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# Democracy lessons in market-oriented schools

## The case of Swedish upper secondary education

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### Introduction

The traditional concept of citizenship is being gradually transformed as emphasis on public responsibility and commitment is replaced by a focus on individualism and consumer engagement (Molnar, 2006; Sandlin, Burdick and Norris, 2012). Similarly, general strengthening of links between the educational economic spheres, including the marketization of schools, may be expected to change the signification of citizenship and democracy education. This article addresses such effects of the recent re-structuring of Swedish upper secondary education, according to market principles. With its ambitious democracy-fostering goals and far-reaching marketization, Swedish education constitutes an interesting case in this respect.

According to international comparative studies, democracy education is more broadly defined in the Nordic countries than elsewhere, as teaching *about*, *for* and *through* democracy, with a strong emphasis on active participation (Bronäs, 2000; Lister, Williams, Anttonen et al, 2007; Mikkelsen, 2003). The Nordic model of democracy education should be seen in the light of the modern history of these countries. Being prominent examples of social democratic welfare-regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1996), their policies from the 1930s onwards not only attributed crucial economic functions to education, but equally importantly emphasized its social functions, with citizenship, social equality and integration as core components (Telhaug, Medien and Aasen, 2004). Further, the Nordic conceptualization of education *for* democracy must be related to the kind of citizenship that developed in the Nordic social democratic countries in the post-war period, which was framed by well organized labour and other social movements, stable agreements between social partners and high levels of trust between citizens and governments (see e.g. Fulcher, 1991; Kuhnle, 2000). Fostering the development of young people as responsible and active citizens was regarded as a crucial aspect of the Nordic welfare societies *and* their economies. However, the balance between democratic and other social educational motives on the one hand, and the economic functions

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of education on the other, has varied over time. This also applies to the particular *aspects* of democracy, participation and influence that have been emphasised (Olson, 2008).

In recent decades Swedish education has been thoroughly transformed, in a similar manner to the general trends in other OECD-countries. Choice, competition and new public management have been introduced globally to (allegedly) align education more closely to the demands of the ‘knowledge economy’ or ‘knowledge capitalism’ (Ball, 2007; Jessop, 2006; Peters, 2003). Jessop (2006) speaks of a broad transition starting in the 1970s, from the Keynesian welfare state aiming to maintain full employment and raise living standards for all citizens, to the Schumpeterian welfare state, actively seeking to contribute to competitiveness by promoting innovation, enterprise and flexibility. ‘The economy’ in this context includes diverse, previously excluded activities and sectors, one of which is education (cf. Apple, Kenway and Singh, 2005). However, the shift from a uniform, centrally regulated school system to one with far-going decentralization and market elements, based on ideas of choice and competition, has been more rapid and radical in Sweden than in many other places (Bunar, 2010; Lundahl, 2011). The whole Swedish education system is now exposed to competition and choice, but marketization has hitherto been most powerful at upper secondary level.

For the sake of simplicity, this article refers to a school market, but it would be more correct to speak of a quasi-market, as upper secondary school in Sweden is regulated and financed by the state at central and local levels. Hereafter, ‘market’ denotes a situation in which several producers compete to accomplish public tasks and/or the existence of internal management systems, modelled on the idea of a business firm. The article primarily focuses on phenomena related to the first of these two aspects, external competition (cf. Ball and Yodell, 2008).

The neoliberal turn and tighter connections between the state, education and economy, have affected the meanings of citizenship and democracy globally, despite considerable variations between national, regional and local contexts. Individual agency – responsibility, enterprise and self-regulation or ‘governmentality’ – is celebrated at the expense of collective action. The ‘consumer citizen’, *willing, resourceful and capable of making market-led choices* (Rasmussen et al., 2009:164) is incessantly championed. Values of universalism and equality are tending to be replaced by virtues of ‘becoming the best’ and ‘making a difference’. Swedish schools presently work in a highly decentralized and, in international comparison, uniquely market-oriented context (Bunar, 2010; Lundahl, 2011). At the same time their work is supposed to build on the old values of the social democratic welfare-regime, which creates considerable tensions and professional dilemmas (Lundström and Holm, 2011). While Sweden has been among the nations with the lowest social segregation at primary and upper secondary levels (Jenkins, Micklewright and Schnepf, 2006), growing class-related differences between schools and groups of students have become increasingly visible in the early 2000s; divisions and inequalities that are partly driven by the school choice system (Östh, Andersson and Malmberg, 2010; Swedish National Agency for Education, 2012). Consequently, the possibilities of encounters and exchange between students from diverse backgrounds, traditionally an important aspect of informal citizenship education, have diminished. The question how Swedish citizenship education and students’ influence are affected by school choice and the needs of schools to market themselves has hitherto been

largely neglected, especially in terms of the differences between public and independent schools (see below) with regard to so-called citizen competence (Ekman, 2011).

