

Citizenship education in discussions concerning political issues

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The purpose of this article is to analyse the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) use of discussions on social and political issues and then problematize the meaning of “discussions” – in particular, the topic of discussion – through a qualitative analysis of actual discussions in the classroom. A qualitative study of classroom discussions is used to shed light on everyday preconditions between teacher and students. The topic of discussion, is analysed as a social and discursive construction. Political matters such as institutional issues and (inter)national affairs in the ICCS-study are also mostly the focus for the teachers in the classroom study. However, the interaction between teachers and students would seem to indicate that choice of issues for discussion always is a political choice. If students are imagined through a lens of being citizens, already in school, then choice of issues for discussion could be understood as a process of negotiation between the teacher and the students. The issues for discussion can therefore be connected to a notion of legitimate democratic participation concerning mutually recognized issues.

Keywords: ICCS 2009; discussions; political issues; classroom; citizens.

Introduction

The International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS, 2009)¹ aims to capture young people’s readiness to participate as active citizens in society. One distinct theme concerns their participation in discussions on social and political issues. This is not surprising because discussion on such issues is an aspect often connected to active democratic participation. If democracy is conceived as a matter of committed citizens and their common communicative practices concerning essential issues of public life (Dewey 1927/1991, Hess 2009), then the use of discussion is

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one of the cornerstones of democratic participation. When young people actively participate in discussions in school about political and social issues it may be understood as a sign of their democratic commitment and possibility of participating in democratic practices. Such commitment also includes discussions in school; an area also paid attention to in the ICCS-study. It is reasonable to assume that the ICCS-study will be received as a more or less authoritative document concerning how conditions for discussions ought to be understood in terms of classroom practice. Therefore there are good reasons to explore how the ICCS frames young people's/student's participation in discussions which are supposed to capture an important aspect of their readiness for active citizenship and democratic participation.

In this article I will argue that democratic participation cannot be taken for granted without considering the interests of the participants. One such dimension is the "what", i.e. the choice of actual issues for discussion. There are endless possibilities for issues that might be considered for discussion, but not all of these can be seen as being equally relevant for all participants. In a sense, to be active in a discussion on social and political issues – a distinct subject or a certain perspective on a subject – also implies a political action concerning how the participant positions him/herself in regard to the actual issue at hand.

In order to understand the possibilities for young people to participate in discussions in school it is therefore analytically important not to take the issue of discussion for granted but to pay attention to how a given political issue is constructed and responded to by the students in the classroom practice. There is a potential tension between highlighting issues which, on the one hand, are common for all (cf. Hess 2009), i.e. concerning conditions which affect more or less everyone in society, and on the other, a genuine and democratic interest of being involved in issues for discussion shared between the interlocutors of the classroom discussion. This tension is also relevant for citizenship education. What are the preconditions for being included in a classroom discussion concerning issues which are common and make sense for active citizenship?

The purpose of this article is to analyse the ICCSs' use of discussions on social and political issues and then problematize the meaning of "discussions" – in particular, the topic of discussion – through a qualitative analysis of actual discussions in the classroom. My special focus is where students negotiate issues for discussion, thereby making visible the social construction of an issue, and not as something taken for granted, independent of the actors in the discussion. Connected to this analysis some possible consequences for citizenship education are outlined.

Discussions will be defined as an activity in which at least two participants treat an issue as lacking a common resolution and thus requiring some kind of deliberation or debate. Qualitative ethnographic study of classroom discussions (cf. Farrar 1988, Liljestrand 2002, Love 2000, Åberg et al 2009) should not primarily be seen as a critique of some hidden ideology in the ICCS. There is a built-in methodological problem involved in using surveys. If discussions and commitment for an active citizenship are to be measured, the concepts used in such surveys need to be clear and distinct, and perhaps also rooted in more or less conventional understandings of what is meant by such concepts. However, this “distinctiveness” is likely to exclude other voices and everyday actions in school with relevance for what active citizenship might mean for young people themselves. The thrust of this article should therefore be understood as an attempt to widen rather than replace how the ICCS-study depicts young people’s abilities to participate in discussions concerning social and political issues.

