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## **Class Councils in Switzerland: Citizenship Education in Classroom Communities?**

Democracy depends on the participation of citizens. Citizenship education is taking place in classroom communities to prepare pupils for their role as citizens. Class councils are participatory forms of citizenship education guaranteeing the children's right to form and express their views freely as written down in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Theoretical deficiencies and empirical objections have been formulated against participation in the school setting. Despite widespread practices, empirical data about class councils in Switzerland barely exists. In our research project we video-recorded fourteen class councils in secondary schools, we interviewed the teacher and four pupils of each class, and all the pupils filled in a standardized questionnaire. Class councils are very popular forms of education with pupils although the actual power to influence decisions by deliberation is doubted to some extent. Quantitative analysis of the video-recordings shows the wide range of forms of class councils that exist in respect to the talking time of the pupils. To express one's own viewpoint and to understand the standpoint of other discussants, construct arguments and counterarguments, participate, and lead discussions are difficult tasks. Based on the empirical research the project describes three forms of class councils that differ in the degree of favouring the development of communicative competences as a part of citizenship education.

### **Keywords**

Class council, participation, citizenship education, deliberation

## **1 Introduction**

Until the end of the 1990s there was no subject such as citizenship education in the curricula of the German-speaking part of Switzerland, with the scarce exception of teaching civics (knowledge about Swiss political institutions) in some cantons, often included in the subject of history (Jung, Reinhardt, Ziegler 2007). Participatory and deliberative forms of citizenship education – like class councils – were barely implemented in schools till the end of the 1990s but have gained importance in the last decade. The Swiss conceptions of citizenship education are rooted in political history and intertwined with the democratic system that needs competent citizens and legitimacy to survive. That is why requests for a strengthening of citizenship education appear mostly in times of political crisis (Oser 1998).

First, we will give a short review of the history of citizenship education in the

German-speaking part of Switzerland to explain the status of class councils in citizenship education. Second, we will refer to empirical studies from the last decade neglecting the transfer from participation in schools to democratic competence. In spite of empirical objections and theoretical deficiencies we consider class councils useful instruments to match the pedagogical aims. In the third part of the article we explain why the theory of deliberative democracy allows the integration of many pedagogical aims like discipline by classroom management, social cohesion by integration, or moral development by arguing due to the importance of communicative competences.

Class councils are opportunities to deliberate and to discuss in the classroom community in support of communicative competences of citizens. Deliberations are discussions where decisions on requests are taken. In the empirical part of the article, we describe three forms of class councils, focusing on conditions conducive to participation by deliberation. Finally, the discussion of the results will give some conclusions about the practices of class councils.

## 2 History of Citizenship Education in Switzerland

Citizenship education is sensitive to political and economic crisis during which some conceptions of citizenship gain in influence and become dominant (Allenspach et al. forthcoming). Class councils were not compatible with the dominant historical conceptions of citizenship education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, class councils and other participatory forms like school parliaments have many roots. This chapter explains how class councils in Switzerland are connected to deliberation and why this form of citizenship education is gaining ground in schools.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Planta (1766) described how he organized his boarding school according to the model of the Republic of Rome: pupils took the role of judges and officers who were responsible to maintain discipline. The accuser and the accused of breaking school law disputed in public trials and were assisted by advocates; the court decided by majority rule. With the death of Planta, his model of a republican school was lost.

Citizenship education as a trans-disciplinary topic was institutionalized during the liberal revolution in the 1830s and 1840s. Liberal politicians propagated the implementation of secular public schools for everyone (e.g. Snell 1840; Zschokke 2007). Against the opposition of the Catholic Church and conservative cantons, the liberal ideas about public schools were established. The model of public schools has undergone changes but the school system is still shaped by the ideas from the era of liberal revolution (Osterwalder 2000). This holds true as well for citizenship education, which is understood basically as developing rationality, especially by language skills, and acquiring knowledge about Swiss history, geography and political institutions. Class councils fit to this conception of citizenship education as a trans-disciplinary topic focusing on language skills which are needed to participate in public deliberations.

