

The (embodied) citizen

Exploring young people's possibilities to engage
in the wellbeing of others

Silvia Edling

The intention with this article is to contribute to discussions regarding the role of education to combat different forms of violence towards others, such as discrimination, bullying, oppression and so forth. This is done by exploring the relationship between how young people describe their everyday responses to other people's life circumstances and the image of a citizen who engages in other people's wellbeing presented in the ICCS report. In interpreting the relationship between the report and the young peoples' narratives, Kristeva's understandings of politics and the political have been fruitful. The concepts direct attention to embodied moments that are not captured in politics while at the same time they convey a message about young people's possibilities of promoting the wellbeing of others in the field of the political. Hence, Kristeva's interpretation of the concepts provides a language that makes it possible to think and hence approach the educational desire to stimulate young people's engagement in the wellbeing of others otherwise (not instead).

Keywords: ICCS 2009, ethics, young people, embodiment, politics and political.

Introduction

The article takes its point of departure in the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, ICCS 2009 (Schultz et al 2010).¹ What is especially highlighted here in the ICCS report, are the questions asked to fourteen-year-old youth regarding their ability to engage in making the lives of others better and the motives for asking these questions. Hence, the claims raised within the ICCS study are placed in the foreground.

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Quantitative and qualitative investigations need not be seen as enemies. They contribute in different ways to understanding and improving social life, while at the same time being subject to the limitations accompanying their specific form of approach. So it does not necessarily come as a surprise if there are differences between various methodological slants. However, the choice of questions in the ICCS report indicates that there are certain ways of behaving in society that are preferable to others when it comes to encouraging and fostering young people to engage in the wellbeing of others – and these claims deserve consideration. So, whereas the strength of the ICCS study is that it enables a comparison among different countries overtime, it also conveys a message about what is included and excluded as well as valued and less valued in the concept of citizenship (cf. Cherryholmes 1988, Englund 1999).

Rather than proposing a more suitable way of combating different kinds of violence and promoting the wellbeing of others, the article strives to contribute to an ongoing discussion in education regarding the desire to counteract different forms of violence, such as oppression, sexism, xenophobia, harassment and bullying (cf. Kumashiro 2002, Todd 2009, Frånberg 2003, The Swedish National Agency of Education 2003). Hence, the notion of promoting the wellbeing of others is understood very broadly here, namely as an aspiration and engagement not to subject others to harm in different ways.

The aim is to problematize the notion of a citizen who promotes the wellbeing of others, as described in the ICCS report, by comparing it to the narratives of nine young people who depict their sense of embodied responsibilities to others. The article asks two interrelated questions:

- Who is the citizen that engages in the wellbeing of others and becomes engrossed in promoting the wellbeing of others, according to the ICCS report?
- What are the limits and consequences of this particular meaning of citizenship as concerns the (young) people's possibilities of engaging in the wellbeing of others?

The article is divided into four parts. To begin with a methodological background to the study is presented. In part two reasons for the set of questions chosen in order to measure the ethical citizen and the questions themselves are analyzed through the grid of discourse analysis. To detect the limits of what it means to be an ethical citizen according to the ICCS report, this is compared to the discourses generated in stories of nine young people and their everyday responses (part three). Julia Kristeva's concepts of the political and politics are used as tools to interpret the rela-

tionship between the report and the narratives (in chapter two and three). The study ends with a short conclusion that regenerates the educational desire to stimulate citizens to take an interest in the wellbeing of others.

The methodological approach of the study

A short description of the ICCS report and the interviews is presented below. The notion of discourse psychology is highlighted as an approach to detect patterns of meaning in written and oral language. While discourse analysis functions as a means to categorize the data, Kristeva's concepts *politics* and the *political* make it possible to interpret the categorizations generated in the ICCS report and the young people's narratives.

The ICCS report contra interviews of young people

The article is based on two qualitative studies, involving 1) the ICCS report's written motives and questions expressing desirable ways of being towards others 2) nine young people's oral narratives depicting their sense of responsibilities to others in different settings. The written and oral use of language is here understood as a source for making meaning. The study of meaning-making "shed[s] light on the question of communication, social action, and the construction of I, the Other, and the world" (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, p. 114). What is highlighted are the conditions for promoting the wellbeing of others as generated through the report and young people's ways of defining the world and their relations in it (p. 115).