I will begin by examining how the ICCS-study refers to discussion as an issue for discussion. My criteria for selection of excerpts from the ICCS is the use of the term “discussion” or what I have considered as corresponding activities to discussions (as defined above), such as argument about a controversial issue. My reading will be critical in the sense that I pay attention to how young people’s democratic participation is included and excluded in the formulations of ICCS. In the next section I describe the classroom study, which is followed by a case study where one student negotiates an issue for discussion alongside the teacher’s agenda in the classroom. In the last part of the article I discuss some wider implications of how the case study can shed light on young people’s participation in discussions and its relation to their citizenship.

Discussion(s) in the ICCS-study

Survey questions that deal with discussions are framed in relation to civic knowledge and discussion skills but above all to certain aspects of social and political issues. One aspect that occurs in all countries is “Communicating through discussion and debate” (36 countries). In developing questions for students concerning discussion, and other aspects of civic education, the ambition of the ICCS is partly to connect to prominent goals in the different national curricula. The ICCS also stresses the importance of participating in discussions by its reference to Richardson (2003).

Reported participation in political discussions with peers, parents, and teachers proved to be a more influential predictor than civic knowledge. (p. 122)

What kinds of discussions, then, are given prominence in the ICCS-batteries of questions? The students were firstly asked to rate the importance of a given set of activities related to civic engagement: voting in every national election; joining a political party; learning about the country's history; following social and political issues in newspapers, on the radio, on TV, or on the internet; showing respect for government representatives; and, engaging in political discussions. What can be concluded from this battery is that political discussions are seen as being connected to political institutions such as political parties and media representations and, in the context of the survey, are likely to be interpreted by student as corresponding to activities in political institutions. Thus, when the last question refers to "engaging in political discussions", this use of discussions is contextualized from a perspective of issues in political institutions and how such issues might be presented in media (p. 93).

To understand how the concept of "political and social issues" is framed in the ICCS and its possible connotations for students it is important to note previous uses of this concept. In the report the concept is divided into four categories: local community; your country; in other countries and international politics (p. 116). Issues concerning "your country", "other countries" and "international politics" clearly refer to political institutions connected to these countries. The local "community" also has clear connotations to political institutions representing the community.

Students are also asked to describe the extent of his or her engagement in discussions in the following: "When political issues or problems are being discussed, I usually have something to say" (p. 117). This question clearly directs attention to political knowledge as something one ought to be more or less informed about to which is added the reader: "I know more about politics than most people of my age". One possible interpretation of the question concerning discussions is that if you happen to know something about politics, then you ought to be able to discuss politics. Even if the student was used to participating in political discussions without the added qualification, a possible reading is that "I'm not used to discussing things that I don't know a lot about".² The ICCS-study further includes the notion of discussions in an assessment of "citizenship self-efficacy" where students were asked to rate how well they saw themselves performing certain activities (p.120). The two first questions have a clear relevance for discussion of social and political issues:

- Discuss a newspaper article about a conflict between countries.
- Argue your point of view about a controversial political or social issue.³

Here the perspective is on how *well* students think they might perform these activities. From another point of view, participation in such activities could also be seen as a citizen's right, i.e. a citizen has the right (cf. Beckman 2003) to participate in discussions regardless of – based on some kind of criteria – whether they might or might not be adept at participating in such discussions.