In the aftermath of the civil war in 1847 and the foundation of the Swiss Nation in 1848, the invention and the strengthening of Swiss myths – William Tell, Helvetia, and medieval battles – was used to raise the legitimacy of a multicultural state composed of two confessions and four languages. A total revision of the constitution in 1874 and a partial revision in 1891 included direct democratic instruments: initiative and referendum. Semi-direct democracy augmented the need to educate citizens. Schoolbooks of civics instruction were written to improve patriotism, for example by the member of the Swiss government, federal councillor Droz (1886). Nevertheless, citizenship education continued as a marginalized topic in Swiss schools. Nation building by the invention of Swiss myths and the implementation of direct democratic instruments was successful and there was no need to develop citizenship education.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reform pedagogy was gaining ground in Switzerland. Inspired by Planta and referring to William L. Gill with his formation of school cities in the USA, Hepp (1914) described a sophisticated model of self-governance including class councils. On an international level, John Dewey's (1993) idea of schools as "embryonic societies" and democracy as a way of life shaped conceptions about participation in schools. In Switzerland, World War I and II prevented reform pedagogy from spreading further and participatory forms of citizenship education were not paid attention to anymore.

The threat of being attacked and invaded by military forces during World War I and II caused a backlash to the old paradigm of teaching civics to strengthen patriotism. Although national initiatives were minimal due to the resistance of cantons trying to keep their competence for education, new schoolbooks of civics instruction were produced during World War II and were partly edited till the 1990s (Wagner 1991).

During the Cold War the myth about Swiss neutrality during the World Wars was constructed. A prosperous economy allowed the installation of the welfare state. In combination with semi-direct democracy and suffrage for women in 1971, this situation of wealth and democracy produced a great deal of legitimacy for the political system. Uncommon forms of citizenship education like class councils were mostly ignored.

For Freinet (1979), the classroom assembly took a central role in school life where teacher and pupils decided together on problems and requests which had been collected on a wall newspaper. His pedagogy was better known in the French-speaking than in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, where institutions for the participation of pupils were introduced sporadically in the 1970s. Altogether, Freinet's pedagogy had little influence on the Swiss school system (Quakernack 1991).

In the 1980s, moral education was developed based on Kohlberg's theory of moral development, using the method of moral dilemmas inside just communities (Oser, Althof 1992). Essential to just communities are collective decisions taken in community meetings, but there are very few schools in Switzerland defining themselves as just communities.

The need for participation was raised again in the 1990s due to low voter turnout which reached bottom in 1995 with forty-two percent in the national elections. This situation raised political interest for participatory forms of citizenship education.

In 2003, Switzerland was deflated by the publication of the results of the international IEA study (Oser, Biedermann 2003), which stated a level of political interest and knowledge below international average combined with xenophobic tendencies in Swiss pupils. These results contradicted the self-perception of large parts of the population looking at themselves as the most democratic citizens in the most democratic country of the world. To improve political interest, knowledge and participation, citizenship education was integrated in the curricula in some cantons. Beside the traditional way of teaching civics – mostly in history lessons – the class council was rediscovered as an instrument for citizenship education often in combination with school parliaments.

The growing importance of participation in schools was supported by international initiatives. In 1997, Switzerland ratified the Convention of the Rights of the Child which gives children the right to freely express views in matters affecting them. The class council is one way to fulfil this obligation being the place where pupils can discuss school matters. Within the Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE) led by the Council of Europe, six teacher manuals were published and one was translated to German about children's rights (Gollob, Krapf, Weidinger 2010). Democracy and human rights as normative foundations are key aspects in the negotiations about the future role of citizenship education in the new curriculum for the German-speaking part of the country which will probably be implemented in 2014 (Geschäftsstelle der deutschsprachigen EDK-Regionen 2010). According to the preliminary conception of the curriculum citizenship education will stay a trans-disciplinary topic and runs the risk to be neglected (Ziegler 2011).

