



Young people's voices on participation in school

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The report you are holding in your hands is a report written FOR young people and adults about participation in school. The report was written BY young people and researchers who together carried out a study of young people's perceptions and experiences of participation in school life. The study was conducted in a research circle in which eight young people worked alongside two researchers. The research team created and conducted a survey in the form of a questionnaire for young people. The report presents how one hundred students responded to the survey in spring 2010.

Researchers' Preface

In educational research, various definitions have been proposed to explain participation in school. However, few of these studies have asked young students about what the concept of participation in school means for them. This study is an attempt to define students' perspectives on participation in school life by involving them both as research partners and as respondents to a survey.

Thanks to you, our young research partners, we were able to identify and include more dimensions of participation than are usually covered in research about participation in school. You facilitated access to the school and made valuable contributions about language use, as well as ethically formulated and relevant survey questions. When we analysed the results, your experiences as students were of great benefit as it gave us new understanding of certain statements made in the responses to the survey.

Working in interaction with you meant that we as researchers did not completely control the research process. Research questions, choice of research methods, analysis and dissemination of the final results were jointly decided in the circle. Initially, this felt unusual and a bit scary for us as researchers. We did, however, quickly discover that we could rely completely on you and have great confidence in your ability to work, reflect and discuss about the issues at stake. This report presents a more complex picture of what it is like to be young today than would have been possible without your inputs in the study.

There are many people who have helped to make this report possible. Thanks to all the students who responded to the survey. To our research partners we want to say that it has been a true privilege for us to learn from your experiences and to be given the opportunity to grow and develop together with you!

Jeanette Åkerström and Elinor Brunnberg September 2010

Research partners' Preface

Participation, in various ways, is a right of all students in school.

But what really counts as participation, and where is the limit?

Are all students sufficiently informed of this right?

These were the issues that aroused our interest and made us get involved in the research circle. We also liked the idea that we would be able to use our own experiences and work with students from different schools on a common project.

Our participation in the research circle was more instructive than any of us could have imagined. We learned about all sorts of things, from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to how to analyse the results of questionnaires. But much of what we did was also about our own opinions - our experiences were valued! The results of our research were also used in practical everyday life. This made us really realise how important knowledge is, regardless of whether we got it from each other or from Jeanette and Elinor.

Within the research circle, everyone's opinions were listened to and treated with respect. This created a sense of belonging in the group and led to great collaboration!

Something that we truly realised in the research circle is the importance of an overall picture of an issue, and also that the inclusion of young people's perspectives is especially important when the research is about young people. The world of young people changes quickly, and the changes can be difficult to understand for someone who does not live in this world.

We want to thank all students who participated as respondents. Your views helped us progress in our work. We thank our patient and committed leaders - Jeanette and Elinor. We would also like to thank each other for daring to accept the challenge – together we did an incredible job!

Helin Talayhan September 2010

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1. Background (*researchers*)

In autumn 2009, two researchers at Örebro University, Sweden took the initiative to invite young students to participate in a research circle. Invitations went to secondary and upper secondary school classes, both in mainstream schools and special schools for students hard-of-hearing. The research circle started in January 2010. The research circle members comprised young students from three different schools in the city of Örebro, a doctoral student, and a senior researcher from Örebro University and Mälardalen University, Sweden. The doctoral student acted as project manager with responsibility to drive the research circle forward. She also provided appropriate training in each new phase of the research process. The senior researcher acted as supervisor and had ultimate responsibility for research quality as well as some training in data analysis.

Our work in the research circle is an example of *interactive research*. This means that researchers and people with no formal training in research work learn together throughout the research process (Svensson & Aagaard Nielsen, 2006). Three important characteristics of interactive research processes are

- integration of various kinds of knowledge in a joint knowledge formation
- equal collaborations between researchers and those who the research concerns
- ambitions to contribute to change processes

(Swedish Interactive Research Association, SIRA, 2007)

Researchers' participation in interactive research is important since they have the training to collect and process data, and to relate findings to theory and previous research. Equally important in interactive research is the partners' expertise in terms of determining relevant research questions, as well as their ability to scrutinise mainstream theories and policies from an insider perspective (Westland, 2006). In our research circle, it was important that young students got involved. With their experience of what it is like to be a young student in society today, our young research partners highlighted important determinants for young people's perceptions of participation in school.

Before initiating a research project that involves humans all Swedish research has to be vetted from an ethical perspective (Central Ethical Review Board, 2010). The application for this involves describing the purpose of the intended project, key research questions, data collection methods, and from which people information will be gathered. Prior to the initiation of the research circle, our

study was vetted and approved by one of the Regional Ethical Review Boards. In our application, we as researchers tried to account for the dynamics and openness that characterise interactive research, but did not completely succeed in this. Already in the early stages of the research circle, the young research partners proposed using interviews as a complementary data collection method. Renewed contact with the Regional Ethical Review Board clarified that the original vetting did not include interviews as a data collection method. As a new vetting procedure would have delayed the project, which would mean that some of the circle members would not have been able to take part in the entire research process, we made a joint decision not to conduct interviews as a data collection method.

