EDITORIAL

Joakim Lindgren
Spaces of social inclusion and exclusion
A spatial approach to education restructuring and identity in Sweden

Björn Ahlström
Student Participation and School Success

Jonas Christensen
Proposed Enhancement of Bronfenbrenner’s Development Ecology Model

Jonas Aspelin
What really matters is ‘between’
EDUCATION INQUIRY

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The concept of “educational science” in the Swedish context

*Education Inquiry* is a new international journal in the area of educational science. It has emerged in a period and a situation where in particular the concept of “educational science” is being used in different contexts in Sweden, not in the sense of the discipline of “education”, but as a field with unclear boundaries and ambitions. Initially, the concept was employed in various types of investigations and policy documents that in different ways concern proposals to change teacher education in Sweden.

The concept is conspicuous by its absence in the Swedish educational encyclopaedia, *Pedagogisk uppslagsbok. Från A till Ö utan pekpinnar* [“Educational encyclopaedia. From A to Z without lecturing”] from 1996, but it had already been used in an investigation of teacher education from 1978 *Lärare för skola i utveckling. Betänkande av 1974 års lärarutbildningsutredning* (LUT 74) [“Teachers for schools under development. Report from the teacher education commission of 1974”] in connection with proposals to provide teacher education with a research basis by means of various different postgraduate studies. On that occasion, the proposal contained three different types of postgraduate studies: discipline-oriented postgraduate studies based on disciplinary depth in the departments, and postgraduate studies in “education” as an educational methodology alternative. Between these, let us call them extremes, a third alternative was also suggested, namely postgraduate studies as a “general educational science alternative”, with demands for knowledge of subject theory, but also something else concerning teaching and learning.

After that, the concept seems to have lain fallow for several decades before it was again used in the 1990s by one of the two teachers’ unions, Lärarförbundet, in *Professionella lärare* [“Professional teachers”] (1995). The concept was used there in relation to issues concerning teachers’ efforts regarding professionalisation. In this connection, the expression “educational science basis” is used, referring to scientificity in a general sense, but also to didactic research in connection to different disciplines, i.e. subject didactics, research and development work in the activities of schools as well as engagement in the development work of schools.

The concept of “educational science” then cropped up in a proposal for a new teacher education *Att lära och leda. En lärarutbildning för samverkan och utveckling* [“Learning and leading. Teacher education for cooperation and development”] (1999). It contained a proposal to establish a new branch of science, Educational Science.
In Sweden fixed scientific resources are allocated precisely via branches of science, and the idea was hence that this branch would for the first time be guaranteed fixed scientific resources. However, the Swedish Parliament decided not to approve this proposal. Instead, an “Educational Science Committee” was established within the Swedish Research Council for the purpose of allocating research funding to research projects in the area. The concept of “educational science” is used for the broad research and postgraduate studies that are conducted in connection with teacher education and correspond to the needs of teacher education and professional educational work.

In the proposal for a new teacher education presented in 2008, En hållbar lärarutbildning [“Sustainable teacher education”] (HUT07), the “teacher education” concept is used in the sense of a “common educational science core”, i.e. knowledge to be acquired in teacher education. This core includes issues concerning the organisation and conditions of such education, the foundations of democracy, curriculum theory and didactics, the theory of science, research methodology and statistics, development and learning, special needs education, social relations, handling conflicts and leadership, assessment and marking, evaluation and development work. Educational science is seen as an umbrella term for research in different disciplines that is devoted to culture, education, teaching, fostering and learning. In the government proposal for a new teacher education, which is intended to be launched in 2010, Bäst i klassen – en ny lärarutbildning [“Best in class – a new teacher education”] (prop. 2009/10:89), these areas recur as examples of this educational science core.

The rise of the concept of “educational science” should be seen against the background of an enormous expansion of the education area in Sweden. From the early 1990s onwards new curricula for schools, a new marking system, wider entrances and programmes at upper secondary level were introduced, efforts involving adult education, child care and care of schoolchildren became parts of the education sector, preschools were given a curriculum of their own, the quality assessment of educational activities was started etc. In this period, the education sector in Sweden was doubled; the number of children in the sector grew from about 1.4 million to more than 2.5 million at the same time as the number of adults in education also rose. Taken together, including teachers and pupils and other school staff, the sector increased from about 1.5 million to about 2.8 million. If academic education is also added to these figures, more than 40 percent of the country’s population is found in this sector.

In a recently presented report from January 2010 on transition to postgraduate studies in different areas, the National Agency for Higher Education shows that there are limited postgraduate studies in the Educational science area (Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, 2010). It reveals that, on average, six percent of the students who have completed an undergraduate programme in Sweden start postgraduate studies. Among those who have parents with a postgraduate degree the proportion is higher, 16 percent, as might be expected. These are average figures. A closer inspection reveals great differences among the different disciplines. In science
about 30 percent of the students proceed to postgraduate studies after their undergraduate programme. The corresponding figures are in descending order: medicine and odontology (16 percent), humanities and theology (10 percent), agriculture and forestry (8 percent), technology (8 percent), social sciences and law (4 percent), health sciences (3 percent) and fine arts (1 percent). At the bottom of this scale we also find education and teaching, i.e. educational science, where only 1.5 percent of the students proceed to postgraduate studies after their undergraduate programme.