Central among those questions which include discussions is a section entitled “Student communication about political and social issues” where the main focus is how often students discuss “political and social issues” with parents and friends (p. 122; table 5:5, 16–127). Here the ICCS-study concludes that

Not surprisingly, associations between reported interest in political and social issues and frequency of talking about these matters were statistically significant in all ICCS countries. (p. 123)

However students also seemed to be interested in discussing matters other than political and social issues; in this case about the countries themselves:

Students tended to talk with friends about other countries much more frequently than they talked about political and social issues. (p.122)

How do issues about “other countries” differ from political and social issues? An interpretation of how “political and social issues” are used in ICCS is that political agency is mainly oriented toward issues connected with political institutions. Questions considered important, as estimated by the young respondents themselves, would seem to be absent or at least not relevant in the ICCS report. The concept “political and social issues” also includes parents’ perspectives and level of education;⁴ official media and not least civic knowledge. To be considered a participating citizen would seem to include knowledge that is not available to all and that is not being taught in all schools. A democratic society – on the basis of how ICCS frames these issues – is composed of people who share such political knowledge.⁵

A satisfactory climate for discussions of political and social issues in the classroom is included in another battery of questions (p. 174). These questions focus on to what extent classroom discussions allow for students themselves to introduce questions about political and social issues (Biesta & Säfström 2001). However, from the ICCSs’ definition it is not clear what might or might not be allowed in contributing to this aspect of a satisfactory climate for discussion.

To summarize, when the ICCS actualizes discussions on social and political issues the assumption would seem to be that students should have clearly defined knowledge of public issues, such as, current events in political institutions and how these might be interlinked with international events, while at the same time acknowledging that this is something most students are only partly familiar with. To be able to participate in a discussion one has to have civic knowledge about such matters. This focus can only partly be explained by the survey design itself. To be able to handle large amounts of data from different cultural contexts, the survey strategy was limited to conventional use of “social and political issues”. But the choice of issues in the ICCS may also be understood from a liberal conceptualization of democracy where an individual’s relationships with the state, or its institutional framework, are in the foreground. It is the individual with a capital “I” who is the subject and who becomes a central “building block” in the ICCS-construction of discussions. This “individualization” may be seen as a consequence of portraying young peoples’ democratic participation in the context of a measurement culture; the survey itself always addresses a more or less autonomous individual (cf. Olson 2012b). Thus, the primary relation who underlies what is expected of participation in discussions concerning social and political issues in the ICCS seems to be the individual and his or her relationship with public issues, i.e. issues with a common referent to people living in a state. To be able to master and to discuss such issues thus becomes a pre-condition for a properly educated citizen. I will now problematize this concept of discussion by turning to discussions in the classroom.

The classroom study

Using a classroom study of teacher-led discussions (Liljestrand 2002) of controversial issues, I now turn to an explication of what may be seen as relevant issues for the students. One observation from this study is that subjects for discussion may become the object of negotiations between teachers and students (e.g. p. 110–113; 129). The classroom study consists of video recordings from 14 lessons (8 social studies lessons and 6 religious studies lessons). Five teachers and six classes took part in the dissertation project. Five of these classes were made up of students from theoretical Gymnasium programs and one class consisted of students from a practical “trade-programme” (sv. handelsprogram). To complete the recordings data was also generated from classroom observations and collections of different teaching materials. Apart from a quantitative analysis of speech distribution

between teacher and students, and between boys and girls in the class, a qualitative method is employed.

For the purpose of this analysis a classroom discussion counts as “discussion” if the participants in the classroom themselves approach, define, or frame (Goffman 1974) an activity as such. Within this expected and global activity, different comments by the students on the actual subject are a regular feature. The teacher’s comments are also a regular feature in these activities. Such an activity thus corresponds to the initial definition of a discussion in the sense that the comments are different and are distributed among different participants in the classroom. From this material one case was chosen based on two criteria: when the teachers’ agenda is challenged and when a student introduces experiences from everyday life. The teacher’s agenda in this case also corresponds to the ICCS definition of social and political issues.