The concept of the research circle developed from the Swedish tradition of study circles and their agenda of democratic and joint learning (Lundberg & Starrin, 1990). Research circles have been successfully used to carry out interactive research in schools (Holmstrand & Härnsten, 2003; Persson, 2009). However, in the vast majority of these circles, only adults have been involved as participants.

In recent years there has been an increase in research involving young people as research partners (Kellett, 2005). However, at an international congress in 2010¹ about interactive research approaches very few studies involved young people as research partners. In a Swedish context, we only know of one research circle where young people have participated as research partners. In that study, upper secondary students and researchers examined well-being and health in school (Sundberg, Forsberg & Lundberg, 2006:8).

Both from a quality perspective as well as a children's rights perspective it is important that young people can make their voices heard in interactive research settings. This study is an important contribution to such a development.

¹ ALARA World Congress 2010, Participatory Action Research and Action Learning: Appreciating our Past, Comprehending our Presents, Prefiguring our Futures, Action Learning and Action Research Association, Melbourne 6-9 September.

2. Design and Production of the report

The report is divided into six parts: Background, Design and Production, Method, Results, Discussion and Suggestions, and Concluding Remarks. Everyone in the research circle has contributed to the written text. Researchers and young people have, however, focused on different elements and the researchers have been responsible for compiling the report.

In this brochure the sections describing the background to the study, as well as design and production were written by the researchers. The method section describes our work in the circle and was written by the young research partners. The results section summarises the main findings of the survey, in which one hundred students participated as respondents. The results are divided into six chapters. In the first chapter, written jointly by young people and researchers, the main findings are summarised in a model of participation in school life. The model includes four types of participation and these are presented in greater detail by the young people in chapters' two to five of the results section. The sixth and final results chapter is about vertical and horizontal exposure in school. This chapter was written by young people and researchers together and examines different strategies that students use to handle situations when they have experienced mistreatment from adults or peers at school. The discussion section consists of two parts in which young research partners summarise the main findings and provide suggestions about how to increase student participation in school life. In the concluding remarks, researchers make some comments on the impact of the results as well as some challenges arising when involving young people as research partners.

The text was translated into English by the project manager and then reviewed by an English translator.

3. Method (*young people*)

The first thing that happened in the circle was that Jeanette gave us Post-It notes on which we were to write what we thought was meant by participation in school life, and what it did not mean. We put our Post-It notes on a wall so that everyone could see and discuss what the others had written. To help us start thinking about participation in school life, Jeanette also equipped each of us young people with a disposable camera. With the cameras we took photos of situations that we thought illustrated participation as well as non-participation in school. At the second meeting in the research circle, we sorted the photos according to what kind of participation they illustrated. Using both the photos, and the Post-It notes that we wrote during our first meeting, we identified that participation in school life could be divided into four main types.

Having obtained an overall picture of what participation in school life meant we went on to discuss what research questions would guide our future work in the circle. After a brainstorming session, we chose the ideas that we thought were most interesting. The research questions that we chose to examine were:

How do students and teachers perceive and experience the various types of participation?

What do students and teachers think about their responsibility to participate in school life

Before we asked students and teachers about what they thought about participation in school, we learned more about children's rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also learned about research ethics and various data collection methods. We made a joint decision to carry out a survey that included both questionnaires and interviews with students and teachers. Before we had been invited to the research circle, Jeanette (our project manager) and Elinor (our research supervisor) had written to the Regional Ethical Review Board. The Board had said that it was okay for us to use questionnaires as data collection method. However, when Jeanette and Elinor asked about interviews, the Board would not allow us to use interviews in our study without making a new application for ethical vetting. We then decided not to do any interviews at this time.

The questionnaires that we created contained both closed questions (where you could tick a box with your preferred answer), as well as open questions (where

you could write freely). When creating our questionnaires we were inspired by existing surveys used in earlier research. We also tested the questionnaires on friends and family members to see if we needed to adjust anything.

We contacted seven classes in three different schools to tell students about what we were doing and to ask them to participate. We worked in small groups that, together with Jeanette, visited two classes each. Jeanette also visited three teacher teams at two different schools to distribute their questionnaires. Unfortunately, only a small number of these questionnaires came back and we have not included them in our analysis.

A total of one hundred students (sixty one girls and thirty nine boys) from three secondary and upper secondary schools responded to our questionnaire. Respondents came from both mainstream and special schools for students who were hard-of-hearing. The survey was completed during lesson time and those who were not in school that day (thirty-three students) were excluded from the study. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary. One student chose not to complete the questionnaire, so the total number of exclusions from the study was thirty-four.

In the Easter break, we held a workshop to initiate the analysis of the information we had got from our respondents. Jeanette had compiled all the data and we received a thick stack of paper with frequency tables and cross-tabulations from the answers of all closed survey questions. She explained how to read the tables and we went through them all to select those we thought were most important, interesting or surprising. Jeanette then converted these into charts which we used to illustrate the results in the report.

To analyse the open survey questions, we worked in small groups where each group was responsible for one or two of the survey questions. We analysed response to a question using content analysis, which Elinor trained us in. This means that we clustered all responses to a question into sub-groups using pencils of various colours. Creating sub-groups within each question helped us to get a comprehensive understanding of the variations in responses to a question. We also wrote short summaries of the responses to each question. When one group had finished their analysis, it was critically reviewed by one of the other groups to determine whether they agreed with the analysis or not.

