The political voice of young citizens

Educational conditions for political conversation – school and social media

Erik Andersson

Political conversation is a prerequisite for social cohesion in society. Due to digital media, a new educational situation has been shaped that creates different conversational possibilities in which the political conversation can take place. The analysis of two cases, the international students' questionnaire used in the ICCS 2009 and findings from research in a Swedish net community, represents two spaces – school and social media – containing specific educational conditions for political conversation. These two spaces are used to problematize and discuss, in terms of political socialisation, educational conditions for political conversation in school. The Political Voice of Young Citizens is shown to be framed by different conditions depending on where, when, and how the political conversation is institutionally arranged and directed.

Keywords: political conversation, political socialisation, social media, ICCS 2009, education.

Introduction

The purpose of the article is to problematize and discuss, in terms of political socialisation, educational conditions for political conversation in school. Two empirical spaces – school and the social media – frame the discussion, while two cases from these spaces are used to discuss the educational condition for political conversation. An analysis of the international students' questionnaire (IEA 2007) in the ICCS 2009[1], findings of the Swedish research part in the ICCS

Erik Andersson, is a Doctoral student at the School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences, Örebro University. He is employed as a doctoral student at the School of Humanities and Informatics, University of Skövde, Sweden. E-mail: erik.andersson@his.se

(Ljunggren & Unemar Öst 2010a, 2010b), as well as research results of the analysis of a Swedish *net community*[2] called Black Heart are described. *What does the condition for political conversation look like in these spaces?* When assessing young people's citizenship, civic competences, and attitudes, the ICCS potentially reproduces a specific view on education, the political conversation, and the young citizen. This view is discussed in relation to young people's political life, a situation of new life politics taking place in social media.

Since new forms of communication are used in school and society, the traditional classroom has undergone considerable transformations. The social media could be used in the classroom to materialise an interface – a third space – between political conversation in everyday life and political conversation in the classroom. Overall "it is clear that new technology has the potential to provide opportunities for a new, hybrid form of communication" (Bretag 2006, p. 983), but we know little about its consequences for political conversation. The normative standpoint is that young people are already political citizens; they are politically relevant, which makes all educational aims and efforts even more noteworthy – young people are highly political.

Part *one* of the article provides a background, a contextualisation of *political conversation*, while part *two* illustrates conditions for political conversation in the school, represented by the case of the ICCS 2009. In part *three,* conditions for political conversation in social media, represented by the case of Black Heart, are illustrated. A discussion of the two cases in terms of political socialisation is provided in part *four.* Theoretical and methodological issues have been reduced to benefit the discussion, using the two cases, regarding the educational conditions for the political conversation in school, in terms of political socialisation.

Political *Conversation* and Social Media in School

The relationship between political conversation and engagement in the democratic process is strong. Political conversation is a basis for the development of social cohesion in society. It is a central part of human coexistence, which is politically constituted, forcing people to choose between conflicting options and ways of living. *The political* is a part of human organisation where controversies can be transformed into political ones, if they are strong enough to group humans into friends and enemies or, at best, political adversaries. The political acknowledges the everyday political life, regardless the space and place for that life. *Politics,* on the other hand, refers to the institutions

and practices through which human coexistence is arranged (e.g. voting, political organisations, and resource allocation). Politics creates order in the controversial context that the political offers (Mouffe 1993/2005). *The political* is a necessity, an ever-present potential, for everyday free wheeling political conversations that could become political by entering a public space in order to potentially enter the space of *politics*. *The political* and *politics* is, in this perspective, used as a basis to elaborate the understanding of political conversation and political socialisation. Thus, the micro level of political conversation is highly relevant for politics and vice versa.

Political communication, political activities which aim to create political meaning using different resources, such as written text, pictures, symbols, music, videos, body language, and so on, includes *political conversation* which contains different forms and aims of political communication, such as debate, dialogue, discussion, and talk. Distinguished characteristics in the empirical data make it relevant to *analytically* use the *deliberative* and the *agonistic* understanding of political conversation. In short, deliberation is an equal give and take, ideally without any a priori right to speak or define the problem in its own way. It is communication, understood as *discussion*, which aims at common (temporary) agreements, the promotion of rational and well-grounded arguments and consensus orientation (Englund 2007, 2011, Hess 2009, 2004). Agonism, understood as *debate*, aims at communication in order to maintain and acknowledge conflict as a built-in potential in all kinds of social contexts by promoting different positions within an agreed democratic framework (Mouffe 1993/2005).

Social Media and its Significance for Political Conversation

The social media, an interactive form of digital media combining technology, social networking and user-generated content often placed on the Internet, comprises an everyday mode of communication and information transformation. The interactive use of digital media is increasing among youth creating specific demands on schools: "In training pupils to handle the complexities of a heavily mediatized world, and the forms of identity work that it entails, educators will need to draw on children's out-of-school experiences" (Drotner 2008, p. 182).

