

To Make Schools Democratic – a long term commitment

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In many societies schools have been used for a long time to prepare new members of the society to participate in democratic life. Inside the schools students have learnt about the construction of different societal institutions that are created to protect and serve the democratic life. Often the learning have taken place by reading about what is going on in the society and by listening to teachers, that talk about life in society. At the same time life in the school may run following rather undemocratic traditions, where equality is non-existent and influence is uneven distributed.

To stimulate students to function in future democracy, they gain from getting used to participate in contemporary democratic life in their own school. To develop schools so that they really work as democratic organisations, where students both participate in the inner democracy and learn from it, you need to go for long term solutions. In these you need to challenge and re-challenge teachers and school leaders so that they really respect the students as partners in the inner democracy. Some observations of the long term actions that have been undertaken in Sweden to stimulate students to participate in the democratic society is presented below.

Democratic learning – seldom measured

There are several ways to interpret democratic learning. One way is to see the learning that happens in schools as a preparation for life in future situations within a democratic society, that demands the kind of knowledge that is built up at school. Another way is to see the distribution of what is learnt between different groups as essential. To be democratic, the learning needs to have an equal distribution between important groups like the two genders, different ethnic groups or socio-economic groups. A third way to interpret the main theme is to look at the rights of the students and find out how these are treated by teachers and school principals. To be democratic, the learning that takes place at school needs to be based on real power sharing between the learner and the teacher. The views that the young ones hold, need to be respected by the staff. Learning is something that the students own and something that they have essential influence over.

The first viewpoint can be asserted in a more limited way and a more elaborated one. The more limited view finds it to be enough when the students learn the content of the curriculum. If students are well educated in different subjects that are chosen by decision makers for the schools, it is assumed that they will be well equipped for the participation in the future democracy. There are many examples of studies made of school effectiveness, which are restricted to this condition. The measurement of the outcome of the school is limited to results on knowledge tests of traditional school subjects. Of course this way of estimating the outcome of schools is too limited. There is a need for

the use of direct measurements of the readiness of the students to participate in democratic procedures as well as there is a need for estimations of how well they might solve problems of a mathematical kind or how well they might use written language. Recent development within the field of school evaluation and educational research gives some hope. The Civic study made by the IEA is for instance made in such a way that it helps different states to compare how well the students have succeeded to pick up what they might use in democratic processes.

When you look back it is interesting to see how small efforts there have been spent on the measurement of these outcomes of schools. As the idea to use schools as a place to train young people to become members of a democratic society goes back in time more than one hundred years ago in some Western states, you could expect a good deal of studies on how the democratic mind is influenced by schooling. But you do not find a rich literature on how schools have reached democratic aims.

Early efforts to stimulate democratic learning

However, there are books written about democratic learning. Some of them have its origin in the discussions held a century ago based on some interesting experiments that were going on in the fairly new democracies that existed at that time. Practical experiments were made to use schools as places for model learning. Almost everything inside these schools were designed to serve the purpose of simulating democracy to help the young ones to learn from their actual experience. Some of these early experimental schools were found in the United States. The most well known school in this country might have been the George Junior Republic School in Freeville N.Y. Its programme became well disseminated over the United States in the beginning of the twentieth century. In this school students elected their own president, who actually shared some of the power of the government of the school with the principal. The whole environment of that school was a kind of simulation of the real democracy of the US at that time and the students were not only participating in decision making, but also held different responsibility posts at the school.

A little later in time, during the twenties, there were schools in the early Soviet Union that used the same dynamics to foster their students to participate in the young democracy that was believed to take over, after the old regime. In these schools, designed by A.S. Makarenko, young people that had suffered from the many years of war and the succeeding civil war, were rehabilitated into modern life. Makarenko used internal democracy among the students to get them to set norms that helped them to behave in more civilised ways. The schools had student councils and many of the students held responsibility posts at the schools that helped them to understand democracy by real experiences. The students in these schools did not only learn together, but they also had to earn their living by participating in the surrounding society, as the war economy left very little to the schools for the basic things like food and fire wood.

Perhaps the most interesting of the school experiments that occurred around the beginning of the twentieth century was the laboratory school that Dewey managed in Chicago. In this school the ideas of the French philosophers were practised for the first time in

full school scale. In this school the students learnt democracy by sharing the power over the decisions of what should be learnt and how the learning should be made.

There have been many followers to these early experimental schools in many countries. In Sweden we started to follow the ideas of Dewey from the twenties and onwards as a basic pedagogical idea that fits in well with other ideas about how students could be respected in schools. From the late forties, with the fresh memory of the evils of dictatorships in mind, Sweden chose to use its schools and the education given there, as a kind of vaccine against fascism. Since then we have built in several components in everyday school life to make students used to democracy by participating in it from early years. In Swedish schools, students and their teachers hold class councils, usually once a week. The students elect representatives to school councils, which discuss important matters in the school about once a month. The climate of the schools are such that students discuss with each other and with the teachers about their learning and other issues to such an extent that the answers of the students on international surveys on discipline, like the one that appeared in PISA, yield low rankings. Swedish schools share the lowest rankings with the schools in other North European countries, which have the same tolerance towards the say of young people in their schools. The students in schools in these countries report in the same time that they have good report with their teachers and feel free to express their views.