Biesta (2003) distinguishes between three kinds of democracy education in school: theoretical, formal and informal. Theoretical democracy education refers to schools' preparation of students to become citizens in a democratic society by, for example, teaching them about the constitution, general elections and parliamentary decision-making processes. Formal democracy education denotes students' practical experience of direct democratic participation, such as the way it is inscribed in national curriculum guides. It includes activities in both class and school councils, and students' possibilities to influence the everyday work of schools. Informal democracy education refers to fostering democracy indirectly by the transmission of certain values and ways of communicating. Here we expand this concept to encompass students' experiences of schooling more generally, as they are assumed to contribute to their beliefs and understandings of what influence and democracy are (and are not). A wider approach is also advocated by Biesta and Lawy (2006):

... there needs to be a shift in focus for research, policy and practice from the teaching of citizenship towards the different ways in which young people actually learn democratic citizenship—which must also include attention to the ways in which young people learn not to be involved with questions about democracy and citizenship (Biesta and Lawy, 2006:64).

## Aims and design of the article

This article addresses the scope for students to learn about democracy, and the expressions of such learning, in emerging formal and informal elements of today's highly market-influenced Swedish upper secondary education. The aim is explorative; to examine, begin to elucidate and provide foundations for further studies of how the market-orientation of schools frames and affects students' (and other key actors') perceptions and understanding of democracy, and their participation in democratic activities, in Swedish upper secondary schools.'

Theoretically, the analysis departs from the concepts of performance mode and de-centred market-positioned pedagogic identities introduced by Basil Bernstein (2000). Empirically, we mainly build on recent Swedish research on upper secondary education, primarily ethnographic classroom studies. These studies did not focus on marketization, but more generally on theoretical, formal and informal democracy teaching and learning. Some of them were conducted as parts of the research project *Active citizenship? On democratic education in the upper secondary school* (2007–2010), which aimed to develop knowledge about students' attempts to actively discuss and influence their schooling and the opportunities offered by the teachers and schools to do so (Öhrn, Lundahl and Beach, 2011; Rosvall, 2012; Hjelmér, 2013). Other relevant contributions include: a study of students' learning practices and learner identities during 12 years of ethnographic fieldwork in upper secondary schools (Beach and Dovemark, 2011); a doctoral thesis addressing questions of critical thinking versus reproduction of common values (Wyndhamn, forthcoming); a study of student influence by Rönnlund (2011), though it focuses on phenomena in lower secondary level schools; and the project *Upper secondary school as a market* (2008–2011), which analysed the prevalence and impact on schoolwork, staff and students in upper secondary schools of

market solutions and market steering, though it did not specifically deal with democracy education (Lundström and Holm, 2011; Lundahl, forthcoming).

The article is structured as follows. First we give a brief introduction to recent changes in Swedish upper secondary education, particularly reforms that have opened schools up for choice and competition. We also highlight demands and goals of national school curricula with regard to student influence and democracy education. Next, Basil Bernstein's concepts of performance-mode and pedagogic identity are introduced, and some of their implications for democracy learning are outlined. Consequences of performance and competition demands on students' learning about, perceptions of, and engagement in, democracy, fostered through both formal and informal activities, are then considered. Finally, conclusions regarding the effects of the market trends on democracy-related aspects of upper secondary education are presented.

