their economic capital: for students from public schools, the increase in financial problems at home is related with higher levels of political literacy, while in private schools the more often students perceive the existence of financial problems, the lower their political literacy (Fig. 3).

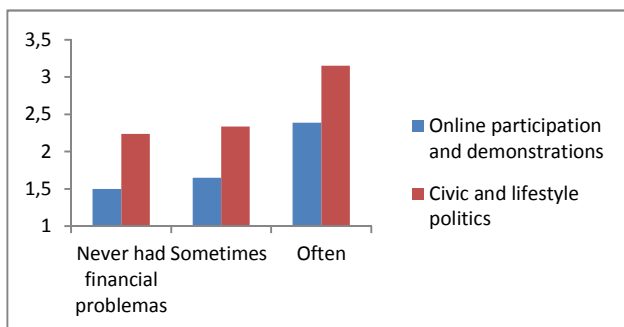
Figure 3: Political literacy – interaction effects between type of school and financial problems



7.2 The role of socioeconomic variables on civic and political participation

Economic capital is significantly related with both participatory dimensions, in the same way: the level of participation in the online sphere and in demonstrations increases with the existence of financial problems at home. The same happens regarding volunteering and lifestyle politics. The score on both dimensions stands out when students report feeling “often” the existence of financial problems at home.

Figure 4: Civic and political participation – effect of financial problems



Furthermore, regarding online participation and the involvement in demonstrations, there are interaction effects between cultural capital and type of school, and between economic capital and the type of school. Oddly, the students with high cultural capital and with low cultural capital from public schools report more experiences of e-participation and involvement in protests, while students in the intermediate levels of cultural capital (medium-low and medium-high) belonging to private schools show a higher engagement in those forms of participation (Fig. 5). Furthermore, participation through online platforms and in demonstrations appears to be induced by students’ lack of economic capital – as portrayed in Figure 4 –, with higher levels of participation when feeling “often” the existence of financial problems at home (particularly for private-school students) (Fig. 6).

Figure 5: Online participation and demonstrations– interaction effects between cultural capital and type of school

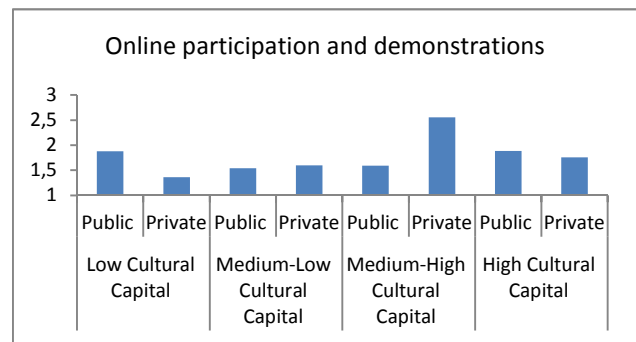
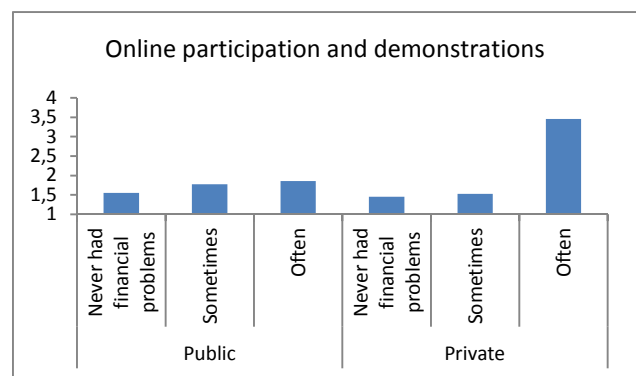


Figure 6: Online participation and demonstrations– interaction effects between type of school and financial problems



8 Discussion and final remarks

The results show that high cultural capital has a clear effect on political knowledge. Having highly educated parents, a wide access to information and good expectations about one’s own educational progress improves the likelihood of being well-informed about political systems and the role political parties should have in a democracy, as well as the ability to interpret a political leaflet and understanding what corruption is. This result is not unexpected, considering the fact that possessing a high cultural capital typically distinguishes those who are closer to legitimised culture from those who are further away from it (Bourdieu, 2010 [1979]). However, and regarding the type of school youngsters attend, public-school students exhibit more political literacy than their private-school counterparts. Nevertheless, the interaction effect between the type of school and cultural capital shows that this pattern of differences – political literacy scores being higher for public school students and for those with higher cultural capital – does not emerge for students who belong to a cultural elite (high cultural capital), but it clearly does for those students who have medium-high cultural capital (whose parents do not have high educational levels, but nonetheless display high expectations regarding their future educational attainment and have a relatively high number of books at home). Thus, access to political knowledge and literacy is not something necessarily linked to private schooling contexts, nor exclusive to some sort of cultural elite. In fact, a self-selection effect may be at stake here.



In other words, public schools are related to higher political literacy, except regarding youngsters who already belong to a family environment characterised by a high level of cultural resources and more access to political information. The contact with plurality (different opinions and living conditions), and probably the stronger conveyance of universalist values (Dreeben, 1968) that characterises public school environments may be fostering more knowledge about democracy and the political world. In its turn, economic capital emerged as an important variable regarding experiences of civic and political participation. The students who report having financial problems at home more often participate in the online and offline realms, both through protests and individualized forms of activism. This result seems to confirm, then, that subjective perceptions of deprivation and hardship are important in mobilising for political action (Klandermans, 1997). Concerning specifically online participation and the involvement in demonstrations – currently very close spheres of participation, especially considering the socio-political moment in which we collected the data, described in section four – the lack of economic capital increases the likelihood of getting involved in this kind of participatory pattern, most notably regarding private-school students. A tentative explanation for this may be that the impact of the economic crisis is felt more intensely, at least in subjective terms, by those who were previously immune to this kind of problems. Thus, they may feel more prompted for action.

As seen in Figure 3, the levels of political literacy are very similar for students who have high economic capital, whether they are in public or in private schools. The situation is completely different with respect to students with low economic capital, with students from public schools having much higher levels of political literacy than those from private schools. While this may appear contradictory with the fact that private-school students who more frequently perceived financial problems are more prompt for action, this may be explained by the specific context in which the data were collected. Indeed, the data gathered may refer to a short and specific time frame, in which promptness for action was not determined by a stable socioeconomic situation (including stable knowledge about the situation), but rather by sudden changes that had an impact on emotions and attitudes and promoted extreme behaviours. Although private institutions are known for being very effective in leading youngsters towards a successful educational pathway (Rosado, 2012; Nata et al., 2014), they seem less successful in terms of political education, probably avoiding an explicit politicisation of the school context.

E-participation and involvement in demonstrations seems to be the participatory pattern more significantly influenced by a complex relationship between economic and cultural capital, considering the type of schools. As discussed above, students in this cluster do not have highly-educated parents and therefore are not related to typical upper class families, but nonetheless display very high educational expectations and have a significant

number of books at home. Youngsters in this cluster who study in private schools probably do so due to an extra financial effort from their parents. Therefore, and again taking into consideration the social context, the socio-political circumstances may have pushed them to engage in online discussions about the political situation and to participate in the anti-austerity demonstrations that occurred in this period as they may have felt that their high expectations were being put at risk. Another way of looking at these results, and considering that these kind of counter-intuitive effects are specifically related to the pattern of online participation and demonstrations, is that the extraordinary high levels of civic and political engagement at the time may have blurred the traditional cultural and economic capital boundaries, bringing diversity to the streets and the online forums.

Overall, the results indicate that, on the one hand, socioeconomic status continues to be a useful device in analysing knowledge and behaviours –with political literacy being related to high levels of cultural capital; on the other hand, however, youth groups, particularly taking into consideration their schooling context, are far from homogeneous. Considering the type of school (private or public) is useful, mostly to complexify more or less established ideas such as the one that students from private schools present higher levels of political literacy than public-school students. Our results indicate the opposite: public-school students exhibit higher levels of political literacy, also when they feel financial difficulties. Moreover, regarding cultural capital, the results show that the parents' education level is not necessarily a source of cumulative disadvantage for some youngsters, as they, despite that fact, aspire to attain high academic titles, display good political knowledge and engage in civic and political forms of participation. Finally, and regarding economic capital, the results go in line with both the classical and the recent literature on collective behaviour which suggests that contexts of crisis and socioeconomic hardship trigger protests (e.g., Marx & Engels, 1992 [1848]; Kornhauser, 2010), particularly from groups whose position is threatened and risk serious losses (Buechler, 2004).

In sum, these results suggest two final observations. Socioeconomic status is very relevant in studying political literacy and participatory experiences, as it shapes some of the expectable patterns that emerge from the data. Yet, it is the contexts (space and time – the schooling context and the moment of data collection) in which different capitals interact that render both expectable and unexpected patterns more understandable. In other words, socioeconomic variables play an influential role in political knowledge and behaviours – whether towards a 'fatalist' condition (political literacy being related with high levels of cultural capital) or some sort of 'leverage' (lack of economic capital) being related with higher levels of political participation). That is, the type of school and the specific moment (social, political and economic) that frames youngsters' lives and experiences are fundamental in making sense of the influence that socioeconomic capitals exert in political literacy and



participation, adding complexity to what could be regarded as simply fatalism or leverage.

This article challenges the literature indicating that public schools' bureaucracy and lack of resources may provide less room for the development of civic and political competences – our results prove otherwise in what regards political literacy. Further studies could focus this particular dimension, looking into the curriculum specificities of both types of schools and the activities they promote in relation to students' knowledge and behaviours. Additionally, our results contribute to a deeper understanding of the effect of cultural and economic capital in relation to the schooling context, showing that in a particularly hard (and therefore, politically effervescent) socioeconomic context, the lack of economic capital propels political involvement overall, also possibly changing previous patterns of civic and political participation and literacy.

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Endnotes

¹ www.inequalitywatch.eu/spip.php?article192&id_mot=80&lang=fr

² The effects of school year were not directly taken into account in this analysis, given that previous exploratory analyses showed that both 8th and 11th grades presented a similar distribution regarding cultural and economic capital variables.

³ Eighth grade students have been included in the sample because this is a relevant age period concerning political development (Amadeo, Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Husfeldt, & Nikolova, 2002). Like 11th grade students, they have the right to participate in political events. Actually, we have data – not analysed in this article – showing that some of the 8th grade youngsters took part in demonstrations, both along their peers (in students' demonstrations) and their families (in anti-austerity demonstrations).

⁴ During the think aloud method, 11 youngsters (aged between 14 and 23 years old) gave important suggestions, mainly regarding the clarity of the instructions and the items of the questionnaire. Based on their comments we introduced several changes concerning the standardisation of responses' scales and the way some questions were formulated, mainly in order to avoid ambiguous interpretations by the respondents. Specifically regarding the four items of political literacy, the changes were mostly rewording in order to make the discourse simpler.

Ola Strandler

Constraints and Meaning-Making: Dealing With the Multifacetedness of Social Studies in Audited Teaching Practices

- This article discusses how the implementation of outcome-focused reforms in Sweden were experienced, enacted and handled by ten experienced social studies teachers.
- The teachers were interviewed and/or observed before, during and after implementation.
- The emphasis in social studies teaching shifted from extrinsic dimensions toward intrinsic dimensions.
- The article argues that this development is problematic since it risks circumscribing central tools that can be used to deal with inherently complex subject dimensions.

Purpose: The backdrop of the article is the emergence of an international and politically motivated ambition that aims at standardising the purpose and outcomes of teaching practices via various forms of outcome controls. This ambition of standardisation is discussed in a Swedish context in relation to social studies teaching, which, at its core, has highly diverse and sometimes conflicting aims and purposes. The purpose of the article is to analyse tensions that arise in practice as ten experienced Swedish social studies teachers implement outcome-focused reforms in their teaching, and to critically discuss implications for social studies teaching.

Method: Interviews, observations and a conceptual framework built on Paul Ricœur's discussion on the concept of practical reason has been used to analyse tensions that arose when the teachers implemented standardised tests and grading.

Findings: Teaching practices shifted from social studies extrinsic dimensions (emphasising an open and individual understanding from social issues) toward social studies intrinsic dimensions (emphasising knowledge about a predetermined content) as a result of policy changes, teachers meaning-making of the reforms, and in relation to external constraints. In conclusion, it is argued that this shift risks circumscribing tools that can be used to deal with inherently complex subject dimensions.