It is debatable whether digital media has political and democratic significance. One perspective is that it offers a space in which the democratic conversation can take place, and a large part of the democratic process will be held and revealed in that space: "In the arena of new politics the Internet has become not only relevant, but

central: it is not least its capacity for the 'horizontal communication' of civic interaction that is important" (Dahlgren 2007, p. 8). Another perspective posits that "there have been some interesting changes in the way democracy works, on the whole, the import of the Internet is modest; the net is not deemed yet to be a factor of transformation" (p. 8). What we know is that the digital media not only affects young people's lives and society in various ways, young people and others (e.g. politicians such as Barack Obama) affect society by using its potentials (Olsson & Dahlgren 2010, Fenton 2010, Mossberger et al 2008, Livingstone 2007, Montgomery 2007). Societal changes create challenges to education. One way to tackle these challenges is to develop education programs based on "highly conventional citizen models which centre on the idea of the "Dutiful Citizen"" (Bennett 2007, p.62). The Dutiful Citizen is expected to "learn about basic workings of government and related political institutions, to understand the values of the national civic culture, to become informed about issues and make responsible voting choices" (p. 62). Another approach is to view the young citizen as a "self- actualizing Citizen" (p. 62). This is a citizen who may

> see her political activities and commitments in highly personal terms that contribute more to enhancing the quality of personal life, social recognition, self esteem, or friendship relations, than to understanding, support, and involvement in government. (p. 62)

In a similar manner Sonia Livingstone writes:

> It seems that the Internet supports, and young people prefer to engage with, new civic or life-political issues … Particularly, they respond to project-focused, pragmatic, and low-obligation yet high profile activities, which are organised through forums characterised by open and spontaneous, ad hoc, low-commitment, self-reflexive, and strategic communications within flexibly defined, peer-based network. (2007, p. 105)

Thus, views of the young citizen, democracy, citizenship, and politics govern the educational process and specific educational conditions for conversation are thereby created.

The use of online discussion forums in education is increasing and findings illustrate potentialities and shortcomings, when using digital media in classroom conversations. The digital media is a challenge facing education – not the solution to all problems in education and society. There is, in fact, little basis for assuming that digital media

will make young people any more politically engaged and participative when used in school (cf. Selwyn 2007). This is an empirical question in need of further research. The proliferation of digital discussions in education (Wang & Woo 2007) and more teachers experimenting with digital discussions (Rossi 2006) make it necessary to understand their educational potential (Andresen 2009). So far, research shows that the classroom becomes more open, thus giving the students a voice in their learning (Andresen 2009, Kim et al 2007, Rossi 2006).

Face-to-face and computer mediated communication could be combined creating a (third) space for learning and teaching – an interface between the school and the experiences and capacities of the student. The student becomes producer and consumer – *prosument* (Andersson 2010c) – when using digital media in the classroom, bringing a shift from knowledge transmission to knowledge construction. New patterns of classroom conversation take place leaving the IRE (Initiation, Response, and Evaluation) pattern and disclosing a dynamic relation between teachers and students (Xu 2008). Digital conversations allow for elaborated thoughts through a careful choice of words and could be used to develop argumentation and identify valid reasons (Kim et al 2007), critical thinking skills (Guiller et al. 2008), knowledge construction, and learning autonomy (Wang & Woo 2007). The participants can "engage in a more thoughtful discussion by explaining their ideas and sharing their personal experiences or by inviting more discussion of an idea from others" (Schallert et al 2009, p. 724). Findings indicate that participants are more likely to focus on the topic, cite more literature and incorporate "the author's beliefs with their own experiences" (Wang & Woo 2007, p. 273). When researching schools using *one-to-one* computing programs, Mark Warschauer found three changes in the classroom: "*scaffolding* (provision of support so students can read more challenging material), *epistemic engagement* (active involvement in knowledge building), and *page to screen* (increased amount of reading online)" (p. 55). Similar findings have been reported by Susanne Kjällander (2011) who studied student (age 6–17) interaction and meaning production when using digital resources in a social science classroom. Digital resources became 'a third element' in the interaction, creating a cooperative climate that made the digital interface a collective responsibility. Digital conversations indicate that there is no need to fight for the conversational space. In addition, shy and introverted students, as well as those with speech difficulties, usually silenced by 'loud' participants in the classroom, can make their voices heard. The conversation offers flexibility in time and space[3].

Conditions for Political Conversation: the ICCS as a case representing School

The ICCS is necessarily distinct, but excludes relational, contextual, and elusive captured data, due to the inherent methodological problems of quantitative studies. In this section, research assumptions used in *the international students' questionnaire* (IEA 2007) of the ICCS are identified. These illustrate different views on the political conversation in relation to whether the citizenship status (who) – is a young person or an adult – and the location (where) for the political conversation. In addition, findings with regard to the role of the teacher in the Swedish classroom, within the Swedish part of the ICCS, are considered. In the analysis of the questionnaire, the definition of political conversation was used by searching for related words within all the questions (e.g. discussion, debate, talk, and vote). The outcome was analysed using three questions: *How* is the political conversation described in the international students' questionnaire? *Who* is addressed *where* in the questions? *Which* words are mainly used to describe *adult* political conversations and *young people's* political conversation?

The result of the analysis reveals eight questions, which contain multiple choices (from 6 to 13 alternatives). The underlined bold words in the questions highlight central aspects used in formulating the result.

12. On a typical day, how much time do you spend on the following activities **outside of school**? (En vanlig vardag, hur mycket tid lägger du ner på följande aktiviteter utanför skolan?) Using the computer or internet for fun is mentioned together with the activities of talking on the telephone and chatting on the internet with friends.

13. How often do you engage in the following activities **outside of school**, in your spare time? (Hur ofta ägnar du dig åt följande aktiviteter utanför skolan, på din fritid?) Most alternatives include the use of chat (prata).

15. **In school**, have you ever devoted yourself to any of the activities mentioned below? (Har du någon gång ägnat dig åt någon av nedanstående aktiviteter i skolan?) The activities described are debating, voting, discussing, protesting, and setting school activities.

16. How often do the following events happen when you **discuss** political and social issues in **regular lessons**? (Hur ofta händer nedanstående saker när ni diskuterar politiska frågor

och samhällsfrågor på vanliga lektioner?) When the individual student is addressed, the political intervention is described as an assertion of opinions (tycker, åsikter). When the activity is framed as a group activity, it shifts to discussion.