## Educational reforms and democracy education in retrospect

A normative, collective and society-centred conception of democratic citizenship was prominent in the late 1940s; school should foster the development of citizens who could resist totalitarian ideologies and take responsibility for social development founded on citizens' own insights and will. A functional rational view of democracy as mainly a representative form of government became prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. The need to educate committed democratic citizens who could actively engage in and influence social life was strongly emphasized once more in the 1970s. Training children and young people of critical thinking to avoid indoctrination was seen as crucial (Englund, 1986/2005; Olson, 2008). A further prominent aim of upper secondary education was to empower students to influence their working environment and studies, thereby enabling them to take a joint responsibility for social and societal matters in the future, both in Sweden and internationally. In contrast, the 1994 upper secondary school national curriculum emphasised the development of individual responsibility, individual freedom and uniqueness were emphasised: *School's task is to let every single student find his/her unique individuality and thereby enable him/her to participate in social life by doing his/her best to exercise responsible freedom* (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2006:5). Hence, schools on the one hand had an explicitly stated obligation to support the development of pupils to become *responsible persons who actively participate in, and contribute to, vocational and civic life* (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2006:5). On the other hand it was clearly stated that all who worked in school were to promote democratic structures in school, and that teachers should ensure that all students *have real influence in the work methods, work structures, and educational content* (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2006:15). Ensuring that the young are granted opportunities to know about, exert and experience influence in school are also central goals in the 2011 curriculum plan.

## Decentralisation and market reforms of education

After a series of decentralisation reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, Sweden now has one of the most decentralised educational systems in Europe. Based on neoliberal ideas of freedom of choice and promotion of quality, a school market emerged in the 1990s and rapidly developed in the 2000s. Swedish education from preschool to upper secondary education levels is now strongly exposed to competition and choice, but marketization has been most powerful at upper secondary level to date. In 2000, less than 5% of students at upper secondary level attended free-schools. Ten years later this proportion had increased to almost a quarter, albeit with substantial local variations (40 to 50% of young people in the three biggest cities attended an independent upper secondary school in 2011). Simultaneously, the free-school sector has been rapidly restructured, fuelled by the legal possibilities in Sweden (in contrast to most other countries) for free-schools' owners to extract profits. The free school market of the 2000s is dominated by large groups of school companies; joint-stock companies currently own 86% of all upper secondary free schools. Profitable and relatively low-risk, the free-school market is attracting new actors, including venture capitalists (Erixon, Arreman and Holm, 2011).

However, it is important to recognize that *all* upper secondary schools are affected by the market model. Since the early 1990s, municipalities have been allowed to offer upper secondary programs and courses relatively freely in response to individuals' preferences and local conditions and needs. In 2008, young people's freedom of choice was extended to upper secondary school education all over Sweden. The growing competition for students has resulted in the emergence of an immense array of locally designed programs and study orientations. Further, most upper secondary schools now invest considerable resources in marketing their services (Erixon Arreman and Holm, 2011). The daily work of principals, teachers and other staff has been clearly affected by the competition, while students experience its effects mainly when they have to choose from a bewildering array of competing upper secondary schools and programs (Lundahl, forthcoming).

## Curricular and organisational reforms of upper secondary education

A reform of Swedish upper secondary education in the early 1990s, initiated by the social democratic government, dealt with alleged problems of upper secondary education in meeting changes in working life requirements and needs of students. The duration of all national programs, academic and vocational, was standardised to three years, and all provided eligibility to higher education. Young people's right to upper secondary education was laid down by law, and municipalities were obliged to offer a broad variety of national programs, primarily related to the students' interests. However, the conservative-liberal coalition government in office from fall 2006 initiated a new reform that introduced a stronger division between vocational and academic programs of upper secondary education, only the latter giving direct access to higher education. Employability was one of the keywords of the new reform initiative, while concepts such as democracy and citizenship were hardly mentioned at all (Lundahl, Erixon Arreman, Lundström and Rönnberg, 2010). The reform came into force in 2011, and at the same time a new curriculum plan was introduced, displaying some

neoliberal features. For example, enterprise became a mandatory aspect of all programs. At the same time, the older formulations about educating democratic citizens remained almost unchanged.

To conclude, upper secondary education in Sweden is presently framed in a neoliberal, market-oriented context\*\*. The national curriculum strongly emphasizes individual performance, while the goals of democracy education have remained largely intact for a longer time.