At the first meeting of the research circle, Jeanette suggested that we met every third week. However, we later made a joint decision to meet every second week so there would be no postponement of the planned conclusion date for the circle. We met either at a café in the city centre (Märtas Café) that is popular with young students, or at Örebro University. A few times we also tried to have meetings via the Internet. However, we gave up that idea quite quickly as we young people did not think that it was as efficient as meeting face-to-face.

A good thing in our circle was that, at an early stage, we created a contract that stated our agreed conduct of behaviour in the circle (Appendix 1). This created an atmosphere in the circle where you dared to say everything that came to mind.

The things that we found out in our analysis are published in this report. We have also been invited to talk about our experiences as research partners with politicians, practitioners and researchers at various national conferences.

4. Results

The results section summarises the responses of the one hundred students who answered the questionnaire, and is divided into six chapters. The first chapter illustrates various forms of participation in school, identified in the research circle and supported by the respondents. The four main types of participation are incorporated into the comprehensive model 'Young People's Perspectives on Participation in School Life'. The four main types of participation are also presented in more detail in chapters two to five of the results section. The sixth results chapter is about vertical and horizontal exposure in school. Exposure can be described as an antonym for participation, and is therefore an important element in gaining a comprehensive understanding of young people's experiences of participation.

4.1 Four main types of participation in school life

Young people defined participation in school life as being listened to and taking part in decision-making processes. In our study we call this way of being involved in school **political participation** (see also Elvstrand, 2009). Student councils, school meal councils, and class councils are perceived as good because they give students the opportunity to influence and make their voices heard. When students have no access to decision-making in school, they feel excluded from an important aspect of school life. Students feel that it is the responsibility of adults in school to invite young people into decision-making processes. In response to the survey-question "*When do you not feel that you are participating in school*", one respondent stated:

When teachers decide not to ask students what they think or feel. (Boy, upper secondary school)

But respondents also identified having friends as an important dimension of participation in school. In the report this is called **social participation**. Social and political participation differ in terms of stakeholders. Whereas adults control students' participation in decision making, it is peers that determine the degree of social participation. Students also describe their own responsibility in getting involved in social and extracurricular activities.

A third type of participation in school life is called **participation in learning**. Young research partners described this type of participation as feeling a desire to learn, to be motivated and to feel an engagement in what is taught. For most respondents, experiencing this type of participation is vital for them performing well in school. Respondents felt that enhancing students' desire to work required good working relationships between students and teachers. Respondents believed that it is the teachers' duty to motivate students to learn. However, they also highlighted their own responsibility for doing what is expected of them in order to be a good student, i.e. attend school, do homework, be active rather than passive, and respect the needs and rights of classmates.

Participation in learning is to listen, take notes and be generally active. (Boy, upper secondary)

A fourth and crucial type of participation is inclusion in the linguistic context. Young research partners described it as being active in various kinds of dialogues, and in the report it is called **communicative participation**. Communicative participation is interrelated to the other three types of participation in school life as it determines the student's ability to get involved in lessons and in decision-making, as well as with peers. Students with a hearing impairment described communicative participation as hearing what your peers say and having time to respond appropriately, as well as having teachers who are sufficiently skilled in sign language. But communicative participation is not primarily about hearing or not hearing. Hearing respondents also described experiences of non-participation due to teachers using words that they do not understand, or when peers talk about issues that are unfamiliar.

The interrelationship between the different types of participation in school life is illustrated in the model 'Young People's Perspectives on Participation in School Life' (Figure 1). Participation is described as desirable and something that adults should promote. But young people also highlighted their responsibility in making themselves participate as well as their duty to show peers and teachers respect. Consequently, the triad of 'Rights, Responsibilities, and Duties' is included as it is identified as a key aspect of young people's experiences of participation in school life.