As regards the Swedish ICCS report (The National Swedish Agency of Education 2010)² the questions concerning ethics and social relations are especially emphasized under the heading of "Attitudes and values." That is also the reason why this article is limited to this specific chapter. The part in the chapter illuminating the pupils' view of themselves as citizens is not taken into consideration here. Each main question in the study is followed by sub-questions, and pupils are then provided with a set of options to choose from. Hence, it is the questions in the ICCS study found under the headlines "Attitudes and values" that are of interest in this article rather than the pupils' answers. The part in the chapter illuminating the pupils' view of them self as citizens is not taken into consideration here. According to the report there are several aspects that need to be taken into account in order to be a democratic citizen who engages in the wellbeing of others based on questions, sub-questions and statements that the pupils have to relate to. The ICCS

report's image of the citizen who is able to promote the wellbeing of others is compared to the narratives of young people.

Nine young people between seventeen and nineteen years of age were asked to describe their everyday relations with others in different settings. Each interview lasted between 40–90 minutes and was later transcribed by me. The reason for not delegating the process of transcription to others is that it allows me to have a higher perceptiveness to the dynamics of the context (Trost 2005). The interviews are half-open, which means that certain themes were fixed (the same in all of the interviews), while the conversation within these frames contained a high amount of freedom (Kvale 1996, Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000, p. 118). In focus were the young people's ways of picturing their sense of responsibilities when encountering other people's life circumstances. In ethical theory the objective to engage in the wellbeing of others is often connected to the individual's responsibility, which involves an ability to act in ways that do not harm other people (Lucas 1993). Hence, responsibility is here understood as *an ability everyone possesses from the beginning, namely the ability to respond to other people's life circumstances*. In the awareness of another person's life condition a *feeling* of responsibility is awakened, but it is possible to either engage the wellbeing of others (assume responsibility) or to inflict pain (ignore the awakened responsibility) (cf. Lévinas 1981). From Zygmunt Bauman's (1995) point of view, it becomes a question of what we *choose* to do with the sense of responsibility aroused by the Other.

Certain patterns can be detected in the ICCS report and young people's responses, by comparing particular phrases and words used by the writers in the report and the young people in the narratives (Wetherell & Potter 1992). In discourse psychology it is essential to pay attention to the role of the interviewer and interpreter. This implies awareness that the responses and themes in the interviews are affected by the discourses I am familiar with, which means that a different person probably would have responded differently to the young people's stories as well as coded the material in another way (Fielding 1993, Potter & Wetherell 1987). In order to interpret the relationship between the ICCS report and the youths' stories, Kristeva's concepts of *political* and *politics* are used.

Politics and the political

So as to understand the ethical dimension of discussions about democratic citizenship I turn to Kristeva's (2002) distinction between *politics* (the polis) and the *political*. Following Kristeva, all knowledge becomes visible through language and the images it generates, rendering language and the imaginary essential entrances when it comes to understanding

thought and meaning-making (p. 131). Politics focuses upon images of the good life established in formal social settings such as governments and school boards. It has to do with already recognized and generally accepted power structures, values, laws and norms, and as such it functions primarily to secure stability and order (p. 3ff). The images presented through politics can seem captivating since they create a grid through which reality is viewed and become a benchmark against which life is measured (p. 73ff).

Whereas *politics* is focused upon general images of the good life created in formal arenas, the *political* in Kristeva's (2002) writings, directs attention to people's everyday embodied interactions. She does not abandon the notion of images since she argues that the only way of gaining knowledge is through images (p. 167, see also Kristeva 1984). By studying people's meaning making (images), expressed through language, it becomes possible to discern how individuals perceive and act towards others and hence how they generate the interplay between norm/abnormality. All the minuscule responses involving, for instance, strong emotions, recurring patterns of disruptions, tensions between ideals and senses become significant to highlight because they say something profound about the shaping of a society and the conditions for engaging in the wellbeing of others.

Kristeva does not suggest that politics has become superfluous and that the political as a model should replace it. Images may very well influence people's actions, but what she points out is that they are entangled with the intimate domain in ways that ruptures stability, and in order to handle violence these ruptures cannot be ignored. Consequently, viewing the world through the grid of images projected through politics risks overlooking the embodied struggles in people's lives – where both (unintended) violence and joy are intermingled – that take place in the field of the political *independent* of the symbolic images governing in formal settings.