## Pedagogic identities and performance mode

We build on Basil Bernstein's (2000) concepts of *pedagogic identity*, related to a *de-centred market position*, and *performance mode* when analysing findings from recent Swedish studies of students' democracy learning. Bernstein characterises pedagogic identity as a construction of *a sense of belonging to and different from, and for the internal sense making and external relationships in time, space and context* (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999:271). The model consists of four positions (Retrospective, Prospective, Market and Therapeutic) that represent different approaches to regulation and management of moral, cultural or economic change, and that generate different kinds of pedagogic identities. The positions can appear in combination, in opposition, or be excluded from the arena.

Two of the positions (Retrospective and Prospective) generate identities through resources managed by the State (centring resources), while the other two (Market and Therapeutic) generate identities through local resources (and local institutions have considerable autonomy over their resources). In this article the identity generated by *the De-centred (market) position (DCM)* is of particular interest. The DCM pedagogic identity is characterised by the institutional or individual actor's focus on obtaining and maximizing its, her or his exchange value in the market. The focus is on short-term rather than long-term gains, and extrinsic rather than intrinsic values.

According to Bernstein, the collective base is increasingly dominated by the *performance mode*, at all educational levels.

*Market relevance is becoming the key orientation for the selection of discourses, their relation to each other, their forms and their research. This movement has profound implications from the primary school to the university* (Bernstein, 2000:86).

At school level, the performance mode especially permeates the management of schools, but increasingly it also affects what counts as knowledge and pedagogical practice in school. At national and international levels, the performance mode is, for example, clearly manifested in the measurement culture that been increasingly influenced education in the past 20 years (cf. Hopmann, 2008, Taubman, 2009). It is also clearly discernible in international evaluation initiatives, such as PIRLS, PISA and TIMSS, that aim to develop and apply high-stake tests, measurements and comparisons of certain aspects of students' knowledge.

Departing from Bernstein's model, we expect to find the following phenomena and orientations at school and classroom levels:

- two kinds of actors: the individual student and teacher (or other staff) on the one hand and the school/firm on the other;
- a focus on the individual's freedom of choice;
- a focus on individual rather than collective agency;
- a focus on behaviour and activities that may enhance the individual student's and/or school's performance and competitiveness;
- a focus on image management, i.e. behaviour and activities that may enhance the visibility and attractiveness of the individual and/or school.

Implications of this market orientation for democracy education and learning are highlighted in the last part of the article.

## New contours of democracy education and learning

In the following sections we analyze the formal and informal opportunities that market-oriented schools provide for students to exert influence and learn about democracy, students' responses to these opportunities, and student-initiated actions to influence education. The responses and strategies of the students are viewed in terms of performativity and individual influence, choice, loyalty, exit and voice – the last three emanating from the categorization of responses to organizations in decline proposed by Hirschman (1970).

### Prioritized knowledge and forms of influence in the performative school

A number of Swedish and international studies have described the impact of neoliberal ideas on contemporary education, focusing on individual rights and academic performance (e.g. Fielding, 2001; Gordon, Lahelma and Beach, 2003; Hjelmér, 2013; Olson, 2006), but paid less attention to democracy education other than theoretical aspects, for example as parts of history or civics. For instance Hjelmér found that teachers felt guilty about their democracy teaching, feeling that it was something they did not have time to reflect over or plan properly.

A new conception of the successful student has become dominant in Sweden since the early 1990s, that of a self-regulating, autonomous and responsible learner who exerts considerable influence over his or hers own study situation (c.f. Irisdotter Aldenmyr, Wigg and Olson, 2012; Lindblad, Lundahl, Lindgren et al, 2002; Rönnlund, 2011). The quotation below from a principal encapsulates both this conception of success and efforts to foster it:

We want to create (...) freedom of choice for students and teachers, who will take responsibility for the curriculum by controlling content from within a system of choice options. Students can determine where and when they learn (---) Our aim is to help students to be motivated, alert, inquiring, self-governing and flexible users as opposed to just recipients of knowledge (Beach & Dovemark, 2007:63).

In other words, individual agency, performance and individual needs are strongly emphasized, and this is reflected in the kinds of influence focused upon in schools' routines.