Keywords:

Social studies, assessment, audit, new governance logic, practical reason

1 Introduction

As several researchers have pointed out, social studies is a multifaceted and elusive subject/concept that can both denote a separate subject with a focus on, for example, social issues (Morén & Irisdotter Aldemyr, 2015), and label a collection of loosely associated social science subjects like history, geography and economics (Parker, 2010). Hence, even on a conceptual level, social studies is already characterised by elusiveness and multifacetedness, with different meanings in different educational systems, as well as on different levels within the same educational system. This vagueness is even further enhanced by sometimes fierce discussions on what social studies is, or ought to be, which juxtapose the generally 'modern aura' of the subject social studies with 'old,

stagnated and out of date' subjects such as history (Evans, 2004); disciplinary approaches with multi- or inter-disciplinary approaches (Davies & Dunnill, 2006); subject-focused essentialism with pupil-oriented progressivism (Elgström & Hellstenius, 2011); 'academic' understandings of the subject with 'applied' ones (Ikeno, 2012); and the transmission of facts with critical analysis (Bruen, 2013). There are however, as Barton (2012) argues, reasons to be cautious about using a polemic or conflictual tone in these types of discussions, not least since their effects on actual teaching practices are highly unclear – what is enacted in classrooms tends to differ from policy discussions (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012; Ozga, 2000).

However, there is neither a lack of (politically motivated) attempts to pin down what social studies (or any other subject) is, nor any reason to assume that social studies teaching is unaffected by such attempts. On the contrary, reforms in many countries' educational policy aim at standardising the purpose and outcomes of teaching practices via various forms of outcome control. For example, Suurtamm and Koch (2014) describe how teachers reluctantly adapt teaching to categories of the grading systems; Pope, Green, Johnson and Mitchell (2009) depict discrepancies between teachers' perceptions of pupils' needs and their perceptions of institutional requirements (such as grading and standardised testing); and Au (2007), in a metasyntesis, argues that

Ola Strandler is a lecturer and PhD student in the Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg. His research interest concerns the relation between educational policy and teaching practice. He is currently writing a dissertation on the effects of increasing assessment reforms on teaching practice in Sweden.
Department of Pedagogical, Curricular and Professional Studies, University of Gothenburg, P. O. Box 300, SE 405 30, Gothenburg, Sweden
Email: ola.strandler@gu.se



high-stake testing exerts significant control over the structure of knowledge, ways of teaching and selection of content, although the specific influence on social studies may differ due to different test designs, policy enactment and teaching traditions (Au, 2009). There are thus strong reasons to suggest that these types of outcome-focused reforms entail a change in governance logic that can potentially restructure teaching practices in social studies (as well as in other subjects), although in highly complex, context-dependent and, sometimes, unintended ways.

The purpose of the article is to analyse how ten experienced Swedish social studies teachers enacted, experienced and handled the implementation of outcome-focused reforms in their teaching practices, and to critically discuss implications for social studies teaching of the new governance logic. Sweden is an example that is particularly well-suited for such a study since policy changes have focused on standardisation and outcome control during the last few years: introducing national tests in social studies, grading in lower years, new knowledge requirements and core content to be taught in each subject (Olovsson, 2015; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2015). Ten experienced social studies teachers in year 6 have been observed and/or interviewed during their first year of implementing grading and national tests in their teaching. In order to analyse how the teachers experienced and handled the reforms in practice, a conceptual framework built on Paul Ricoeur's (2007a, 2007c) discussion on the concept of practical reason has been used (Strandler, 2015).

2 Setting the scene: Social studies in Sweden

Since the introduction of a comprehensive school system in Sweden in 1966, history, geography, civics¹ and religion² have been regarded as a particular group of subjects under the term social studies. Discussions about social studies have often revolved around the organisation, aims and content of these four subjects (Schüllerqvist, 2012). With the comprehensive school system, progressively inspired ideas of thematic and pupil-oriented approaches (Broady, 1994) gained ground and challenged the boundaries of older subjects (Samuelsson, 2014; see also Evans, 2004; Osborne, 2003). History, geography, civics and religion were increasingly integrated in a thematic social studies block, at times even into a common subject, with shared aims, knowledge requirements and no content specified (Karlsson, 2009; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2015).

A restructuring of Swedish educational policy in recent years has entailed a sharp and deliberate alteration of this trend, which has strongly influenced how social studies is governed, conceptualised and organised. Extensive policy changes have been launched in response to an increasingly strong perception that Swedish education is in a "state of crisis", where deteriorating results in international surveys have been used to justify reforms with a greater focus on outcome control (Pettersson, 2008). In politics, as well as in the media, the notion of a

progressive, unfocused school has been contrasted with neoconservative and neoliberal ideas of tradition, clearer notions of knowledge and market logics (Wiklund, 2006; cf. Apple, 2004).

The emphasis on clarity and outcome control in these discourses is part of a broader change in governance logic in public sectors, which is based on auditing techniques, principles and routines to verify compliance with administrative norms and regulations (Strathern, 2000; Power, 1997). The change is closely linked to new public management reforms that were launched in Sweden and elsewhere in the 1980s and 1990s; privatisation, managerialism, marketisation, decentralisation and outcome controls (Tolofari, 2005) were promoted with the promise of a more decentralised, democratised and effective model of governance (Hood, 1995). However, in order to govern public services under new circumstances, these reforms also came with, or were followed by, a (new) recentralised form of governance that increasingly measured, assessed and monitored professional and social life (Lundahl, Erixon Arreman, Holm & Lundström (2013). This has nurtured a demand for external tools that clarify the unclear and condense practical activity into (supposedly) objective measures of, for example, educational outcomes (Forsberg & Lundgren, 2010; Hardy & Boyle, 2011).

In the light of this logic, the progressive, thematic-driven and pupil-centred social studies block appeared as obsolete. History, geography, civics and religion are thus (again) thoroughly separated in the latest Swedish curriculum of 2011 (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011), although still grouped under the label social studies. While the previous thematically organised social studies syllabus (of 1994) only specified general and broad aims such as "know and reason about the fundamental ideas of a democratic system, and practise democracy in everyday actions" (in year 5), the new syllabuses have more specific aims in each of the four subjects, where in civics for example, pupils should "analyse social structures using concepts and models from the social sciences" (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2011, p. 189).

The introduction of grades at earlier ages (now in year 6 instead of year 8) has further separated social studies in grade 6 since pupils now are assessed in accordance with content-specific knowledge requirements in each of the four subjects. In civics, for example, pupils need to meet the following requirement for a pass grade (E):

Pupils have good knowledge of what democracy is and how democratic decision-making processes function, and show this by applying developed reasoning about how democratic values and principles can be linked to how decisions are taken in relation to local contexts. (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2011, p. 196)

Furthermore, newly added *core content* specifies 54 topics to be taught from years 4 to 6, divided between the four subjects. These include, for example, the Swedish natural and cultural landscapes in geography; cultural interchanges through increased trade and



migration in history; key ideas behind rituals, precepts and holy places in Christianity in religion; and the tasks of the Swedish parliament in civics (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2011). Finally, subject separation has been strengthened by the introduction of standardised tests, in which the pupils are examined in one randomly selected social studies subject in year 6 and 9³.

The delineation of clear subject areas and a focus on educational outcomes are symptomatic of the new governance logic's reliance on measurable, evaluable and comparable data (Power, 1997). The logic is thus better suited to *certain* dimensions of social studies teaching, while being less suited to others (Wahlström & Sundberg, 2015). Generally, the logic corresponds to what will here be called the subjects' *intrinsic dimensions*. According to Husbands, Kitson & Pendry (2003), intrinsic aims and values "chiefly emerge from concepts and assumptions within the discipline itself" (29) and thus aim at an understanding of a subject in itself, of a clearly defined content and established conceptual constructs that are (often) based on scientific disciplines. The aims, knowledge requirements and content above are examples of these dimensions in social studies since they emphasise the *use* of specific models, *knowledge about* the subjects and a well-defined *content* with subject-specific topics. All in all, the examples rest on clearly defined subjects and contents that can facilitate assessments.

However, social studies continue to have dimensions that do not fit the descriptions of intrinsic dimensions. Teaching practices are still commonly organised under the label "social studies" until year 6, which is why schools can decide to register a combined social studies grade rather than four separate ones (although the knowledge requirements, aims and core content are subject specific). In addition, the civics, geography, history and religion syllabuses continue to stress generic and pupil-oriented aims: In year 6, religion includes existential individual-oriented aims such as reflecting over life issues and one's own and other's identities (cf. Osbeck, 2009); civics includes aims of active citizenship and critical thinking (cf. Morén & Irisdotter Aldemyr, 2015; Sandahl, 2015); history includes existential dimensions of historical consciousness (cf. Schüllerqvist & Osbeck, 2009); and geography should view the world from a holistic perspective (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2011).

These characteristics are examples of what will here be called social studies' *extrinsic dimensions*. In comparison with above, these dimensions lie outside of well-defined subjects, conceptual constructs and scientific disciplines – emphasising a more open and individual understanding of oneself, life and society (Husbands et al., 2003; Schüllerqvist & Osbeck, 2009). The elusiveness of these dimensions does not relate to well-defined content, aims or assessable skills and therefore the dimensions do not fit well with the new governance logic. Extrinsic dimensions are thus now primarily articulated in the overall aims in the curriculum, and only to a lesser degree in the core content and knowledge requirements. In a way, the

change in governance logic has thus altered the emphasis in policy toward social studies' intrinsic dimensions. For teachers, this alteration was most clearly manifested in the introduction of grading and standardised testing in year 6 social studies in 2012, which embodies the new governance logic in concrete and compulsory assignments.

3 Conceptual framework

The shifted emphasis in social studies policy confronts teachers with new tensions – dilemmas, choices, moments of insecurity – in relation to established teaching practices, preconditions, individual intentions, everyday working conditions etc. (Stronach et. al., 2002). How the teachers experienced and handled these new tensions in practice will here be construed through the lens of Ricœur's (2007c) discussion of a practical reason. In a broad sense, the concept of practical reason refers to discussions on how humans make decisions for action (such as teaching) in particular circumstances (see for example Wallace, 2014). Ricœur's position on practical reason was that it neither implies a knowledge of how things are, nor how they ought to be, but rather a capacity among actors (teachers) who try to reconcile seemingly conflicting dimensions of action. In particular, he stressed how a practical reason can function as an "arbiter and judge" between universal, institutional demands on action (such as the new governance logic) and the practice, which is always particular and in change (Ricœur, 2007c).

This does not necessarily mean that teachers solve all tensions that can arise, but rather that teaching is regarded as a perpetual struggle to manage an inherent complexity in (here) social studies teaching (Strandler, 2015). In teaching practice, social studies' intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions are neither dichotomous, nor mutually exclusive, but coexist and overlap – teaching that focuses on intrinsic dimensions does not exclude individual insights among pupils; and teaching that focuses on extrinsic dimensions always presupposes a certain content. Here, the dimensions are thus first and foremost used analytically, to depict two different points of entry into, or ways to think about, organise and conceptualise social studies teaching. While the extrinsic dimensions relate to teaching as an unpredictable activity where the subject is a tool for unfolding generic skills and pupils' individual meanings, the intrinsic dimensions relate to teaching that is about general conceptions and pupils' mastering of a clearly defined subject content that can facilitate assessment (cf. Hopmann, 2007). As the reforms clearly lean toward one of the dimensions (intrinsic), the two terms are used to describe changes in teaching, as well as tensions that arise in practice.

Practical reason is here used to focus analysis on how the teachers mediate between these tensions. More specifically, what will be used is how Ricœur's discussion on practical reason rests on a dialectic view on action, which he regarded as an individual undertaking that was concurrently *constrained* and given *meaning* through norms and values (Ricœur, 1981b, 2007b). Throughout data



collection and analysis, focus has therefore been on how the reforms on one hand *constrained* the teachers mediating position; and on the other hand how the same reforms were included as new *meaning-making* parts of their teaching.

4 Methodology

The implementation of national tests and grading in social studies teaching has been studied in year 6 classrooms. This is not a very well-researched area in Sweden, where research on social studies teaching has often focused on policy or teaching materials for older pupils (Johnsson Harrie, 2011). However, there are some analytical benefits to a study in year 6. Swedish pupils often change schools and/or teachers in year 7, which is why a relatively high proportion of teachers in year 6 had neither given grades, nor conducted national tests in social studies prior to the reforms. This enabled data collection from experienced teachers (ranging from 4 to 24 years of experience⁴), with little or no experience of grading or (standardised) testing in social studies. Data was collected from 10 teachers during the school year of 2012/13⁵, which was the first year that grades and national tests in social studies were implemented. The teachers differed in age (35 to 57 years) and gender (although nine were female), and worked in schools of different sizes and socioeconomic statuses, in both rural and urban settings.