The intimate domain is thus a space in which the mind is being reincorporated with the body and consequently a space where the inner/outer (the unconscious/conscious) are involved in an endless collision with each other. Kristeva refers to the body as a container that harbors drives and desires, which break into language like waves and color its meaning. The conscious and unconscious, the inside and outside, are entangled and therefore influences meaning making *and* action (28 ff and chapter 4). Thus, following Kristeva (1984, 1991), conflicts in society such as inequality between the sexes, racism, xenophobia, ethnic persecution and so forth cannot be solved merely through conscious arguments in the social arena, since it overlooks the conflicts taking place within the subject. For example, there can be seemingly rational

conversations in which women end up being associated with weakness and foreigners with danger. Consequently, no matter how rational the arguments are, they cannot be distinguished from the individual presenting them and her or his intimate images of others (*ibid.*). As a result, the ambition to combat oppression requires more than mainly adapting to images of good ethical behavior, which generally governs in politics. Rather she shifts the focus to conditions for being ethical in terms of *becoming a subject in relation to others*.

Since every encounter with others is unique and the subject cannot fully control her or his actions due to the split subject where the body and the social, or the unconscious and the conscious, absolute stability is impossible. From this way of reasoning, the subject is under a constant process of change. The subject cannot always be loving and caring, for instance, since an encounter may trigger emotions that may very well influence speech and action in a direction opposite to one first intended. Becoming a subject is, for Kristeva, both ethical and political in that it points to a link between the tiny embodied responses of people and the weaving of social structures. The responses *are political*, she argues, since the features of a society take shape in these many encounters in the same way as *they are ethical*, considering that they influence the lives of others (Kristeva 1991, Kristeva & Oliver 2002). A respect for plurality, generally cherished in modern democratic nations, is hence provided a physical meaning in Kristeva's writings. Considering that the ICCS report is based on certain norms in society that define what it means to be a citizen who engages in the wellbeing of others, it can be interpreted as an expression of politics.

The politics of IEA/ICCS 2009 – an overall view

Motives

According to Schultz et al (2008), a motive for conducting the IEA report is the “growing impact of globalization, external threats to civic societies” such as terrorism and anti-democratic movements, “and the limited interest and involvement of young generations in public and social life” (p. 7). According to the writers, democracy is understood in broad terms as rule by the people and involves both democratic procedures (voting, elections etc.) and an ethical dimension (based on ethical principles) striving to engage a respect for human rights by cherishing equity, freedom and social cohesion. Equity is a principle that is based on an idea that people are born equals and has the right to be treated justly. The principle of equity is pictured as the road to productivity, peace

and harmony. The principle of freedom means the right to have freedom from fear, freedom of speech, and freedom of belief. Social cohesion is founded on a vision that connectedness, common visions and a sense of belonging, strengthens a society's ability to cherish plurality: "When social cohesion is strong, there is active appreciation and celebration of the diversity of individuals and communities that comprise a society" (p. 21). One motive for posing the questions in the study can thus be said to be founded on a desire to cherish the creation of a peaceful society, a respect for plurality and a living without fear – amongst other things. The discursive language chosen to describe this motive can be seen as being influenced by liberal values (cf. Sprod 2001, Halstead 2005).

The ICCS report (The National Swedish Agency of Education 2010) that links the IEA study to a Swedish context is the focal point of this article. According to the ICCS report one aspect of *being a democratic citizen* involves *being ethical* in order to combat oppression, and it is the image of the engaged ethical citizen that is to be addressed in this article. In the ICCS study it is stated that the democratic values are of an ethical kind and necessary to pay regard to if citizens are to be able to handle human rights and oppression of different kinds in society (p. 85–86). The engaged ethical citizen is subsequently an aspect of civic engagement, i.e., a state-citizenship relationship (a contract between the citizen and the state) based on an idea of a particular kind of citizenship participation in civic life. The notion of civic engagement is described more thoroughly by Olson (2012).