## School choice and school exit

According to neoliberal theory and ideology, customers' rational choices should be the primary factors affecting the goods and services that are offered and, ultimately, which firms that survives and thrives. The same thinking is applied to the school-market in Sweden, where all students in the ninth grade of compulsory school are expected to make crucial choices (which will strongly their future career options) from a smorgasbord of upper secondary schools and programs offered across the country. Further, as students' choices have direct economic consequences for the schools, marketing has become a highly prioritized activity. According to our surveys in 60 Swedish municipalities, nine out of ten upper secondary schools market their programs, and half of them spend *considerable* resources on marketing. Nine out of ten principals and three out of four teachers and career counsellors are engaged in marketing, and many of the students act as school ambassadors. A wide range of means and channels are used: school fairs, open houses, advertisements, web pages, personal phone calls and various inducements (Lundahl, in press). The students find the wide choices appealing in some respects, but frustrating and stressful in others.

It's a choice that will influence your life three years ahead, it's important you make the right choice. It felt so huge (...) it was such a big choice. You had so many alternatives; there were no limits (student).

Significant factors that schools highlight, and candidate students consider, are not merely related to the educational programs, no less important are factors related to the schools' locations, reputations and images of their students. The choice is not just about a program; no less importantly it is also related to location, reputation and the image of the students that populate the school.

And then it's very much about what kind of students go to the school, if you feel that you belong there, that it's sort of your style to go to that school. That's the most important reason I believe (student).

The competing schools' attempts to profile themselves and attract young individuals thus interacts with students' needs to form, try out and confirm their present and future identities (Lundahl forthcoming).

Students also have considerable potential power as they represent capital – a sum of money that the school is eager to retain. As one teacher in a public school puts it:

We want to retain the students at all costs (...) we sometimes almost work too hard to persuade the students to stay here (...) Because a student who leaves costs money (...) Our bosses keep telling us this (...) we shouldn't have any vacancies.

According to national student statistics, approximately 15% of all upper secondary school students change school or program for various reasons. Voting with their feet' is their main

way of having a say in education in Swedish schools today, and young people probably learn that they ‘make a difference’ principally as customers and consumers of education by selecting from the smorgasbord of marketed offers.

In practice, ‘voting with your feet’ is the dominant form of having a say in education in Swedish schools today, and young people in all probability learn that they make a difference as customers and consumers of education when they face the offers from the market\*\*.

## Voice versus future investment

Despite the ambitious goals to educate students about, for and through democracy, the general picture of current formal and informal democracy education emerging from research is quite gloomy. Students get limited opportunities to influence education and teaching, and their influence is mostly limited to minor aspects, such as the order in which course assignments are tackled, timing of examinations and the length or frequency of breaks (e.g. Hjelmér, forthcoming; Nyroos et al., 2004; Rönnlund, 2011). Motivation among the students to exert influence over teaching and schoolwork varies, but is mostly low. Initiatives to exert influence are often enacted on an individual rather than collective basis, and the outcomes of collective actions are generally meagre. Formal student councils attract little interest from students and teachers, and seem to have little effect on decisions in school matters (Danell et al., 1999; Hjelmér, 2013; Rönnlund, 2011).

Students in an ethnographic study by Öhrn et al. (2011) who were dissatisfied with the teaching generally did not take initiatives to talk to the teachers involved. The reasons for this varied between academic and vocational programs however. For example, the students enrolled on an academic program (Natural Science) refrained from taking action because they thought it would have adverse effects on their marks and future academic success. Hence, voicing dissatisfaction was perceived as conflicting with performance goals. In addition, they trusted their teachers to teach in the most effective ways, especially in mathematics (Öhrn, Lundahl and Beach, 2011; Hjelmér, forthcoming). In contrast, the instruction in the vocational programs was more amenable to student influence. However, vocational students’ dissatisfaction and efforts to exert influence often concerned personal relations and lack of well-being rather than teaching matters. Marks and study achievement thus seemed to be weaker driving forces among these students. More generally, opportunities to voice criticism and suggest changes varied between contexts, relating above all to the status of the subjects, programs and groups of students (cf. Högberg, 2009; Johansson, 2009). Beach and Dovemark (2011) came to similar conclusions, and found a marked change over a 12-year period in a study of classroom practices in upper secondary schools. An element of ‘thinking about returns’ and a culture of self-interest became increasingly apparent in successful students’ descriptions of their strategic actions, and seemed to dominate at the end of the research period, particularly in the academic programs:

Making the right choices is important (and) competitive behavior is . . . needed if you are to get on and do well . . . It helps if you have a good attitude and show initiative (but) what we need (most) is a good return on our effort and interests (student).