Class councils fit into a curriculum which defines citizenship education as a trans-disciplinary topic. In the canton of Aargau (where our research mainly was conducted, complemented with two classes from the canton of Solothurn) class councils are explicitly mentioned in the curriculum (Kanton Aargau 2011) for lower primary schools (first to third grade), and for secondary schools with basic requirements. Pedagogical aims like listening, arguing, reflecting and leading discussions are integrated in (German) language education. The same is true for the curriculum of the canton of Solothurn (Kanton Solothurn 2011) where, additionally, citizenship education is explicitly established as a trans-disciplinary topic referring to knowledge about institutions, but also to democratic competences and attitudes. Schools are understood as places to practice a democratic way of life. Aargau and Solothurn represent typical Swiss cantons in respect to citizenship education: Citizenship education is marginalized in the curriculum and class councils aren't mandatory.

Class councils can be linked to multiple pedagogical aims in several subjects: to enhance social cohesion of the class, to maintain discipline, to educate democratic citizens, to further communicative competences, to guarantee participation, to develop a democratic school culture, or to solve conflicts. These promises of class councils have been challenged by empirical research and theoretical reasoning as discussed in the next section.

### 3 Review of the Current State of Research

A lot of research was done under the label of participation. Studies about class councils stress problems putting into practice participation in schools (Kiper 1997; Friedrichs 2004; de Boer 2006; Haeberli 2012). These findings are consistent with the observation that participation in general cannot overcome the hierarchy between pupils and teachers, resulting in low degrees of participation (Biedermann, Oser 2010; Wyss, Sperisen, Ziegler 2008). Furthermore, Reinhardt (2010) concluded in her meta-analysis of empirical studies that there is no transfer from participation in schools to democratic competence as a citizen. In Switzerland it was Biedermann (2006) who stated this missing connection between participation in schools and electoral and political participation. According to these results, participation in schools is not a promising way to raise voter turnout.

Participatory and deliberative forms of citizenship education have an impact on pupils' political socialization and identity. One result of Biedermann's (2003) empirical research was that pupils would prefer to participate more in classroom deliberations. The wish to participate is relevant because the felt effectiveness of deliberations is connected with political identity in terms of political fatalism. Pupils who are convinced that they can change something by deliberative participation show less political fatalism (Biedermann, Oser 2006).

Political identity is formed by processes of socialization. Schools are important institutions for socialization in terms of transferring values, norms, and virtues from one generation to the next (Carleheden 2006). Deliberations depend on a democratic political culture which gives enough room for discussions. Students' perceptions of openness in classroom discussions are positively associated with civic knowledge which positively affects political participation (Schulz et al. 2009). In conclusion, effective deliberations in combination with a general openness for discussions are important determinants for the political socialization – supporting political identities of individuals who are convinced that they can make a difference by political participation.

### 4 Theoretical Background: Participation by Deliberation

Various theoretical objections to the effectiveness of participation in schools have been raised. Reichenbach (2006) stressed the ambivalence of participation in schools because participation between unequal individuals is not possible; a minority of students does not even want to participate and participation interfered with informal hierarchies. This ambivalence of participation refers to several paradoxes, which Gruntz-Stoll (1999) illustrated as pedagogical antinomies (e.g. freedom vs. social cohesion; conserve vs. change) and antagonisms in education (e.g. self-determined vs. determined by others; learning as accommodation vs. learning as expansion). It is not possible to maximize all the pedagogical aims at the same time. Conservation of national traditions and customs may require restrictions of the freedom of autonomous individuals. Teachers who are

aware of these contradictions can use this knowledge to reflect upon the pedagogical situation together with the class.

Despite the theoretical deficiencies and empirical challenges, we argue in favour of class councils as an instrument for citizenship education. It is the irony of participation to learn to withstand the troublesomeness of participation (Reichenbach 2006). In the next section we argue from a theoretical point of view for participation by deliberation.