Data was collected through interviews and classroom observations:

- All teachers were interviewed for the first time during the semester before the implementation of grades and national tests. The interviews focused on the teachers' experiences, backgrounds, perceptions of the reforms and expectations about how the reforms would relate to teaching practices. In short, the aim was to establish an initial understanding of the different contexts in which grades and tests would be introduced. The length of the interviews varied between 30 minutes and 1 hour.
- Half of the teachers were asked, and agreed, to have their teaching observed during their first year of implementing the reforms. The observations were conducted in continuous time periods of between three and five weeks, depending on the teachers' work and schedules. Approximately 220 hours were spent with the teachers inside and outside of classrooms.
- A second retrospective interview was conducted with all of the teachers in the semester that followed the implementation of the reforms. The interviews were structured around themes that had emerged during observations and in the first interviews. The same themes are to be found in the structure of the result section below and include how the reforms made teaching more transparent to external stakeholders, how time and competitive pressures affected how the teachers enacted the reforms in practice, and how the reforms provided teaching with clarity, meaning and weight. The questions focused on concrete events, actions and statements from the first interviews and observations (van Manen, 1997). The length of the interviews varied between 1 and 1½ hours. Both the initial and retrospective interviews were

transcribed before analysis. The teacher names have been changed in the article.

During both data collection and analysis, teaching has been regarded as a form of practical reasoning. As shown above, the retrospective interviews investigated themes that concern how the reforms both constrained and provided new meanings to teaching. The observations likewise focused on what kinds of teaching became feasible and what kinds of teaching became problematic. The interviews were conducted as semi-structured life world interviews (Kvale, 1996) and had the aim of getting as close as possible to the teachers' own experiences, perceptions and interpretations of the reforms in relation to their own practice. The fieldwork was conducted as semi-participant observations, which included observations, conversations and social interactions but no participation in the daily work of teachers. Field notes were used to document observations and conversations, which enabled a targeted focus on the teachers and teaching practices for a long period of time (Patton, 2002). All in all, the observations offered an opportunity to study social studies teaching practices in the field but "from the outside", with a distance that is difficult to accomplish with interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

4.1 Analytical procedures

Ricœur (1981a) stated that an analysis without a moment of distancing and objectification lacks direction and the potential for critique. Hence, to merely seek an understanding of the teachers' experiences would be incomplete, just as it would be incomplete to merely regard teaching as an effect from policy. Analytically, this has entailed a data collection and analysis that has oscillated between a moment of *close understanding* of the teachers and a *distanced explanation* of what type of social studies teaching that was facilitated/impeded by the reforms (Strandler, 2015).

The moment of close understanding was characterised by a listening, empathic attitude and focused on how the teachers experienced the introduction of grading and standardised testing and how they (based on these experiences) handled them in their established social studies teaching practices. Analysis was thus in a sense focused on how the teachers used a practical reason to mediate in the tensions that arose from the new governance logic.

The moment of distanced explanation was characterised by a focus on how the introduction of grading and standardised testing *affected* social studies teaching practices. In this moment, the concept of practical reason played a different role where it was not so much used to conceptualise teachers' mediating role, but rather to illuminate how the new governance logic restructured the preconditions for a practical reason to operate.

Although these different moments emanate from different epistemological levels, they are not separate, but rather are different analytical positions that have

been synthesised to enable an understanding of the teachers under particular circumstances, but also to enable a critical discussion of the implications for social studies teaching from the new governance logic.

The different types of data collection thus in part correspond to different parts of the analytical process – while the interviews provided data for a close understanding of the teachers, the observations provided a distanced perspective on how the reforms affected practices. The moments did however overlap and directed one another since, for example, themes that were identified during observations guided the retrospective interviews.

The moment of distanciation was further enhanced in analysis as the transcribed interviews and field note excerpts were continually regarded in the light of the new governance logic. Such a distanciation provided increased depth in the understanding of individual teachers, but also a perspective on teaching practices as *manifestations* of a new governance logic, which could form the basis for a critical discussion.

5 Results

5.1 Transparency

With the introduction of grades and standardised testing, the teachers of this study faced an increased pressure that teaching and teaching results should be made transparent to external stakeholders:

I really need to flesh out, and... so I have... if someone were to come and ask why, I really need to have proof for what I have done. (Diana, Interview 2)

one cannot just say... that you really feel that you do not really get there, you still have to be able to point out exactly what that is... that is my duty, that I can show that. (Mary, Interview 1)

The work this pupil has done is amazing, it is worth a lot, much more than most of the others in the class have done, and then I'm not able to just say... well I can say how fantastic that is, but I cannot display that somewhere. I find that hard! (Karen, Interview 1)

The pressure on transparency drew their focus in teaching practice towards the measurable, reportable and evaluable, which tended to make certain teaching approaches problematic. In an illustrative example, Mary often returned to an ideal of “surprise” in teaching that had no direct connection to predetermined aims or content, which meant fewer opportunities to foresee the outcome of teaching. Teaching segments that were congruent with this ideal typically included discussions, debates, dramatisations and the like, and were, according to Mary, opportunities for ‘surprising’ the pupils, creatively shaping lessons in responsive dialogue with pupils’ reflections, questions, and comments. On a general level, she found this ideal of surprise to be in tension with the increased focus on outcomes in teaching:

Interviewee: I used to think like that a lot, that they [the pupils] should not really know what to expect when they came in. I used to think that was something that was satisfying in itself. And I still think that something needs to happen during lessons. But... well, now there has to be a plan for what they should do, nothing unexpected can suddenly happen in that way, because every lesson needs to be part of this plan.

Interviewer: And the plan is directed toward...?

Interviewee: ...toward assessment. (Mary, Interview 2)

This type of influence seems to have been particularly troublesome in social studies where the teachers found it more difficult to fully integrate assessments into their established teaching practices. Instead, assessments were “constructed in a different way than teaching, turning them into something else than teaching, into something that is separate from and in tension with teaching” (Field notes, 121002). This tension between assessing and teaching social studies is further illustrated by the following conversation after a lesson where a social studies national test (religion) had been returned:

Afterwards, we talk. Gillian describes how pupils’ knowledge increasingly needs to be articulated in columns, boxes and matrices, which finally lead up to a grade. A system has emerged, she continues, that is unfavourable for pupils’ “social studies thinking”, where she needs to rush through spontaneous discussions and reflections that start during class, “where pupils can develop”, in order to make time for this [filling out and discussing grading forms]. /.../ An important point in Gillian’s reasoning is that it is neither content, nor the design of the national tests that affects teaching (she has been involved in constructing one of the social studies tests), but how teaching and its outcome need to be externally audited. (Field notes, Gillian, 130505)

The excerpts above show how the teachers felt constrained to a certain type of teaching as they took on the reforms. As the testing and grading assignments were introduced in practice, they in a way became a “model” for social studies teaching – one that prioritised well-delineated, well-defined and assessable content, and which could provide the teachers with grounds and arguments for specific grades. This “model” was highly congruent with social studies’ intrinsic dimensions, while it was in tension with the subjects’ remaining extrinsic dimensions. It is important to note, however, that the “model” did not constrain teaching in a direct sense, but primarily via indirect self-regulating processes. It was the teachers’ awareness that teaching was followed by grades and tests that affected what kinds of teaching they considered to be feasible. Mary above, for example, could certainly continue to surprise her pupils in teaching, but the emphasis on results, predictability and transparency in the reforms coupled such approaches with an element of risk.

5.2 Time

The teachers associated the risk in departing from the “model” above with a common dilemma in teaching –



the limitation of time. All the teachers perceived the new core content to be extensive, while the time available for social studies teaching was perceived as scarce. Sandy, for example, tried to use open, interdisciplinary teaching approaches to solve this dilemma and find time for all the topics included in the new core content, an approach she felt was encouraged by the National Agency for Education. The same approach, however, gave rise to a similar concern to Mary's, that certain disciplinary core content would be insufficiently covered and assessed (Sandy, Field notes, 130415):

They [National Agency for Education] have extensive, like really thick books, in which they really stress the importance of thematic work, saying that's how one ought to work, while the grading system is the opposite. Where is the logic in that? (Sandy, Interview 1)

A more common (and in a sense more successful) way to approach the dilemma between content and time included various forms of hierarchisation between topics, where matters considered to be peripheral were merely "checked" off the list:

When taking a look at the core content, immediately, you can say: no way that there is time for all that. Still, you have to. Then someone proposes, just touch upon it, at least you have to touch upon it. Ok, touch upon it, yes, you can do that, but what's the use, to only touch upon it, when they [the pupils] will not remember that anyway. (Diana, Interview 2)

...but I think it has to be like that, some parts will be a question of just checking off, and if someone really has learnt something, that... you don't know. (Mary, Interview 1)

The teachers also expressed new constraints on assessment itself. Most of them considered non-written assessments (for example discussions or debates) to be time-consuming and unreliable, while they considered written assessments (for example tests or reports) to be time-effective and reliable. In a way, the teachers used the results from written assessments as physical representations of pupils' knowledge that they could file, assess, compare and recall in order to justify grades. Time was a crucial factor in this development:

Interviewee: I have a hard time figuring out how to do it differently in social studies. I find that hard.

Interviewer: Why is that, I think I understand, but could you put into words why it becomes difficult?

Interviewee: Well, it might have been possible if you had more time, if I could sit down and have oral discussions where everyone could be heard. Because we had that sometimes, but it is still more difficult to see what they actually know, I think, even when I've had them in smaller groups. (Mary, Interview 2)

Here, it is clear how the new governance logic's increased demand on transparency entailed that primarily written and documentable results mattered. Simi-

larly, Sandy, in one of her attempts to work in an interdisciplinary way, included core content and knowledge requirements from several of the social studies subjects, along with Swedish and Art. However, as the deadline for registering the semester's grades approached, focus shifted from subject content to submitting in time:

"Since you have had weeks to work in social studies, she explains, you cannot come and say that you did not have time to work with this".

Grades will be registered on May 31 and before that, she [Sandy] needs to compile their work for grading. She says that she is hoping that the pupils see how serious this is. In the end, she encourages the pupils, telling them that she can see how they work; the problem is the lack of time (Sandy, Field notes 130425)

Generally, time increased the element of risk of deviating from teaching that was well-delineated, well-defined and assessable, which further circumscribed how the teachers could work with social studies' extrinsic dimensions. The lack of time turned each segment, project or assignment in social studies into an investment of time that needed to "deliver a return" in terms of transparent results. The teachers thus tended to choose a focus on clear and time-efficient learning *results* in teaching, rather than focusing on unclear and time-consuming learning *processes*. Of course, there is not necessarily a contradiction between a focus on results and a focus on processes - the latter always leads to the former in one way or another - but the governance logic's emphasis on *predictable* results certainly adds an element of uncertainty and risk to an unpredictable, open and process-oriented teaching practice - i.e. social studies' extrinsic dimensions.

5.3 Market logics

Beside time, the competitive situation of some schools further underpinned the importance of reducing vagueness and risk-taking. Mary, who worked at a new independent primary school, is a prime example of this. The school was recently established by one of the major companies that have emerged in the wake of marketisation. Since the new school's survival, and ultimately teachers' jobs, depended on pupil and parental choice, empty seats were a central concern at the school, and for its owner (Mary, Interview 1). In this case, the competitive pressure resulted in an informal understanding among the teachers to increase emphasis on the knowledge requirements and assessability in order to meet parental demands for transparency and clarity in teaching (Mary, Field notes, 120924). Such an emphasis, however, made the teachers more open to criticism, as Gillian described at the end of her first year of grading:

Interviewee: Why do I need to defend what I know by virtue of my profession, what I, in some way, consider myself to know /.../ Although I find it hard now, it is my profession, it is my job, it is what I do, and then you're questioned by the parents. I find that situation really troublesome.

Interviewer: Does that happen a lot?

Interviewee: Yes, it has happened quite often now since it's the first time that year six are graded and the parents get as stressed out as their children. Why don't they get an A?

Interviewer: That was after the first grades at Christmas, and then parents came?

Interviewee: Yes, and then you first needed to explain in every little tiny detail, that your daughter gets this, or your son gets that because of this. And then everything falls back on them saying that this is only an estimation. That it is only a subjective assessment. Yes, of course it is, that is what grades are. (Gillian, Interview 2)

This increased parental influence, which ultimately stems from pupils'/parents' right to school choice, further increased the demand for transparency and underpinned the need to reduce the impression of vagueness with regard to the subject or the teaching. The teachers therefore used an emphasis on clear outputs in social studies to give a transparent and credible outward image of their teaching, something which could expose them to criticism. The reforms' constraining influence toward certain result-oriented teaching practices thus has to be understood within the context of a highly marketised school system, where threats of a loss of reputation or lack of clarity and structure could affect the very existence of schools.