Longitudinal studies of internal democracy in schools

Although the strivings on system level in my country have been evident, to make schools become good places for learning knowledge and skills that you will find useful in future democracy demanding situations, the competition between these skills and academic achievement skills is strong. Usually the training of the democratic skills is left aside in favour of academic achievement skills. Therefore the development tempo in the schools to improve the quality of the democratic learning is not very high. Some insights into nine Swedish schools that I have studied over twenty-five years (Ekholm and Kull, 1996) can illustrate what I mean. I made a survey in 1969 among teachers and students of grade 8 in nine comprehensive schools, when the students were 15 years old. I asked the students about how often they participated in the decision making in eleven concrete issues. They were asked to estimate the frequency on a four grade scale, running from always via rather often and not very often to very seldom or never. I came back to the same nine schools in 1979 and also in 1994 and repeated the same questions to see what changes had appeared in the schools.

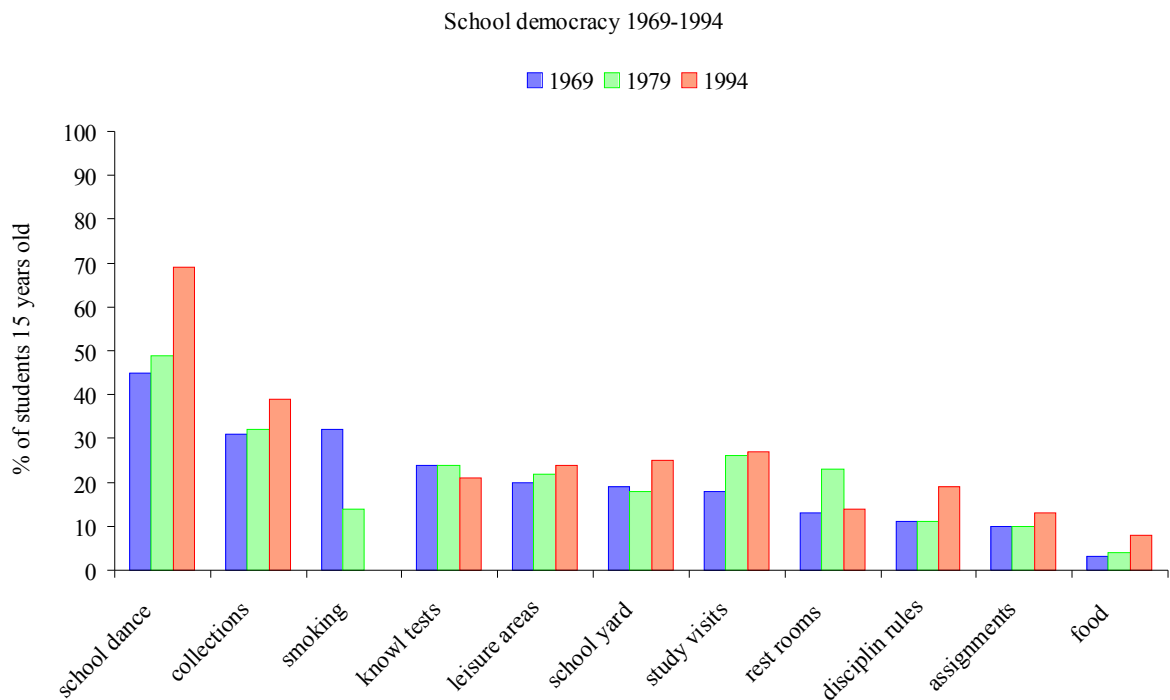


Diagram 1. Estimations made by students how often they have participated in decision making at school in eleven different issues. (% of students, N 1969 = 1 141, 1979 = 1 206, 1979 = 1 036)

The items covered such things as to take decisions about schools dances and where to go on study visits, decisions about the content of discipline rules in the school and at the school yard, decisions about how leisure time rooms should be furnished and the choice of content of home assignments and knowledge tests and decisions about collections and about the food in the school restaurant. There were also items about decisions taken about the order in the restrooms and the rules for smoking at school. The over all results on these eleven items, represented by the percentage of students that said that they had participated in decision making very often or rather often, are shown in diagram 1.

The efforts that the Swedish school system have put into practice, to create lively internal democracies in the schools which should stimulate the students to participate in their society, had not resulted in the wished outcome. The results that are reflected in the outcomes at the nine schools together, show that a larger part of the students estimate that they have a say in four of the eleven items. The two items that have the largest increase – school dances and collections – are two things that appear rather seldom in the school life. Other everyday phenomena, like the content of home assignments and knowledge tests do not face a similar increase. In one area the students have lost all power. That is to decide about rules on smoking at the school, where the government has forbidden all smoking in schools. One conclusion of this study is that you need to work with long perspectives in mind if you are going to improve the quality of a school.