21. How **important** is it to **behave** in the following ways for you to be a good **adult citizen**? (Hur viktigt är det att bete sig på nedanstående sätt för att man ska vara en god vuxen medborgare?) Behaviours related to political conversation are *following* the political debate in newspapers, radio, TV, and the Internet, as well as *participating* in political discussions.

30. How **well** do you think you can carry out the following activities? (Hur bra tror du att du skulle kunna göra nedanstående saker?) The activities mentioned: discussing news articles about conflicts between different countries, asserting views on a controversial issue, observing a TV-debate on a controversial issue, writing a letter to a newspaper, and making a speech in front of the class on a political issue.

32. A list of ways for **adults** to become involved in **politics** follows below. What do you think you will do when you **become an adult**? (Nedan följer en uppräkning av olika sätt för vuxna att engagera sig i politiken. Vad tror du att du kommer att göra när du blir vuxen?) Becoming involved in politics is reduced to voting in different elections within society.

33. A list of activities that you as a **young person** could do in the **coming years** follows below. What do you think you will do? (Nedan följer en uppräkning över saker som du som är ung skulle kunna göra under de närmaste åren. Vad tror du att du kommer att göra?)

Question 33 is one of the few questions that address digital possibilities for political conversation. However, the way the question has been put (how you as a *young* person) denotes that this is less important than common adult political activities and behaviours mentioned in questions 21 and 32. Digital media is raised as a possibility for observing (following the political debate) and participating in political discussions (outside of school). The use of digital media is mainly subscribed to young people drawing a line between adult political activities and those of the young. There is strong acknowledgement of adult and future valued participation. While political conversation, activities in school and those of adults in society are described as discussion, debate, and voting, the political conversation of the young outside the school is described as chatting, talking, and asserting opinions.

The vocabulary of how *well* they can carry out certain activities indicates a certain understanding of what should be regarded as *good and relevant* political actions.

With regard to "actually handle and discuss controversial issues in the classroom, teachers use different strategies of communication and many teachers hesitate to let the student openly discuss the issues freely" (Ljunggren & Unemar Öst 2010b, p. 9). Based on Swedish data in the ICCS, the authors have developed a model that illustrates four roles teachers assume when dealing with political issues, which show the relation between 287 teachers' acceptance of controversy and their choice of communicative strategy (2010a, 2010b)[4]:

- The Debate Leader (66 teachers)
- The Tutor (51)
- The Norm Mediator (or Discussion Leader) (138)
- The Rejecter (32)

"The norm mediator opens up for a discussion in the classroom. Clearly states what he/she thinks of the expressed opinion, tells the students about how such an opinion is regarded in the society and refers to laws and curricular norms" (2010b, p. 10).

Conditions for Political Conversation: Black Heart as a case representing social media

Black Heart is a Swedish net community with over 80, 000 members ranging in age from 14 to 27. The research was conducted in the form of an observer and focused on controversial political text conversations in a discussion forum. The number of text conversations amounted to 17 000, of which ten were analysed. All conversations contained different political positions – conversations between adversaries. This community was selected because of its semi-public character and the fact that it is owned and run by young citizens who have no interest in making money. Overall, the methodology can be described as a *web content analysis* using a type of *computer mediated discourse analysis*. The methodological basis of my research is inspired by *discourse theory* and *rhetoric*. The method is a *case study* and *the* case is defined as the *conditions for situational political socialisation and its outcomes*. In analysing the data – text from different parts of the community and the text conversations – the performativity and the discursive work of the text was in focus. Findings from a pilot research study (Andersson 2010a, 2010b, 2010c) and my on going research,

related to the conditions for political conversation, are selectively presented and illustrated.

Black Heart (figured name) is by itself described as a social, active, living, large, open and alternative, friendly, playful and serious community. It is addressed to those with specific music and clothing styles (dark and emotional), but attracts other people as well. Different activities are offered, such as blog, chat, discussion, interest group, and photo album. It could be described as a democratic, equal, legal, and participatory driven *institution* whose basic principles are transparency, clarity, direct communication, influence, debate, activity, progress, and commitment. Black Heart is owned by its young creator and governed by a group of five called *CREW*. All the communication is monitored by *ADMINS* (18 persons) who make sure there is no undesirable behaviour. Written rules and conditions formulate the institutional frame and not following the rules could mean expulsion. Black Heart is a *semi-public* community; you can observe activities without being a member and produce content as a member. The rule of freedom of speech is fundamental. This right of having an opinion and defending it in public is institutionally restricted in the *Rules and Conditions*. The participants must accept the institutional setting with regard to their participation:

> - You are not allowed to break the Swedish law at Blackheart.se
> - Pornographic, xenophobic, and copyrighted material is strictly prohibited on the entire site
> - You may not use the site for activities that may be perceived as offensive, such as incitement, harassment or bullying
> - You have to be the person who you claim to be, to use someone else's data or image is not okay
>
> **Excerpt 1**

The first post in the text conversation initiates and frames the conversation, a conversation in which the participants have to be issue oriented – stay on topic. This is explicitly formulated by the *ADMIN* for the discussion forum POLITICS.