5.4 Clarity and meaning-making

The teachers also perceived the result-focus as something positive. As Paige describes, the new syllabuses were in sharp contrast to the previous ones:

In my opinion, it feels... it feels positive. It's a lot, but it feels simpler than the old one, which was... I felt that... it was more difficult to keep track of, what are we really supposed to do? So... I think that the core content is a positive thing: so this is what should be addressed. While at the same time, they should get here... these abilities... It feels more thorough and well conceived. (Paige, Interview 1)

The provision of clarity expressed in the excerpt is indeed another perspective on the increased demands for transparency. In nearly all schools, communication of results was dealt with via different types of learning management systems (LMS). The documentation of pupils' progress in these systems' matrices, categories and boxes in a way provided the teachers with some distance from the new and sometimes stressful act of grading since results, once registered, were perceived as more objective and fair. Also, the registering of progress in LMS further enhanced an impression of clarity to pupils, their parents, school management and other stakeholders, as Mary explains:

Well... perhaps... I think that grading feels less important suddenly, at least for me, and it does not feel as tough anymore, perhaps it is because we have Schoolsoft [LMS], where I fill in a subject matrix with the knowledge requirements. How far did you reach on this assignment?

Then it is sort of already filled out when I grade. In a way, I have already made an assessment based on the knowledge requirements, which makes it easier. It feels fairer, and the pupils find it fairer. Somehow, they think that what is written there is the truth, although it of course is my assessment the whole time. (Mary, Interview 2)

These processes of clarification and distancing helped the teachers to structure the social studies subjects in teaching, which provided a supposedly objective conceptualisation of clearly defined subjects, in which teaching was directed toward tangible, clear outcomes.

Here it becomes clear how the reforms on one hand constrained the teachers' handling of tensions, but on the other hand became a new and meaning-making part of their teaching practices. Increased transparency, time shortage and market forces constrained how the teachers could handle tensions, but the reforms also provided the teachers with structure, clarity and new meanings in their work. This double-sidedness was evident in a change of attitude among some of the teachers. For example, after having had quite a negative attitude toward grading initially, Mary's attitude gradually became more nuanced. In retrospect, she explained:

I have always been negative toward grades really. But I really think that I can see... that for the first time there is some kind of... well, to some extent it functions like a circle, connecting everything. Before, it was more like, ok... we do this and then there is a mark, and then you do this and there is a mark. It was not any kind of... but now, everything has a function in some way /.../ it becomes a virtuous circle... hopefully. (Mary, Interview 2)

The metaphor of a circle in the excerpt illustrates how the teachers used the new assessment assignments to establish new structures in teaching that, in their most concrete form, revolved around sets of aims and knowledge requirements that commenced and concluded teaching segments. This is illustrated in the following field-note excerpt, in which Meg introduced a final piece of work before grades were to be reported at the end of the semester. When introducing the assignment, descriptions of the knowledge requirements take up an extensive proportion of time:

Meg tells the pupils that this is really what geography and social studies are about, what they will be graded on, what they always have to return to and what they have been working with the entire semester. "You need facts, but you also need to describe why by answering the sub questions [written on the instructions that have been handed out], we know that they have steppe, but what is the significance of that? /.../Why, what, how, not only that things are in a certain way [emphasis on *that*]. (Field notes 131129)

The excerpt shows how the teacher uses the knowledge requirements to delineate social studies ("this is what social studies is") and connect a seemingly separate segment to previous work ("this is what we have been working on the entire semester"). However, the excerpt

also illustrates how the teacher does not structure teaching around issues that concern how the pupils ought to work, nor what to work with in a direct sense. Instead, it is the assessments and the knowledge requirements that are used to create a sense of cohesiveness by recurrent references to the knowledge requirements before, during and after assignments – in matrices, pedagogical plans, tests, posters, instructions etc.

This type of provision of clarity and cohesiveness illustrates a more positively connoted meaning-making process that in a way solved tensions in practice. The solution rests, however, primarily on assessments, which further emphasised social studies' intrinsic dimensions as a (the) structuring principle in teaching.

5.5 Weight

Finally, another aspect of the governance logic will be discussed, which somewhat further explains how the teachers handled the reforms as new and meaningful parts of their teaching practices. Among others, Goodson (1995) has pointed out that high-stake examinations can improve the status of individual subjects. For Pat and Tom, both teachers at the same middle school (in social studies and science), this was certainly the case:

Tom and Pat described how everything feels new and tough, but also that national tests and grading were appreciated as recognition for their work and subjects (social studies/science). The reforms have entailed that social studies/science have reached a "higher level" and gained status in relation to major subjects such as Swedish, English and maths. Nowadays, they can, and need to, put more time, attention and energy into these subjects, and to finally register a grade or to carry out a [national] test in one of the subjects is a recognition of the "long term work" that teaching in social studies is. "Perhaps it is not on a level with maths, Swedish or English, but still...", Pat concludes. (Field notes 130125)

Similar notions that grading and examinations "added weight" to social studies were frequently expressed by several of the teachers, although in somewhat different ways. This, however, did not only concern social studies in relation to other subjects, but also included a perception that pupils tended to consider the subjects in a more serious manner when they were graded:

They are pushed really, they are... motivated really, but it is also stressful, they get nervous and worried. However I notice the difference in the six graders now in comparison with the previous semester, they're sort of: let's do this now..., which definitely means that we need to be there and support them, and not just push them too hard. (Meg, Interview 1)

The addition of "weight" to teaching was most clearly manifested in intermediate moments between segments that were assessed and segments that were not. For example, one of Mary's civics lessons was introduced with a value exercise (a recurrent element in this class), in which the pupils were asked to adopt a position, deliberate and discuss various issues. These exercises

were dialogic, unpredictable and built on the pupils' active participation (Field notes 120924). The approximately 15-minute-long segment neither directly nor explicitly addressed any assessable knowledge requirements, aims or contents. However, the segment was in sharp contrast to the remainder of the lesson (35 minutes), in which the pupils were prepared for the next week's combined history and civics test on democracy. The two segments were symbolically delimited from each other with detailed instructions, accompanied by a set of knowledge requirements from the civics syllabus along with questions to be answered from a booklet on the history of democracy and the Swedish political system. Besides the obvious differences in instruction, the emphasis in the teaching now shifted from the pupils to the teacher, and from active participation to (civics) subject enactment: the pupils now worked individually, with a predetermined topic toward a (more or less) explicit goal, defined by a selection of knowledge requirements. This also altered the teacher's role: rather than facilitating discussions, reflections and comments, the teacher mentored the pupils (toward a test) within the frame of a (more) clearly classified subject (Field notes 120924).

The shift in the lesson above clearly illustrates the difference between a teaching that leans toward social studies' intrinsic dimensions and one that leans toward social studies' extrinsic dimensions. These types of delimitations during lessons, between non-assessed and assessed segments, were quite common among the teachers of this study. Time spent on the latter types of segments did however increasingly exceed the time spent on the former and the assessed segments were the prime vehicle for the "weight" that Pat and Tom talked about above, a state of affairs that most certainly contributed to the teachers' priority on social studies' intrinsic dimensions when tensions arose.

6 Discussion

In this article, I have analysed how social studies teachers experienced and handled tensions that arose in teaching practices as they implemented outcome-focused reforms. The introduction of grading and of national tests in year 6 were new and unavoidable features in practice – the teachers had little or no room to choose not to grade or not to conduct national tests. The teachers thus saw little alternative but to handle the tensions that arose between the general stipulations of standardised knowledge requirements, core content, tests etc. and their established teaching practices, preconditions and individual intentions. If this mediation is unpacked as an expression of practical reason, it appears as a simultaneous meaning-making and constraining process.

On the one hand, the teachers handled tensions by partly embracing the new assignments as significant and meaningful parts of their teaching practices and fundamentally restructured what they regarded as central in social studies. Rather than organising teaching around the subjects' extrinsic dimensions – individual, unpredictable and generic skills that transcend subject

boundaries – teaching now revolved around assessability. Aims, knowledge requirements and core content functioned as scaffolds or frames that provided social studies teaching with a sense of meaning, clearly illustrated in Mary’s analogy of a virtuous circle in teaching. This meaning-making of the reforms entailed a certain degree of predictability in otherwise multifaceted and elusive subjects, without directly or explicitly limiting what the teachers perceived as good social studies teaching. Nevertheless, such notions of clarity and predictability were more congruent with social studies’ intrinsic dimensions than with its extrinsic dimensions, which thus underpinned the development toward more clearly defined subjects, derived from predetermined subject conceptions and assumptions. This meaning-making process can be understood as an act of balance between autonomy and clarity – there might have been less room for elements of “surprise”, but the teaching gained in terms of structure, clarity, “weight” and status. On the other hand, the teachers’ leeway to handle tensions was highly constrained by factors that were beyond their influence: The increased focus on outcomes and transparency interrelated with competitive pressures and limitations of time, which made it more important for the teachers to be able to justify grades and give clear accounts of teaching for external stakeholders. These external pressures influenced aspects of teaching that used to be characterised by (more extensive) teacher autonomy, for example how to work with specific content, how and if that content would be examined (including a variety of oral and written assessments), and whether content from different subjects (social studies as well as others) should be integrated. Hence, although the extrinsic dimensions continue to make some mark on the social studies syllabuses, the shift in practice toward intrinsic dimensions operated through restraints on teacher autonomy. Such a relatively high level of autonomy used to facilitate unpredictable learning processes, discussions and interactions that were all prerequisites for social studies’ extrinsic dimensions.

The tensions discussed here are in a way inherent in the new governance logic. On the one hand, the teachers had considerable discretion to decide on how to teach the core content, but were on the other hand required to be precise about what teaching should lead to. It is crucial here that the new governance logic did not entail any mechanisms that explicitly enabled or prevented certain kinds of teaching. Since the logic works through outputs rather than inputs, policy was in a way “separated from operations” (Olssen & Peters, 2007, p. 323) and did not specify how the teachers should organise their teaching practices. Management of risks appears to be a central reason for why the shift in emphasis in policy still had such great impact on teaching practices. To quite some extent, the new governance logic tries to create certainty in what is inherently uncertain – making complex teaching processes transparent so that they can be evaluated in relation to precise aims and knowledge requirements (Power,

1997). The logic therefore did not only correspond better to the clarity of social studies’ intrinsic dimensions but also coupled the vaguer extrinsic dimensions with an element of risk in teaching: the teachers made their teaching transparent to cover their own backs, organised their teaching to minimise the risk of losing pupils to competitors and chose methods and assessments that satisfied the governance logic within tight timeframes. Management of risk also characterised how the new governance logic provided new meanings to teaching, since it created certainty and direction in otherwise open and uncertain practices.

7 Conclusions

The shifts in teaching practices described above, one can argue, are problematic for several reasons. The Swedish social studies subjects have long had aims that pupils both need to learn *about* and *from* social issues, such as citizenship (Sandahl, 2015), ethics (Osbeck, Franck, Lilja & Lindskog, 2015) and democracy (Rautiainen & Rähkä, 2012). The multifacetedness of social studies is in a way an asset, necessary to tackle such aims, which are inherently complex, by no means self-explanatory, and therefore difficult to pin down in assessable results. It thus seems highly problematic that the new governance logic seems to promote teaching practices that, despite what is stated in syllabuses, prioritise knowledge *about* rather than *from* these issues, attaining clarity at the expense of complexity. As the subjects’ intrinsic dimensions dominate practice to answer to a model of governance based on auditing, there is thus a risk that social studies’ multifacetedness is circumscribed, promoting a teaching that is oriented toward knowledge reproduction and social reproduction rather than critical appraisal. The extent to which such a development is problematic ultimately depends on one’s position on the purpose of education in general. The inevitable ideological nature of the influence of auditing on teaching practices, however, calls for discussions that do not merely look at standardised, result-focused reforms in relation to pupils’ results (which is something of a closed-circle argument), but also in relation to the teaching practices they promote.

Certainly, much research has been conducted on these types of changes in governance logics (see for example Ball, 2003; Beach & Dovemark, 2011; Olssen & Peters, 2007), but research on teaching practices under such altered circumstances has been less common. Further research in this area could focus on specific characteristics of individual subjects (such as here), specific teaching elements (such as classroom assessment), or on social science teaching more generally. Also, a focus on pupils’ experiences could contribute to a deepened understanding of what the changes entail for everyday life in social science classrooms. On a more general level, finally, the neoliberal backdrop of these logics (Lundahl et al., 2013) needs to be further investigated in terms of how social and relational practices in schools (between teachers as well as between teachers and pupils) are reorganised.