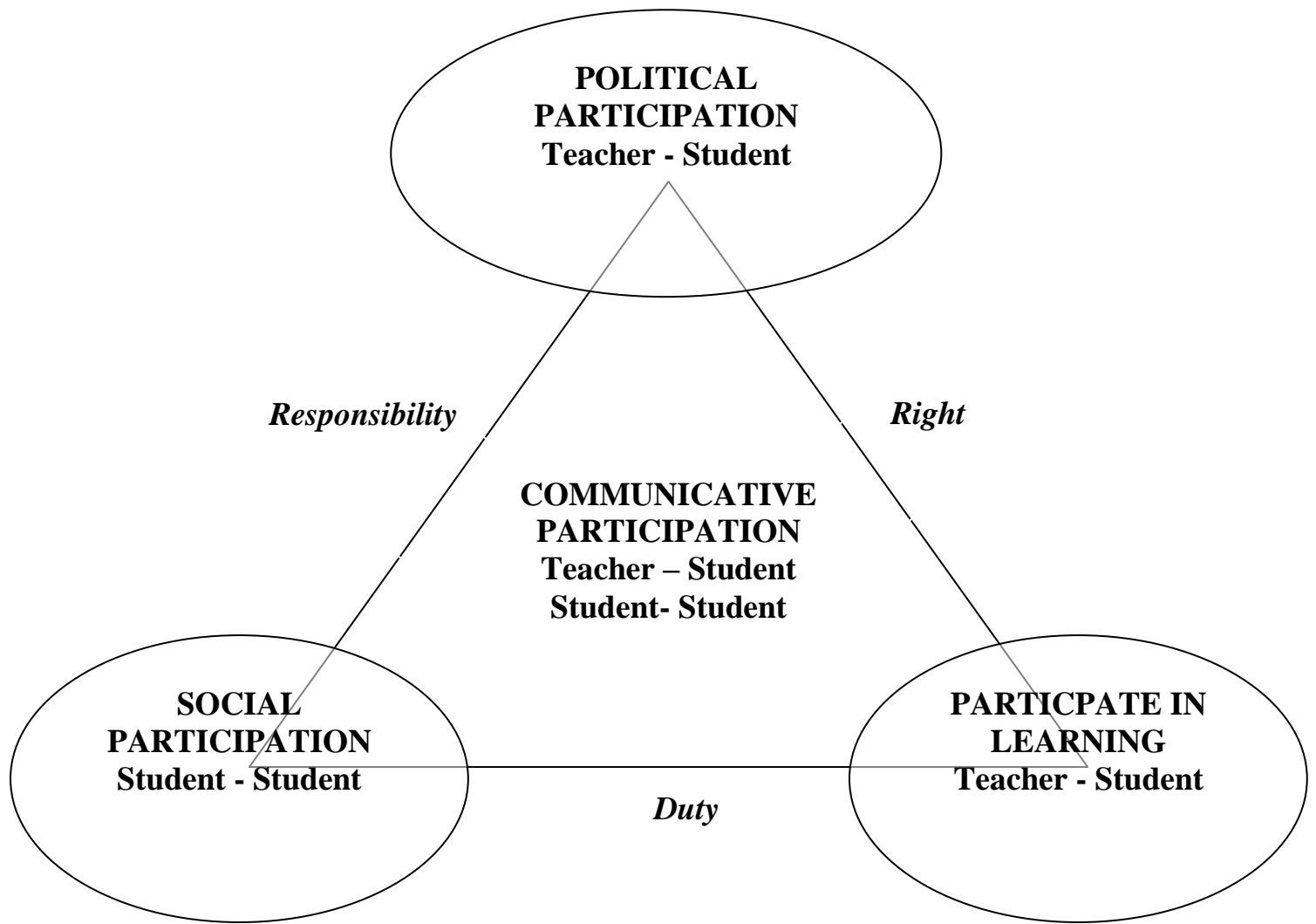


FIGURE 1: Young People's Perspectives on Participation in School Life

4.2 Communicative participation

Chatting with friends

Without a common language, students' social participation immediately decreases. Respondents with a hearing impairment described that they sometimes did not have enough time to hear what peers said when they used spoken Swedish. In such situations, the students said that they sometimes chose not to ask the speaker to repeat what she or he had just said. They also described that sometimes, when they did ask, they were told by the group that it was irrelevant and the group just went on to discuss another subject. The student who had asked for a repetition could then feel excluded from the social fellowship in the group.

But having a common language is not as much about hearing or not hearing as it is about having the same experiences. More than one in five students (23%) said they sometimes felt excluded when friends talk with each other. It might be that they talk about common experiences that you do not share, when you do not know the people they are talking about, or when you do not understand your peers' way of reasoning.

[It is like when] you feel you are not invited into the conversation and they seem to think that you should not really be there. (Girl, upper secondary)

It is more common for girls (27%) than boys (17%) to describe that they have felt excluded when peers talk to each other. Usually, respondents describe situations where they have felt temporary exclusion. However, some accounts describe experiences, which could be referred to as systematic discriminations, where peers never listen, walk away when you start talking, or form groups in which the respondent does not feel welcome.

Understanding what the teacher says

Almost one in five students (19%) has felt excluded during lessons because they have not understood what the teacher was talking about. The respondents think it is difficult to feel engaged in learning when the teacher is talking too fast or not contextualising the subject. When students experience exclusion from teaching they easily lose concentration, get bored or feel sad.

It's never fun to have a teacher who is not engaged in the students or the subject. [It is] the opposite for me having the "desire" to learn. (Girl, upper secondary)

Accounts from respondents with hearing impairments describe situations when participation in learning becomes extremely challenging. These are situations when there is no interpreter, the technology does not work, or the teacher has insufficient proficiency in sign language. Among respondents with disabilities, more than one in four students (27%) said they had felt excluded during lessons.

4.3 Political participation

A majority of the students (76%) think that it is important to be part of decision-making in school. Among respondents in secondary school the percentage is even higher (82% versus 72% among respondents in upper secondary schools). Although many of the respondents are satisfied with their present degree of political participation, one in four (27%) wishes that they had more influence in decision-making at school. Compared to the girls, it was a greater proportion of the boys (38% versus 22% of the girls) who wanted more influence in school (Figure 2). There is also a small group of students who think that they have too much influence.