In the classroom recordings one can see a pattern similar to that revealed in the ICCS; the teacher focuses on societal issues corresponding largely to actual events as reported in public media such as taxes, questions concerning aid and genetic engineering. Concomitant with this pattern is a distribution of speech activity where the teacher, on average, is responsible for about 50 % of total utterances. However, students are also able to negotiate the teacher’s discussion agenda in regard to issues and perspectives, a pattern that could be expected to arise when the curriculum stipulates students’ participation in choice of relevant (sub) problems. These kinds of situations reveal how issues for discussion are construed as social constructions as seen from the perspective of everyday life in the classroom. It also points to a broader construction of curriculum content, visible in the earlier section of the article, namely, the priority of common, clearly distinguished public issues connected to political institutions.

Students’ and the teacher’s perspectives on social and political issues

The case outlined below highlights two kinds of discourses in the classroom. One, clearly in line with the kinds of questions highlighted by ICCS, is represented by the teacher and the other, more informal or personal, is represented by the students. The case is taken from a social studies class with 16-year-olds and presents the initial phase of a discussion about developmental problems in poor countries. Students, in groups, are urged to freely identify some important problems having rather briefly read background materials distributed by the teacher. The first student interjection concerns infant mortality

which the smaller discussion group also links to another problem; the tendency to have more children in order to prevent a situation where the parents, in their old age, are left alone without security. Another group makes a connection between infant mortality, spread of disease and poor hygiene.

The teacher then focuses on the aspect of high birth rates and tries to develop this theme further by asking the students to come up with more causes which could explain these. One student suggests ignorance about contraception. When the teacher is not offered any further explanations, a student, Sanja, suggests that “they have nothing to do in their spare time”. The teacher relates to Sanja’s joke by telling a funny story about how a 6 hour electricity blackout in New York in 1967, “caused an unprecedented baby boom”. When the teacher diverts from the/his main lesson agenda in this way content is clearly being framed as jocular. However, when Ragnhild enters the discussion, in connection to the teacher’s joke, with a comment on the year of the incident, her interjection connects neither to the teacher’s agenda, nor as part of the joke. Through the joke the geographical focus is shifted from poorer countries to the USA (NY) and Ragnhild connects to this by introducing a theme about young American Catholics and their sexual behaviour.⁶

Excerpt: I don’t know whether this has anything to do with ignorance

- 01 T: there one has a function (.) why the developing countries have so
 02 many children ‘they don’t have tv: s’ ((buzz and giggles))
 03 MS: ((laughs))
 04 H: Anton Anton Anton when did this happen
 05 T: in the sixties- I don’t remember if it was sixty-seven or something
 06 like that
 07 R: I don’t know whether this has anything to do (.) with ignorance (.) it
 08 resembles that- or that’s is but if one sees for instance the US
 09 where ((the buzz is ceasing)) there are many religions there they say
 10 like this ‘yes you are for instance a Catholic and fifteen you may not
 11 being with a guy you shall have a date you may not do this and this’
 12 there are no sex education in school they are not allowed to do this
 13 so they go in cars and do this and have never seen a condom and then
 14 there are children being born and then they cannot afford it
 15 and [they may not take care of the children
 16 T: [>WELL<
 17 T: is this correct that catholic countries there it is [hip hurray
 18 R: [not-
 19 T: and very- many children are born
 20 R: no but not just so but it is a bit like this in different religions»

- 21 H: no
 22 R: »it is like this hard-
 23 T: yes
 24 R: it may not be like this for everyone but- cause I know a girl who got
 25 a child and they were like this (.) she had an abortion she- then this
 26 family was catholic and they- just 'she was fifteen and she did not
 27 want to take care of the child and I mean 'she is totally stupid'
 28 couldn't they understand just like it was actually- one has to take
 29 care of the child so she was really stupid=
 30 T: =couldn't she have an abortion
 31 R: no she went- she had an abortion and her friends they () a friend of
 32 her 'she is totally stupid because she did not want to take care of
 33 her child when she is fifteen why don't one [want to do this
 34 T: [uhu
 35 (1,0)
 36 R: they thought that was [really weird
 37 T: [I only thought that if one now is like-
 38 religion has such a respect for life- for life then would one in such
 39 religions not allow abortion (.) and it corresponds quite well (.)
 40 there is a very catholic country in Europe where one have been
 41 terribly hard against abortions
 42 B: >Ireland<
 43 S: It[ly
 44 H: [Italy
 45 ((lines omitted))
 46 T: Ireland correct