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Endnotes

¹ Civics was taught as a part of history until 1962.

² The subject changed from Christian religious education to the broader non-confessional and pluralistic Religious Education in 1969 (Flensner & Larsson, 2014).

³ Due to threats from the (majority) right-wing opposition in parliament to push for grading in even lower years, a settlement was reached to introduce grading on a trial basis from year 4 in 100 schools in 2015. In the same settlement, the social studies (and science) national tests were made optional and later removed in order to reduce teachers' administrative burden (The social democratic party, 2015).

⁴ Years of experience: Pat 16; Mary 7; Sandy 4; Paige 16; Ralph 11; Meg 12; Diana 12; Gillian 24; Karen 17; Patricia 15

⁵ 2012/2013 for all but one teacher for whom data was collected during the following school year.

Caroline Ignell, Peter Davies, Cecilia Lundholm

Understanding 'Price' and the Environment: Exploring Upper Secondary Students' Conceptual Development

- Differences between everyday and scientific conceptions of environmental issues in pricing are identified.
- Upper secondary students in this study were more likely to refer to production issues than consumption issues in their conceptions.
- Even after studying economics, students' conceptions seemed to be in a state of flux.
- Although conceptions of how prices were determined and how they should be determined were separated into categories with a similar structure, students tended to be inconsistent in their conceptions.

Purpose: To explore changes in upper secondary students' conceptions of environmental issues in how prices are determined and how they should be determined.

Design: The study uses an 'alternative frameworks' conceptual change approach to examine change in the conceptions of fifteen business and economic students. Students were asked about the prices of familiar products and asked to explain prices for eco-friendly and eco-unfriendly products. A first interview was conducted in the second year of education and the second interview a year later when students were 18 years old and in the final year of schooling. Interviews were carried out by a researcher independent from the schools and carried out in schools.

Findings: Identifies the fragmentary nature of students' every-day thinking in relation to productivity, consumer preference and negative externalities. Results show characteristics of partial conceptions, which are considered as students' conceptions in a process of change towards a more scientific understanding of relationships between price and environmental impacts.

Practical implications: The study clarifies conceptions, which students bring to the classroom and the directions that development in understanding may take. The study should help teachers to design effective strategies to support students' learning.

Keywords:

Price, externality, sustainability, longitudinal study, economic and environmental education

1 Introduction

We investigate changes in upper secondary pupils' explanations of price in relation to the environment through a qualitative longitudinal study. The study is premised on a belief that students' conceptions of environmental considerations in price matter for the extent to which citizens are able to exert a well-informed influence on economic policy towards sustainability (Davies, 2006; Davies, 2015). This study follows earlier work (Ignell, Davies & Lundholm, 2013) that reported infrequent and inconsistent references to environmental factors in the students' explanations of price differences between several goods. The present study addresses three

questions: What differences are there between students' conceptions of environmental issues in pricing after one further year of education in upper secondary school? What differences - before and after given information regarding environmental issues and after one further year of schooling - are there between students' explanations of how prices *should* be determined? What differences are there between conceptions that are evident in student explanations of how environmental issues *are* reflected in prices and judgments about how environmental issues *should* be reflected in prices? We explore how students' different conceptions change over a year's time, during the two final years in a business and economic education program in three Swedish upper secondary schools.

The next section of the paper addresses the theoretical background and evidence of students' environmental and socio-economic conceptions. This is followed by a description of the study's design and analysis. The results section starts by presenting evidence of students' thinking about how environmental impact and pricing are determined and continues by showing findings of changes in students' conceptions. Our discussion considers implications for teaching and learning in business and economic education.

Caroline Ignell, is PhD Student at the Department of Education, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden, Email: caroline.ignell@edu.su.se

Peter Davies is Professor of Education Policy, School of Education, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, United Kingdom, Email: p.davies1@bham.ac.uk

Cecilia Lundholm is Professor of Educational Science with a specialisation in teaching and learning in the social sciences, Department of Humanities and Social Science Education, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden, Email: cecilia.lundholm@hse.su.se



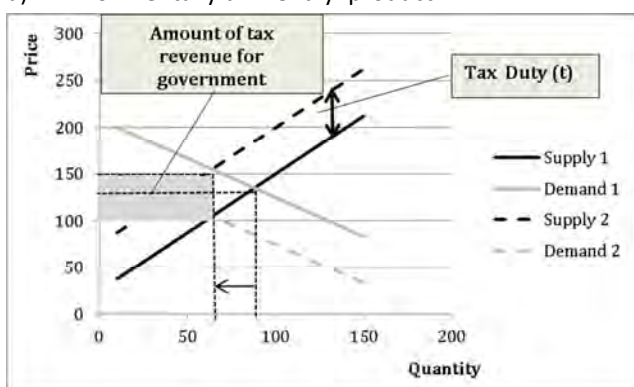
1.1 Background

This section sets our study in the context of environmental externalities and conceptual change. Market prices underestimate costs of production and consumption when there are negative environmental impacts (such as pollution of natural environments) which are known as externalities (Gravelle & Rees, 1992; Owen, 2004; Tietenberg & Lewis, 2009). One possible response to this problem is to prevent forms of production/consumption that generate environmental damage. This prevention will typically take form of regulation backed by law. From the standpoint of neo-classical economics this may well result in a loss of welfare since there is likely to be some level of environmentally destructive production which yields sufficient benefit that most people would prefer to live with the damage done than to give up what is produced.

A second response is to aim for a price and output level that would arise if the market took account of externalities. This may be achieved by tax and credit systems, which adjust rather than eliminate environment-degrading production (see Figures 1(a) and 1(b)).

Figure 1. Supply and demand responses to environmental externalities

a) 'Environmentally unfriendly' product



b) 'Environmentally friendly' product

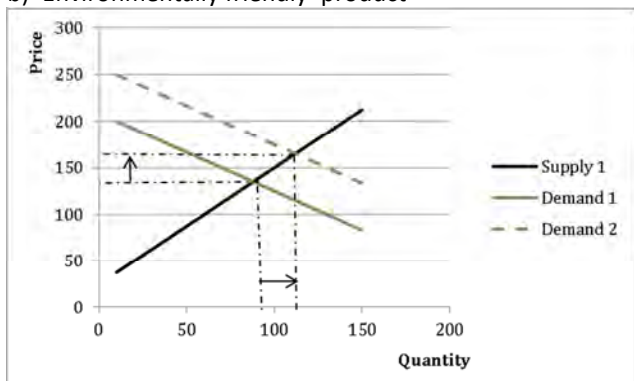


Figure 1(a) shows how a tax per unit (t) which is equivalent to the level of externality at the equilibrium price shifts the supply curve upwards, raises the equilibrium price (by less than the rate of the tax) and raises tax revenue (shaded area) for the government. In principle, a similar fall in production could arise if consumers fully internalise the externalities i.e. by increasing their

demand for environmentally friendly products and thereby move away from more harmful activities. In this case (Figure 1a), demand for the 'environmentally unfriendly' product falls from D1 to D2 as consumers switch to the 'environmentally friendly' product (Figure 1b). In this case there is no tax revenue.

Socio-economic aspects of beliefs about environmental sustainability have received limited attention within the research literature on students' conceptual change and few studies have examined conceptual formation (Lundholm & Davies, 2013). Nonetheless, the powerful normalising effect of students' experience and dominant beliefs in their society have emerged as themes in studies of pupils in China (Sternäng & Lundholm, 2012) and England (Davies & Lundholm, 2012). For example, students' attending 'Green Schools' in China commonly expressed a belief that environmental problems were unavoidable when developing an economy, but economic growth would enable these problems to be overcome in the future. However, in the English study, some of the students believed that markets did not offer an automatic solution to environmental problems. For example, students argued that there would be over-consumption of products when prices do not reflect externalities.

An important notion in our study is that we approach students' understandings in terms of alternative frameworks, rather than misconceptions, meaning that individuals' understandings of a scientific phenomenon can be held in parallel and understood as alternative, to a scientifically correct, way of understanding (Driver & Easley, 1978). Larsson and Halldén (2010) have shown, from repeated interviews with children on the concept of earth, how various conceptions might shift during the same interview. Furthermore, over a period of 3 years, the children's conceptions are shown to be integrated as well as differentiated into new conceptions. These findings suggest that individuals might hold multiple and parallel understandings, explained in terms of multiple frameworks, of a scientific phenomenon. On the basis of their experience, students will develop conceptions of price and the environmental consequences of production and consumption. Here, we are interested in comparing these conceptions with the conception embodied in Figure 1.

Research in conceptual change has captured changes in students' understanding through tests and/or interviews before and after teaching interventions. Our study focuses on differences between students' conceptions at age 17 and age 18 years. In the year between the two interviews, students followed a study programme in business and economics. As mentioned, our study examines (i) differences between conceptions of environmental impacts on pricing after one further year in upper secondary school; (ii) differences between explanations of what prices *should* be before and after being given additional information regarding environmental impacts, and (iii) differences between conceptions evident in explanations of how environmental

impacts *are* reflected in prices, and judgements about how environmental impacts *should* be reflected in prices.

2. Method and analysis

This study uses a longitudinal design and follows the same students *through time*. The premises are that analysing change requires at least two reference points through time and we follow Saldaña (2003) in seeing change as a process outlined in the terms *from-through* rather than *from-to*. The first phrase conveys a sense of unfinished change, which is still in process and this description is more apt for the data we present in this study. The following section describes the participants and the procedure of our data collection, followed by an outline of the analysis process before the results are presented.

2.1 Participants

Data were gathered from students aged 17 and 18. All participated in Sweden's national business and economic educational programmes, and were studying subjects such as business economics and international economics in addition to mandatory courses e.g. in civics, science and geography. The students came from three different upper secondary schools in a mixture of urban and non-urban localities. A sample of 16 participants (eight female) volunteered for and attended the first interview. One student did not participate in the second interview and two students did not participate in the last part of the first interview. The research design followed ethical guidelines regarding consent; the de-identifying of interviewees, disclosure and data security (Gustafsson, Hermerén & Petersson, 2011).

2.2 Data collection

Students were interviewed twice and each interview lasted about 30 minutes. The first interview took place in mid springtime and the second interview was roughly one year later when students were in their final study year. Each interview explored elaborated thinking through dialogue in an informal setting between the interviewer and the student (Mishler, 1986). This means that students' thoughts about specific issues were discussed along with personal experiences of purchasing the associated goods and services. During the second interview, each student was also asked to state what he/she recalled from the previous interview. The interview settings were the same in both years, namely; conducted with the same interviewer and the same students, in the same schools and during the months of March and April. The interview questions and structure were also the same during both occasions, with consistency in products (beef-burgers, taped/untapped water, flight and train services) to be elaborated on and questions focused on students' conceptions about pricing. In this paper we focus on students' thinking about beef-burgers.

2.3 Interview design

Table 1 presents an overview of the two interviews. The interviews followed the same guideline each year and were conducted by the first author.

Table 1: Interview format of the first and second interviews

-
1. Do you sometimes buy a beef burger? If so, how often?
 2. Are there differences in price between burgers that are more environmentally friendly and those that are not? Describe, what are the prices?
 3. Does this surprise you?
 4. Why is it like this?
 5. What influences these prices?
 6. Are there other factors that influence price? (This question was repeated several times during the session to assure the student got the opportunity to present all possible causes to prices he/she could think of.)
 7. What *should* the prices for the beef-burgers be? If you could decide.
 8. Is there anything additional that *should* influence the price?
The interviewer presented information specifics of negative impact (see Appendix 1) related to beef-burgers on a laptop and after this the seventh question was repeated somewhat modified.
 9. Is this something that *should* influence the prices for the beef-burgers, when you have seen this information?

After the second interview the student was asked if and how pricing had been part of the education.

The interviews focused on students' conceptions of how price *is* determined and how prices *should* be determined for eco and regular beef-burgers. This example was chosen partly because we believed that 'buying beef-burgers' is part of the common experience of most Swedish students. Beef-burgers were also chosen to build on results from previous studies. Ignell et al., (2013) asked Swedish secondary school students (using an open-ended questionnaire) 'What possible reasons there could be for a burger bought from one restaurant having a higher price compared with a burger bought from a different restaurant?' Just over 20% of the students referred to environmental impacts in their answers. A minority of the students also referred to environmental considerations in terms of customers being willing to pay more for an 'ecological product'. However, an English study (Davies & Lundholm, 2012) found little evidence of thinking about externalities in students' judgements about the appropriate price for a beef burger compared to other goods. This might reflect differences between the national contexts. The Swedish media have focused on beef production as a cause of global warming, and some school-cantinas have introduced 'Meat Free Mondays'.