As is well known, it is now easy to conduct searches via Google and obtain a conception of different concepts and their distribution. In February 2010 the Swedish concept of “utbildningsvetenskap” [“educational science”] produced 131,000 hits. On the same occasion other concepts in the education sector gave the following number of hits: “skola” [“school”] 15,500,000, “universitet” [“university”] 10,900,000 and “pedagogik” [“pedagogy”] 1,230,000. The conclusion that might be drawn from this is that the concept of “utbildningsvetenskap” is relatively new, but also that is has become increasingly frequent in social discourse and education in Sweden. Another conclusion that may be drawn is that the concept is employed in many different contexts, as a name for university departments, conferences, graduate schools, faculties, research, professorships, lectureships etc.

Ever since the late 19th and early 20th century there has been an intimate relationship between the growth and institutionalisation of the social science disciplines on one hand, and a context with great social problems and strong demands for generating knowledge of social facts from different parts of society on the other, in particular from institutions such as schools, politics, administration etc., all connected to the state. Actors in the political field have received support and inspiration for their political innovations in the discourses developed by actors in the disciplinary fields. When the concept of “educational science” is being launched on a wide front, this should be seen in this connection. As a concept, content and practice, it has not been formulated by the researchers and teachers in the area. It should rather be seen as a politically determined multidisciplinary organisational principle lacking specific content but working for the attaining of goals without them being decided. As Trondman (2006) puts it, educational science actors have provided a multidisciplinary bunch of researchers with a concept, an organisational principle and a research area that are now also supposed to be filled with content. Education Inquiry will participate in this work.

This issue of Education Inquiry contains four articles. In “Spaces of social inclusion and exclusion. A spatial approach to education restructuring and identity in Sweden”, Joakim Lindgren takes as his point of departure the decentralised Swedish school system that has become ever more directed at the construction of self-governing and responsible pedagogical identities that are supposed to make integration and participation possible. Drawing on the work of the geographer Edward W. Soja, he acknowledges how material and symbolic spatialisation intersects with the local production of included and excluded identities in the context of restructuring education. The article
is based on a study in two areas of a segregated Swedish city, one disadvantaged and the other advantaged. Lindgren uses a wide range of data such as policy documents, questionnaire data, longitudinal statistics, interviews with local politicians, school actors and former students. The findings show that former students from the disadvantaged area were more often excluded from further education and dependent on social welfare to a higher extent. Moreover, they faced low expectations and were simultaneously excluded from new educational processes that explicitly aim at social inclusion. Lindgren discusses how ethical ideals of decentralisation and participation, and the evaluation of such policies in terms of access to further education and work, conceal the local production of excluded identities. This production, he argues, is based on an amalgamation of material conditions and spatial representations.

In his article “Student Participation and School Success. The relationship between participation, grades and bullying among 9th grade students in Sweden”, Björn Ahlström finds his starting point in the Swedish school law and curriculum which states that students are to be participative in their work and that they should work in a participative manner. The pedagogical idea is that influence and participation have multiple benefits for students’ development. The article examines the relationship between student participation and school success. By using a theoretically based participation index, eight schools were chosen for closer examination. Success was measured by school grades and the level of perceived bullying among students. Student participation seems to have beneficial effects on students’ academic and social development. In schools with a higher level of student participation, the grades were higher and the level of perceived bullying among the students was lower than schools with a smaller level of participation.

In “Proposed Enhancement of Bronfenbrenner’s Development Ecology Model”, Jonas Christensen deals with how academic disciplines are constituted and claims that the related professional developments must be viewed within their wider social, political and economic frameworks. When studying the organisation, transformation and spheres of influence of professions, the Development Ecology model, he argues, provides a tool for understanding the encounter among societal, organisational and individual dimensions, a continual meeting point where phenomena and actors exist on different levels, including those of the organisation and society at large. However, the theory of development ecology may be questioned for how it looks at the individual’s role in relation to other actors in order to define and understand the forces underlying the professional development and constitution of academic disciplines. Factors relating to both the inside of the individual and social ties between individuals and in relation to global factors need to be discussed.