Our empirical research is based on the theory of deliberative democracy from Habermas (1993). Before Habermas it was Dewey (1993; 1996) who emphasized the importance of communication for democracy and education. Deliberative democracy as a theory is normally used to describe processes of will-formation and decision-making in the political system. In the school setting, deliberation as a type of discussion to reach decisions is a method used to augment communicative competences of students (Parker, Hess 2001). Citizens need communicative competence to participate politically in deliberative processes (Joldersma, Deakin Crick 2010). To influence public will-formation and political decision-making, citizens must learn to debate using arguments, to emphasize and to critically reflect empirical facts and normative reasons. Habermas' theory of deliberative democracy has been ignored by the mainstream of educational discourse until recently (Fleming, Murphy 2010). The strengthening of communicative competences is not limited to learning in school but can be observed in many learning opportunities of citizens in everyday life.

Developing open communication between different perspectives (worldviews) implies developing a communicative competence in its widest sense: having opportunities to make use of one's citizenship rights by developing one's communicative abilities, and being recognized and listened to in different settings (Englund 2010, 21).

We stress the development of communicative competence in class councils as the core for citizenship education. Deliberative democracy by Habermas (1993) explains how participation, discipline, and integration are linked to communicative competences.

- *Political Participation.* In deliberative democracy, political participation is based on communication. The acceptance of the procedure of the decision-making process and the quality of discourse during the deliberation process produce legitimacy for deliberative democracy as long as the quality of decisions is considered reasonable by the public.

- *Discipline.* Whether rules and laws are accepted and observed (i.e. discipline) depends on the legitimacy of the legal system. The legitimacy of the legal system in a democracy is based on fair procedures, human rights and democracy guaranteeing private and public autonomy of individuals. Only autonomous individuals can enact legitimately laws in deliberative democracy.

- *Integration.* Rational discourses are aimed at reaching consensus to raise social cohesion. Consensus is an instrument to integrate all the participants by deliberative processes.

To use deliberation in classroom communities as an instrument for citizenship education has also challenging aspects. The disciplining effect of deliberation bears the risk that the majority of the class, supported by group norms and necessity for consensus, oppresses the views and the opinions of minority (Karpowitz, Mendelberg 2007). Critics of deliberative democracy do not believe in the sincerity of participants. The outcome of decision processes might be manipulated by strategic communication. It is very difficult to observe whether participants are honest or whether they lie in order to influence a decision (Holzinger 2001). In addition, the autonomy of individuals may not be guaranteed due to the hierarchy between teacher and pupils and peer group pressure. The shift from participation to deliberation does not overcome the deficiencies of participation but theoretically encompasses various pedagogical aims based on communicative competence.

Teachers involved in class councils should know about the deficiencies and challenges arising from the contradiction between ideals and practice. In hierarchically organized schools with pupils who partly do not wish to participate, it is more fruitful to focus on the process than on the result. Deficiencies can be used by teachers as opportunities for reflection of their practice.

The idea of linking citizenship education to communication and reflection is inspired by Dewey's pedagogy about democracy and education (1993). In Dewey's view class councils are places to experience democracy by communication.

Dewey took the view that democracy was not primarily a mode of management and control, but more an expression of a society imprinted by mutual communication, and consequently a pluralist life-form. It is in this perspective, too, that Dewey emphasizes the communicative aspects of education and the idea of education as a place for reflection upon common experiences (Englund 2006, 508).

Participation in school and in the political system does not work perfectly. This situation opens opportunities to reflect about conditions needed for participation, discipline and social cohesion. Drawn from these theoretical remarks our empirical analysis focuses on communication.

## 5 Research Design

The analysis of previous scientific work in the field of citizenship education has shown that there is little known about the realization of class councils in schools. Therefore, we do not know how teachers plan and conduct the class councils, what goals they pursue or which expectations they have. Also, there is little known about the pupils' perception of class councils and their roles during the lesson. For that reason, the two main research questions of our own study are as follows:

- (1) What happens during class councils?
- (2) What is a “successful” class council?