> - Freedom of expression – yes, but keep it clean. Obvious racist propaganda and racial insults are strictly prohibited and will receive a warning and then suspension.
> - Personal attacks and all kinds of acts is a big NO NO as well as over the entire forum.
> - Please contact me when off-topic, personal attacks, spam or nonsense occurs.
> - Doesn't the topic address you – do not bother to write anything at all, not even one-liners like "/ care".
> - If you link direct to xenophobic material on a website, use the "hxxp: / /" instead of "HTTP ://".
> - Handle it nicely.
>
> **Excerpt 2**

Communicational strategies and norms are established in the interaction between the participants and the institution, while social hierarchies are created and become visible when groups are formed in the conversations. The research has identified five conditions for conducting

political conversations: the technical frame, the OT-possibility, the ontological condition for conversation, the administration pedagogue, and the privilege to define. In short, *the technical frame* controls the technical aspects, possibilities and limitations set by the medium in the conversation. *The off topic (OT) possibility* opens and closes the rule to be content oriented in the conversation. *The ontological condition for conversation* makes clear that the conversation should be competitive and conflicting – it should, as expressed by several participants, contain different political perspectives and well-defended opinions. *The administration pedagogue* is the role-based condition that governs the rules and norms of the institution (*ADMINS*, comparable to the role of the teacher in the classroom conversation). Finally, *the privilege to define* is a prerogative held by the thread creator – who has the right to decide which content is suitable for the on-going conversation. Participants are confronted with each other's political values, attitudes, and positions, when public and private issues are dealt with, mostly by using evidence and arguments to promote a stand. There is strong *discursive pressure* that urges the participants to *confess* and *defend*: "you should confess your interests and political positions … the interests are common property, concerning all members in the community, and should therefore be open to criticism and dealt with within an argumentative frame of reference" (Andersson 2010b, p. 392). This is illustrated in a text conversation called *Nuclear Power*:

A1:	Nuclear power *is* <u>good</u>. *It's* harmless as long as you use it the right way.
B1:	I <u>agree</u>, however, it *is* a finite resource, which *is* a problem!
C1:	Yes, it *is* not in any way hazardous to for example refract uranium. The final storage process *is* also <u>one hundred</u> per cent secure.
A2:	Would you like to bicycle in a wheel or what?
C2:	You do not exactly give a <u>serious</u> picture of yourself when you act as, or *are*, a <u>troll</u>. If you're wondering, I would <u>first</u> go for a reduction in consumption, *which means* less electricity needs. The *right wing mantra* about "economic growth" *creates* enormous environmental problems and *means* that we consume much more than the earth can handle. <u>Secondly</u>, we have the opportunity to replace nuclear power with renewable energy; it's just that the fabrication of money *is* in the way. A resource-based economy would be much better, since it *is* rooted in reality and not in stuff of made-up value.
A3:	Typically *communists* – opinion fascists.
	If you primarily want to invest on a drop in consumption, I *think* you should <u>turn off your computer</u>.
	Of course we can replace it, but now it *<u>is not</u> directly* the right time because the new energy *is not really* developed.
C3:	I did not say that you are not allowed to have your <u>opinion</u> just that people *will not* take you <u>seriously</u> *if* you do not keep the conversation at a serious level …
	Excerpt 3

In *A1,* a clear confession is stated that makes the position of *post identity* A explicit. This position is in opposition to C, which is illustrated by the use of irony in *C1* (one hundred), a rhetorical resource later used in response (*A3*, turn off your computer). Post identity C in *C2* and *C3* illustrates the importance of seriousness – this is a *serious* political conversation where you have the right to present your opinions and *defend* them. Behaving like a *troll*, producing irrelevant content, and not being serious, are aspects that do not belong in the political conversation, which is also stated by *ADMIN* in defining the rules of the conversation. *Modality* (bold and italic words), often strong, is used in trying to convince adversaries and defend what is at *stake* – political positions and interests (C2, A3 – italics).

The participants are, in general, given the opportunity to "take and *make* place in the public debate where they can be heard, respected and listened to" (Andersson 2010b, p. 393). By *debating* and arguing political issues, young people seem to locate themselves within the public controversy – giving air to their political voices.

Political Socialisation of the Political Voice

The purpose of the ICCS study was to investigate "in a range of countries, the ways in which young people are *prepared* and consequently *ready* and *able* to undertake their roles as citizens" (Schulz et al 2008, p. 7, author's emphasis in italics). The transfer of norms, values, and knowledge from one generation to another could help to preserve society and support the existing political system. In education this could be done by emphasizing coverage of content – knowledge first – as a core pedagogical strategy and later, if at all, politically discuss and debate the content (cf. Simon 2005). However, merely advocating this approach to political socialisation is problematic. The citation exemplifies a view of political socialisation (prepared, ready, and able), which I find troublesome. Basically, only advocating the preparation perspective, aiming at 'successful' socialisation, excludes young people from societal concerns and the possibilities to influence, feel engaged, involved, and concerned in the on-going creation of society (Biesta 2010, Pfaff 2009, Harris & Wyn 2009, Haste & Hogan 2006). Young people are governed to wait – put on hold because of their age – before they are acknowledged as citizens and members of the political life. This is problematic in education: "If young people are to be positioned merely as citizens-in-waiting, it seems that there are other things they prefer to do with their time" (Livingstone 2007, p. 120).

Generally, political socialisation is a process where humans develop a 'civic identity', different political and societal attitudes and skills (Amnå et al 2010). In the analysis report of the ICCS (Skolverket 2010b) the view of political socialisation in the ICCS is commented on as being based on consensus thinking interested in civic/citizenship learning and political knowledge – how (democratic) norms and knowledge are reproduced and taken over by the growing generation. The international students' questionnaire illustrates this tradition, which is further expanded in the title of the report from Skolverket, the Swedish National Agency for Education (2010a) – *Tomorrow's citizens.* With regard to the who – the adult, the young person as a future adult and citizen – in the where (the society), the political conversation is defined as protesting, debating, discussing, voting, and criticising in formal public and societally arranged settings. Regarding the young person in the school, the political conversation is defined as debating, decision making, speaking, talking, and above all – discussing, while with regard to the young person in society, the political conversation is defined as talking, chatting, and asserting opinions. The vocabulary used reminds us of Bennett's (2007) *Dutiful Citizen.* Thus, a disparity between the inside and the outside of the school is created. Time and space become central aspects creating a value-divide between the political voice of the young and the adult citizens.