The variations between the nine schools are small, as can be seen in diagram 2, where an index of student estimated school democracy is used. The index has a lowest value at 11 and a highest value at 44. There are only two schools that have improved their internal student democracy during the twenty-five year period, which is not too flattering for the schools or for the Swedish school system. To be able to improve this inner quality of a school there is good need for systematic work, where feed back of the outcomes also in the democratic skill sphere is needed and not only feed back of the outcomes in the academic fields. It is also obvious in this study that there is good need for the use of the knowledge about school improvement if the school will be able to reach the aims that the state has formulated for them.

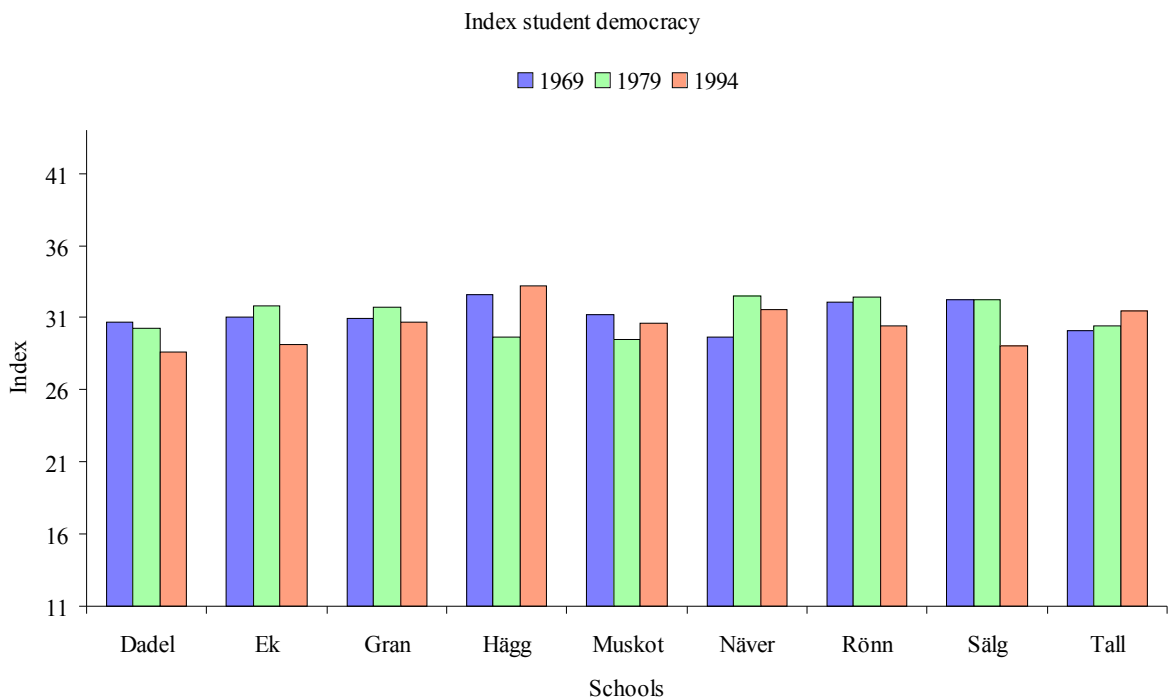


Diagram 2. Estimations made by students at three occasions (1969, 1979 and 1994) how often they have participated in decision making at school in eleven different issues. (% of students in nine different comprehensive schools in Sweden.)

The study of the nine schools over twenty-five years is the longest of the same schools that I know about. Within a year another Swedish longitudinal study will be finished where 35 schools will be followed up through interviews after twenty years from the start of the study. Blossing and Lindvall (2002) will report on that study this year and will then be able to show if there are more happy outcomes for the democratic training in Sweden. We are also preparing a follow-up study of a national evaluation in 2003 that originally was made in 1992, which will help us to get an eleven year longitudinal study of more than one hundred schools in Sweden that were the sample of that study.

Meanwhile we are able to reflect some of the tendencies of the recent development in this area by using data from a broader attitude survey that has been repeated 1994, 1997 and 2000. In this study we do not have access to data from the same schools, so we have to rely on three different random samples of Swedish students aged from 14 to 18 years. In this study the students were asked to judge to what degree that they felt that they had participated in decision making in seven areas of the school life. It was about what books that would be used, about the quality of the food, about the school rules, about home assignments, about changes in the closer school environment, about what to learn and also about how to learn at school. In diagram 3 the results of this study is presented.