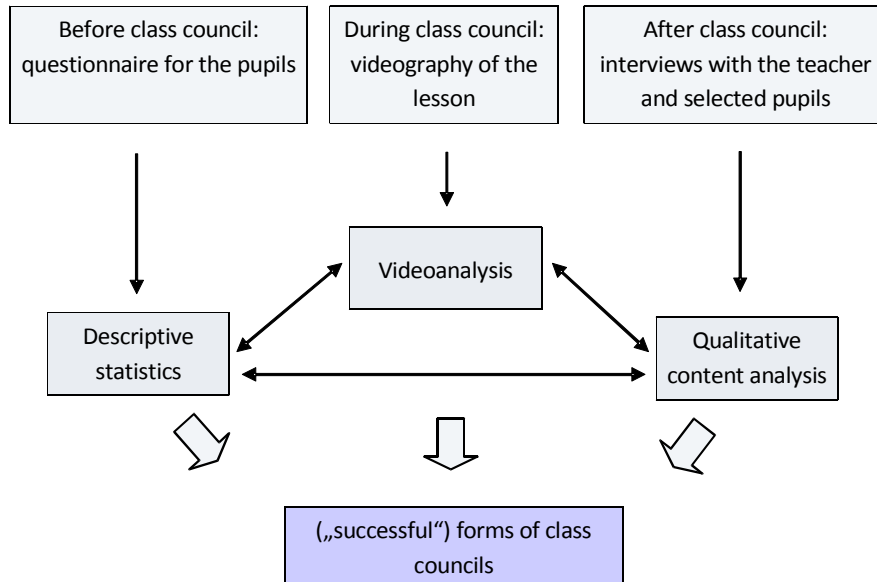
To find answers to these questions we worked with a mixed method design: a questionnaire for the pupils, semi-structured interviews with the teachers and selected pupils of the class, and a video analysis of videotaped class councils. In the following, we will give a short description of the different instruments.

- *Questionnaire for the pupils:* All pupils of the participating teachers were asked to fill in a short questionnaire. Through the questionnaire we gathered information about the pupil’s experiences with and observations of class councils. Also, the pupils had to give answers to questions about conflict and discussion behaviour, views on democratic procedures, and demographic information. The written survey was carried out about a week before the videography of the class councils; the data was entered into SPSS.
- *Videography of the lesson:* With every teacher we agreed upon a date on which a class council lesson was recorded on video. The teacher was instructed to perform with the pupils just as a normal class council would take place without the presence of a camera crew. The parents of the pupils as well as the teachers were informed about the video recording before the videography and they were asked to give their written consent. For video recording two video cameras were used: a camera was positioned at the front of the classroom, the second in the rear. With this procedure, all individuals who participated in the class council could be recorded. The implementation of the video recording was directed basically to the specifications of the camera script of the project "History and Politics" (Gautschi et al. 2007). The video recordings were digitized and processed as MPEG-4 files for data analysis.
- *Interviews with the teachers and selected pupils:* After the videotaped class councils, the teachers and four selected pupils of the class were interviewed with a semi-structured questionnaire. The selection of the four pupils was made on the basis of information in the questionnaire (gender, assessment of the class council, and participation in the class) trying to choose pupils with different views and attitudes. Through the interview additional information on the implementation, objectives, expectations, and experiences of the class councils were captured. The interviews were recorded with digital audio recording devices and fully transcribed. The analysis of the interviews is based on Mayring’s method of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2007).

The research design and the interrelation of the different research instruments are shown in figure 1.



Figure 1. Research design and interrelation of the different research instruments



The recruitment of teachers who already perform class councils with their classes and were willing to participate in the research project proved to be a major challenge. The research project was announced and publicized through various channels. A total of fourteen teachers from the canton of Aargau and Solothurn decided to participate in the project. The teachers taught at secondary school (6th to 9th grade); ten were female. Table 1 gives an overview of the teachers who participated in the study with data on school type and gender.