In Jonas Aspelin’s article, “What really matters is ‘between’. Understanding the focal point of education from an inter-human perspective”, the focal point of education is simultaneously defined as the place where the most important educational activity is taking place, and the place where the main interest of educational theory (and
educational practice) should be located. Aspelin discusses the idea that the focal point is located somewhere between the teacher and the student. This idea is introduced by references to Gert Biesta’s inter-subjective theory. The article discusses Martin Buber’s contribution to understanding the focal point of education. Buber contributes by emphasising “the interhuman” as a primary dimension in relation to “the social”. From Buber’s perspective, what really matters in education exists in an ontological and relational event. In the last section of the article it is suggested that exploration of the focal point should not stick to just one form of relationship. The interhuman event is, taken by itself, supposed to be primary, yet the focal point cannot be fully understood without a penetrative picture of its social context.

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Student Participation and School Success
The relationship between participation, grades and bullying among 9th grade students in Sweden

Björn Ahlström*

Abstract
The Swedish school law and curriculum states that students shall be participative in their work. They should work in a participative manner and the pedagogical idea is that influence and participation has multiple benefits for students’ development. In this article the relationship between student participation and school success is examined. By using a theoretically-based participation index eight schools were chosen for closer examination. Success was measured by school grades and the level of perceived bullying among students. Student participation seems to have beneficial effects on students’ academic and social development. In schools with a higher level of student participation the grades were higher and the level of perceived bullying among the students was lower than schools with a lower level of participation.

Keywords: participation, influence, bullying, grades, school success

Introduction
The Swedish school curriculum states that schools should be based on democratic values. All activity within schools should accordingly be designed according to democratic values (Lpo94). Keywords found in this curriculum policy are: human rights, individual freedom and integrity, equality between different groups and solidarity with the weak and the vulnerable. Schools are expected to work actively against bullying, racism, inequality between genders and all other forms of insulting behaviours or attitudes (SFS 1985 Chapter 1, 2§). Further, Swedish schools are required to provide all students with an equal education (Norberg 2009). To put it succinctly, with the school working in a participatory manner the students learn how to treat other people and how society works in a wider context.

Participation is part of both the civic and the social objectives of schools, having been so prescribed by the Swedish curriculum and school law. By not only allowing but encouraging students to practice democracy and be part of decision-making, the students, the school and society as a whole can all benefit (Torney-Purta, Schwille &
Amadeo, 1999). If students are allowed to be freer in their everyday work, they will be empowered to take part in discussions and can, by themselves or together with teachers, make decisions. Further, studies show that an organisation’s participatory level has an important relationship with psychosocial well-being (Antonovsky 2004, Marmot 2006, Gardell 1976) as well as efficiency (Thorsrud & Emery 1969). A significant issue to examine is whether students’ social relations and participation are related to the issue of bullying and insulting behaviour in schools. It may be assumed that if students work together and learn to accept others’ opinions and learn to discuss differences they will develop character traits and an internal culture that can prevent bullying within an organisation.

Currently in Sweden there are political and public debates about student academic achievements and the general cultural environment in schools. The issue of student achievement has been predicated by numerous claims that Swedish schools are falling behind other European schools in the academic field. At the same time, there has been a discussion about the general cultural environment in schools. Critics have accused schools of being too slack or undisciplined. They claim that the adults at Swedish schools have lost their authority and that students have too many rights that prevent teachers and principals from doing their work in a satisfactory manner. According to these critics, the aim of involving students as participants in their own education has failed. Giving students more power and control, it is asserted, has been at the expense of the adults. In a response to these criticisms, at the time this article was being written changes were being made by the minister of education so as to give schools the ability to act more harshly against students when something goes wrong and that will reintroduce greater adult authority, carrying with it the ability to use greater disciplinary actions (Internet 1). One can argue that, if student participation is an important part of the curriculum and that several positive outcomes can be connected to the level of participation, it would be common for Swedish schools to work in such a manner. In addition, it would be against the curriculum and the school law if schools do not develop prerequisites for pedagogical foundations based on the participation of and influence among the students.

**Purpose**

This study emerges from a larger project looking at successful schools. The purpose of this particular article is to examine the relationship between school success (expressed by low levels of bullying), schools’ academic achievement and schools’ work with student participation and influence.

**The main study**

Structure, culture, leadership: Prerequisites for successful schools? is the name of the project from which the data used in this article have been collected. The selection of schools was made in several steps. First, 12 municipalities were selected that differed...
Student Participation and School Success

politically, geographically and in size. Since the project’s aim is to study successful schools one starting point was to define success. Then one successful and one less successful school in each municipality were chosen. These were selected in such a manner that one school was slightly above and one slightly below the national mean of grades. Schools at the very top and the very bottom were not selected because such schools usually have special prerequisites such as the parents’ educational background and social class. In selecting schools with similar prerequisites the organisational structure, culture and leadership was studied in order to find internal differences between the schools. As stated in the introduction, Swedish schools are charged not only with the task of developing students’ academic knowledge but also with developing students’ social and personal abilities. Given this mandate, a school cannot be perceived as successful solely due to the measure of strong academic results. Instead, schools can only be perceived as successful if they achieve both good academic and social outcomes; this was the starting point of this project. School grading systems are a natural and straightforward way to assess school achievement regarding students’ academic development. However, assessing the students’ social and civic development presented a more demanding challenge. The solution used in this project was to develop a survey instrument.