You try to create an image ... and reap the rewards of your investments (another student) (Beach and Dovemark, 2011:316).

Students who did not adopt, or actively rejected, this kind of thinking were seen as failing in the competition and were regarded as less motivated and smart than those who accepted it. They were also used by the more successful students as contrasts to those who aimed at university studies and high future positions in society.

The findings presented by Beach and Dovemark (2011) imply that upper secondary students, especially middle-class students enrolled on the academic programs, generally act in ways that they believe will maximize returns from invested time and effort, or that at least do not endanger good grades. They tend to regard participating in a student council as a waste of time as it diverts energy and time from more gainful school activities. Individual and collective efforts to affect teaching organization, contents and methods are pursued only if, and as long as, they are perceived as beneficial to study success. In other words, democracy education is interesting if and when it enhances performance outcomes.

### Loyalty to the school and its image

Creating and maintaining a positive image of the school has also become increasingly important in the upper secondary school market. Students' satisfaction and high performance are often emphasised in schools' image management. For example, principals argue that it is no longer sufficient to ensure that students excel, the excellence of their school's performance must also be externally visible (Holm and Lundström, 2011).

Conversely, bad results and declining student numbers are threats to a school's reputation and attractiveness. Hence, grade inflation has been reported in several Swedish studies (e.g. Wikström and Wikström, 2005; Vlachos, 2010), and this problem is particularly serious at upper secondary level, where competition for students is stronger and external control of grading weaker than at compulsory level. For example, in one of the previously cited ethnographic studies, Wyndhamn (forthcoming) observed that teachers' grading of students' work was sometimes changed by the principal so that the marks of poorly-performing students would not harm the image of the school. Furthermore, teachers describe pressures to renounce their professional judgment in order to please and retain the students. This appears particularly prevalent in schools that are fighting for survival (Lundström and Holm, 2011), indicating that a new kind of seller-customer relationship between teachers and students is emerging.

The students play roles not only as customers of education and the 'student material' of the education production line, but also as ambassadors of their schools. They are expected to participate in various events, e.g. open houses and school fairs, to market their school or program, and feel obliged to talk positively about it in their leisure time. A competitive spirit is also reflected in descriptions of how to 'beat' other public and free schools (Lundahl, forthcoming). Conversely, creating a negative image of the school is rarely tolerated. For instance, Wyndhamn (forthcoming) describes students being asked to be on their best

behaviour when ninth-graders ('potential customers') are visiting the school, otherwise they may give the school a bad reputation. The teachers emphasize that they are representatives of the school, a message that is frequently given to the students to foster a positive and docile approach among them. Wyndhamn concludes that an emerging normalisation of school marketing contributes to student/representatives of schools being reluctant to criticize or question them.

School's involvement in democracy education and amenability to collective forms of student influence may be used as a marketing argument *per se*, but this is an exception rather than the rule. Among the eight schools we examined in our study of upper secondary school as a market, only one (a public school in a region with relatively weak competition) stressed student influence and participation, and described its organisation of student democracy as an asset at the school homepage (Lundahl, forthcoming). More often (especially some of the independent free-school companies), try to attract students by highlighting opportunities for individual studies outside school. This is in line with the discourse of the self-governing learner and with the drive to reduce teaching costs

## Concluding discussion

This article explores the degree to which, and how, emergence of a Swedish school market is reflected in schools' formal and informal democracy education and democracy learning. The analysis is based mainly on recent Swedish research, particularly ethnographic studies of upper secondary students' democracy education and influence, and our project on the marketization of upper secondary education, focusing on the consequence of schools' competition for students and funding.

We found clear indications that young people's democracy learning in school, particularly their experiences of exerting influence, or trying to exert it, is affected, in several ways, by changes in students' roles and power in market-oriented schools. Firstly, students experience influence as customers when they are selecting schools and programs in grade nine of compulsory school, as the upper secondary schools intensively compete to attract them by all means available. Students' choices clearly 'make a difference' here. Later students embody substantial 'capital' for the school, which will suffer adverse economic consequences if they leave. Even if students do not exploit exit options, the mere possibility that they may do so constitutes a threat. The students' potential to 'voting with their feet' thus constitutes a major new form of student power in Swedish schools. Secondly, students represent value to the school by contributing to its marketing as school ambassadors and representatives, and by avoiding giving negative impressions of their school.