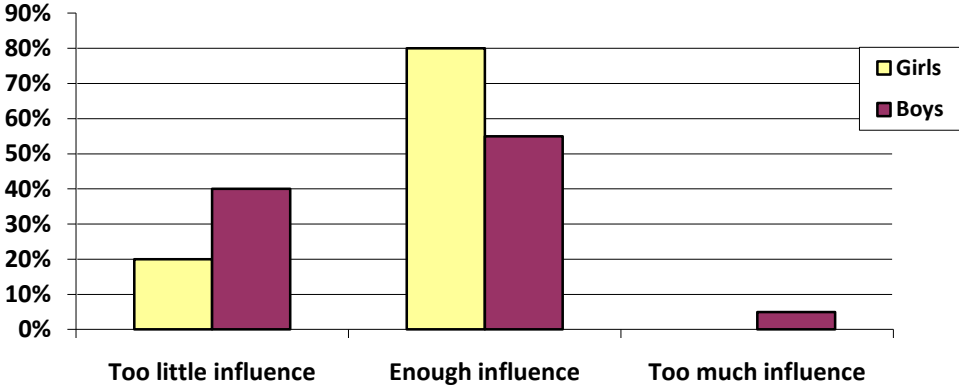


FIGURE 2: Perceived political participation by gender

It is also a larger proportion of respondents with a disability (40% versus 24% of students with no disability) that are dissatisfied with the degree of influence that they have in school today (Figure 3).

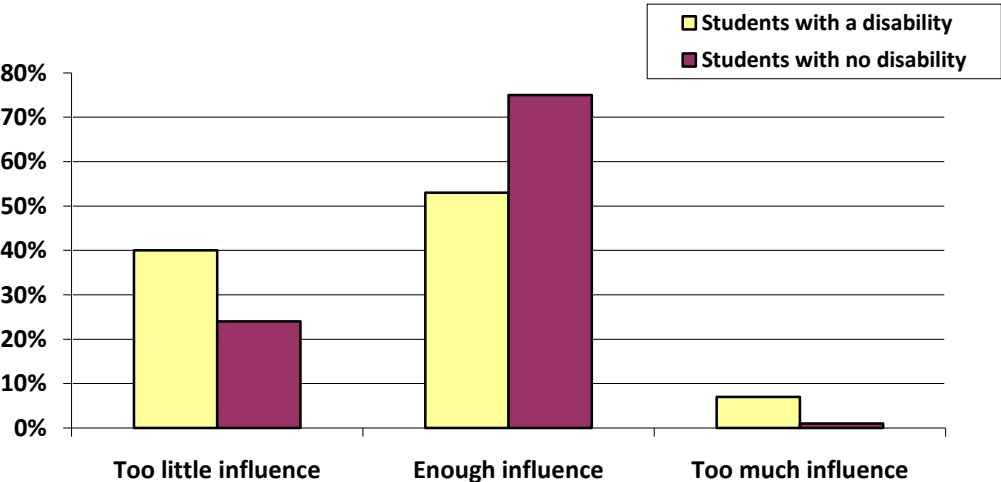


FIGURE 3: Perceived political participation by function

Students want to be involved in planning schoolwork, discussing how teachers and students can work together to create a good working climate, and participate in decisions concerning food served in the school dining room, as well as facilities and social activities in school.

[I want to take part in decisions about] studies and general things such as locker placement ... everything that concerns us students. (Boy, upper secondary)

4.4 Social participation

Respondents describe school as being both a workplace and a place where you meet friends and have fun. Peers are perceived as important since they can support and inspire you to perform better in school. With a friend in school you have someone to share your thoughts and ideas with and friends can also protect you from feeling lonely.

Friends in school are important so you don't feel alone or vulnerable. You need someone you like to hang out with and talk to in order to enjoy school. (Girl, upper secondary)

Some respondents describe peers as being so vital that they would not want to go to school if they did not have friends there. However, some admit that peers sometimes make them lose concentration on their school work. There seems to be a difference in the importance of friends in school depending on whether students regard school primarily as a workplace or as a social venue. When school is regarded as a workplace, peers are described as being important as they help you to perform better in school. However, it is not so vital to have your best friends in school.

[It is] important to have people to hang out with and so on. But real friends need not necessarily attend the same school. (Girl, upper secondary)

Most students are satisfied with the friends they have in school. But some respondents in very small classes said that they do not have that many peers to choose to hang out with. These respondents describe that they usually socialise with the whole class. However, if there are distinct groups in the class and you do not find someone to hang out with, it is easy to feel excluded.

4.5 Participation in learning

Desire to learn

The last type of participation identified in the report describes experiences related to school work and the desire to learn. Respondents made a clear connection between feeling a desire to learn and school performance. Nine out of ten students (91%) think that their desire to learn influences their capacity to learn. Desiring to learn is described as being active rather than passive, being inspired and motivated, and understanding the context of subjects taught during a lesson. A small group of students (9%) stated that desire to learn did not matter in terms of their capacity to do their school work. In this group there were three times as many boys (17%) as girls (5%).