The School and its Problem – the emphasis on conventional political socialisation

If the democratic society is dependent on the citizens' ability to participate in well-grounded political conversations, the school has the responsibility to make this possible – to ensure that the students can grow and develop civic competences (Englund 2007, Hess 2004). In Sweden, the importance of conversation is continuously taken seriously in the national curriculum (Lgr11)[5]. However, "Despite the importance often assigned to participation in classroom discussions, it has been repeatedly found that most students do not participate" (Caspi et al 2006, p. 718). The teacher is supposed to have the pedagogical responsibility for the political conversation. Communicative skills are therefore important. If the school rejects or ignores political, provocative, and sensitive questions, it also denies students the possibility to conduct deep and meaningful political conversations:

> in classrooms where teachers activate students' ideological differences through controversial issues discussions, students

begin to see political conflict as a normal and necessary part of democracy … This normalization of conflict is linked to enhanced political engagement. (Hess 2009, p. 34)

The teacher creates the conditions that determine what kind of political and democratic competence can develop in school. Merely advocating *the norm mediator* reduces the educational possibility and mainly steers the upcoming generation in agreed directions, thus seeing young people as 'becomings' and 'not yet' political citizens (Biesta 2010, Amnå et al 2010, Pfaff 2009, Bakardjieva 2009, Biesta & Lawy 2006). This 'preparation perspective' is problematic because "it relies on the idea that the guarantee for democracy lies in the existence of a properly educated citizenry so that once all citizens have received their education, democracy will simply follow" (Biesta 2010, p. 556). What will happen when central aspects of democracy, conflicts as the lifeblood of democracy, are left aside?

As an alternative to the conventional tradition, "educators should accept the contingency defined by the particular situation at hand rather than try to ensure that after being educated individuals will become one kind of person rather than another from any universal standpoint" (Ljunggren 2010, p. 29). Young people live their lives in different places, creating different conditions for their political socialisation. The school seems to forget this when it places the issues 'objectively' in a societal and far distance as it tries to 'indoctrinate' proper democratic norms and values, proper ways of thinking and acting, reducing the possibilities for political conversation in and out of school – reducing young people's civic competences. Viewing the citizenship status as an object, something that *is* and should be achieved, excludes a careful look at *how* it is done. It neglects the intimate relationship between *closeness*, *importance,* and *action*. What is close to you affects you stronger. An issue close to the individual makes the issue seem important, strongly inviting the taking of action. In school, this implies a shift from achievement to practice, an opening for culturally embedded aspects in the everyday life of young citizens.

Political knowledge increases when there are opportunities to discuss political issues in the classroom (Almgren 2006). The possibility of the school to foster democrats is located in the open classroom, affecting students' political knowledge and the learning of democratic values positively. The use of social media has been shown to open the classroom, but faces considerable challenges in the conventional tradition. Will there be any space left for political conversation when, together with the dominating and norm mediating voice of the teacher, the role of the school is reduced to knowledge instruction, knowledge

control, and evaluation? "When epistemology is expected to do the work by delivering true stories and true facts in school there would be no reason to pay attention to the opinions of others or to question what is heard and seen" (Ljunggren 2010, p. 20). The school is the only venue where young people from different backgrounds meet over a period of a long time. Therefore, the school is a suitable space for political conversation since it has curricular opportunities for conversation about issues, teachers can teach students how to participate, and the ideological diversity is pre-given and could be turned into a 'deliberative' (Hess 2009) asset suitable for debate.

The results of the ICCS and the analysis of the questionnaire are problematic, if we consider that one of the main aspects in the socialisation process is the development of civic literacy, for example, by participating in genuine political conversations in the classroom. If authentic questions, students' experiences and preferences in education that promotes engagement, participation, and qualitative learning are important, then more is required. The task of fostering democrats is a living challenge facing all teachers – daily. The agenda of the formal political establishment, a conventional understanding of political conversation and socialisation, ignores emerging new politics (e.g. described by Livingstone 2007, Bennett 2007, Loader 2007, Castells 2009). If educators continue this tradition, the voice of the young citizen will be even more soundless in the school. Thus, a school that builds on these foundations loses young citizens, their views, interests, media experiences and practices, as well as their views on communication, democracy and participation. According to Bennett, "Civic identifications and practices, if they are to be adopted, must have some anchors and inducements in the lived experiences of individuals both inside and outside of the education and socialization settings in which they are introduced" (2007, p. 62–63). An alternative, as I see it, is a discursive approach to political socialisation – situational political socialisation.

Situational political socialisation includes a form of self and peer socialisation that recognises the individual's own contribution, as a social actor, to socialisation. Situational political socialisation is the opposite, using the words of David Buckingham, to the "traditional, functionalist account of socialization" meaning "the young person is a passive recipient of adult influence, a "becoming" rather than a "being" in their own right" (2008, p. 4). This implies a discursive understanding that socialisation is open, uncertain, and social actor dependent. Situational political socialisation is a situation where people create societal, political and citizenship positions, attitudes and knowledge's – it is an event in a specific context where people contingently foster

one another in given and non-given directions and timeframes. Thus, the social actor becomes, in the context of digital media, a *prosument citizen*, that is, a citizen using the digital media when entering the public space, consuming and producing societal content (norms, values, interests) and thus participates in the constitution of society.