Our interest in students' verbal thinking about how prices *should* be settled was included in this study given results in previous work (Ignell et al., 2013). In that study, students often reasoned differently according to whether they were explaining how prices were determined or suggesting how they *should* be determined. In the last



section of the interviews, the students were given information about environmental impacts from beef production and asked if the described effects *should* be affect price. The information was aimed to provide the students with a specific context through which they could express their understanding, thus overcoming difficulties of an abstract phenomenon such as externalities (Berti & Bombi, 1988). More specifically, the information, which was presented in two short extracts, could elicit conceptions not brought forward in the previous elaborated content. The information was chosen because it highlighted some key processes through which production impacts on the environment and estimated the scale of these impacts.

2.4 Analysis

All interviews were recorded and transcripts were written with short facilitating words (such as *okay, I see, and yes*) omitted. We used thematic analysis of students' thinking about environmental impacts and pricing to identify different patterns in students' thinking (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis started with manual coding and grouping of transcriptions to identify essential parts of the interviews with reference to negative environmental impact in relation to how prices *are* respectively *should* be constructed. The coding procedure was partly data-driven in that the process depended on our interview data. However, this procedure was also theory-driven, in that we approached the data based on understandings from earlier research by Dahlgren & Marton (1978). They reported patterns of how the price of a bun is conceptualized by university students in qualitatively different ways; in terms of price decided from supply and demand or its intrinsic value. In the following part of the analysis we organized the different codes into themes, from how pricing was described and concluded in the two themes of price influence; i) production methods - the inputs and costs for producers and ii) consumers' requests and preferences. We labelled these themes Productivity and Consumer preference in organising our data. In the following phase we identified levels within our themes that suggested some progression in students' thinking. The results were then discussed and agreed among the authors in line with a recurrent inter-reliability process. Aspects of the data of each level are presented in the next section and followed by a summarizing of the papers' findings.

3. Results

There are four main results sections. The two first sections present different conceptions of environmental impacts and pricing and changes in these conceptions through time. The two last sections describe changes in conceptions of how prices *should* be determined and differences between conceptions evident in explanations of how environment impacts *are* reflected in prices and judgements about how environmental issues *should* be reflected (that is after given information of negative impact from production). We differentiated between the complexity of conceptions through different levels of

complexity: *basic, partial* and *complex*. These labels are intended to convey the sense of transition (partial) everyday (basic conceptions) and more scientific (complex conceptions). In each table we have attached short and elaborated content descriptors to the categories of conception. These conceptions are exemplified through students' excerpts.

3.1 Conceptions of negative environmental impact in relation to price

Thirteen of the fifteen students that participated in both interviews made environmental connections in their thinking.

3.1.1 Productivity and negative environmental impact

The results show three different levels of productivity (Table 2).

Table 2: Levels of thinking about productivity

<i>Basic</i>	Eco = higher cost	Eco goods are more expensive because they are more costly to produce.
<i>Partial</i>	Eco = more resources = higher cost	Eco goods require more resources in their production and this makes them more expensive (the productivity principle).
<i>Complex</i>	Eco affects resources in two ways (short term and long term)	Eco goods are more expensive because they use more resources that have to be paid for (like labour) but they conserve the natural environment (either a capital argument or a holistic view of the environment argument).

Basic conceptions suggested that the higher price of the eco beef-burgers was related to the use of less chemicals and to lower emissions. These explanations offered no indication of *why* not using chemicals would add to cost of production. This conception is illustrated in the following exchange:

"Maria: Well, one does not use chemicals (to produce eco-beef burgers) and a lot of stuff ...

Interviewer: And how is that influencing the price of the burger?

Maria: I think it perhaps gets more expensive.

Interviewer: Okay, why is it like that?

Maria: It is because one does not grow it in a regular way.

Complex conceptions of productivity explicitly related the cost of production to the use of resources.

Rolf: I would say that it is more expensive with eco-friendly beef burgers for you need to ... take longer, to probably get resources ... and that takes more time if you are into special fodder and stuff for the animals and ... then it is also ... it takes a longer time ... when you consider the environment, I would say.

... I suppose the eco ones would be more expensive because in most cases, it's cheaper to do something and not care about the environment and not consider the environment. Because there is no need to use resources for

reducing impact and ensure that they do not contaminate which calls for extra work most often.

This explanation argues that producing environmentally friendly burgers incurs more costs because it uses more resources. It recognises that other forms of production have negative consequences for the environment, although it does not explicitly refer to how these consequences might be valued or that they involve a loss of resources.

We identified other *partial* conceptions of productivity that suggested an understanding that was in transition between the *basic* and *complex* conceptions. For example:

Martin: So if we want to have eco it is more expensive since one pay for the environment.

Interviewer: What is it that you pay for?

Martin: For the nature to be well... if you should take care of nature it costs money.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Martin: Well it is really difficult ... One has first to think of what the meat, what the animals eat... Transport does also influence to some part. It is probably what the raw material costs and the profit and if it is eco sound it probably costs more. It costs more to take responsibility and recover the nature... well to make it easier for the nature to get in the right phase, which has been influenced when one takes out the natural resources.

In the first part of this exchange Martin expresses a similar conception of production to Maria. However, he is also beginning to express the idea of an externality: referring to the economic (market) system as encouraging ‘cheap’ production, whilst the environment is ‘something you have to pay for’. Moreover, in the final part he begins to express how forms of production may affect cost. Some indications of his uncertainty are conveyed by ‘influence to *some part*’ and ‘*probably* what the raw material costs’. Although he is beginning to develop a conception of relationships between production and cost he is not yet explicitly thinking in terms of productivity: the ratio of inputs to outputs. Comparison of students’ utterances did not provide firm grounds for believing that some were thinking about productivity and resources for a single firm, whilst others were thinking in terms of market supply. Future research might examine what prompts students to recognise this distinction.

3.1.2 Consumers’ preferences and negative environmental impact

We distinguished between two different levels of consumer preference and Table 3 outlines *basic* and *partial* conceptions of environmental impacts and consumer demand.

Table 3: Levels of thinking about consumer preference

<i>Basic</i>	Single demand argument: willingness to pay	People value eco and will therefore pay higher price (demand matters).
<i>Partial</i>	Two relationships between demand and price.	If the price is higher people will want less of it, (movement along demand curve) and if everyone wants more of something it will tend to put the price up (shift in demand) (price influenced by market demand and its interaction with supply).

We categorised conceptions as *basic* if they suggested that some consumers would be willing to pay a higher price for eco-burgers.

Rolf: It may well be that the personal approach that some people might be willing to pay more if they know that it is environmentally-friendly made... they have a higher price just because they can do it.

Interviewer: If you develop it a little bit ... if you are willing to pay more for a product ... it can be more expensive ... is that what you think?

Rolf: That may be the fact, definitely, that can influence, when they price the product.

Interviewer: How do you think about this?

Rolf: So, people would rather buy something that they know ... so they do not get a bad conscience about the environment, so, they know it is made properly so they want to pay a higher price in order to avoid it (bad conscience).

Although this explanation starts by referring to ‘some people’, it is really dividing people into those who are willing to pay more and those who are not. There are two types of individual in this thinking rather than a market demand which is a continuous negative relationship between price and demand reflecting variation in what people are willing to pay and how many of them that are willing to pay each price.

We found no utterances about consumer preference which we could classify as *complex*. However there is a way of conceiving a *complex* understanding of consumer preference in relation to negative impact and it is suggested in the economic literature that; some consumers value the production’s impact on the environment and are willing to internalise externalities by paying a higher price, to encourage production of eco-friendly goods. This increases demand for these products so that a higher price is associated with greater production. Price is thus influenced by market demand and its interaction with supply and consumers’ internalisation of externalities (Brown, 2001; Tietenberg & Lewis, 2009). This is illustrated in Figure 1b.

We also identified some conceptions as *partial* because they provided some evidence of starting to think of price as a ‘market’ phenomenon and some evidence of starting to distinguish between movements along a demand curve and shifts in demand (without explicitly formulating the ideas in these terms).



Manfred: Well, it is like... what I am thinking of is perhaps the demand.

Interviewer: Well, okay, what is that?

Manfred: Well, that is simply how much people buy of a product.

Interviewer: Mm, how is that influencing the price?

Manfred: Well, that depends on. In many cases, like if there are a lot of people who want to have the product, the price is raised because people buy it anyhow, however, sometimes one reduces the price simply because people buy the cheapest alternative. That is usually how it is for food... Yes, people's mentality so to say. It is probably those who decide if they are going to buy it or not. It has probably to do with demand I assume.

Although this explanation does not express any explicit idea of a market demand there are references to the responsiveness of price to how many people will buy the product and the responsiveness of demand to changes in price. These ways of thinking imply a market in a way that it is not apparent in Rolf's explanation.

3.2 Changes in conceptions of how prices are determined

In the previous section we have described and exemplified the levels of conceptions. In the following part we present changes between the levels we found between the first (T1) and second (T2) interview. This answers our first research question. Our main observation is that there was very limited change in the thinking of this group of students. Four students provided evidence of conceptual change: in each case the change was in thinking about productivity. We found two types of change: *basic to partial*, and (one student) *partial to basic* conceptions (see the overview of changes in Table 4).

Table 4: Overview of conceptual differences

	Ellen, Marcus		Felix, Marin, Ronja		Herbert		Kristin		Manfred		Maria		Mark		Rasmus		Rolf		Vilma	
	A				A		B		B		B				B					
Environmental references	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2	T1	T2
Productivity																				
Basic							*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Partial	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Complex																	*	*	*	*
Consumers																				
Basic											*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Partial											*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Complex																				
No environmental references					*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

A: No conceptual differences over time.

B: Characteristics of conceptual differences that include partial productivity conceptions.

3.2.1 Change from basic to partial productivity conceptions

Three students shifted from a *basic* to *partial* conception of pricing concerning productivity. An example is provided below. At T1 Maria asserted that eco-burgers are more expensive than non-eco burgers because they are not produced with chemicals. She offers no rationale for this connection. At T2 she does offer a rationale in terms of the 'time needed' to produce eco-burgers. She makes no explicit reference to costs, so we have interpreted this as an idea which is not yet fully formed and

therefore categorised as 'partial'. She also refers in T2 to 'taking care of things' when producing eco-burgers implying, but not clearly stating, that eco production demands more resources like labour in order to conserve the natural environment.

Maria (T1)

Productivity (basic)

Maria: Well, one does not use chemicals (to produce eco-beef burgers) and a lot of stuff ...

Interviewer: And how is that influencing the price of the burger?

Maria: I think it perhaps gets more expensive.

Interviewer: Okay, why is it like that?

Maria: It is because one does not grow it in a regular way.

Maria (T2)

Productivity (partial)

Maria: Well ... more time is needed for the eco compared to the non-eco goods, so one does not think of ... chemicals ... and how one produces the goods... I think more time is needed for the eco burger ... one thinks more of the effects from the emissions, one takes care of lots of things and that influences the price.

3.2.2 Change of environmental references in relation to consumer preference

Students made fewer references to consumer preferences than to productivity. Five individuals referred to consumers in the first or second interview by stating that the price of eco beef-burgers is influenced; by consumers who prefer animal care, eco-labelled goods, or who believe they are doing climate-smart actions when paying higher prices. No student referred to consumer preferences in both interviews hence we found no changes across time in sophistication of conception of consumer preference.

3.2.3 Environmental references in relation to combining productivity and consumer preference

Four students referred to both productivity and consumer preference in their thinking about prices. For instance, Maria, one student (Mark) presented a *basic* theme for production reference and *partial* theme for consumers' preference in his first interview. Another student (Rolf) expressed a *complex* conception of productivity and a *basic* conception of consumer preference. Two other students combined two *basic* respectively two *partial* levels.

In summary, whilst we found one example where a student expressed a more *complex* conception in the second year, the overall picture suggested tentative and transitional change at most. The changes we observed were restricted to students' conceptions of the role of productivity and externalities. Some students only talked about price and the environment in one of the two interviews. Although all these students were following a course in business and economics in their final two years of schooling, there was no evidence of consistent change in conceptions of price and environmental effect.

3.3 Conceptions of what prices *should* be - prior to and after receiving information about biodiversity loss and climate change

When presenting the results concerning the second research question we focus on student views on how prices *should* be determined. We also examine differences in expressed views before and after receiving written information about environmental impacts of production and distribution (Appendix 1). Nine students made environmental connections before and after given information in the first and the second interview, and these students are included in the analysis. In this section we concentrate on the thinking of these students.

Table 5: Themes and levels for how prices *should* be determined.