In order to justify the questions in a Swedish context the writers of the ICCS report turn to the syllabus describing the subject of social science. In the syllabus it is stated that it is essential that the pupil learn to see things from different perspectives and actively *take a stand against* situations that violate other people. The syllabus points out that it is the value of *tolerance* towards those with divergent opinions that is desired and that tolerance is based on an understanding that situations can be conceived differently by different people based on for instance their class, gender and ethnic belongings.

In the social science subject the necessity to *orient amongst different views* is stated as important to observe, as well as the need to teach pupils *to take a clear stand against opinions involving violations of other human beings*. A *ground for tolerance of dissent* is created by the understanding that phenomena may be perceived differently by different people, depending for example on gender, class and ethnicity. Swedish legislation on *fundamental rights and freedoms* and the International Covenants on Human Rights, such as the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the

Convention on the Rights of the Child, serve as a basis for reflection on commonality from a national and global perspective (syllabus for social science subjects, p. 73 in The National Swedish Agency of Education 2010, my own translations and emphasis).

Pupils should *have knowledge of basic democratic values* and the school must observe and convey *values such as equality, gender equality and individual freedom and integrity*. As concerns the social science subject it is stated in its curriculum that it has a particular responsibility to *discuss and analyze democratic values* and in this context, develop the ability to review, assess and take a stand in social issues and engage the pupils' will to participate and exert influence. The *ethical program is included in all education but takes on special significance when it comes to issues of democracy, human rights, power and oppression in various forms*. One of the goals that students in grade nine have to reach is precisely to understand the common and fundamental democratic values on which our society rests. They should therefore not only be aware of them, but also understand them (The National Swedish Agency of Education 2010, p. 86, my own translation and emphasis).

Following the report, a central mission for school is to discuss people's rights and obligations in society. It is therefore important that the pupils share the common guidelines regarding the human rights declaration and be aware that this concerns everyone. In the Swedish syllabus, which ICCS refers to, it is also stated that the school needs to provide the pupils with knowledge that allows them to take a stand in questions that arise in a *pluralistic and interdependent society*. The reason for this is that a democratic society is grounded on respect for the individual's unique value regardless of their group belonging. The report interprets the syllabus and argues that knowledge and values are inter-reliant, implying that the pupils' position statements in value issues should be based on knowledge (p. 73–82). Democratic values need to be understood and appreciated according to the report, and for this reason the pupil's ability to *value and take a stand* in social issues is particularly essential to practice. Besides it is also pointed out in the ICCS report that the pupils need to have knowledge of ethical values, as this is important in order to handle different forms of oppression. The writers justify the need to stimulate young people's ethical awareness on the basis of the democratic framework stressing human rights. However, rights are mentioned together with the need to pay regard to power and oppression of different kinds. To sum up, the language in the ICCS report highlights the motive for justifying the questions in the study, by linking them to the ethical values in the Swedish syllabus. In the syllabus it is pointed out that work

against oppression is essential and that the means of achieving this is primarily through the following discourses: being tolerant, gaining knowledge, taking stands against oppression and through discussions providing opportunities to deliberate about different opinions.

Questions

The questions harmonize well with the reasons presented in the report as to why the questions are important in a Swedish context. They are in this study are treated as important, since they denote what are considered important and less important qualities for being an ethical democratic citizen (cf. Cherryholmes 1988). The first set of questions focus upon the young people's relationships and attitudes to certain groups in society (gender, ethnic groups and immigrants) as well as their sense of trust to people in general and political institutions. The values stressed are based on rights. The second set acknowledges the young people's relationship to democratic values (citizenship rights) in general.

The query regarding how young people view different groups of people and how they view the relationship between individuals revolves primarily around measuring if they have:

- gained a particular kind of knowledge, based on tolerance (towards dissidents) and knowledge about human rights
- taken a stand against the violation of other human beings (as opposed to actively working against violation of others)
- an interest in participating in aiding others *in the future* and through certain arenas, for example through joining either political parties or other organizations. Hence, the focus is upon the future and formal/collective gatherings and thereby excluding other forms of inter-subjective relations).

The discourses of what it means to be a citizen who promotes the wellbeing of others presented in the ICCS report are compared to the narratives of nine young people. Whereas the ICCS report represent politics, through its fixed ideals and pre-defined norms the young people's narratives shed light on the field of the political characterized by a flow of action, the juxtaposing of different norms and embodied encounters. The plausible inconsistencies, tensions, orders and disorders in the narratives, unlike the orderly ideals in the ICCS report, bear political relevance in that they convey a message in the formation of social structures and human life.