Concluding Remarks

A preliminary conclusion is that **the School** (the ICCS) is characterised by a narrow type of *discussion,* which is mainly *unidirectional* through *norm mediating* that builds on a *conventional* tradition of political socialisation where the political voice is supposed to be heard in the *future*. On the other hand, **the social media** (Black Heart) reveals a *multifaceted* and initially *open* political *debate* in which the conversation is characterised by *closeness* and *conflict* that deals with controversies here and now based on the political interest of the young. Their political voice is being heard *now* and the young participants are framing the political socialisation. However, the picture is more complex. What can be learned from the cases in order to revitalise young people's political socialisation and learning in school?

In ICCS, *public* political issues are framed as adult matters that are supposed to be learned in the school which is governed by the teacher who mainly uses few perspectives and creates few possibilities for students' own questions – the political conversation is reduced to *politics*. Young people are, following this logic, reduced to apolitical beings until they have reached legal age – even if they are, by law, already citizens. The conventional tradition, heavily promoted by the national curriculum, which aims to defend the principles, norms and values of the liberal democracy and the Swedish community, leaves the teacher with only *one* communicative strategy in politically complex situations. When disclosing controversies and placing the students in a politically marginalised position, education becomes apolitical, potentially risking the survival of a democratically viable society. If the democratic conversation is characterised by a thoughtful and nuanced consideration of *different* options and perspectives, then there is a need to discuss the purpose and strategies in promoting democratic education.

In Black Heart, *discursive pressure* directs the participants into having strong and well thought out arguments, there are initially equal opportunities and rules for civility in the communication. However, and this is the great divide between the school (represented by the case of the ICCS 2009) and Black Heart, the net community is more

open while at the same time constituted by power structures, strict rules, and conversational norms – a common communicative culture built by the institution *with* the participants. The content of *public and private* political issues is not defined and normatively given – it is multifaceted and rich in perspectives making space for *controversy*. There is an inherent assumption in the political debates of the Black Heart community that we can *never* reach consistency, regardless of different interests. The basic assumption is that you should have and maintain different opinions and positions not, as in school, normatively steer them in one approved direction. Conflicts are ontological conditions, the lifeblood of the political conversation.

Due to the increasing use of digital media, changing conditions for conducting political conversations and young people's 'informal' political practices are hardly 'measured' in the ICCS, owing to its conventional basis. The findings in the ICCS confirm the results of previous research (Michaels et al 2008, Rossi 2006, Caspi et al 2006, Nystrand et al 2003, Liljestrand 2002, Lindblad & Sahlström 1999) – the Political Voice is silenced by the voice of the teacher instructing the students in the 'proper' ways of citizenship that aims at future participation in the democratic society, hopefully making them *prepared, ready,* and *able*. Due to increased assessments (educational focus on knowledge transfer, tests, and results) and their impact on education, the possibilities for an open political conversation in the classroom could be further reduced by the conventional tradition. Furthermore, owing to the teachers' agenda (equal to that of the ICCS) in political issues (Liljestrand 2012), lost dimensions of well-being (Edling 2012), failures in nurturing the civic spirit and civic engagement (Olson 2012), one can wonder what will happen to educational values such as critical conversation, autonomy, political interest, personal experiences, and participation. If the conventional tradition of political socialisation continues to dominate, will there ever be (properly) school-educated citizens? Will the increased use of social media in teaching (and society at large) change this existing order?

Hence, *The Political Voice* is framed with different conditions, depending on *where*, *when* and *how* the political conversation is institutionally arranged and directed. Digital media creates possibilities for *discussion and debate*. It opens for the voice of *the prosument citizen*, for ideological and political positions and experiences, making space for deep, multifaceted, and content oriented conversations. Which kind of political person is educated in this '*third*' space? If we recognise the importance of different teaching methods, should perhaps some attention be directed towards digital educational conditions when considering the didactical basis for conducting political conversations

in school? "Only if the institutional structures (school, family, peers) that shape young people's daily lives support civic participation does it seem that young people feel enable to engage with the civic or public sphere, on or offline" (Livingstone 2007, p. 121), in or out of school. This is not to argue for a technical solution – that digital media is going to take care of all the problems. Rather, there is a need to re-think the understanding of political socialisation and the purpose of education and try to deepen our understanding of digital media and its educational impact. Digital media cannot alone be expected to revitalise educational conditions for political conversation in school. Changes within education and politics have to take place, hopefully creating spaces for young people to bring all of themselves into school. In this case, I would argue for enhanced *double transparency* – to make *politics* (the formal political establishment in society) visible, compelling and accessible to the young and *the political* (e.g. everyday political concerns people have in their lives) visible and acknowledged by adults working as key actors in the political establishment. There is a need, with the words of Stephen Coleman, to engage *with* young people – willingness to

> enter their spaces on their terms; to communicate in mutually accessible language, without condescension; and to produce a shared political agenda, without trying to impose conventional norms. In short, it involves engaging with calls for new conceptions of active citizenship and democratic participation. (2007, p. 36)

The ICCS and Black Heart illustrate perspectives of the political life of the young citizen, creating different educational conditions for political conversation. Viewed analytically, *politics* and *the political* could vitalise each other. By taking advantage of curricular opportunities in school, taking its point of departure in the shared experiences of (political) communication, the political gap could be bridged.

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. 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. (Schulz et al 2010): (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, 2711 teachers and 3464 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 percent 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. A place on the Internet with opportunities for members to take part in a variety of activities (e.g. chat and discussion forums). There are several variants of net communities: large and small; international, national, local; open, semi-public, closed.

3. There are, of course, disadvantages and shortcomings using digital communication in political conversations. For instance, what happens to the body and becoming a subject in relation to others? What will happen to face-to-face (f-t-f) conversations? Is a digital conversation as real as f-t-f? The digital conversation requires the ability to express oneself in writing – possibly excluding some students.

4. Diana Hess (2004, p. 258–259) has identified four different approaches – strategies of communication and degree of acceptance of controversy – to the discussion of controversial political issues in the classroom, similar to these: Denial; Privilege; Avoidance; Balance.