Table 1. School type, number of classes and gender of the teachers who participated in the study

	Special school	Basic requirements	Extended requirements	High requirements
6 <sup>th</sup> grade		2 (f)	2 (f)	
7 <sup>th</sup> grade	1 (m)	1 (f)	2 (f / m)	
8 <sup>th</sup> grade			2 (f / m)	1 (f)
9 <sup>th</sup> grade		1 (m)	1 (m)	1 (f)

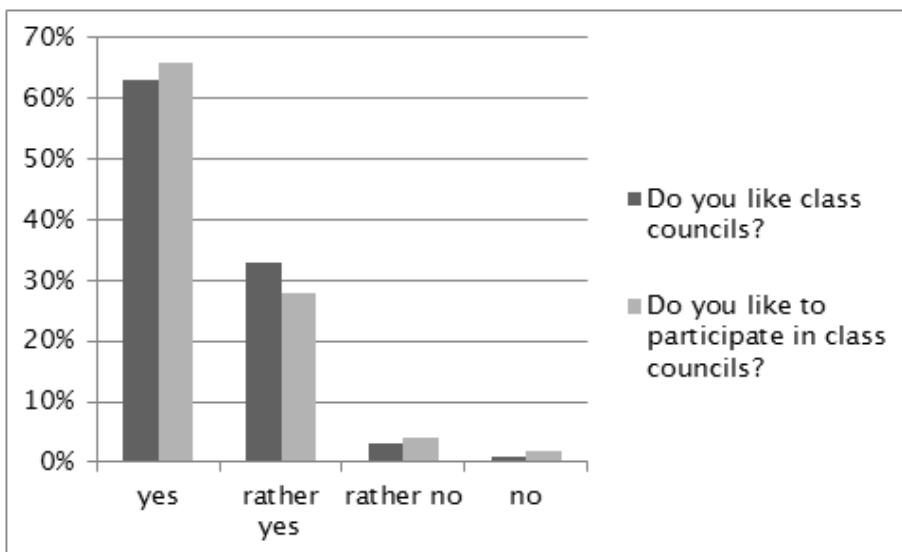
## 6 Results

In the following chapters, we will give insight into the results of our study. With regard to the content of this article, the focus will be on two research instruments: the pupil questionnaire and the videography. The results of the interviews will not be included.

### 6.1 Estimation of Class Council by the Pupils

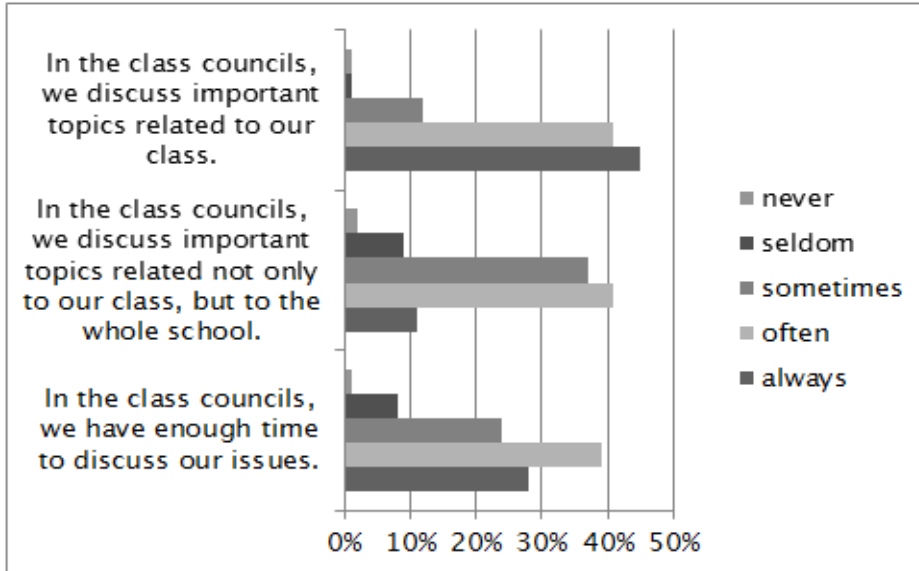
The analysis of the questionnaire showed that the pupils (N=246) liked the class councils and that they also liked to participate in class councils (see fig. 2). Most of the pupils said that they rose to speak two to five times during class councils (sixty-one percent), fifteen percent of the pupils thought that they rose to speak more than five times during a class council and twenty-four percent said that they normally did not say anything during class councils.