	Theme of qualitative level	Productivity	Consumer preference
<i>Basic</i>	Compensation	Non-eco goods (eco-unfriendly beef-burgers) <i>should</i> be more expensive because they generate negative environmental impact.	People should value eco friendliness and they should pay a higher price. (or) People prefer to buy less expensive goods therefore eco should be cheaper.
<i>Partial</i>	Externalities	Emissions and other environment harming actions create a cost, which <i>should</i> be included in the price (to reflect the total value of resources used). (<i>Externalities</i>)	People should value eco friendliness when they get information of the negative impact and price will be reduced since high demand reduces the price (no reference to changes in supply).
<i>Complex</i>	Price should reflect externalities and effects on resources	Non-eco production, which damages resources, creates costs that would not be included in the price unless there is, for example, a carbon tax. (<i>Combines productivity and externality arguments.</i>)	

We found three different views of how prices *should* be: eco *should* be more expensive, non-eco *should* be more expensive, and the two types of beef-burgers *should* have the same price. The arguments for these are analysed in terms of *basic* and *partial* and presented in

the following text exemplified by students' quotations. These conceptions follow the study's earlier analysis that described how prices *are* formed within the two main-themes; 1) by productivity references and 2) by consumer preferences.

3.3.1 Differences between 'pre-information' and 'post-information' conceptions

We identified two differences (a and b) between views expressed before and after the information was presented. We label these in terms of 'pre-information' and 'post-information'.

a) From consumer preference to productivity references

Manfred, pre-information, T1

Basic level of consumer preference: eco should be cheaper because that is what people purchase.

Interviewer: If you could decide, what should the prices be for the Eco and non-Eco beef-burgers?

Manfred: Well, if it were possible it should have been (be) like a reversed situation and the eco should be cheaper and ... people would start to buy more of the eco-goods and become aware of this (that non-eco have an impact to the nature).

...

Manfred: Yes, it is not doable to change the price right away ... it has to happen gradually and ... But in the long run I think that it should be cheaper than conventional meat.

Interviewer: Why is that the case?

Manfred: Yes... first, people buy what is cheapest, and then it is good for the environment also.

Manfred, post-information, T1

Partial level of productivity: non-eco should be more expensive because of the future risks they generate.

After that information was given and the follow up question posted 'Do you thinking this is something that *should* be included in the price?' Manfred responded 'Yes, of course' and the interview continued to elaborate on the opinion.

Interviewer: If I understand you correctly, you think this negative environmental impact should be... part of the price of the burger?

Manfred: Yes if one could decide... one has to have a long-term view also. In the short turn it is cheaper to buy the ordinary burger, but in the long run...

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Manfred: Yes, the environment as such. The greenhouse gas effect and all that and we hear about... global warming, will lead to negative consequences.

Interviewer: Do you have any particular consequences in mind?

Manfred: Yes, the temperature is increasing and that leads to, well we have seen what it is like in the Sahara desert... for sure that has taken some more time, but if you think for a few hundred years ahead, maybe there will be tropical climate here by then. Then growing crops will not be as easy and so on.

b) From productivity to combining productivity and consumer preference

We use extracts from interviews with Felix to exemplify this change.

Pre-information, T1

Before reading the information, Felix expressed a *basic* conception of productivity, referring only to environmental damage from non-eco production.

Interviewer: What should the prices be for the both types of beef-burgers if you could decide?

Felix: Well, I think they should only produce the eco, or, well, what can I say, because otherwise we destroy the environment... so you have to reduce the price for the eco-burger to get better.

After reading the information (T1) Felix refers again to environmental damage but also comments on consumer preferences. He still does not refer to the cost to the supplier of the non-eco production and does not relate consumer preferences to the price they are willing to pay, so the conception expressed here is still classified as *basic*.

Interviewer: Is this something that you think should influence the price?

Felix: When they use chemical pesticides... that could harm the environment and so on. Nowadays people do not care about the environment, except in Europe, but the people selling goods here (in Sweden) import from other countries where they use chemicals, and for instance clothes, from other countries' manufacturing, however it is still this planet we live on.

Interviewer: So you think the eco-burger should be cheaper compared to the conventional?

Felix: Yes!

However, these differences before and after the provision of information do not mean that the information simply forces students to adopt a particular change of focus. If information forced a particular change we would expect each student to change their thinking (from before to after the information) in the same way in Year 2 as in Year 1. In fact, two students changed their thinking in the same way in both years (following a) and only one did not change their thinking at all in either year (in response to the information). To illustrate this comparison of changes between Years 1 and 2 we focus on Maria's descriptions.

Before the information, Maria focused on consumer preferences, although her thinking fell into our *basic* level. She also answers the question in terms of 'what would make people buy more eco-burgers' rather than directly framing her answer in terms of 'what *should* happen?'

Maria, pre-information, T1

I: What should the prices be for the beef-burgers?

M: I think eco should be expensive or (rather) if people shall buy it, it should probably be cheaper, - so people buy them, well I don't think they (the buyers), that so many think of eco (but) if it is cheap they will buy it.

After reading the information she expressed concern about the long-run production implications of non-eco-friendly farming (asserting 'species could die out' and that this could lead to the price of meat getting higher in Sweden). The interviewer then asked her about whether her concerns for the future *should* have any impact on current prices.

Maria, post-information, T1

I: So when you think of this negative impact, it is something that should be included in the pricing of beef-burgers? And it should be ...

M: More expensive!

I: And who do you think should pay this extra cost to take care of the environment?

M: It is probably we.

I: What do mean by this?

M: Well, all of us that buy the beef-burgers from the shops you know.

As in Time 1, before reading the information, Maria shifts between answering the question in terms of 'what is the case' and 'what *should* be the case'. She also focused on productivity rather than consumer preferences, though her thinking was still at a *basic* level.

Maria, pre-information, T2

Interviewer: How do you think prices should be determined?

Maria: Regular (non-eco) burgers are cheaper because one does not put that much time to (produce) it and that should people get to know before they buy the regular burger.

Interviewer: What do you mean by this?

Maria: Well I do not know how the process ... I think some give more time to the eco burger, like if one thinks more of the effects from the emissions, one takes care of lots of things and that influences the price.

After reading the information she repeated the concern she had expressed, post-information, in Year 1, that non-eco friendly production would reduce bio-diversity. However, this time she argues that consumers *should* respond to the risk of species reduction by buying more eco-friendly burgers. However, she believed that this would *reduce* the price of eco-friendly burgers. She does not articulate the consumer preference argument in which consumers internalise negative externalities by being willing to pay more.

Maria, post-information, T2

Maria: If more people (should) buy the eco beef-burger they help to reduce the negative impact and there will not be that much reduced biodiversity. Interviewer: So if more people buy the eco beef-burger the emissions will be

reduced ... and how is that influencing the price – that more people buy eco?

Maria: The price will be reduced since high demand reduces the price... if they get more information about how the nature is influenced.

In summary, we find that the additional information was associated with a rich variation in individuals' changes between conceptions from T1 to T2 and also during the interviews. This can suggest that information about environmental impacts prompts different aspects of individuals' conceptions of links between pricing and the environment. Between T1 and T2, all students, except three, offer different views of how prices *should* be determined. Students express arguments for a higher price in relation to different levels of productivity only, or consumer preferences only, or in combination, and, after information of environmental impacts present new arguments; shifting focus to new levels of productivity/consumers, or a combination.

3.4 Changes in conceptions of how prices *are* determined and *should be* determined

This section examines differences between conceptions of how environmental issues *are* reflected in prices and judgments about how environmental factors *should* be reflected in prices.

We begin by comparing the categories of conceptions that we observe amongst this group of students. One similarity between students' utterances about how prices are determined and how prices should be determined was that they referred to productivity more than consumer preference. This similarity was present before and after the presentation of additional information. In addition, we observed no examples of complex conceptions of consumer preference either when students were thinking about the causation of price or what price should be.

However, when examined the utterances of individual students there seems to be little consistency. For example, Manfred made no reference to consumer preference either in T1 or T2 in his responses about how prices were determined. However, he referred to consumer preference when explaining how he believed price should be determined in T1 before and after receiving additional information. Before seeing the information he argued simply that consumers will buy whatever cheapest and therefore that eco-burgers should be cheaper. After seeing the information he articulated a logic for this position on the basis of externalities, although he did not express an idea of consumers internalising externalities. The significance of the relationship between beliefs about how prices are determined and how prices should be determined is illustrated by the interview extracts from Maria. Her conception of the role of productivity in determining price developed from basic to partial between T1 and T2. But she made no reference to consumer preference when asked to explain how prices were determined. However, she refers to consumer preference in each of her utterances about

how prices should be determined. By T2, before seeing the information, she expresses a conception of consumers internalising externalities ('if one thinks more of the effects from the emissions, one takes care of lots of things and that influences the price'). However, her utterance after seeing this formation in T2 indicates that her thinking about how demand affects price is problematic. She claimed that 'high demand reduces price'. She does not appear to have developed any clear view about how consumer preference switching between two products will affect their prices. These extracts, in the context of the whole set of responses suggest that everyday thinking about how prices are determined and how they should be determined develops along separate pathways and there is no automatic spill-over from development in one pathway on to development of the other. One implication is that teaching should explicitly help students to develop a coherent way of thinking about both questions. Economic analysis of policy responses to environmental problems emphasise the importance of market incentives (and the implications of their absence), so the development of students' grasp of the relationships between consumer preference and environmental problems is important for citizenship.

4. Summary of results

We have explored changes in upper secondary pupils' explanations of price in relation to the environment and found that almost all students (thirteen of fifteen) made connections once or repeatedly through time when thinking about how prices *are* and *should* be determined for eco- and regular beef-burgers. Students' different conceptual changes through the final years in school are summarized in the following.

What differences are there between students' conceptions of environmental issues in pricing after one further year of business and economic education in upper secondary school?

Economic and business studies aim to improve students' understanding of price by developing integrated thinking about supply and demand. We found only limited evidence of success in this objective in students' thinking about price in the context of environmental effects. We did find some indications of development in students' thinking about the impact of productivity on price. However, even those changes, which we did find, appeared to be still at an uncertain stage of transition from a more simple to a more *complex* way of thinking about price. The students in our sample were still struggling to integrate their thinking about productivity and their thinking about consumer preferences and we did not detect any firm steps being made towards stronger integration. Nonetheless, we believe our analysis has helped to clarify not only the different levels of understanding which students may display but also likely trajectories between these levels and the uncertainty attached to students' progress. We believe this evidence could help teachers to improve the effectiveness of their teaching and, thereby, the role of schooling in developing



an economically informed electorate (Davies, 2006; Davies, 2015). Findings, across a years' time, for how prices *are* determined show changes between levels of productivity where the characteristics of *partial* conception are essential for almost all students. Changes are from *basic* to *partial* and from *partial* to *basic* conceptions of productivity. Furthermore we found that five students once highlighted the levels of consumer preference as *basic* or *partial* conceptions however we did not find any changes between these levels over time.

What differences - before and after given information regarding environmental issues and after one further year of schooling - are there between students' explanations of how prices should be determined?

Besides exploring differences between conceptions of how prices *are* determined this study also explores differences between students' explanations of how prices *should* be determined. This interest concerns students' conceptual differences before and after they are given information, as well as changes regarding these explanations after one further year in the business and economic program. In the first year, two different views were revealed 'pre- and post-information'. The first illustrates how students before information associated (a) *consumer preference to influence pricing* and after information *highlighted productivity references* when asked how prices *should* be determined. The second change shows a shift from (b) *productivity as an argument before information, and after information, arguing for a price in relation to both productivity and consumer preference*. These various differences are represented by almost half of the students. The other students referred to the same price influencing mechanism before and after information, for instance to consumer preference for eco goods both before and after received information. Changes through one year show that (a) is consistent at group level however not fully at individual level and (b) is of a sporadic matter. This exemplifies that the provision of production-based information does not simply forces students to adopt a particular change of focus towards production. An important notion is that all students, except three, present various shifts in views of consumer preference and productivity, 'pre- and post-information', over time.

What differences are there between conceptions that are evident in student explanations of how environmental issues are reflected in prices and judgments about how environmental issues should be reflected in prices?

Results on students' conceptions of how prices are determined and preferences for how prices *should* be determined show that students show several different changes between the themes over time. It is important to underline that most students referred to productivity as a factor that has impact and *should* have an impact on the price (after given information about particular negative production impact) while consumers were connected to more frequently for how prices *should* be, before the information was given. However three

individuals did not follow this line of thinking over time. They once specified, after productivity information, a connection to consumer preference that *should* influence prices.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study is conducted within the theoretical framework of conceptual change where the individuals' learning process is traditionally seen as changing from an initial understanding to a more scientific understanding of a phenomenon. In the light of this, questions have been raised about the coherence and stability of individuals' conceptions and the classic *replacement model* that imply that conceptual change is a liner-replacement-movement, from understanding A to understanding B, has been suggested to be incorrect. Research into science conceptual understanding has shown that parallel conceptions can co-exist and even contradict (Larsson & Halldén, 2010; Halldén et al., 2013; Shtulman & Valcarcel, 2012; Shtulman & Harrington, 2016).