I study as much as I can, regardless of whether I am bored. (Boy, secondary)

Taking responsibility

To experience participation in school, respondents believe it is their responsibility to go to school, concentrate, be motivated, listen, take an interest, and do their homework. They think of these things in terms of what is expected of them as students and also describe that they have a duty not to infringe on peers' ability to learn or teachers' ability to teach in school. Respondents also talk of the need for collaboration between teachers and students to increase participation in learning. One quotation that illustrates this is one respondent's answer to the survey question "What would have changed a situation where you felt that you did not learn anything?" was:

I should have been more focused and the teacher should have been more dedicated. (Boy, upper secondary)

Students need to feel confident that the teacher and peers will listen to and respect their opinions if they are to speak out in class. Respondents state that it should be okay to say the wrong thing sometimes without being ridiculed or judged. Noise levels in class also influence students' comfort about speaking out loud in class, but in somewhat different ways. Some respondents find it easier to speak out when it is silent, while others prefer there to be some small talk in the classroom because they will not attract as much attention when they speak up. However, if the classroom environment is chaotic and loud, students will ex-

perience difficulties in concentration. Respondents also described that they expected the teacher to be present and keep order during the lessons.

Survey question: *What would make you feel comfortable about speaking up in class?*

Answer: *When you've raised your hand to say something the teacher should really listen and try to understand you. [She] must also control the class so that you know that no one will start to laugh. (Girl, upper secondary)*

4.5.1 How teachers can increase students' desire to learn

Students desire to learn is increased if the teacher shows engagement and likes teaching her subject. Students' motivation is also affected by how the teacher introduces the subject. If the teacher explains clearly what is to be reviewed and what students are expected to learn, it is easier for students to understand why it is important to learn about a subject. Respondents also state that it is important that the teacher is strict and does not lose track during lessons. A good way to get students' attention is to explain the subject in a broader context and give examples that students can relate to their own experiences.

[The teacher can] explain with examples and compare to everyday life so that you understand why it is important that you learn about the subject. (Girl, upper secondary)

Respondents stated that it is important to feel active rather than passive during lessons, or they lose concentration and become bored. But being active means different things to different students. Some said it meant having enough time to take notes, for others it was doing something creative, while others described it as having open discussions about the subject.

If the lesson is long it needs to be broken down to include some interactive exercises. But respondents warned that these exercises had to mean something. They did not, for example, like the teacher to be over-explicit, or to ask obvious or purely hypothetical questions, since it made them feel ridiculed. Also, it was very important that the teacher, having asked a question, really listened to the student's answer.

Respondents reported that they became more engaged in school if they had positive and enthusiastic teachers. It is also important for students' capacity to perform well in school that the teacher speaks to students as individuals, and meets individual needs. When asked how a teacher should act to improve the desire to learn, the respondents emphasised that it was important to have a teacher who believed in them.

Teachers should be positive and give me hope. (Boy, secondary)

Equal treatment

Some respondents described situations where the teacher distinguished between students in class. Some felt that the teacher ignored them in favour of more gifted and talented students. One out of five students (21%) felt that their teachers distinguished between girls and boys in class. The difference was described as girls not being reprimanded or being treated more kindly than boys. The teacher could place greater demands on girls to perform well and behave in school, but boys were seen as getting most of the teachers' attention.

You don't always have the chance to say what you want to say. The teacher has already pointed to the smartest person in the class and asked her or him. (Boy, upper secondary).

4.6 Horizontal and vertical exposure

Almost one in five respondents (17%) had been subjected to mistreatment by a peer in school. Survey accounts described experiences of unpleasant comments, scorn, physical abuse or exclusion from the social fellowship in class. Since it is a student who treats another student badly we call this kind of experiences **horizontal exposure**. It was five times as common for girls (20%) to have experienced horizontal exposure compared to boys (4%). It was also more common for respondents born in a country outside Europe to have experienced horizontal exposure compared to respondents born in Europe (Figure 4).

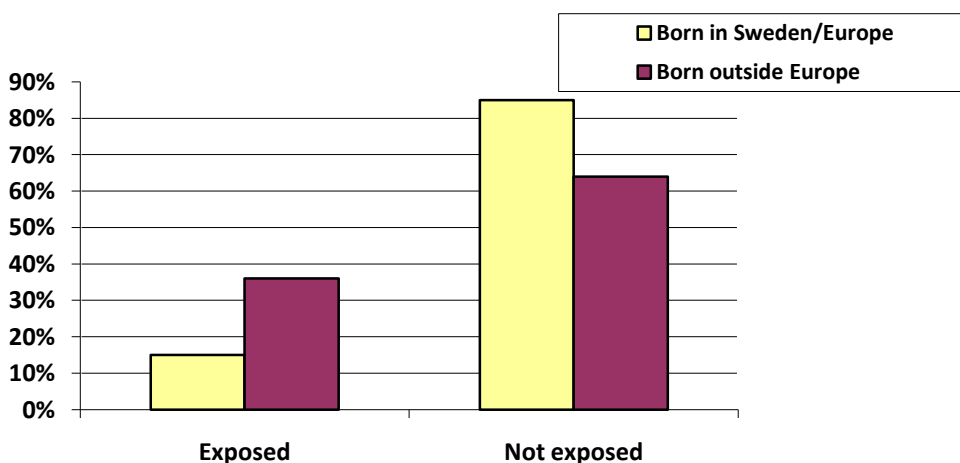


FIGURE 4: Experienced horizontal exposure by country of origin

When it is an adult in school who treats a student badly we call it **vertical exposure**. Fewer respondents (7%) reported experiences of vertical exposure, yet more than one student in twenty (that is about one or two students per class) had experienced mistreatment from an adult at school. Students described feelings of vertical exposure when they had been verbally abused or when a teacher had questioned their capacities or distinguished very pointedly between students.