Young people’s sense of responsibility for the life circumstances of others in the field of the political

When analyzing the young people’s narratives two parallel themes could be distinguished: 1) the embodiment of ICCS discourses and the conditions for promoting the wellbeing of others that these embodied responses entail and 2) responses to the life circumstances of others in the young people’s narratives that are excluded from the discourses valued by the ICCS report while at the same time saying something fundamental about the young people’s possibilities of promoting the wellbeing of others.

By comparing particular phrases and words (Wetherell & Potter 1992) a distinction could be found between young people who *merely acknowledged other person’s life conditions* without feeling that they wanted or could interfere and others who more actively *assumed responsibility*. The distinction can be linked to the students’ attitudes to school, i.e. between students who described themselves as easily educated and those who had difficulty learning or felt aversion towards the entire school system.

Table 1. The comparison of the young people’s responses indicates a distinction between assuming responsibility and merely acknowledging others’ life circumstances, and between present and future (or time-and-space-bound responses) (Edling 2009).

Assuming responsibility	Responses (solely) acknowledging others’ life circumstances
<i>Responses entrenched in everyday life: caring responses, helping responses, protecting responses, being a conscious consumer, being nice to others, advising others, resisting hatred.</i>	<i>Dependent upon others to engage (a) person’s or a community’s wellbeing: school knowledge first, dependent on the power of many.</i>
<i>Time-bound responses of help: joining an organization, traveling to a country where there is a lot of suffering.</i>	<i>Transforming others’ suffering to one’s own benefit: self-defense, intrinsically good responses, reflecting oneself in others’ misery.</i>

The embodiment of ICCS discourses

The dimension of the political directs attention to the difficulties of ignoring the intimate domain where seemingly rational arguments collide and becomes entangled with the bodily drives and desires that follow a different logic than the rational. The intermixture of the subjects' inner- and outer life is physically manifested in the young peoples' everyday life through their ways of bringing their own struggles into the discourses present in the ICCS and thereby influencing the features of everyday relations in ways that take unpredictable expressions.

Some of the young people in the study described their commitments to others in a language that harmonized well with the discourses presented in the ICCS report, namely the focus upon the future and certain spaces, being tolerant, and take a stand against violation. To begin with, the question of time and space plays a significant role in the ICCS study. Several of the questions focused upon estimating the pupils' future engagement where their present answers were considered to be launch pads for their future lives as citizens. The notion of time and space was also present in the interviews with the youth. Those young people who conceived of themselves as strong learners linked their sense of responsibilities more profoundly to a distant future or to aid organizations which are bound to time and space in a particular way: collective gatherings, formal structuring, and reliance on a specific time of day for meetings (for instance five o'clock to seven o'clock on Mondays).

Two stressed that they wanted to help others *after* their education by becoming a lawyer or a psychologist. Even here responsibility is limited to particular hours in a day (when they meet their clients during work days) and certain arenas for formal gatherings (hospital or courthouse). Furthermore, to be responsible requires here that the individual gain a proper education in law or psychology. Comparing their answers to questions in the ICCS report they can be said to possess essential qualities needed to be a democratic citizen. Their engagement for the wellbeing of others is based on becoming properly educated and is linked to the future, to formal and collective gatherings and certain hours in the day.

Thus, the field of politics is interwoven in the young people's ways of talking about their relations together with the intimate domain expressing their own desires and drives: "that's something I would like to change", "I'd like to go to Africa and help people", and "[e]arlier I was sort of 'he looks odd, I don't want to talk to him'". Something in the existence of disadvantaged women triggers *Karolin's* commitment more than anything else, Africa is the continent that *Amanda* associates with a need for a helping hand, and the notion of odd people is something which *Amanda* felt she has struggled with.