The classroom discussion of what causes development problems for poor countries can be linked to other themes in the ICCS such as social and political issues in other countries (ICCS, p. 166). The interaction concerns not only locally situated voices within the classroom but also an encounter with a different kind of discourse that can be identified as occurring outside the classroom. Ragnhild relates to the teacher's original agenda at the beginning of her interjection: "I don't know whether this has anything to do with ignorance" (line 07). In doing this she indicates that her forthcoming interjection *may* be perceived as more or less irrelevant to the discussion. On line 16 the teacher responds to Ragnhild's interjection by implying that the utterance is inappropriate with his loud comment (">WELL<") before Ragnhild has a chance to finish what she is saying.

The teacher then re-introduces an international perspective (lines 17–19) by asking the students if people in catholic countries may have a more fatalistic attitude to procreation and thus have a higher birth-rate. During this question Ragnhild initiates an alternative position on line 18. She comments that this is a question of how religions restrict

people's behavior in this area. Once again, her topic is exemplified by people of her own age and their relation to sexuality, childbearing, and, in this development of her theme, to abortion (lines 24–29). The teacher follows up Ragnhild's thread with an IRE-question to the whole class indicating a supposed correct answer about a certain country that has a strict approach to abortions. In his conclusion from the different answers (according to the sequence as transcribed), the teacher summarizes Ragnhild's interjection in terms of an abstract concept of "religious values".

Ragnhild's thematic thread is based on the life of real individuals of her own age, while the teacher's thread relates to problems formulated as national issues, disconnected from real individuals. This excerpt shows how Ragnhild's and the teacher's perspectives are negotiated and that Ragnhild's initial comment, "I don't know whether this has anything to do with ignorance", is indirectly and negatively responded to by the teacher. The teacher's evaluation is that Ragnhild's interpretation of what ought to count as a relevant sub-issue and additional perspective of the main issue (high birth rates in poor countries) is not relevant. What is happening between these real adolescents seems to be of no importance for the teacher when it comes to an explanation of higher birth rates in poor countries. Ragnhild would seem to be breaking ground rules of classroom discourse by invoking a personally related everyday perspective (cf. Edwards & Mercer 1987).

Her participation can also be contrasted with that of the other students who align themselves with the teacher's agenda; a recognizable pattern in the classroom study. These negotiated situations highlight, nevertheless, various preconditions for participation about what counts as common social and political issues, or about presuppositions concerning a shared perspective. A school class is just not a collective entity but is made up, more or less, of different voices, which both reproduce and produce a social and discursive order. There is a difference between the students that make this social order visible. The teacher must react to all public interjections in the classroom, which in turn guides implicit values about what discussions on social and political issues become visible.

One possible didactic interpretation is that the teacher more or less reproduces curriculum standards that are every student's right and obligation as participants in public schooling, namely, issues concerning how to identify problems in poor countries. To be an educated citizen implies knowledge about affairs valued as important by political institutions such as aid agencies, and to be able to formulate one's own informed opinions on such common social and political issues.

To be a democratic participant in society is to be able to participate in decisions allocated to powerful institutions in society; and such participation demands an ability to be able to discuss such questions (cf. Hess 2009). Such a didactic interpretation is also commensurable with the focus of the ICCS curriculum, i.e. to be active in discussions concerning actual issues connected to political institutions is a sign of civic commitment.