A questionnaire containing 52 questions was developed. The questionnaire was answered by 2,128 students in the 9th grade in 24 Swedish schools in 12 different municipalities that were part of the SCL study (Ahlström & Höög 2010). In each municipality there was one successful and one less successful school in relation to academic results. The data contain information about the schools and the students’ age, sex and socioeconomic background. The assessment tool used was the SCOS (Social and Civic Objectives Scale), which is a questionnaire developed to measure different aspects of schools’ achievements in relation to their social and civic objectives. By using the SCOS and the schools’ grades as tools for selection it is possible to assess different schools’ level of success in these areas. All schools in the study were chosen in such a manner as to control as much as possible for gender, parental level of education, and immigrant background (Ahlström & Höög 2010, Höög 2010). The main idea of the project was to find schools with similar external prerequisites so as to make the organisational analysis relevant. The next step in selecting the schools was to add the SCOS values and relate these to the grades in order to categorise the schools in four different groups. As shown in the table below, the schools can be categorised from A/S (strong academic/strong social), indicating that a school’s students have both relatively high grades and a high score in the SCOS, to a/s (weak academic, weak social), indicating that this is a school that is less successful in relation to both academic and social objectives.
Table 1. The four types of schools

| Successful in achieving academic objectives | Successful in achieving social and civic objectives |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| **More**                                    | **More**                                          |
| A/S                                         | Schools that achieve both social and academic success |
| a/S                                         | Schools that focus on fostering the children socially in order to develop an environment for learning |

| **Less**                                     | **Less**                                          |
| A/s                                         | Schools that focus on academic excellence          |
| a/s                                         | Schools that “fail” in developing the students both socially and academically |

Bullying

Bullying is a subject of concern in all organisations but the school environment has historically been an arena of special interest. Why bullying is particular, but not exclusive, to schools is a question that has attracted a number of different explanations. One starting point is that students aged 7 to 15 have to attend school due to school attendance being compulsory and by doing so they are often placed in groups whose members they cannot choose themselves. In these groups tendencies of harassment and bullying are evident (Olweus 1994). When defining bullying, Olweus’ (1994) definition is used. A person is bullied, Olweus states, when they are repeatedly and over a period of time exposed to negative actions by one or several persons. Between the bully and the victim there is an imbalance of power whereby the bully can be stronger both physically and socially (Andreou 2001, Björk 1999, Carney 2000). This power relation might be invisible to adults at the school when they are, to some extent, excluded from certain areas such as locker rooms and corridors (Höistad 1997). When bullying occurs, it is often boys who are the perpetrators while the victims are both boys and girls, although some studies indicate that boys are more common victims (O’Moore & Hillery 1998, Hazier, Hoover & Oliver 1992, Slee 1995, Rigby & Slee 1991). When studying such a complex topic as bullying one has to be clear when pointing out the starting point of this article. As indicated in the title, the subjects that are being studied are different schools and the work and strategies in relation to participation and how that might relate to different school outcomes. Strategies to prevent and decrease the level of bullying have to include actions at the school level that strive to change the culture or climate at the school (Whitted & Dupper 2005). Studies of bullying have primarily focused on psychological aspects of bullying and on who becomes a bully (Bliding 2004). In this article the main focus is not on the individual level or the psychology of bullies and victims, but the focus will instead be on the organisation as a whole and how the organisation works with participation and relate this to the students’ perceived level of bullying. One can relate bullying to
schools’ social objectives in several ways. The most obvious is the students’ relationships with other people. The curriculum states that schools shall teach and encourage students to honour values like human rights, freedom and equality between different social groups. The social objectives also incorporate values such as a sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility (Lpo 94). Clearly, this is closely linked to values that can be related to democracy and participation. A not too bold statement is that bullying can be conceptualised as a form of antidemocratic action (Lundström 2004). Hence, by perceiving bullying as antidemocratic this behaviour can clearly be related to a school’s democratic climate or culture.

In the SCOS-survey one question is used to assess the occurrence of bullying at schools and it is formulated as: *Does bullying, discrimination or other insulting behaviour occur at your school?* The return rate for this question was 98.3%. The main reason for using student-centred data is that the students themselves can see things and be participants in environments from which adults are excluded. For this reason, bullying can occur in a school without the adults there knowing (Ljungström 1994, Höistad 1997).