I mean it's a disadvantage for [women]...that you encourage them to attack you. *I want to work with law* because that's something I would like to change. (Karolin, seventeen years old)

Wow, I have no idea [after upper secondary high school]. *On one hand I'd like to go to Africa [and] help people* – I've been thinking about that a lot. And I've been thinking about *becoming a psychologist* sort of. But I don't know exactly what I'd like to be, that I don't know. I would like to help people because I think it's fun. (Amanda, seventeen years old)

Wow, a lot of information about stuff I think/.../There should be more information about everything in order to decrease the mistakes – so that everyone is aware of the risks/.../Earlier I was sort of *'he looks odd, I don't want to talk to him'*. *I have become much more open*. (Amanda, seventeen years old)

Three of the young people pointed out that they have been members of aid and political organizations, but that they – at the moment – more or less lack the time to be engaged. Even here they harmonize with the vision of a good democratic citizen in the ICCS report stressing responses tied to certain spaces. Some of the youth engaged traditionally through joining a political party, while others were more modern in their engagement, by participating in different aid organizations. In this sense they already qualify as good democratic citizens. Like above, their own desires are present and interlaced with the discourse in ICCS: “help people especially children that's *fun*” (Amanda), “worsen the situation for coming generations. It's really *depressing*” (Ingrid), and “*I am a socialist*” (Mehmed). They bring something of themselves into the discourse and color it from within.

Earlier I was part of the youth organization ‘*Save the Children*,’ but now I don't have time to do that so [I have left it]. But to help people, especially children, that's fun. (Amanda, seventeen years old)

It's not that I'm engaged in it, but ok, I'm a *passive member of the Field Biologists*. It was a friend of mine who got me hooked and asked me to sign this paper, and I thought I can do that. *.../[Environmental pollution] will worsen the situation for coming generations. It's really depressing*. (Ingrid, seventeen years old)

As I said, I'm a socialist. *I was active in the Young Leftists earlier, or I still am*. (Mehmed, seventeen years old)

The discourse of being tolerant and take a stand against violation in the ICCS report was also embodied in the young people's narratives. Their everyday interactions with others (outside the private domain of friends and family) were characterized by *responses solely acknowledging other people's life circumstances* in different ways, either by claiming that they see others who suffer but that they are incapable of doing anything to prevent it by arguing that it is not appropriate to cause a conflict, a scene or an outburst. The ideals of tolerance as a means to accept others, and thus avoid exposing those who are different from themselves to strong emotions, is placed on trial by the drives (intimate domain) the youth struggle with regarding people who are not tough, who are stupid and who disagree with them (the limits of tolerance are explored more thoroughly in Edling forthcoming). What the embodied responses give call to, are moments when the youth hurt others unintentionally, feel themselves suffocated or become paralyzed when it comes to helping others who are harassed.

I think that *I'm quite tolerant actually*, there aren't many unfamiliar people I get very irritated at – where I have an outburst of rage – but more with people I know, like my parents.../I don't put much weight in spoken language but rather prioritize the written. That is what I really find valid. Everything else that is said you can just ignore since they are sheer cursory thoughts that people just say. *Friends say to me that don't you understand that you're making the person feel bad?* Then I think, couldn't that person become a little tougher, just ignore it? (Ingrid seventeen years old)

No, but it was their way, they were just so unpleasant and I thought, poor people, they don't have self esteem, *they have to harass others* all the time. I hate that [others being harassed]. S. What do you think it depends upon? K: *!.../It could be a discussion and they didn't listen to other person's point of view or something. They say what they think – everyone says what they think but some things you just keep to yourself. Unpleasant things are sort of not necessary for everyone to hear.* Well, you don't have to think like everyone else, but we still have to respect each other, and some people have real difficulty with that. And I can become so dreadfully furious at that. I have held my temper for a year, not to be exposed like that – not to be seen as [a person like them]/.../That's how I felt. *I could show them how things should be, but I don't want to, because I don't want to be like them.* (Karolin, seventeen years old)

M: But I liked it [that he didn't get angry]. I would like to be that kind of a person, but I'm not. I get angry, but often I try not to say anything/.../You know, if you asked my friends they would probably say that he is [I'm] irritated when he is [I'm]

with us [them]. That I seem irritated about something. *But I try to hold my tongue.* (Mehmed, seventeen years old)

I think it is important that you are considerate to others [and] that you should accept them for what they are, because I see that as an important quality in people/.../Deep inside I think I [accept other people for who they are], but *then I can get irritated at minor things, but I keep that to myself. It is nothing I say or express to someone else, that I don't accept them, so to speak/.../*We can have very different opinions sometime and we have – I have – as I've mentioned earlier, difficulty with being wrong. That is something I have to accept. *In order to avoid a quarrel I have to sacrifice myself. And that can make me feel angry, that they won't accept that I'm right, when I know that I'm right.* (Katarina, seventeen years old)