An alternative interpretation is that such an agenda threatens to exclude students who themselves do not see such problems as important, but who want to reformulate political issue with a personal resonance. Outside of school, adults entitled to vote have an obvious right and priority to perhaps ignore these kinds of questions. However, if students are to be regarded as citizens in their own right, they should also be granted a right to negotiate the meaning of social and political issues in different ways. From such a perspective, taking as its point of departure, students' status of full citizenship, the issue of high birth rates in poor countries could also be formulated as a concrete problem for young people willing to make a contribution to public life, even if this had not been the teacher's intention from the outset. Ragnhild's introduction of the theme, and perspective, of young people's sexual behaviour and morals may also be regarded as context sensitive ("I'm not sure whether this has anything to do with ignorance"), a position also supported by the teacher connecting to sexual morality. Making a sharp division between an institutional and non-institutional discourse, and between a national and personal perspective would not appear to be a fruitful point of departure.

From a Bakhtinian point of view, Ragnhild's interjection(s) about teenage life and its relationship with sexuality could be seen as a hybrid (Bakhtin 1981) and perspective enhancement of the issue introduced by the teacher, rather than something other than a relevant issue concerning development problems in poor countries. Her interjections are also emotionally engaging, which may also be seen as her interpretation of an actual issue (Løvlie 2007). The vulnerability of the girl in her narrative is highlighted by Ragnhild's portrayal of her, and may potentially have parallels with girls or young women in poor countries.

When students in the classroom study interrupt the discussion agenda by not referring to the teacher's agenda but to personal experiences, a dichotomization between public questions, more or less independent of everyday experiences, indirectly becomes problematized. If students are perceived as citizens-to-be (Gordon et al 2000) the meaning of these interruptions becomes problematic and something that the teacher has to manage in order for the discussion agenda to be followed sufficiently.

However, if students are perceived as citizens or as members of a public, the meaning of these interjections could be seen as a potential for re-interpretation of the issues, focusing on certain aspects of the (sub) issues brought up by the teacher (cf. Liljestr and 2002, p. 172–175). The overall picture in the study is that the teacher responds more and more cooperatively when students align themselves with the teacher’s agenda on a certain public issue. Thus, there is a strong similarity between the tone of the ICCS methodology and the classroom study, including the case above. However, what one does not find with the ICCS is the notion of negotiations taking place in relation to teachers and students.

Discussion

The case above sheds light on a prominent theme in the ICCS, namely, discussions on inter-national issues and the question concerning students’ competence to participate in such kinds of discussions. The classroom case reveals how the meaning and relevance of social and political issues in discussions ought not to be seen as a given but something that is socially constructed. There are other corresponding examples of negotiations in the classroom study. Both the occurrence of such negotiations and a close analysis of them shows how the teacher strives to maintain a certain agenda, but also how students tend to try and shift the agenda in other directions. From a perspective of being a “good” student, with a need of more citizenship competence, this may be seen as a (more or less) temporary disturbance in well ordered citizenship education.

These negotiations may also be regarded as a sign that the teacher’s choice of issues for discussion is not something neutral but may be a political choice in itself. It is also important to pay attention to institutional conditions on a broader level. The teacher in the example has probably both enough knowledge and creativity to reformulate his choice of issue in a way that is more in tune with the students’ perspectives. It can be argued that the main problem with Ragnhild’s perspective is that it neither fits neatly with the demarcation from a broader institutional and educational policy perspective of civic knowledge in the classroom nor in the ICCS.

In the classroom study there were many occasions when students were invited to participate in the discussion but declined to do so. From a traditional view of teaching, this could be construed as a challenge for the teacher; i.e. to include as many students as possible in active classroom discourse. However, if we understand social and political issues as being connected to the life experiences of different students

(Dewey 1938) and understand students as equal citizens, students should not only have a right to participate in discussion of civic issues but should also have a legitimate right *not* to participate. Habermas (1996), using the concept of legitimate political power, refers to a legitimate right not to participate in political processes.