**Participation and influence**

The concept of participation has recently been emphasised in our society as employers have looked at participation in an effort to make their organisations more effective (Sinclair 2004). In schools and in the Swedish context encouragement and work on participation gained ground during the 1990s and early 2000s. However, recent public debate has shifted focus from the benefits stated in the school law and curriculum towards order, namely, grades and rules. However, the curriculum policy states that students shall have an influence and participate in the present school law (4 kap. 2§, 5 kap. 2§). According to the curriculum, it is not enough for schools to give students knowledge about democratic values. The education institution shall conduct itself in a democratic manner and in such a way that the students can be prepared to participate actively in society (Lpo 94). In compulsory school every student is expected to learn to listen, argue, discuss and be able to use knowledge as a tool to formulate arguments. Further, students are expected to be able to test their assumptions and solve problems. In order to do that they have to develop character traits that will enhance their participatory abilities. This idea is built on the assumption that the most fundamental democratic freedoms are the freedoms of thought and action; providing students with the experiences needed to realise such freedoms is what should be the focus of education (Dewey 1948). Studies on schools and other work organisations show that a high level of participation and influence enhances the commitment of students and/or workers and leads to greater satisfaction in the workplace (Blumberg 1971, Selberg 2001). To participate and have an influence in a working process makes the individuals (in this case, students) involved because the work becomes an extension of themselves and by making their own decisions the subjects control, create and change their own work (Blumberg 1971).
The literature on the subject shows that a leadership which strives to develop an organisation that works in a participative manner can be successful in a number of ways. By working in this way the leadership can be assured that decisions are taken by the right people and the organisation as a whole receives more intellectual input given that if more people are involved more knowledge is being used (Plunkett & Fournier 1991). By having an influence over decisions employees (in this case, students) often feel more committed to the work at hand and the organisation as a whole (Yukl 1998).

Student participation and academic achievement is a relationship that has not received much attention. This neglect probably is the result of the main focus being put on other work organisations and the presumed outcome of an improved and more effective organisation; this is despite the presence of examples of a relationship between students’ participation and their achievement (Voelkl 1995). The need for students’ participation in schools has been more emphasised in relation to social and civic objectives in schools. These objectives refer to schools’ duty to help students develop into democratic citizens and to give students the necessary tools they need to function in society. In addition to these objectives, beyond that it is a basic human right another reason for encouraging student participation is that it is a pedagogical tool that creates prerequisites for learning which can easily be connected to student outcomes and grades (SOU 1996:22).

One of this article’s main focuses is the relationship between student participation and the level of bullying, which has not been a widely studied topic. However, the relationship between the school climate and bullying has been focused on in several programmes that aim to reduce the level of bullying in schools (Höiby, Levin & Thulin 2006, Höiby 2004, Twemlow, Fonagy, Sacco, Gies & Hess 2001). By working in a participatory manner it should develop a school climate that is based on democratic values and processes (Lundström 2004). The school climate is significant as a prerequisite for successful work with topics as moral, ethics and social interaction (Skolverket 1999). In other words, one starting point for this article is that there might be a relationship between the level of student participation and the social climate in a school.

How to assess participation?

As previously mentioned, the SCOS-survey was developed to measure different aspects of the social and civic objectives. In this article the focus is on questions regarding participation and influence and the relationship to bullying and students’ grades. But which questions in the questionnaire measure these dimensions? In sorting out those dimensions measuring participation, a theoretical approach was used. By using the curriculum and the school law as a starting point, three dimensions of participation were constructed out of the questions in the SCOS-questionnaire, namely, communication, democratic participation, and co-operation. Participation could be assessed with one single index unlike the concept of working in a participatory manner, which is complex due to the fact that it incorporates different aspects of what the schools...
and students are to do. The interdependency between these dimensions makes the concept of an index especially valid. Participation cannot function as intended in the steering documents if only one or two of these dimensions works. The basic idea is that these dimensions include character traits that every student can develop in order to gain knowledge through interactions with others and through the pedagogical approach itself that teaches the students to function in democratic settings. If schools create an environment for communication but fail to develop the students’ democratic competence the whole structure of participation cannot achieve its full potential. Only when the three dimensions are aligned can the full impact of participation be visible. One can argue that a school might be very successful in different aspects of what the steering documents refers to as participation yet not be so successful in others.

**Communication**

Communication is the foundation upon which a participatory and democratic pedagogy rests. In order to be able to participate and make decisions students have to experience democratic principles in real situations. Students need to be part of a democratic process where they can express and argue their opinions (Eriksson, Orlander & Jedemark 2005). This is also stated in the curriculum that says the students should learn to listen, argue, discuss and be able to use knowledge as a tool to formulate and try different assumptions and solve problems (Lpo 94). To assure a successful communication environment in which students are voluntary participants there has to be a culture that encourages participation and communication. A culture can be seen as a group of people’s common conceptions and values about their environment. This results in these people interpreting actions and statements in a similar way. One might say that a person who belongs to a specific culture has a similar understanding of reality and this understanding will make communication and collective actions easier (Sandberg & Targama 1998). Being able to communicate not only involves the ability to express oneself so others understand, it also involves the ability to sort out and process incoming information. Communication can be understood as a process where there is a sender, a message, channels, a receiver and feedback (Dimbleby & Burton 1998). In Swedish schools the students are expected, by continuous communication in conversations, reading and writing, to develop their abilities to communicate (Lpo 94). Further, the students should be able to orientate themselves in a complex reality that is in a constant state of change where information is a natural part (Lpo 94). In other words, the culture in classrooms should be such that all students are able to develop and train their communication skills. The main goal for the schools is to promote active learning, which means a condition of active discussion about knowledge and one in which the teacher openly presents, discusses and welcomes different opinions, values and problems (Lpo 94). An environment in which everyone within schools shares the same pedagogical focus must have a structure and culture where communication works (Ärlestig 2008).
The first dimension, communication, consists of four questions that have been put together in an index. These questions are:

- Do you think that your classmates listen to others’ opinions?
- Are your classmates good at explaining what they mean?
- Do you think your classmates express their opinions in such a manner that makes other people listen?
- Do the majority of students participate in discussions during class?

**Democratic competence**

Democratic competence in this regard does not refer to students’ knowledge about different institutions in society; rather it refers to character traits the students have developed during their stay in school. The schools are to be a forum where democratic work shall be part of everyday work. The students have to learn, in order to be functional members of a democratic society, that they can change some of the circumstances in their own environment (Englund 1994). Hence, this dimension captures the students’ ability to work in a democratic manner and their knowledge about the forms of a democratic society. Put succinctly, the mission of the schools is to work in a democratic fashion in all aspects of schoolwork. The students should be helped to develop into democratic citizens and should therefore be given knowledge about the content and form of democracy (Skolverket 2000). The task assigned to the schools is to give students the fundamental values upon which our society is built. The school is to be open to different opinions and expected to encourage students to take a stand and it is important that personal standpoints and opinions can be expressed (Lpo 94). The ability to present and express an opinion is seen as a fundamental democratic trait. It is also essential that students develop abilities to review facts and understand the consequences of different options (Lpo 94). In relation to the curriculum, it is clear that the dimension of democratic competence includes specific traits that each student should develop during their stay in school. These traits consist of the ability to act in a democratic manner and evaluate facts. Three questions that relate to this dimension were chosen from the SCOS questionnaire. Thus, the second index contains the following three questions:

- Do you think that your classmates dare to stand up for their opinions?
- Do you think that your classmates respect the opinions of others?
- Do you think that you and your classmates have the ability to compare and critically review facts?

**Co-operation**

Working in a participative manner means that everyone is involved in the different aspects of work in school. As previously mentioned, the participative concept is closely linked to the schools’ civic and social objectives that include both a micro and macro level. The chief focus of the social objectives is relationships and how we treat each
other in social interactions, whereas the civic objectives are concerned with fostering
democratic citizens and the students’ democratic skills as participants and members
of society (Quigley 2005). Somewhere in between these objectives is the third of the
participative dimensions chosen, namely, co-operation and co-operation skills. As
students adopt and adapt co-operation skills one might argue that they develop an
ability for human interaction and civic awareness (Perlinger, Canetti-Nisim, & Pedah-
zur 2006). In Swedish schools educational activities are expected to be conducted in
a democratic form and to prepare the students for participation in society. By being
part of planning and evaluating the everyday work in school the students develop their
ability to influence and to take responsibility (Lpo 94). This responsibility includes
being able to work together with others, respecting others’ opinions and co-operating
with others. A co-operative culture should create a collective understanding, tolerance
and openness towards people who are different and should therefore be easy to link
to preventive action in relation to bullying (Ahlström 2010).

The third and final index contains these four questions:

Do you think that your classmates believe that what you do has consequences for others?
Do you handle solving conflicts in your class?
Do you think your classmates are good at co-operation?
Do you think that your classmates believe it is important to collaborate?

Index correlations

When measuring participation and using three different dimensions based on theoretical
standpoints to capture the level of participation at the schools, these dimensions
should, to some extent, correlate. These correlations will be presented below in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation between the three dimensions of participation

|            | Co-operation | Communication | Democratic Competence |
|------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| Co-operation | Pearson’s correlation | 1 |  |  |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed) | 1 |  |  |
|             | N | 1885 |  |  |
| Communication | Pearson’s correlation | .507(*** | 1 |  |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 |  |  |
|             | N | 1841 | 1909 |  |
| Democratic Competence | Pearson’s correlation | .579(*** | .583(*** | 1 |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .000 |  |
|             | N | 1828 | 1851 | 1894 |

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

As seen above, all three different correlations have a value above the .5 mark which
indicates that the correlation may be considered as large (Pallant 2006). The high
correlation value indicates that the three indexes capture different aspects in the
same field, namely, participation. The next step is to rank each school in relation to each of these dimensions and to compile a comprehensive ranking that includes all of these dimensions.