The teacher yelled at me but not the other person who did the same thing. (Boy, upper secondary)

Analysing survey accounts of ideal classroom situations, we found descriptions where respondents indicated experiences that came close to both horizontal and vertical exposure. The following quotes are two students’ answers to the survey question “*What would make you feel comfortable about speaking up in class?*” The quotations describe ideal situations where students are free from horizontal and vertical exposure.

I need to know that I am not going to be ignored or mocked for what I say. (Girl, upper secondary, horizontal exposure)

The teacher should not have too high expectations or correct me constantly if I say something wrong. (Girl, upper secondary, vertical exposure)

Among respondents reporting experiences of vertical exposure there were little variations between boys and girls, schools, or the country in which the student was born. However, among the respondents reporting vertical exposure there was a twice as big a proportion of students with a disability (13%) as compared to students with no disability (6%). Figure 5 illustrates experienced vertical exposure by function.

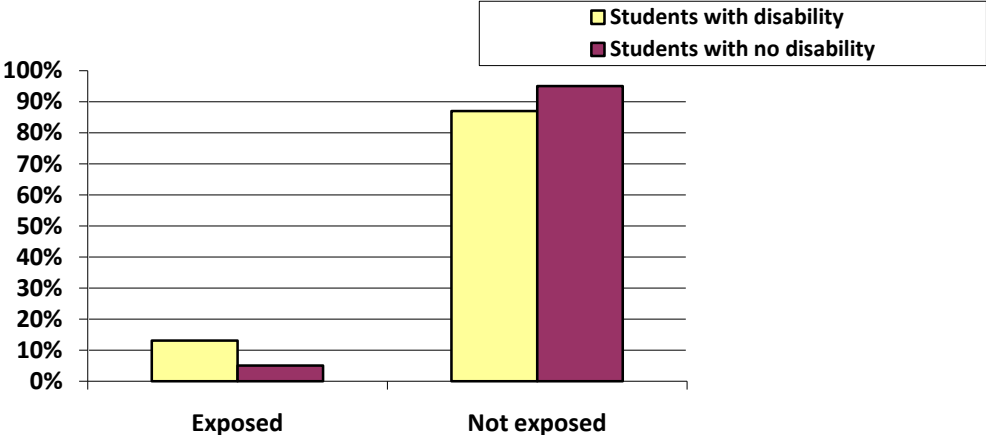


FIGURE 5: Experienced vertical exposure by function

Coping with exposure

Respondents' strategies to cope with exposure differed according to whether they described horizontal or vertical exposure. When it was another student who had treated them badly, the students described how they coped actively by 'getting their own back' or by turning to an adult at the school. Others had learned strategies that helped them reduce the feeling of exposure by finding friends in other classes or going their own way.

The accounts describing vertical exposure lacked illustrations of active strategies to cope with the situation. Instead, respondents described how they internalised their anger, rage and sadness.

Survey question: *How did you react when you were treated badly by an adult at school?*

Survey account: *[I got] very angry and irritated inside. (Boy, secondary)*

Our data does not allow comments on how students deal with serious cases of abuse and bullying.

5. Discussion and Suggestions (*young people*)

5.1 Summary and main result

Our study identified four main types of participation. We have named these types communicative participation, political participation, social participation, and participation in learning. The communicative participation means that students can follow, and be part of the linguistic context both in the classroom and during breaks. Consequently, communicative participation plays a central role in all other types of participation. Without communicative participation students find it very hard to participate in learning or decision-making processes. They will also feel socially excluded amongst peers.

Political participation is important for students' capacity for achievement at school. Three out of four students think it is important to be able to exert influence in school. A greater proportion among boys, students born in a country outside Europe, and students with disabilities would like to have more influence than they have today. This could be interpreted that gender, country of origin and function influences students' opportunities to make their voices heard in school.

Teachers and students must work together to increase participation in learning. Giving students the opportunity to feel a desire to learn is vital to achievement. It is also a joint responsibility of students and teachers.

The social participation is of great importance if the student is to enjoy school. It can also affect students' academic performance since peer support motivates you to do better in school, as well as protecting you from feeling exposed.

In conclusion, all four types of participation are interrelated and greatly impact on student performance in school. Participation is based on the interaction, but various types of participation involve various forms of relationships and stakeholders. In communicative participation, which determines all other forms of participation, both teacher-student and student-student relationships are vital. In social participation it is the student-student relationship that is important and peers guard access to this arena, whereas it is the adults who are in the position to invite students into political participation. The last type, participation in learn-

ing, is also defined by the teacher-student relationship. Three key words generated in the study are responsibility, right and duty. Students believe that it is both teachers' and students' responsibility to provide opportunities for students to perform well in school. However, a student also has a duty not to prevent someone else from participating in school. It is a duty to allow others to participate, but also a responsibility to ensure that you feel involved by actively making yourself participate.

5.2 Suggestions on how to increase student participation in school

To increase students' participation in school they need to know about the contents of key documents that define course objectives, grading criteria and curricula. They also need to be informed about what laws and rules apply to school. If students are to have a real influence in decision-making in schools they need to know where they can actually have an impact.