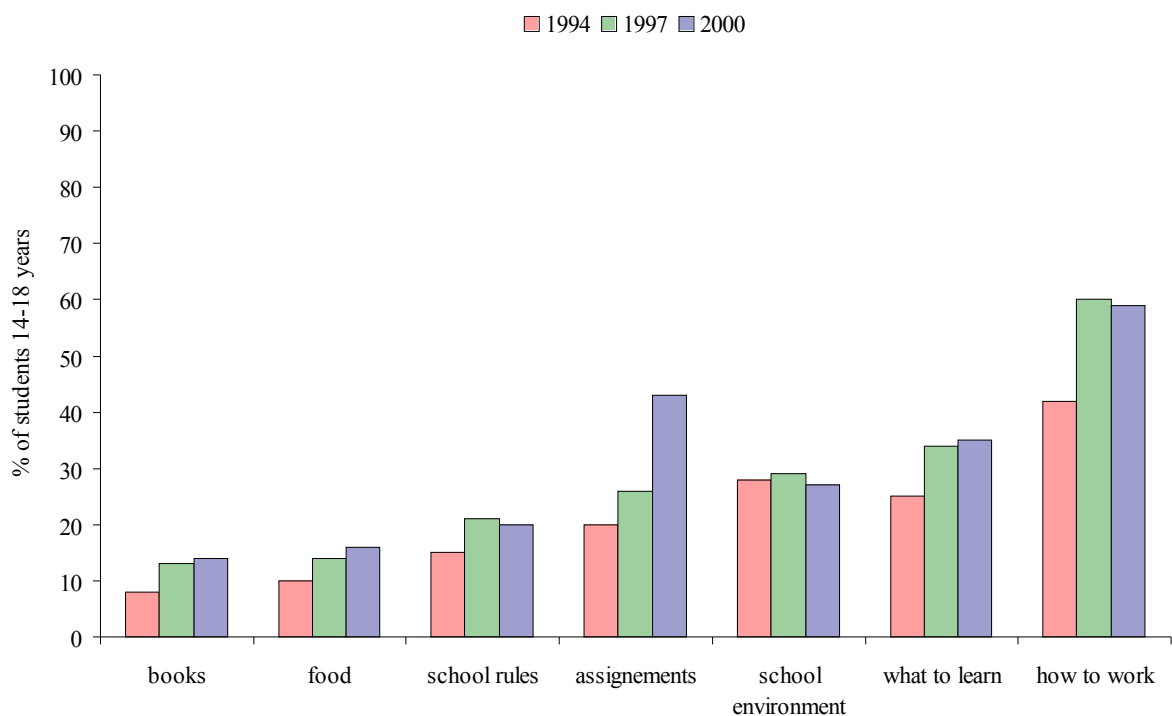


Diagram 3. 14-18 year old students judgement to what degree they have participated in decision-making in seven areas. % of students who say that they have participated to a large or rather large degree.

This study shows that there is a movement in schools during the last years, where more students have experiences that they have had influence over important issues like what they will learn and how they will learn as well as over home assignments. The reliability of the survey is high, so the long period of discussions within Swedish unions of teachers and between the *kommuns* that are the employers of the teachers in most cases, seem to have given fruit. The last part of the 1990's has implied a shift in the attitude of the teacher unions. Instead of being hesitant to changes of the work in schools the unions have declared that they are prepared to take a lead of the improvement work. Salary sys-

tems have been reconstructed, individual salaries are now a normality and in many schools teachers are paid more if they contribute to the improvement.

Better use of the knowledge on school effectiveness and school improvement

I think it is vital that schools everywhere start to use much more of the knowledge that exists about schools as places where young people can make important experiences that they can use further on in their democratic participation. To get schools to be effective in reaching democratic learning aims you therefore need to use the knowledge that has been created on school improvement. That kind of knowledge is now facing two large challenges. One is to reach the users, the other is to be used and when it will be used we really will know if all the statements about this knowledge really is valid and reliable.

Knowledge about school culture and the development of schools have steadily grown during the 20th century. Early works by Waller (1932) on the sociology as well as on the social psychology of teaching has been updated several times. Mort and Cornell (1941), who studied the tempo of American school reforms during the thirties, left important traces for others to follow. During the fifties Gordon (1956), as well as Coleman (1961), contributed with the understanding of the dynamics of the relations between students as an important explanation of school effectiveness. During the sixties Miles (1964) argued against Mort's and Cornell's view that innovations in schools are slow processes in his basic papers on innovation in education. He also put forward his ideas on the healthy organisation (Miles, 1965) and Sugerman (1969) presented thoughts about the school as a social system. Both these texts have stimulated later researchers in their understanding of the inner lives of schools. Boccock (1972) and Schlechty (1976) summarised sociological and social psychological research on schools during this period.

British empirical contributions to the understanding of schools and their transformations have grown from Hargreaves (1967, 1972) earlier works on the inner lives in schools to more recent work based on this theoretical fundament in combination with management of change theories (Hargreaves and Hopkins, 1991). Stenhouse (1977) pointed at the importance of the understanding of the school and its change from a teacher point of view. In Scandinavian countries Ekholm (1971) studied the inner lives of schools and contributed to the understanding of the social development of students (Ekholm, 1976).

During the eighties, co-operation between different approaches for school improvement were stimulated by the OECD. Based on Dutch initiatives, more than a dozen volumes of condensed knowledge on school improvement were produced. Several themes were covered, like the useful knowledge of school improvement (van Velzen et al, 1985), what is known on long term effects of school improvement efforts (Miles et al, 1987), dissemination of successful practices (van den Berg et al, 1989), the use of school based review as a tool for change (Bollen and Hopkins, 1987), how school improvement can be supported (Seashore-Louis and Loucks-Horsley, 1989) and the role of school leaders in school improvement (Gielen et al, 1987). This co-operation brought American and European researchers on school improvement together and an intense exchange of ideas took place.