There appears to be a vacuum between their present and future lives, considering that several of their everyday responses picture events where they solely observe people's sufferings or at times even caused others or themselves pain, while their future selves are interested in improving the life conditions of others. It is as if the present is of no real importance, whereas the future is. So, even here they correspond (implicitly) to the ideals of politics mentioned in the ICCS study in the sense that they aim to be tolerant, i.e. respect divergent opinions without causing a scene. As a consequence they might end up hurting others or themselves or being passive when people are being harassed.

What kinds of responses in the field of the political come to be excluded from the ICCS report?

The young people who visualized themselves as having difficulty with school were keener to *assume responsibility* in everyday interactions with others, while they did not say anything about their responsibilities in the future. This does not suggest that these young people, per se, are morally superior to the youths above – merely that their responses towards other people's life circumstances take other expressions. The responsibilities in focus here are entrenched in the flow of embodied and everyday life rather than being restricted to specific hours of the day and formal arenas. It is a matter of listening to others, holding hands, standing up for others, putting out a leg for protection, etc. This form of responsibility is excluded from the notion of being a democratic citizen in the ICCS report, while it still conveys a message about young people's engagement in promoting the wellbeing of others. The ideals of paying attention to the present are interlaced with their intimate drives

and desires: what they yearn for and struggle with (the sense of panic when seeing a brother being hurt, a desire to support a particular friend who feels bad, and the feeling of difficulty not to expose poor people).

I let others talk!.../[it is important] that you are always there, listening!.../I held his hand!.../[t]hen I said that if you pick up that knife it will be your biggest mistake ever, and I will do it right after you. (Jesper, seventeen years old)

[My brother] is the one we have tried to keep innocent!.../and not tell him things so he wouldn't be a failure like the rest of us!.../ *I put my foot out in front of* [the drunk man threatening us at the subway]; I panicked because my little brother was terrified. (Miranda seventeen years old)

[G]o into X and buy a sweater, that's child labor!.../ *I mean it, we consumers are the ones who create the market!.../I try to consume as little as possible!.../In Spain you can go to the local market and buy potatoes and carrots from the local farmers who come there to sell it, and the money goes directly to them. In Sweden it's very hard.*

There were also examples where the young people actively chose to oppose fixed positions of children and adults by becoming a caring parent when needed or arguing that childish words give more comfort than adult words. Whereas the ICCS report focuses upon the future where the vision of a democratic citizen is an adult and educated person, the young people here actually reverse this ambition. They actively take a stand *against* the intrinsic goodness of adulthood or the fixed position of when one turns adult.

[I]t's *easier to explain with my own childish* words to a person, it makes [them] understand *better than using adult words*. (Miranda, seventeen years old)

A lot of parents work so much that they don't have time for their children!.../so *I have taken care of [my brother] a lot!.../I have had it tough at home, became an adult quickly*. (Laura, eighteen years old)

The future for these young people is described as uncertain due to their difficulties with school, while the present is pictured as harsh (escaping from being locked up, drugs, being dyslectic, being harassed etc.). The future is vague, whereas the present is pressing and at times requires the young people to grab the resources at hand: care, a hand, a foot for protection, resistance of hatred etc. What is more, the distinction

between private and public became unclear in their narratives. They described occasions when they assumed responsibility not only for their family members and friends, but also farmers, exploited children in general, and strangers over the phone. However, their possibilities of assuming responsibility from a power position (profession or political organization) are gravely restricted through their difficulty in learning or adjusting to school structures, as encouraged by the schools.

Concluding summary

Glancing back to the starting point of this article the focus is upon young people's possibilities of engaging in the wellbeing of others and the limits of the ICCS report in encompassing this goal. The ICCS report provides, amongst other things, fruitful generalizations that enable comparison over time. However, in Kristeva's terms, the ICCS report is a representation of politics: a set of fixed rules of how to be an ethical citizen. It is based on a single image of the good life and aims to preserve social order through institutionalized measures. Entangled in politic guidelines, the field of the political exists simultaneously. It is the embodied flow of human life and its relations that is influenced by politics but cannot be restricted to it. What the ICCS report, (politics) and the interviews (political) with the youth illuminate are tensions between the present and future, and between politics and the political.