The first of three items from ICCS assumes that a certain degree of subject knowledge is required for (adequate) participation in discussions. If students' interjections are analysed as a widening of perspectives on issues and as negotiation between social actors, then the stereotypical view of knowing and not knowing a subject can be problematized. The students' interjections may be regarded as relevant, particularly where issues are not predefined as in the ICCS, i.e. defined as being outside the scope of negotiation. In the second type of item the student is required to make a personal estimation of how well he or she is doing in discussions. Hidden in these kinds of items is the fact that the relevance of an issue, in actual settings, is not predefined but may be negotiated. The possibility of estimating whether one is performing well in a discussion would seem to be dependent on how issues are defined in the ICCS as public issues in the narrow sense of the word. The depiction of young people in the ICCS-study becomes a matter of how someone has more or less relevant knowledge of "political and social issues", in order to participate in discussions in an adequate way.

The classroom study shows that social and political issues that are more or less equivalent to common public (inter-national) issues may not at all be attractive for students. There is, as Dewey points out, a huge difference between having something to say and having to say something (Dewey 1902, p. 56, cf. Tornberg 2000, Hultin 2009). So, how can one decide that students (or teachers) have something to say in discussions on social and political issues? One suggestion is that common issues should not be seen as predefined but implicitly connected to different perspectives. Deciding on whether an issue is too private, without any reference to shared experiences, has to be done in actual situations.

From such a perspective, teachers and students should cooperate in their concern over what ought to qualify as relevant issues and not least on how different perspectives of an issue may be drawn. In the spirit of John Dewey citizens should have the right to agree on those problems (Dewey 1927, Ljunggren 2003) that are relevant to the participants involved.

It is the intersubjectively agreed content in this [democratic; authors com.] communication which constitutes the basis for democracy – not the once and for all, already decided, well. (Ljunggren 2003, p. 355)

However, if democracy takes common deliberation among individuals as its point of departure then the teacher's role becomes crucial. To learn how to listen to, and experience other peoples positions, to relate them to one's own, to develop qualified skills for making judgements between different positions and to present these to others, students need to learn from and be taught by a professional teacher (Hess 2009, Michaels et al 2008). Taken from this point of departure the teacher's role becomes not developing young people *into* citizens, but to facilitate young people's personal development of their citizenship.

Citizenship is always an educational challenge; something that is not yet fully realized, irrespective of whether the citizen is young or old. An alternative position for viewing students' participation in discussions as a means for growing into competent-enough-citizens is that their very participation in discussions and institutional public life in general, may be seen as a practise in citizenship. When children and young people begin their participation in public spaces such as pre-school, public school or youth centres, they enter a public world with public tasks. To act according to, and give expression to values in these contexts is often to re-act to orders which are publicly sanctioned, thus extending the local context of the space in which these encounters take place. To participate as a citizen is therefore not a question of individual maturation but of being incorporated into society by everyday experiences and public life. Whether someone is to be perceived as a "citizen" or not is therefore a question of social situatedness rather than an isolated individual capacity that develops with increasing age. To be a citizen may therefore be seen as a potential for learning rather than something that requires learning according to predefined and selective traditions of civic knowledge for making citizenship possible (Apple 2004).

The implicit point in the ICCS seems to be that students should be educated to take an active role as citizens and not to divest responsibility to the state and societal institutions in the governance of people's lives. However, developing critical skills for serious inquiry into such matters requires a teacher that both supports such learning and accepts that such critical inquiry is bound up with different experiences of participation in society. If students are seen as citizens, issues for discussion then become issues for potential negotiation between them and their teachers.

Only through such a sufficiently mutual process may issues for discussion may be recognized as shared issues in the classroom. It is for the professional judgment of the teacher to decide when such situations have arisen and how they should be acted upon. When

students are depicted through the lens of measurement (-culture; see Olson 2012a) relationships between them and their teachers fall out the focus. Another consequence of this is the discursive establishment of the student as an individual “I”, related to the school as an educational, rather abstract, system. International surveys such as the ICCS-study ought to be enhanced by and problematized by qualitative studies of everyday life together with philosophical notions of democratic citizenship, in order to be useful tools for teachers in their task of educating for democratic citizenship.