This study aimed to describe how business and economic school students' conceptions of pricing in relation to negative environmental impact develop. We conclude on a rich conceptual variation of differences and changes over time and, as a consequence, this great variability is difficult to describe as "group" findings (Saldaña, 2003). However, we found that connections between environmental impact and price are commonly expressed with references to production costs and production externalities, as *partial* conceptions. We believe this illustrates students' conceptions in a process of change towards a more scientific conception of relationships between price and various environmental impacts. These conceptions appear to be the students' explorations of various circumstances - an elaborating approach - and they seem to be rational explanations (to students) of pricing for the moment. We believe that students expressing a *partial* conception explained important views of how environmental impact from production influences the prices, since the students highlighted productivity and also, in a tentative way approached externalities, by pointing to environmental costs, which is partly or not included in the price.

The conceptual changes concerning negative impact in relation to consumers show that more than half of the students (8 of 13) did not at any time make references to consumers' demand thinking. This may stem from an everyday conception which treats negative production externalities as entirely the responsibility of producers. Students' experience as consumers does not draw them into a sense of personal responsibility for production externalities which are prompted by market rather than individual demand. As noted by Lundholm & Davies 2013, "*Personal experience offers access to a very limited external context. A student's experience of the price of a drink they buy is restricted to their observation of selling. They do not have observational access to relationships between the seller and the market in which that seller operates. Neither do they have access to relationships between that market and other markets.*" (p. 300). This

points to a learning issue in that scientific conceptions sometimes only seem to be corresponding partly, or, they may even be perceived as contrary to one's everyday-understanding.

As mentioned, the link between environmental impact and consumer preference (by means of demand) is not frequently referred to or elaborated on (even if the interviewer repeatedly asked for additional descriptions of factors that are influencing price). We have not found a change across time that included this particular reference for how prices are determined. This makes us suggest that, in this study, the individuals' experiences of buying does not seem to be linked to buying eco-goods, even if almost all students said that they sometimes buy beef-burgers and when the interviewer added information about eco-version being more expensive the students were not surprised. Thus, in relation to the quote above, the students' experiences of purchasing a hamburger, eco or non-eco, do not provide them with information about the impact of demand on price. Here, it is worth noticing that negative environmental impact, is through time, associated with production processes and environmental costs caused by these. We see these results in the light of a mix of experiences and this suggests that environmental impacts is in a Swedish societal context mostly related to production methods i.e. the supply side of the market. Much attention is given to farming procedures, eco labelled goods and the offers from shops and supermarkets, compared to attention to consumer preference influencing prices. Further, media interest of the program of meat free school lunches, or specific instructions in school subjects, could direct students to a production-focus rather than consumer-focus. Some students in our study described for instance instructional sequences showing how international clothes manufacturing, by growing cotton with lots of pesticides, generate environmental negative impact.

Davies & Lundholm (2012) found examples of students' thinking about over-consumption which suggested that if prices are too low (for example for beef-burgers) more people would buy them causing negative externalities to the individuals in terms of health. Our results show that some students state that eco beef burgers *should* be cheaper so that more people will buy them. However, this is not the current situation. The normalizing effect, in relation to students' preferences for how prices *should* be, could suggest that there would be strong preferences for prices to remain as they always have been (i.e. eco *should* be more expensive) and one/two students suggested this. But, opposite to the current situation, most students preferred eco to be less expensive with arguments to get people to buy them, and post-information with arguments that less negative impact is generated from eco-goods. This can be influenced by education, suggesting how to influence people's choices by pricing. Perhaps is there in Sweden also a norm that is contrary to the English stating that 'eco goods are (too) expensive, and that is wrong'. That could then possibly

explain the results we have, in terms of normalizing effects.

The results of this study show that changes of conceptions and the learning process is not as straightforward as in moving from one aspect of production (supply), to understanding supply and demand in interaction. The results can therefore be discussed in terms of stability; why do students mention the environment in one interview, and not the other? Why is production and not demand talked of at one point and not another? This can be caused by the social or societal setting at large or by a previous educational experience. Briefly, contextual conditions are potential locations of participant change (Saldaña, 2003). However, changes of students' conceptual content is this study's main interest, rather than causes to individuals conceptual understanding, and the findings can also be seen as a result in itself; it is the fragmented and 'floating' pieces of information that students have gained and which they are exploring and 'trying out' in the interview situation. *"Conceptual change seems to be a process of tentative reorganization within different conceptual structures and with different explanatory contexts, and when these tentative reorganizations within different contexts take the form of a new gestalt, a conceptual change is in the process of occurring"* (Larsson & Halldén, 2010, p. 662). Our study has observed that students seem to embrace and elaborate a rich variation over time of how pricing and negative environmental impacts are linked. It also observed a variation expressed in terms of *basic*, *partial* and *complex* understandings of the links. An important result is that more than one aspect of conceptions, of environmental impact and pricing, at one particular time seem to be actualized to the individual.

The vast majority of studies within the research field of conceptual change focuses on students in science education and fewer have focused on students within the social sciences. In addition to assessing a less frequently investigated group of respondents, the study also takes into account two combined, and at the same time interdependent dimensions, namely topics and concepts in social sciences and environmental impact – the former expressed via the price conception and the latter represented by assumed negative consequences from production and consumption, for the environment, externalities. Furthermore, the study serves in addition to this field of research, basing its method on repeated interviews. Hence it addresses the formation of conceptions, presenting views during more than one occasion and with a timespan between them that allows for the respondent to develop along the educational program. The study is thus relevant for teaching and learning in both economic and environmental fields of education and its results highlight the importance of emphasizing the price concept for the understanding of the supply and demand terms of the market and the interaction of them. From the perspective of economic education the study shows that costs for environmental depletion and its relation to the market needs to be exemplified and described in closer detail. The results



also highlight the importance of underlining an economic context for thinking - where experiences might be insufficient or might lead the student in a wrong or false direction. Furthermore, we believe that environmental problems are important challenges for economic understanding, as it is obtained in schools, because it needs to clarify the nature of the interaction between the environment and the economic system. To make students aware of their initial conceptions of this connection is one way of doing this.

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Appendix

Climate change aspects of meat production

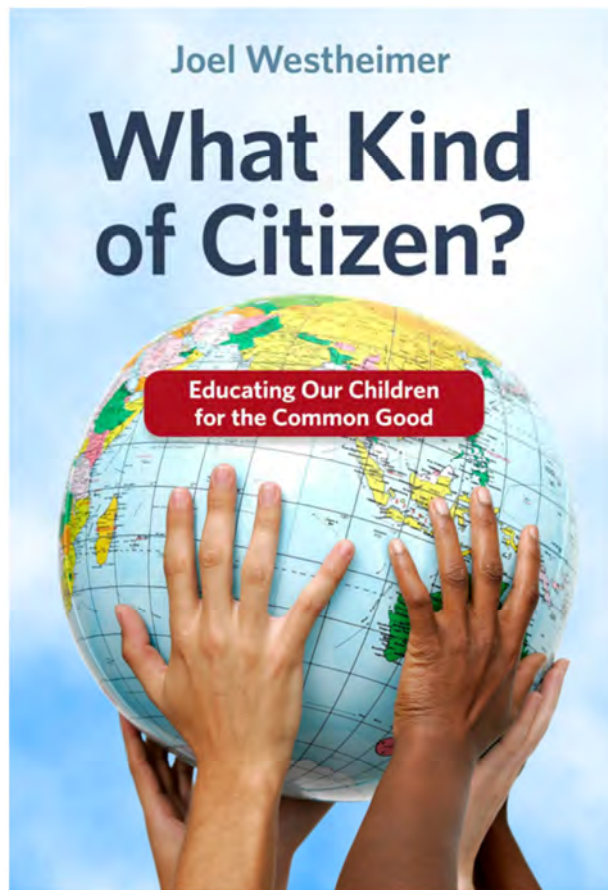
Climate aspects of meat production and consumption do not solely concern the emissions of greenhouse gases. Animal farming requires more energy than crop farming. It is, however, not animals that are the main problem. Rather it is a matter of the forms and location of the production of beef cattle that lead to environmental impact. Instead of a pasture based production, or similar, about 50 % of the crops grown in Sweden is used for dry fodder in animal production. When cultivating the crops, chemical pesticides and fertilizers are used on an almost regular basis and these impacts negatively on the conditions for wild animals and plants. This, in turn, means a reduction of biodiversity, as well as an increase of nature's vulnerability.

Sonesson, U., & Wallman, M. (2009). *Kött är mer än klimat - köttproduktionens miljöpåverkan i ett helhetsperspektiv*. Naturskyddsföreningen. Retrieved from www.naturskyddsforeningen.se/sites/default/files/dokument-media/2009_jordbruk_mat_kott_mer_an_klimat.pdf

Harmed environment from increased meat eating

According to a Swedish study, emissions are reduced when people eat eco-produced meat, from farming based on pasture and/or similar, rather than fodder crops that are cultivated primarily for animal feeding. Production of eco-friendly meat means 40% less emissions of climate impacting gasses and emits 85 % less energy, compared to production that is based on conventional farming.

Pelling, J. (2007, 26 July). Ökat köttätande skadar miljön. Svenska Dagbladet. Retrieved from www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/okat-kottatande-skadar-miljon_248685.svd



Review of the Book:

Westheimer, Joel, 2015. What kind of citizen? Educating our children for the common good, New York and London, Teachers College Press ISBN 978-0-8077-5635-5, 122pp., £25.95.

of citizens: personally responsible, participatory; and social justice-oriented. There is a very clear outline of these 3 types with descriptions, sample actions and core assumptions. Essentially, the personally responsible model links closely with character education of honest and law abiding members of the community; the participatory connects (to use my own short hand interpretation) with community and service learning; and the social justice-oriented with certain types of citizenship education in which there is criticality about systems and structures and connections with forms of activism. Westheimer offers a good discussion about these different approaches and in a reasoned and reasonable way tends to display support for the social justice approach.

The book is very well presented. It is a very useful summary of contexts, key ideas, issues and research findings. I did not always enjoy what I see as a rather folksy discourse but it is very engagingly written. There are good illustrations from mainly (but not exclusively) north America. He makes good use of his own teaching experience (in a range of contexts). I am not surprised that he has a role as an education columnist for CBC Radio as he is clearly able to communicate very effectively with large audiences.

Of course, in such a short book everything is not covered and there is a need for more depth (for example, about the appropriateness of particular teaching approaches across cultural contexts) in what is a complex field. At times labels are used in a broad brush manner. There are difficult philosophical challenges about the nature of the citizen models he offers. There are many other ways of thinking about things in general and within each strand of citizenship there are complex debates that are not really pursued here in any depth. And the key part of this book is connected to something that was published in an academic journal more than 10 years ago (see *American Educational Research Journal* 41(2), 237-269). But this book is just what is needed – it is engagingly written in ways that are appropriate to help clarify important ideas and issues. It is research-based, policy-related and professionally useful. It is essential reading.

*Ian Davies,
University of York*

This is an excellent book which goes to the heart of debates about character (“the personally responsible citizen”, p.45) and community (“the participatory citizen”, p.40) and activism (“the social justice oriented citizen”, p.40). In just over 100 pages Joel Westheimer (professor and university research chair in democracy and education at the University of Ottawa, Canada) raises key issues and provides ways of thinking clearly about them in a well written, engaging style. He declares that “This book asks you to imagine the kind of society you would like to live in and shows how schools might best be used to make that vision a reality” (p. 2). This is complex and controversial but (as indicated by very many very positive statements published on the back cover from highly respected academics and others from around the world) Westheimer has brilliantly achieved his goal.

There are 10 chapters: changing the narrative of the school; no child left thinking; no teacher left teaching; how did this happen; what kind of citizen?; personally responsible citizens; participatory and social justice oriented citizens; thinking engaged citizens; seven myths about education; what kind of school. The early chapters are essentially a critique of the single narrative approach to education in which there is too much standardization, performativity, illustrated, for example, by excessive testing, and meaning that we are missing the flexible, dynamic professionalism that Westheimer sees as essential for education for critical thinking that is allied with promoting the common good.

As indicated above, a big part of this short book focuses on the framework (developed with Joe Kahne) of 3 kinds