5. The word conversation (samtal) is mentioned 254 times, discussion/to discuss (diskussion/diskutera) 195 times and argument 94 times. Conflict is mentioned 10 times and common (gemensam) 30 times. Conflict or conflict of interest (intressekonflikt) is mentioned 10 times. Debate and controversy (kontrovers) are not mentioned at all.

References

Almgren, Ellen (2006): *Att fostra demokrater. Om skolan i demokratin och demokratin i skolan* [To educate democrats: on education in democracy and democracy in schools]. Uppsala: Uppsala University Press.

Andersson, Erik (2010a): Irony in the political: young people's use of irony in a political text conversation in a net community. In Cunningham, P & Fretwell, N, eds: *Lifelong Learning and Active Citizenship*, pp. 602–611, London: CiCe.

Andersson, Erik (2010b): Stake in the political: young people's condition for political socialization in social media. *Politics, Culture and Socialization*, *1*(4), 379–396.

Andersson, Erik (2010c): Text som kontext: rum, plats och text som social situation [Text as context: space, place and text as social situation]. *Utbildning och Lärande*, *1*(4), 76–97.

Andresen, Martin A (2009): Asynchronous discussion forums: success factors, outcomes, assessments, and limitations. *Technology & Society*, *12*(1), 249–257.

Amnå, Erik; Arensmeier, Cecilia; Ekman, Joakim; Englund, Tomas & Ljunggren, Carsten (2010): Skolornas institutionella karaktär och elevernas medborgarkompetens: en jämförelse av olika kommunala och fristående skolor över tid och rum [Institutional settings and civic education: a comparative study of different types of public and private schools]. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidsskrift*, *112*(1), 23–32.

Bakardjieva, Maria (2009): Subactivism: lifeworld and politics in the age of the Internet. *The Information Society*, *25*(2), 91–104.

Bennett, Lance W (2007): Civic learning in changing democracies: Challenges for citizenship and civic education. In Peter Dahlgren, ed: *Young Citizens and New media. Learning for Democratic Participation*, pp. 59–77. New York: Routledge.

Biesta, Gert (2010): How to exist politically and learn from it: Hannah Arendt and the problem of democratic education. *Teacher College Record*, *112*(2), 556–575.

Biesta, Gert & Lawy, Robert (2006): Citizenship-as-practice: the educational implications of an inclusive and relational understanding of citizenship. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 54*(1), 34–50.

Bretag, Tracey (2006): Developing 'third space' interculturality using computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *11*(4), 981–1011.

Buckingham, David (2008): Introducing identity. In David Buckingham, ed: *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*, pp. 1–22. London: The MIT Press.

Caspi, Avner; Chajut, Eran & Saporta, Kelly (2006): Participation in class in online discussions: gender differences. *Computers & Education*, *50*(3), 718–724.

Castells, Manuel (2009): *Communication Power*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Coleman, Stephen (2007): From big brother to Big brother: two faces of interactive engagement. In Peter Dahlgren, ed: *Young Citizens and New Media. Learning for Democratic Participation*, pp. 21–39. New York: Routledge.

Dahlgren, Peter (2007): Introduction: Youth, civic engagement and learning via new media. In Peter Dahlgren, ed: *Young Citizens and New Media. Learning for Democratic Participation*, pp. 1–18. New York: Routledge.

Drotner, Kirsten (2008): Leisure is hard work: digital practices and future competencies. In David Buckingham, ed: *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*, pp. 167–184. London: The MIT Press.

Edling, Silvia (2012): The (embodied) citizen: exploring young people's possibilities to engage in the wellbeing of others. *Utbildning & Demokrati*, *21*(1), 57–76.

Englund, Tomas, ed (2007): *Utbildning som kommunikation: Deliberativa samtal som möjlighet* [Education as communication. Deliberative communication as possibility]. Göteborg: Daidalos.

Englund, Tomas (2011): The potential of education for creating mutual trust: schools as sites for deliberation. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 43*(3), 236–248.

Fenton, Natalie (2010): Re-imagining democracy: new media, young people, participation and politics. In Tobias Olsson & Peter Dahlgren, eds: *Young People ICTs and Democracy*, pp. 19–34. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Guiller, Jane; Durndell, Alan & Ross, Anne (2008): Peer interaction and critical thinking: face-to-face or online discussion? *Learning and Instruction*, *18*(2), 187–200.

Harris, Anita & Wyn, Johanna (2009): Young people's politics and the micro-territories of the local. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, *44*(2), 327–344.

Haste, Helen & Hogan, Amy (2006): Beyond conventional civic participation, beyond the moral-political divide: young people and contemporary debates about citizenship. *Journal of Moral Education*, *35*(4), 473–493.

Hess, Diana (2004): Controversies about controversial issues in democratic education. *Political Science and Politics*, 37(2), 257–261.

Hess, Diana (2009): *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*. New York: Routledge.

IEA, International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (2007): *Internationell studie om medborgar- och samhällsfrågor i skolan. ICCS 2009 huvudstudie: Internationell elevenkät* [International study on civic and citizenship issues at school. ICCS 2009 main study: international student survey]. Skolverket: Fritzes.

Kim, Il-Hee; Anderson, Richard C; Nguyen-Jahiel Kim & Archodidou, Anthi (2007): Discourse patterns during children's collaborative online discussions. *The Journal of the Learning Science*, 16(3), 333–370.

Kjällander, Susanne (2011): *Designs for Learning in an Extended Digital Environment: Case Studies of Social Interaction in the Social Science Classroom*. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press.

Liljestrand, Johan (2002): *Klassrummet som diskussionsarena* [The classroom as an arena for discussions]. Örebro: Örebro Studies in Education 6.