Notes

1. The international report referred to in this article is Wolfram Schulz et al (2010). 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.

2. Content analysis of the relationship between the six items showed that: “The set of six items formed a highly reliable scale, with an average internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) of 0.84 for the pooled international sample with equally weighted countries.” (p. 117) The six items are: I know more about politics than most people my age; When political issues or problems are being discussed, I usually have something to say; I am able to understand most political issues easily; I have political opinions worth listening to; As an adult I will be able to take part in politics; I have a good understanding of the political issues facing this country. Thus, the self assessment of the students’ commitment to discussions is clearly related to a predefined knowledge in the students’ answers.
3. The other activities are: Stand as a candidate in a school election; Organize a group of students in order to achieve changes at school; Follow a television debate about a controversial issue; Write a letter to a newspaper giving your view on a current issue; Speak in front of your class about a social or political issue.
4. Parents are important agents in socializing young people to the domain of civic issues: “There is evidence that young people with parents who are interested in civic issues or who engage their children in political discussions tend to have higher levels of civic knowledge and engagement (Lauglo & Oia, 2006; Richardson, 2003). Given this evidence, the ICCS researchers asked students to what extent their parents were interested in political and social issues and how frequently they spoke with their parents about these issues.” (p. 202). Such results are confirmed in the ICCS (p.217).
5. On p. 138 “debate” used unpecific; “discussions” about school assembly.
6. This transcript may sound a bit strange to the reader but it is a more or direct translation from the Swedish original transcript (in appendix).

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Appendix: Swedish transcript in original

- L: där har man en en funktion varför har uländerna så många barn
'dom har ingen teve' ((SORL OCH FNISS I KLASSEN))
- FE: ((skrattar))
- H: Anton Anton Anton när var de- när hände de här
- L: de sextitalet ja kommer inte ihåg om de var sextisju eller nånting i
alla fall
- R: ja vet inte om de här går in de här (.) om okunnighet (.) ((SORL
TYSTNAR SUCCESIVT)) de liknar det- eller de väl de också men
om man ser som till exempel USA där är det många religioner där
säger dom så här 'a ni e ju till exempel katoliker och femton du får
inte träffa en kille du ska ha en date du får inte göra de och de' de
är ingen sexundervisning i skolan dom får inte göra det så då gå dom
in i bilarna och gör det och dom har aldrig sett en kondom och då
föds de barn å sen har dom inte råd och
[dom får inte ta hand om barnen-
- L: [>HA<
- L: stämmer de med att katolska länder där är det hejsan sv[ejsan och väld-
- R: [inte-
- L: föds många barn
- R: ne[:j men alltså inte bara så men de e lite så för olika religioner dom
- H: [näe
- R: »är så här hårt-
- L: ja
- R: de kanske inte är så i alla men- för jag vet .hh en tjej som fick ett barn
och då var dom så här hon gjorde abort hon (.) då var den familjen
katolsk och dom ba (.) 'alltså hon var femton och hon ville inte ta
hand om barnet ja menar 'hon är ju helt dum i huvet' kunde inte dom
förstå liksom de var ju- man måste ju ta hand om barnet så hon var
jättedum=
- L: =fick hon inte begå abort
- R: nej hon gick- hon gjorde abort och hennes kompisar dom () en kompis
till henne 'hon e helt dum i huvet hon vill inte ta hand om barnet när
man är femton varför [vill man inte göra det'
- L: [(jaha)
- (1,0)
- R: de tyckte dom var [jätteknappt
- L: [ja tänkte bara om man nu är så här- religionen har
sån respekt på liv- för livet då skulle man ju i en sån religion inte heller
tillåta abort (.) och de stämmer ju ganska bra (.) finns ett väldigt katolskt
land i europa där man har varit fruktansvärt stenhård mot aborter
- p: >irland<
- S: itali[en
- H: [italien