Figure 2. Estimation of class council by the pupils (N=246)



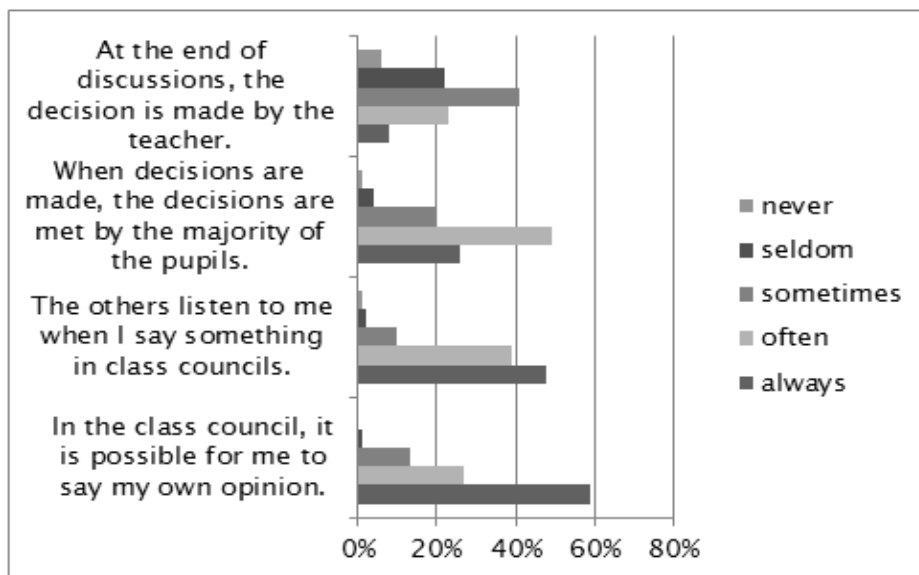
The discussion of issues related to the class or the school life seems to be of high interest. Almost all (eighty-six percent) of the pupils think that in the class councils, they spoke always or often about important issues that concerned the class itself. About half of the pupils thought they spoke always or often about issues that are important not only for the class, but also for the whole school. Also, according to the answers of the pupils, there was enough time to discuss diverse topics during class councils (see fig. 3).

Figure 3. Estimation of the discussion of issues in class council by the pupils (N=246)



An important aspect of class council discussions is whether the pupils can share their own opinions in the discussions. As the results in figure 4 show, most of the pupils thought that they could share their own opinions and that their classmates were listening when someone was speaking. When they needed to find a decision at the end of a discussion, the decisions were met by the majority of the pupils. Interestingly, about one-third of the pupils said that decisions were always or often made by the teacher, and not by the pupils (see fig. 4).