At school, we believe that direct democracy is better than representative democracy. This would give all students the same opportunity for participation, instead of it only being a small group that has been selected to represent all students at the school. Sometimes it is more of a sham democracy when only a few students are involved in making decisions and planning with the teachers.

To perform well in school, it is important that students and teachers can meet at the same level and we do not think the school should be a place where the student feels inferior to the teacher. If everyone in the school knows what their rights are and what rules and policies they are required to live up to it will create a workplace where you can feel involved, thrive and enjoy.

It is also important to take advantage of different experiences when making school a good place to work. All students must have a chance to make their voices heard when policies and rules of the school are decided. Then the joint knowledge that would form the foundation for the school's norms and rules would be based on experiences from all over the world.
How nice that would be!

6 Concluding Remarks (*researchers*)

Although both girls and boys were invited to the research circle it was only girls who got involved in the circle. Boys' voices are represented in the survey accounts, but the conceptualisation, research questions and results analysis might have been expanded if boys had also been represented as research partners. Consequently, when inviting young people to be research partners, strategies need to be adapted to reach various groups of young people.

In the report we use the term school life. This concept is a play on words to draw attention to the similarity between young people's schooling and adults' work. A student in secondary and upper secondary school is expected to be present five days a week and between thirty and forty hours per week. Going to school is therefore a full-time job in which young people in Sweden are enrolled for most of their childhood. Factors like having the ability to participate in an open dialogue, feeling support, good leadership, an adequate workload, a positive working atmosphere, developmental opportunities, and feeling secure have been identified as factors that promote health in a workplace (Angelöw, 2002). All these factors are represented in the survey responses as part of how students describe the concept of participation in school life. Moreover, respondents also provided thoughtful suggestions about how to increase young people's participation in school life. When working to promote a healthy school life, young students, as experts on their everyday life experiences, have a key role to play.

School life is an important part of young people's childhood here and now. School is both a place where they go to work and a place to meet friends and have fun. These two are, however, interrelated and respondents frequently described the importance of friends and social activities for performing well in school. Teaching in school is often about what is important to know in order to become a responsible, educated and autonomous adult in a democratic society. Social contacts with peers, on the other hand, are vital in childhood. When future and current investments compete for young students' limited time resources, young people must set priorities. It can be a difficult choice between prioritising what is of immediate importance and what is claimed to be useful in a still abstract future. One of the experiences that we noticed in the research circle is that young people and adults use different tenses when they organise their lives. While adults often plan far ahead, young people organise their life a lot more in the present. A major reason for young people's preferred organising strategy

might be that they do not own their time on the same terms as adults do. The structural frames within which young people plan their time relatively freely are controlled by adults and most often determined by adults' priorities and time perspective. According to the respondents, one suggestion to give students an incentive to prioritise learning for the future was to combine future and present by relating the subject to their everyday experiences.

An interesting result in the report is how young people think about participation in school life in relation to rights. The adult tendency to connect young people's rights with their needs was supported neither by the young research partners nor by respondents. Instead, young people related their rights to both responsibilities and duties. This variation in how adults and young people talk about their rights is interesting and needs further analysis in order to fulfil the Convention on the Rights of the Child in a way that also acknowledges children's right to protection and adult care.

Young people do not belong to a homogenous group; they are girls and boys with different interests, different backgrounds and different dreams. It is therefore important to consider whose voices were not represented in order to identify remaining knowledge gaps. Young people that were not included in our study were students who are under the age of fifteen, students who are enrolled in schools for children with intellectual disabilities, and young people who are not subject to compulsory school attendance due to lack of Swedish residence permits. Moreover, since the survey was carried out during school time, there are two important groups of young people whose voices are also missing in the report. These groups consist of students not present the day of the survey due to illness, but also the group of young students who actively opt out of participation in school life by truancy.

If you are interested in knowing more about how a research circle works, you can get in touch with Jeanette Åkerström, jeanette.akerstrom@oru.se, or Elinor Brunnberg, elinor.brunnberg@mdh.se.

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Appendix 1

CONDUCT OF BEHAVIOUR

I _____ agree with the following rules during the time that the research circle is running, up to September 2010.

To carry our research together we in the research circle are to:

1. Acknowledge each other and help each other to develop.
2. Make decisions together. *If we cannot agree, majority decisions will be made and opposing opinions will be recorded.*
3. Be kind to each other and respect each other's opinions and diversities.
4. Listen when someone talks and not interrupt.
5. Not tell others what individual circle members say or do. *This also applies to our information providers.*
6. Learn from each other and allow people to change their minds.
7. Do my best to be active in the circle and contribute to the research as best as I can.
8. Initiate all meetings with a summary to make sure that everyone is informed about activities and progress of the circle.
9. Try to join as many meetings as possible. *If I cannot come I will inform Jeanette via phone [...] or mail [...].*

We will work together to analyse, summarise and disseminate our findings. The final findings are owned by the research group ICU and may only be used for scientific purposes.

I am aware that my participation in the research circle is voluntary and that I may conclude my participation at any time. However, as long as I am a circle member I will do my best to follow the above agreements.

Signature

Date



ICU - I see you
Mälardalen University
Örebro University
2010