During the early nineties new overviews of the knowledge on school improvement have been presented. Fullan (1991) assisted by Stiegelbauer, has a ripe volume on the new meaning of educational change, where he shows that a lot of the knowledge so far used, has failed to effect improvement in schools. This view has strong support in the longitudinal studies made during 1980 - 1985 of 35 schools (Ekholm, 1987) and during 1969 until 1994 (Ekholm and Kull, 1996) of 9 schools in Sweden that I mentioned earlier. In both these longitudinal studies schools have much stayed the same although they have met strong demands to improve their inner lives and also have received strong support to that.

Fullan (1991) is far from alone to present overviews of what we know about school improvement work by now. Murphy and Hallinger (1993), Guskey and Huberman (1995) and Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan and Hopkins (1998) are examples of other researchers that have edited rich contributions to the understanding of actual knowledge on school improvement. In his early nineties writing Fullan ends his overview of the knowledge field with some advice on how the rich knowledge on school improvement and transformation can be more used. He wants to replace an older, not well functioning paradigm of school improvement, with a new one that is based on six pillars.

He points at the necessity to change minds from negative to positive politics, which in Block's (1987) thinking means that each person that wants something good to happen, for instance in a school, has to work continually on shaping and pursuing what is valuable. Fullan proposes that people, who want good change to occur in schools, is helped by looking for alternative solutions instead of monolithic ones. He puts forwards the fact that more successful improving schools and school districts have moved into a better future together with some partner. He recommends schools to work in alliance with others and also to change the thinking from an "if only" to an "if I/we" perspective. By the latter Fullan refers to the power of keeping the perspective of what can be done and not looking for why things are difficult to do in a school that needs to develop. He recommends the improvers to accept the full richness of knowledge about the change process.

We know many things about that process and it is a complicated and rich field, where the improvement process does not gain from being simplified. Fullan especially draws the attention to the fact that improvement work needs long term conditions, several years, to become lasting. Finally Fullan concludes that it is important to shift from development in schools based on isolated innovations to a more broad institutional development. He identifies the problem of change and stability in schools to consist of making too many efforts to innovate than is possible to manage, which leads to many finished but not still alive innovative projects in many schools. The important perspective is to create an infrastructure for ongoing improvement in the school as an institution, not to implement more of isolated innovations.

These learnings are close to the perspectives that Murphy and Hallinger (1993) present in their close look on the research based on restructuring of schooling. They find it useful to make a backward mapping with the eyes of students on the change that needs to take place and to focus on the improvement process itself to be successful in the longer perspective. They also recommend systematically work, combined with school-specific approaches to the improvement. They remind the developer of the need for support

among schools to help them to create better solutions. Beside some structural developments in the lives of schools they also see cross-fertilisation between schools as an important component of the development process as well as professional development of teachers. Smylie (1995) elaborates how schools might be redesigned to facilitate learning among teachers. He points at such inbuilt qualities of schools as teacher collaboration, shared power and authority between teachers and authorities, that need to be mixed with egalitarianism among teachers as well as with variations, challenge, autonomy and choice in teachers' work. Smylie pays attention to the need for access for schools to multiple sources of information for learning and external referents to help the school to receive feedback on its strivings. He also pleads for schools to accept teacher's learning as a part of the definition of teacher work, so that the learning of teachers can be an integrated part of the daily working life in the school.

In some studies of schools that have developed practices that improved the qualities of the learning of the students, these pieces of the futuristic knowledge basis have been used. For instance Huberman and Miles (1984) presented in their close look upon innovation processes in twelve schools evidence for several of the six conclusions that Fullan has drawn from his rich literature overview. In two Scandinavian cross-national studies (Vasström, 1985 and Ekholm, 1986 and 1990), where fifteen improvement oriented schools were followed over five years in each study, several parts of the knowledge basis for lasting improvements were supported. For instance the importance of cross-fertilisation between schools, the acceptance of improvement processes as complicated ones, working on a broad front with the changes, to stimulate learning among teachers as a part of the daily work are some of the components that were supported. The same kind of support is given for the futuristic knowledge basis by two other cross-national studies (Dalin et al, 1994 and Hameyer et al, 1995). In the first of these studies, changes in 31 school sites in three developing countries were analysed and in the second study the history of fifteen schools in four industrialised countries, that had succeeded to institutionalise activity-based practices in their inner working lives, were analysed. Support is also given in a study conducted in rural Pakistan of 32 schools with different degree of success with their students (Farah et al, 1996), as well as the studies that have been made by Perera and Lieynenga (1995), Wijesundera (2000) and Perera (2000) of improvement in disadvantaged schools in Sri Lanka.