**Participation rankings**

The main idea is to rank the 24 schools in relation to the level of the perceived participation among the students. Each of the three indexes was compared between the 24 schools and the school that has the lowest score. The best school within the specific index was marked with 1 while the school with the highest score was ranked 24, as shown below. A ranking makes it easy to visualise the different levels of the dimensions at the different schools. Note that it is not enough to be successful in one or two of the participation dimensions to be categorised as a high participation school.

**Table 3.** School rankings in relation to the three different participation dimensions

| Schools | Communication | Democratic competence | Co-operation | Sum |
|---------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----|
| L1      | 1             | 1                     | 1            | 3   |
| J2      | 2             | 3                     | 3            | 8   |
| E1      | 3             | 2                     | 4            | 9   |
| G1      | 4             | 10                    | 2            | 16  |
| B1      | 7             | 5                     | 5            | 17  |
| E2      | 9             | 6                     | 6            | 21  |
| I1      | 5             | 11                    | 8            | 24  |
| G2      | 8             | 7                     | 9            | 24  |
| B2      | 10            | 4                     | 12           | 26  |
| K1      | 11            | 9                     | 10           | 30  |
| H2      | 12            | 8                     | 13           | 33  |
| I2      | 15            | 12                    | 7            | 34  |
| C1      | 6             | 13                    | 18           | 37  |
| F2      | 20            | 15                    | 11           | 46  |
| K2      | 13            | 14                    | 19           | 46  |
| J1      | 16            | 17                    | 17           | 50  |
| L2      | 18            | 19                    | 14           | 51  |
| C2      | 17            | 21                    | 15           | 54  |
| H1      | 19            | 20                    | 16           | 55  |
| A2      | 14            | 18                    | 24           | 56  |
| F1      | 23            | 16                    | 22           | 61  |
| A1      | 22            | 23                    | 20           | 65  |
| D1      | 21            | 24                    | 21           | 66  |
| D2      | 24            | 22                    | 23           | 69  |
In Table 3 the different rankings among the 24 schools are displayed. It is noted that school L1 appears as the best school in all three indexes which gives it a total value of three, the lowest score possible. When summarising these indexes one obtains a participation ranking for all schools that includes the three different dimensions. By doing this it is possible to identify two different groups of schools. One group has a high level and the other has a low level of participation. The four schools that have the lowest score and therefore have the highest level of perceived participation are: L1 (3), J2 (8), E1 (9) and G1 (16). The other group that has a low level of perceived participation is: F1 (61), A1 (65), D1 (66) and D2 (69).

The primary idea is to focus on the four schools at the top and the four schools at the bottom because these schools can display the downsides and benefits of different levels of participation. Focusing on the extremes makes these differences more visible. In addition, schools that work with participation in a positive way appear above what one might call a “breaking point”. However, it is not just by looking at the worst schools that we can see the benefits of successful work with participation as significant differences can be seen in the group one might call the “middle schools”. Nevertheless, the impacts the different levels of participation have on students’ outcomes should be easier to observe if we focus on the two groups below and above the “breaking points”. It is also interesting to relate the groups at the high and the low end of the scale with the group in the middle in order to examine whether there is a linear relationship between bullying, grades and participation. Does the level of bullying increase in all groups when the level of participation declines and do the grades drop when the students’ participation level declines? When it comes to the selection of schools participating in the study the general aim was to choose schools with similar prerequisites and it is thus assumed that the differences between them are the result of internal factors such as the culture, structure and leadership.

**Bullying and participation**

One assumption already presented in this article is that bullying and participation are related due to the fact that if schools are working in a participatory manner the students should be able to develop character traits that prevent bullying. This assumption will be tested. The first step is to see whether the eight schools that were the highest and lowest in the participation ranking relate to one another and to the middle group. As a reminder, the question asked in relation to the perceived level of bullying at the schools was: Does bullying, discrimination or other insulting behaviour occur at your school?
The table above shows the students’ perceived level of bullying among the three types of schools. If all the students perceive that bullying does not occur at their school the score would be 0 and if all of the students perceive that bullying at their school is at a high level the score would be 100. As Table 4 shows, it is clear that those schools with a perceived high level of participation also have a lower level of bullying. The amount of perceived bullying increases with decreasing student participation. To make the relationship more visible, a cross table which includes the high and low participatory school types can be helpful, as presented below in Table 5.

Table 5 reveals a quite strong difference between the two types of schools in relation to bullying. In those schools with a high level of participation, 44.9% of the students acknowledge the fact that bullying does occur frequently. That is a high number given that bullying should not occur at all in Swedish schools. An even more disturbing fact is that in those schools with a low level of participation the vast majority (77.5%) of students says that bullying does occur. Even though these results can be perceived as challenging when both of the school types show that bullying occurs at what one might say is a problematic level, there are important differences. Even though the schools with a higher level of perceived participation have less bullying, the level is still disturbing according to the students. Nevertheless, there is a 32.6% divergence compared to schools with a smaller share of perceived participation, which is almost a third of the population.
Grades and participation

Participation should play a central part in everyday work in Swedish schools (Lpo 94). This is not only important for developing and fostering democratic citizens, but one assumes as well that participation also creates an environment that promotes learning. By following this train of thought, we can assume that schools with a high level of participation would develop their students socially and academically. We already know that a high level of participation reduces the level of bullying in schools, but what about the academic achievements? Table 6 below shows the different types of school grades.