With regard to the interviews, the young people who described themselves as strong learners harmonized well with the politics presented in the ICCS report. They stressed the need to be educated before being able to engage in the wellbeing of others. Moreover, the concentration was on the future, rendering their present endeavors to be characterized by an ambition to merely observe other people's life conditions (motivated by the fact that it is not proper to cause a scene) at the cost of strongly feeling bad themselves, of not being able to interfere when others are hurt and by sometimes hurting others themselves. Contrary to this, the group of young people who found school difficult in one way or another linked their sense of responsibilities to their present activities and to what they have readily available: a foot, an ear, a hand etc.

With this as a background, the young people with a sense of being competent learners and who saw education as relevant for their future professions often returned to the importance of being tolerant, i.e. accepting people for who they are and not causing a scene even if one thinks different. Looking at the criteria embedded in the questions in the ICCS study, these young people have come a long way in being democratic citizens – they are tolerant, know how to argue, take a stand

against violence, are active in political parties or/and aid organizations. However in their embodied responses several of them feel irritated that they have to be passive even though they know they are right. At times this passivity risks hurting them (Katarina, Mehmed), making them incapable of actively interfering when their fellow pupils are harassed (Kristin) or overlooking the fact that even if they are tolerant they might end up hurting others (Ingrid). Put bluntly, the embodiment of politics is expressed in the young people's narratives with all their struggles and shortcomings.

The images of how to engage in the wellbeing of others in the ICCS report is here interpreted as the political – the young people's corporeal responses to other people's life circumstances. Incorporating the body into the political entails a shift from representation (ideals, rights, parties) to transformation (change) expressed through the subject-in-process and from abstract constructions of political citizens to the unique and soft bodies of living and feeling human beings.

Notes

1. For an explanation of the ICCS study, placed in a Swedish context, see *article 1*. For an explanation of how it is related to each article, 3–6 in this volume, see *article 2* [To be or not to be a (properly educated) citizen]. Here I will give a brief summary of the study. The IEA/ICCS study 2009 (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement/ International Civic and Citizenship Education Study) is an international study on 140.000 14-year-old students in 38 different countries in Asia, Europe and Latin America based on several instruments of collecting data, viz. (<http://www.iea.nl/icces.html>): (I) an international knowledge test for students, together with international and national questionnaires concerning their background, attitudes and behaviours; (II) an international questionnaire and a national questionnaire for teachers; (III) an international questionnaire for schools/school principals. The study makes it possible to compare the data from students, teachers and school principals on issues related to democracy, society, justice and citizenship within and beyond schools. The original sample for the Swedish data included in total 169 schools, both public and private, 2 711 teachers and 3 464 students. The sampling process, and the analyses of data, was carried out in a way that enables generalizations over the total population of students in the 8th grade during the investigated period. The data was collected in the spring of 2009 and the school questionnaire, the knowledge test and the questionnaires for students were answered by over 90 per cent of the sampled Swedish schools and students, whereas the answer rate for teachers ended up a bit lower, but still within an acceptable margin of error – of the sampled teachers 74 percent answered. In this article the following study has been in focus: *Morgondagens medborgare ICCS 2009: svenska 14-åringars kunskaper, värderingar och deltagande i internationell belysning* [Citizenship of Tomorrow ICCS 2009: Swedish 14-year olds' knowledge, values and participation in an international scope] (The Swedish National Agency of Education 2010).

2. Contrary to many countries in the investigation, it is pointed out that Sweden has a long educational tradition of fostering democratic citizens, and currently the importance of establishing equivalence, i.e., that everyone in school, regardless of their differences, should be ensured the same opportunity to have a good education. Moreover, the active, critical and knowledge-seeking citizen is praised in Swedish education today together with the belief that knowledge, attitudes/values, and participation/influence are interdependent entities. The three aspects: knowledge, attitudes and values, and participation and influence structure the results of the report and, from this point of view, are kept apart. At the same time it is stressed that it is difficult to separate them considering that it is through knowledge that the individual's possibilities of participating and being ethical are believed to be enhanced. Two Swedish policy documents are considered: the more general curriculum and the syllabus for social science subjects (p. 40–42).

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