The knowledge that exists today on how school improvement can be carried out to be effective, seems to be rich and full of nuances. In some parts the territory of school improvement knowledge has had these qualities for a long time, although, as Fullan (1991) pointed out, the use of the knowledge basis does not seem to have worked well anyway. However this notion seems to be true also for other research based knowledge that could be used by school people. As Tydén et al (1995) points out, there are many signs that school people ignore knowledge that is produced by researchers. One reason seems to be that the researchers create their knowledge from another angle than the school people use. Another reason seems to be that there are difficulties to get school people to critically assess, re-examine and adapt the knowledge to their own reality.

During the nineties researchers try to formulate further knowledge thesis to prevent a repetition of earlier lacking. It is important that these thesis are put forward. It will help the collective process of creating more stable and reliable knowledge about school improvement, but I doubt that the formulation of the thesis will help the people that try to

improve schools to reach better results. I believe so because during the latest decades the utilisation of what is known about the inner lives of schools, about the factors that create effective schools, about the mechanisms behind successful innovative work in schools and about the institutionalisation processes in schools, has been discreet. Or it might be better to describe the utilisation of this widening knowledge basis about school improvements as very restricted. Some few people widely scattered around the world have grasped and used the knowledge about school improvement and about how you might be able to get better results out of your school. This kind of knowledge has not grown into the common owned and used knowledge that appears as something self-evident in learning materials, as modules in pre-service training programmes for teachers or as parts of the knowledge structure of professionals.

During the last decades, research that has grown on school improvement has shifted name. During the late seventies the focus was on teachers and their learning. In-service training of teachers was combined with an interest in the development of schools. In the early seventies the term in use was school development. For instance Dalin (1973) presented a series of books on this topic. In many ways the focus of interest in the knowledge territory of school improvement at this time was directed by views of a deficit paradigm (Huberman and Guskey, 1995). Administrators, politicians, evaluators and researchers determined the deficits and to some extent some of these actors held the idea that something was lacking and needed to be corrected. Teachers were more seen as change objects, than subjects of their own growth and holders of the school improvement process. In one way you could say that teachers, as a large collective, shared the responsibility for these attitudes, together with the others actors. The teachers were not interested to include a common shared responsibility for the school as a working organisation into their professional responsibilities. It seemed to have been enough to care for the students and for the teaching. Therefore there has rarely been any request for school improvement knowledge among the broad layers of teachers. Still that kind of knowledge has no place in the curriculum of the pre-service training of teachers.

In the late seventies the focus was turning and school effectiveness and school improvement were used as two different areas covering close parts of the actual knowledge territory. School effectiveness had an immediate appeal on the conservative politicians that were dominant in the US and in England. The leading political people in these two countries changed the rules of the game for the researchers. It became difficult to get state funding for studies of the egalitarian and grass-root democratic strategies of school change that had developed through the sixties and the seventies (i.e. Schmuck et al., 1975). The rational restructuring of schools was more attractive, with a hope of quick results in slow working social organisations. The term to describe the knowledge field in the US turned over to restructuring, but in Europe the other denominations of the territory have been kept. As Creemers and Reezigt (1997) show there are however several tendencies to link school effectiveness thinking together with school improvement from the middle of the eighties and onwards.

Practical use of school effectiveness and school improvement knowledge in Sweden

To be able to understand what parts of the large bulk of knowledge that have been produced on school effectiveness and school improvement, I think it is important that the knowledge comes into more regular use. What we have seen so far, is to a large extent an utilisation of the knowledge by fascinated users. The real test of the quality of the knowledge within the field of school improvement may come when the less interested and less enthusiastic user acts with it. But before we reach such a state where a broader use of the school improvement knowledge is apparent we need to face the problem to get the knowledge disseminated and accepted as important. The school improvement knowledge seems to be most easily adopted by people that already have the same perspective on schools as the knowledge producers have. One such group is school leaders, which share the view of schools as local organisations that most researchers in the field hold. In my country, Sweden, we have since the middle of 1970 trained new school leaders in a national education programme. In this programme literature, thoughts and actions based on the school improvement knowledge have been frequently (Ekholm, 1992) used. The participants have started to use the ideas, but one important lesson from this long-lasting and ongoing field experiment in knowledge dissemination, is that the knowledge still is difficult to use in the normal school setting. The school leaders try to use it, but also give frequent testimonies about the difficulties to get teachers to adopt the knowledge. They do not seem to share the perspective of the school as a local organisation, which the school leaders keep in their minds. They have a stronger concentration on the classroom level and do not share the interest of the school leaders for creating new infrastructures of the school to make improvements more possible.

