

## Network 25: School Development

### Upper secondary school students on their influence on everyday school work. The results of four studies carried during the period 1996-2009

Korsdal Wenestam, Inger<sup>1</sup>; Wenestam, Claes-Göran<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Åbo Akademi, Faculty of Education, Applied Education, Vasa, Finland;

<sup>2</sup>University College of Kristianstad, School of Education, Kristianstad, Sweden

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A compulsory directive for the Swedish schools is to lay the foundation for democratic values and ideas, making the school children later in life well educated and prepared to partake in the democratic process of the society (SFS1985:1100 1985 December 12). In the schools the students therefore are to acquire knowledge about the democratic process and to be engaged in the development of their schools. The goal is active citizenship.

In several ways it is emphasized that the effects of the education offered in school on students' democratic values and attitudes is not sufficient in itself. It must also be combined with personal engagement, where the students learn to manage the democratic process in everyday work. Therefore the education is to be organised in such a way that students are assumed to have necessary opportunities to gain personal experiences from democratic work at school (Lpf 94, p.5, 14-15). The importance of this educational goal is very large and it is in Sweden reflected by the wealth of books covering it.

**Research topic/aim:** The primary aim of the study is to investigate upper secondary school students' views on issues reflecting their democratic values and what concrete influence they have at school. Another goal of this study is to investigate what similarities and differences which may exist between the four studies. Also, a final aim is to study what effects some background variables may have on the outcome.

**Methodology:** In our paper we present the outcomes from a questionnaire study of upper secondary school student's views on the democratic process as it is shown in their ordinary school day performances. A questionnaire was developed to assess students' views on five areas of principal interest, namely on: student democracy and active citizenship, mobbing, study approaches, learning and finally on lectures and teaching received. In this presentation we have chosen to report solely the students' views on school democracy and their partaking in decision making in school.

The research reported is founded on four empirical studies carried out during the years 1996, 2002, 2005 and 2009. A total of 561 upper secondary school students were participants and completed a questionnaire that was developed for this study. It contains 97 items constructed as statements to which the student can chose a position ranging from 1, "I do completely disagree" to 5, "I do completely agree" along the lines of 5 stage modified Likert-scale.

Items covering school democratic issues amounted to a substantial part of the questionnaire. The students, who participated voluntarily, completed the questionnaire when in class. The outcome of the students responses where then analyzed statistically, by ANOVA and factor analysis.

Preliminary findings from the statistical analysis show there are several factors explaining the students' responses to the questionnaire and thus forming their views on democratic values and partaking democratic work at school. In the paper this outcome will be presented and discussed in more detail. Also the effects of the background variables and the similarities and differences between the four studies will be fully presented and discussed.

**Relevance for Nordic Educational research:** The research presented reports the findings of four

studies covering a time period of 14 years. The study was initiated when the curriculum for the upper secondary school was quite new and has continued until a new curriculum is announced to arrive. The study offers valuable insights in the processes and changes of school students' ways to view the democratic conditions present in school.

### Documentation for learning and participation

Höstfält, Gabriella

Didaktik och pedagogiskt arbete, Stockholms universitet, Stockholm, Sweden

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Documentation at school and the models of record keeping, that teachers can take as a general rule, has developed in other contexts than the pedagogical, preferably within the framework of social services and special education. In school the concept of 'equivalence' can be defined as an idea in order to achieve the objectives of the decentralised actions. On the basis of secondary concepts such as the rule of law, gender equality, democratic participation and freedom of choice, schools are responsible for the implementation of the intention of the plans that accompanies the objective-and results-oriented system.

Implementation of a national curriculum aims to develop certain 'studentabilities', both individual and social. A social capacity that is central to the current curriculum is the ability to understand and relate your fellow man's conditions and values. This ability can be described as a 'citizenshipability', which among other things aims to support the basic values of a democratic society and the citizens responsibility to manage such values. In accordance with the text of the regulation individual development plans assess and document both pupils' knowledge development and other development. My aim is to investigate how the individual development plans formulates this and how they thus supports and shape civil abilities – 'citizenshipabilities' that are desirable in our current society.

By examining and comparing two documentation practices; action program practice within special education and the individual education plan practice within the mainstream pedagogy, didactic research questions elucidating our time issues will be answered, i.e. the skills that are important, how learning is to be organised and which groups that will gain access to the different learning paths. The theoretical framework is constructionistic with a Foucault inspired discourse analysis research design. The school's documentation practices are here regarded as a phenomenon embedded in a historical, cultural and social context. Text analysis at various levels – ideology analysis, discourse analysis and argumentation analysis – makes it possible to critically examine and identify the problems of political power that carries ideas about a general school and everyone's opportunities for learning and participation.

An analysis of the documentation practices textually and rhetorical aspects, intended to enable specific interpretations of the objectives intentions can thus contribute to a development of theory, methods and knowledge within the educational research in the Nordic countries.