Table 6. Grades among the students in the three school types

| Schools            | Mean (grades) | N  | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|---------------|----|----------------|
| High participation | 215.6         | 283| 8.91275        |
| Middle participation| 209.4         | 1402| 7.11782       |
| Low participation  | 205.1         | 285| 12.46363       |
| Total              | 209.6         | 1970| 8.83030       |

The same relationship as seen in relation to bullying can be seen when we take a closer look at the grades. Those schools with the highest level of participation also have the higher grades and, as the level of participation declines, the grades follow. The mean of the grades among the schools in the study was 209.6 in 2006, the year the study was conducted. Throughout the country the mean of grades among students in year nine was 207. Thus, we see that the high participation schools scored higher than both the all-Sweden grade mean in 2006 and the schools that participated in the study; the schools with a low level of participation scored even lower.

Student Participation and School Success

By returning to the four-fold table (Table 7) and placing the eight schools chosen for this study as representatives of schools with high and low participation levels, one can see that all of the schools with a high level of participation are placed in the top-left column in the table. This indicates that these schools can be perceived as successful, meaning that the students at these schools have shown an achievement socially (measured by the SCOS) as well as academically (measured by grades). In the group with a low level of perceived participation, three schools are placed in the box indicating that these schools failed to develop their students in relation to both of the tasks appointed to the schools through the curriculum and the school law. One school (D2) can be considered as successful in relation to the academic objectives but it failed to develop its students socially.
Table 7. Four-fold table – Four types of schools in relation to high and low participation schools

| Successful in achieving academic objectives | Successful in achieving social and civic objectives |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| More                                       | More                                         |
| E1, J2, L1, G1                            | A/S                                          |
| Less                                       | Less                                         |
| D2                                         | a/s                                          |

Discussion and conclusion

Participation is an important aspect of students’ everyday lives in Swedish schools and this is an important topic of interest, especially regarding the outcomes that follow when schools work as the curriculum directs. What happens in schools that work in a participatory manner? They seem to develop their students both socially and academically. When looking at the schools in the study and the perceived level of student participation and relating this to outcomes such as the level of bullying and the students’ academic achievements, an interesting picture emerges. Schools with a high level of perceived participation also seem to have less bullying and higher grades than schools that have a low level of participation. In comparing the three different groups there also seems to be linearity in the results where higher participation means higher grades and a lower level of bullying. By working with participation the students may be developing their ability to be empathic, developing common values within the group and creating a sense of closeness; all three can be related to the social objectives and bullying. It is not unreasonable to assume that it is harder to be mean to someone one feels empathy for, shares values with and feels a closeness to.

In relation to the academic objectives, participation also seems to have an impact. Students in participatory schools may develop confidence and self-esteem. As well, they can collect information and knowledge not only from the teacher but from their colleagues. This environment seems to give the students more input; their grades are higher than those at other schools and the level of bullying is lower. This indicates that participation has multiple benefits.

Students should be able to participate and have an influence over the work they conduct in everyday life in school. So, if students assess their own school as a high participation school they are working in the spirit of the steering documents. By doing so, the schools are fulfilling their task in that regard. The topic of interest in this article is to analyse whether those schools working in a participatory manner have other benefits in relation to the curriculum. And, as shown above, it appears that participation has benefits in several areas. Participation seems to help students develop socially as well as academically. The social parameter used in this article is
bullying and major differences can be detected between the two different types of schools in the material. The development and debate that has emerged in Sweden about the need for greater authority to be granted to adults in schools as well as the focus on academic development might be part of an ongoing shift in pedagogical views in schools. If participation increases both the academic and social development of students then it would clearly be beneficial for all to work in such a way. Perhaps the greater focus on grades and a shift in the pedagogical field will become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. The focus on this new pedagogical approach may lead to lower student participation and therefore an environment that does not allow students to reach their full potential. An unfortunate consequence of this may be a greater number of students at risk of being exposed to bullying.

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Endnotes

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2 Chi-square in the appendix
Internet
Internet 1: http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article4314640.ab [090416]

Appendix

| Chi-Square Tests                      | Value       | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson's Chi-Square                  | 42.521(a)   | 3  | .000                  |
| Likelihood Ratio                      | 43.459      | 3  | .000                  |
| Linear-by-Linear Association          | 30.453      | 1  | .000                  |
| No. of Valid Cases                    | 360         |    |                       |

(a) 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.80.