In Sweden we also combine the knowledge that has been utilised within the school effectiveness field as well as the school improvement field in a nation wide operation. This broadened use of this knowledge is led by the organisation that I am the head of in Sweden, Skolverket or as we translate it into English - The National Agency for Education. This agency has three main tasks. One is to legally control what is happening in pre-school, comprehensive school, secondary school and in adult education in the country. Another task is to make evaluations in the educational system and a third task is to stimulate improvement work in the different parts of that system. All these tasks are expected to be fulfilled in such ways that democratic processes are facilitated and to be effective things have to happen on the level of the local organisation – directly in the schools. To make the achievement of the schools in Sweden visible an internet based information system called SIRIS has been built up. Information about the 5 100 comprehensive schools and the 650 secondary schools that exist in the country can be found here. On one of the sub web pages of skolverket.se it is possible for everyone to look into the SIRIS system. Inside the web site of SIRIS, you meet presentations of results from national knowledge tests, summations of markings of the students, the annual quality report that schools are requested to deliver, national quality reviews and some basic information about the specific school like size, costs, composition of students by sex, foreign background and educational level of the parents. The information is aggregated and presented at school level. For each school it is possible for the user of the system to find the above mentioned information and it is also possible for anyone to make comparisons between different groups of schools. If you for instance want to find out in what way your local school relates to other schools that work under the same conditions, you will be able to do so. The results and other information that are stored from the different schools also make it possible for the user to make comparisons over time, as the information from recent years are kept available.

Within the SIRIS we have chosen to present results of the students of grade nine in the comprehensive schools, estimated by the average sum of marks, but by controlling the relative effect of three background characteristics of the students. On basis of well established research, that has shown that the mixture of students with different socio-economic background and different national background together with the sex mixture of the students explains a large proportion of the statistical variance, we have recalculated the results of the schools using analysis of regression. We present the calculated residual effect and use it as a measurement of the relative achievement of the school. Of course this measurement does not reflect the quality of the single school, but the result makes it more possible for the school to understand the value of its own achievement. We do not use the method for ranking between schools, but the first presentations of the information have given some newspapers an opportunity to make that kind of comparisons. After some debate in the press a more relaxed and interested discussion seems to have appeared. We have good hope to get people used to use this kind of open presentations of school results for internal discussions of the quality of the work at the school and to discuss the distribution of different resources to get improvement in schools. So far we seem to have succeeded at least in one aspect of getting the knowledge area on school effectiveness and school improvement accepted. More and more of the rhetoric on school development involves notions about the rich variation among schools. Less confusion seems to live between the use of the general concept of school as a system and the use of school as a term for a site where learning takes place with its own qualities that differ from other sites.

As the information available in SIRIS is open for everyone there is also an analytic help existing on the web. When you have made your choice of information that you want to use, you are offered that help via the web. There you can find texts that describe how you can interpret the results that you have chosen to look at. You can also find out such things as when the information was collected, by whom it was collected and what groups were examined. Documents that describe rules and aims of importance are there too, as well as links to evaluation reports at the national level that cover the actual area.

During the last four years an interesting kind of method has been used to enrich the national evaluation strategy of schools in Sweden. Beside the ordinary arsenal of knowledge tests and statistics about marks in the schools, highly legitimised “connoisseurs” of different areas of the educational system have made quality reviews in the schools. The government annually decides on two or three areas of concern on which Skolverket reports. Such a review plays an important role for the debate about the area in question and gives policy makers and citizens a sense of understanding for its quality and problems. But it is recognised that the information may not be representative for the whole country, as usually only 20-40 *kommuns* are brought into the annual sample. In every one of the *kommuns* in the sample, the reviewed themes are scrutinised by officials from the National Agency in co-operation with experts of the fields. Examples of issues covered during the last years include e.g. school management, the training of reading skills, sex education, contracts for tender in education, the practice of marking. This year we concentrate on the way in which schools inform about their work, the use of time in schools and how schools keep learning motivation alive. The report to the gov-

ernment about the actual situation ends in recommendations for improvement to different actors of the system, like schools and kommuns.

Since some years all schools and kommuns in Sweden are requested to present annual quality reports, where results and processes of the schools are discussed in relation to the national guidelines. The state, represented by Skolverket, does not only put out the annual quality reports on the internet, but also reads the information and involves in improvement dialogues with the kommuns. It will take the staff of Skolverket five years to hold such dialogues with the 289 kommuns in the country. Beside the quality report of the kommun and its schools, the people from Skolverket put more information on the table to stimulate the discussion. During a series of meetings the kommun and the Skolverket discuss the quality of the local school system and the two parties try to find consensus on one shared understanding of the shortcomings. This shared insight into the local problems is used for creative talks about solutions. The dialogue ends in an improvement agreement between the state and the kommun, where the two parties make undertakings for a couple of years. Most of these consist of new patterns of work among teachers and school managers, but there is also engagement in networks with other schools in the country and relations with the research field that appear as content in the undertakings. To facilitate the improvement actions, Skolverket has the possibility to support the kommun with money for a couple of years. Dialogues kept between the kommuns and Skolverket, that are based on local quality reports and information from the national level, are evaluated by external forces. A review will be presented in 2003.

Conclusions about democratic learning

There are some conclusions that can be drawn from earlier experiences of school improvement connected to the raise of democratic learning inside schools. When using democracy as a living part of everyday life at school it is important not to pretend internal democracy that the students could learn from. It is democracy for real that the students need to experience and to reflect on, to be able to learn. At the same time as it is important that the students get real life experiences from a "close-by" democracy of importance for their own school life, it is also important that they learn about the larger democracy that surrounding society is using. This learning might occur as a result of treating the democracy of the surrounding society as a traditional school subject, but the conference recommend that it never stops as a subject learning exercise.