Liljestrand, Johan (2012): Citizenship education in discussions concerning political issues. *Utbildning & Demokrati*, 21(1), 77–96.

Lindblad, Sverker & Sahlström, Fritjof (1999): Gamla mönster och nya gränser: om ramfaktorer och klassrumsinteraktion [Old patterns and new frontiers: on frame factors and classroom interaction]. *Pedagogisk Forskning i Sverige*, 4(1), 73–92.

Livingstone, Sonia (2007): Interactivity and participation on the Internet: young people's response the civic sphere. In Peter Dahlgren, ed: *Young Citizens and New Media. Learning for Democratic Participation*, pp. 103–124. New York: Routledge.

Ljunggren, Carsten (2010): Agonistic recognition in education: on Arendts qualification of political and moral meaning. *Studies in Philosophy of Education*, 29(1), 19–33.

Ljunggren, Carsten & Unemar Öst, Ingrid (2010a): Skolors och lärares kontrovershantering [Schools and teachers management of controversy]. In Skolverket, *Skolor som politiska arenor: medborgarkompetens och kontrovershantering*. pp. 18–44. Stockholm. Fritzes.

Ljunggren, Carsten & Unemar Öst, Ingrid (2010b): *Controversial Issue Education and Political Literacy – the Case of Sweden*. Conference Paper presented at: The IPSA RC 21/29 Conference Citizenship education: Democracy, Culture, Socialization, Media, Aaalborg September 15–17.

Loader, Brian D (2007): Introduction: young citizens in the digital age: disaffected or displaced? In Brian D Loader, ed: *Young Citizens in the Digital Age. Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*, pp. 1–17. New York: Routledge.

Michaels, Sarah; O'Connor, Catherine & Resnick, Lauren B (2008): Deliberative discourse idealized and realized: accountable talk in the classroom and in civic life. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 27(4), 283–297.

Montgomery, Kathryn C (2007): *Generation Digital: Politics, Commerce, and Childhood in the Age of the Internet.* Cambridge/London: The MIT Press.

Mossberger, Karen; Tolbert, Caroline J & McNeal, Ramona S (2008): *Digital Citizenship. The Internet, Society, and Participation.* Cambridge/London: The MIT Press.

Mouffe, Chantal (1993/2005): *The Return of the Political*. London: Verso.

Nystrand, Martin; Wu, Lawrence L; Gamoran, Adam; Zeiser, Susie & Long, Daniel A (2003): Questions in time: investigating the structures and dynamics of unfolding classroom discourse. *Discourse Processes*, 35(2), 135–198.

Olson, Maria (2012): What counts as young people's civic engagement in times of accountability? On the importance of maintaining openness about young people's civic engagement in education. *Utbildning & Demokrati*, 21(1), 29–56.

Olsson, Tobias (2007): An indispensable resource: the Internet and young civic engagement. In Peter Dahlgren, ed: *Young Citizens and New Media. Learning for Democratic Participation*, pp. 187–204. New York: Routledge.

Olsson, Tobias & Dahlgren, Peter, eds (2010): *Young People ICTs and Democracy.* Göteborg: Nordicom.

Pfaff, Nicolle (2009): Youth culture as a context of political learning: how young people politicize amongst each other. *Young*, 17(2), 167–189.

Rossi, John Allen (2006): The dialogue of democracy. *Social Studies*, 99(3), 112–120.

Schallert, Diane L; Chiang, Yueh-hui Vanessa; Park, Yangjoo; Jordan, Michelle E; Lee, Haekyung; Cheng An-Chih J; Chu, Hsiang-Ning R; Lee, Soon Ah; Kim, Taehee & Song, Kwangok (2009): Being polite while fulfilling different discourse functions in online classroom discussions. *Computers & Education*, 53(3), 713–725.

Schulz, Wolfram; Fraillon, Julian; Ainley, John; Losito, Bruno & Kerr, David (2008): *International civic and citizenship education study: assessment framework*. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

Schulz, Wolfram; Ainley John; Fraillon, Julian; Kerr, David & Losito, Bruno (2010): *ICCS 2009. International report: civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower secondary school students in 38 countries*. International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

Selwyn, Neil (2007): Technology, schools and citizenship education: a fix too far? In Brian D Loader, ed: *Young Citizens in the Digital Age. Political Engagement, Young People and New Media*, pp. 129–142. New York: Routledge.

Simon, Katherine G (2005): Classroom deliberations. In Susan Fuhrman & Marvin Lazerson, eds: *The Public Schools*, pp. 107–129. New York: Oxford University Press.

Skolverket (The National Swedish Agency for Education) (2010a): *Morgondagens medborgare. ICCS 2009: svenska 14-åringars kunskaper, värderingar och deltagande i internationell belysning* [Citizens of Tomorrow ICCS 2009: Swedish 14-year-old's knowledge, values and participation in an international scope]. Stockholm: Fritzes.

Skolverket (The National Swedish Agency for Education) (2010b): *Skolor som politiska arenor: medborgarkompetens och kontrovershantering* [Schools as Political Arenas: on citizen competence and dealing with conflict]. Stockholm: Fritzes.

Wang, Qiyun & Woo, Huay Lit (2007): Comparing asynchronous online discussions and face-to-face discussions in a classroom setting. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 38(2), 272–286.

Warschauer, Mark (2008): Laptops and literacy: a multi-site case study. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 3(1), 52–67.

Xu, Zhichang (2008): When hybrid learning meets blended teaching: online computer-mediated communication (CMC) discourse and classroom face-to-face (FTF) discourse analysis. *ICHL 08 Proceedings of the 1st international conference on Hybrid Learning and Education*.