The emergence of a school market has thus introduced some new forms of student influence, but others may have been neglected or waned in importance. Notably, young people's agency is surprisingly neglected in terms of influencing the forms and contents of their everyday school work. The empirical findings indicate that teachers rarely take students' initiatives into serious consideration. Nonetheless, the students themselves express hope and display the will to exert influence in school improvement and other matters.

Moreover, the increased focus on measurable performance and goal-attainment tends to overshadow more subtle and less easily quantifiable aspects of the curriculum – for example the very possibilities of exerting influence, the practice and voicing of a living democracy and democratic citizenship within education and more widely in society. Participants in student initiatives to influence teaching and educational content even run apparent risks of being perceived as obstacles to effectiveness and performance as educational quality markers. This seems to be the case more in academic programs than in vocational programs, and more among successful, competitive and determined students than among those who are less successful and competition-oriented.

In this article we have chosen not to address theoretical democracy education. However, there is reason to believe that this is affected by the dominating performance mode in similar ways to other subject contents. Influence, democracy and citizenship appear to be regarded as matters that are ‘knowable’ and measurable, as illustrated by the stance and objectives of the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study*, ICCS 2009. This study aims at measuring the readiness among young people in 38 countries to adopt roles as citizens, and its educational implications (Swedish National Agency for Education 2010a, Schultz et al. 2010). The ways in which this is being measured testify to a focus on particular aspects of knowledge and pedagogical practice, namely individual students’ knowledge (factual and formal) about democracy, and their individually initiated, exerted (formal) influence inside and outside of school. Thus, this is what is implicitly regarded as influence and learning democracy. The assessment rationale strongly focuses on individual rather than on collective participation (cf. Olson 2012), implies that ‘what counts’ is individual performativity. and concentrates on outcomes rather than processes, curricula, teaching methods and questioning the purpose of certain methods, teaching and education *per se* in relation to students’ influence and learning democracy (cf. Au 2007, Biesta 2010).<sup>3</sup> Hence, the ‘lessons’ of democratic citizenship offered to the students are few and restricted. In conventional teaching influence, democracy and citizenship are treated as matters that are ‘knowable’ and may be relevant, in some way, in the future. Voting procedures and other formally ‘factual’ aspects of democratic systems at a societal level are prominent examples of the content of these lessons in democratic citizenship. Students’ influence on subject matters seems to be related to the status of the program; the more ‘academised’ it is, like the Swedish Natural sciences program, the less space is provided for influencing the content, aims and ways of teaching and learning. Students enrolled on less academic programs, like the Individual program or Child and recreation program, seem to have more influence, on some aspects at least, of their educational situation.

It should be emphasized that young Swedes’ understandings of influence and change are not solely competitive and individualistic. A large majority of Swedish young people surveyed by the *International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2009* (Swedish National Agency of Education 2010a) held favourable opinions about student influence and the value of collective

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<sup>3</sup> Wayne Au’s (2007) meta-analysis of 49 empirical qualitative studies, which investigated how high-stakes testing affects various aspects of school curricula – the knowledge content, knowledge forms and pedagogy – serves as one empirical example of the heavy reliance on such assessment rationales in education today.

organisation. Four out of five believed that groups of students could contribute to problem-solving and improvements in schools. An equally large proportion believed that collective student action has more influence than individual action.

To conclude, the current decentred market position of Swedish upper secondary schools seems to promote new forms of democracy learning but compromise others. The 'lessons' in democratic citizenship offered to the students in school once they have made their choices are few and restricted, while both their influence and democracy are increasingly limited to navigating among choices. The students' democratic space or potential is being reduced to influencing 'packages' of content, modes or degree of formalised pedagogic frameworks and educational outcomes solely through what they 'go for'. Within each of these 'packages' there seems to be little space for influencing their education or educational situation. Following Basil Bernstein's notion of a pedagogic identity based on a de-centred market context, one may ask if we are witnessing the emergence of a kind of citizenship and civic democratic agency that is centred on how we, as individuals, navigate a bazaar of options, and exploit the power we have as consumers and the capital we embody as sources of funds and representatives of chosen institutions?

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