When schools will be used as living examples of instant and participative democracies possible to learn from, I think it is important not to let too much of old school designs and school solutions stay alive. Schools carry long and well established traditions of working patterns that make it difficult to make democratic learning easy. Schools have been and are often designed to be places where teaching is maximised. As teaching takes place it is sometimes hard for students to learn. The teaching activity eats the time for learning of the students. This might especially be true for certain topics like democracy learned by experience. To be able to learn democracy by experience you need to participate in raising important questions, to prepare these in order to reach decisions, participate in the decision making, take responsibility for the accomplishment of the decision and finally to participate in the evaluation of the whole effort. All these steps in a democratic process take their time and compete with the use of time of the teachers, which

have many important topics to teach the students. However, I think it is important to be evident at this point; to be able to support young people to learn democracy, more time in schools need to be used for experiential learning and thereby less time will be used for traditional teaching.

When schools will serve the task to foster for democracy I also think that we need to break a long tradition on how we wrap in the descriptions of the aims of the school. These need to be written in such ways that not only the staff of the school can understand it, but also the literate student. As schools are expected not to pretend internal democracy, but practice real democracy, students need to share the understanding of the demands that the school faces with the teachers. If one of the two important parties of the school does not know the rules of the game that they are expected to play, it will be rather difficult for the two to co-operate and really reach the aims. Students and teachers also need to spend time on discussions about the meaning of democracy in their schools. Democracy prerequisites equal power distribution between participating parties. To be able to help young people to conquer democracy teachers therefore need to calculate with lost privileges and decreased power in the actual situation. If the teachers do not accept these facts, it will be difficult for the students to test participation roles and to carry out responsibilities that are the core of the experiences that make democratic experiential learning possible. Democracy is based on tensions and conflicts, as it is a civilised way of living with the tensions and a civilised way of solving the conflicts. To be able to help students to learn democracy schools cannot close their eyes for tensions. They also need to learn to like some of its internal conflicts, as they might be useful in the experiential learning of democracy.

Democracy needs to be treated in schools as a rather broad concept, not only limited to the construction of societies but also as a basic attitude that exists in everyday life and that is practised in many ways between people. This attitude has as its core equality and power sharing. As there might be tensions between the norms of the families of some students and schools that try to develop this basic attitude among its students, I think that it is important that schools invite the families. When discussions with the families about the values within the schools are held and when comparisons are made with the values of the families, the students will be helped to understand how to cope with the demand to participate in the democracy of the school. I also think that it is equally important to invite the politicians to the school, so that the students might experience the ways that the logic of the political life outside school works. Encounters with politicians are especially important when students have tried to influence the local decision making about important issues of the students (i.e. the traffic environment, the resources of the school) and are waiting to see the results of the actions.

To be able to help students to learn democracy it seems to be better to design your schools so that the same teachers follow the students for a longer time. Democracy exists with a long-term perspective. Students get involved in questions where it might take months and sometimes years, to prepare the decisions by lobbying and local opinion work. To be able to see the steps of democracy that are needed and from which you might learn, the students need to be challenged by some adult persons that have followed them through the process. Some countries have chosen more profitable strategies than others in this area. Teachers following their students only during one year and then not seeing them anymore during the school years was seen as a less effective strategy

than the one that is used in Denmark, where the same teacher might follow the students of the comprehensive school for nine years.

To get democratic learning to become a reality, teachers themselves need to learn more about democracy, democratic attitudes and democratic decision making. In-service training activities need to be used for experiments with decision making structures, where teachers get acquainted with different ways for students to raise questions, to prepare for decision makings and for decision makings. When we in Sweden have used in-service training of teachers for this purpose we have been struck by the observation that many teachers not are used to take advantage of the full repertoire of the different steps of democratic actions. There are many ways in which students might experience how to initiate a question in the internal democracy. During one semester the students might use the rule that a question is raised if a single student wants to, another semester you need to be a group of five to be able to raise a question. Some semesters the rule might permit the principal of the school to raise questions within the student bodies. A decision making might be prepared by a group of people or by individuals. The preparation work might end up in one proposal or in three proposals put forward to the decision making body. Decisions might be taken by the combination of simple majority rules with one member one vote rule. But decisions during another semester might be taken by the combination of the rule of a qualified majority rule with the rule of one group one vote. Experiential learning is based on rich variations and comparisons. This is true also when learning democracy. That is why teachers need to learn more about the rich subject of practised democracy.

To my mind students need to concentrate their efforts to participate in the real democracy of their schools in areas of strategic importance. One such area is evaluation in schools and especially such evaluations that are focused on the way in which the school succeeds to influence the democratic learning of the students. That is an evaluation topic that is profitable to get things to move in the local school. Students might for instance make questionnaires in which they ask if students have participated in decision making during the last year. By asking such questions and repeating them during the years it is possible for students to help teachers to see if any progress is made at the school. As it takes a long time to change the distribution of power in schools and to create better routines for the internal democracy, the students need to hand over the old questionnaires to new generations of students to make the development visible.

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