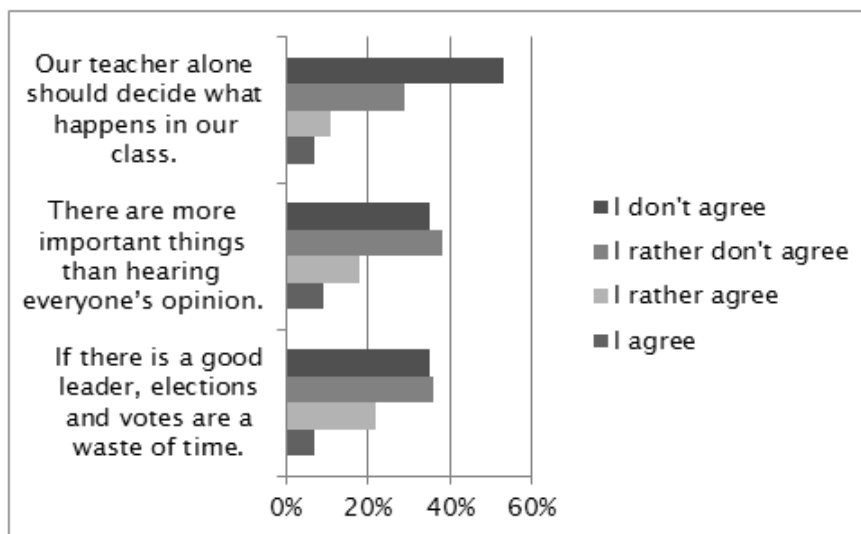
Figure 4. Estimation of the discussion decisions made in class council by the pupils (N=246)



Another interesting result of the analysis of the questionnaire is the fact that almost seventy percent of the pupils said that they could always or often make a difference through class councils and that they could take responsibility.

In the questionnaire, some general items about various aspects of participation and democratic trust were included. In figure 5, three selected items are shown.

Figure 5. Estimation of general aspects of participation by the pupils (N=246)



The analysis of the three items represented in figure 5 shows that most of the pupils did not agree with the statements. Therefore, they thought that votes and elections were necessary and it was important to hear everyone's opinion. Also, they did not want the teacher alone to decide what happened in their class. However, it is interesting that around twenty to thirty percent of the pupils did agree with these items.

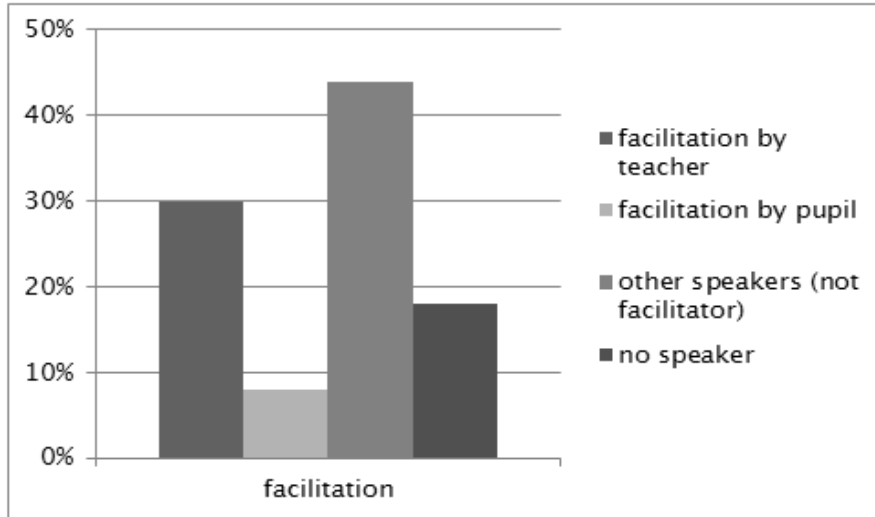
## 6.2 Analysis of the Videotaped Class Councils by Coding

For the analysis of the videotaped class councils we invented a coding system. By coding the videotaped class councils, we got information about the sight-structure of the lessons, like working methods, speaker time, facilitation, structuring of the lesson, or the use of media. After an intensive training, an intercoder-reliability of Cronbach's Alpha of at least .88 was reached, which is considered good reliability. The videos of the class councils have then been coded by the two raters individually.

The analysis of the fourteen class councils showed that an average of around ninety-two percent of the lesson was whole-class work. A great amount of time (sixty-four percent) was used for discussions about various topics, like discussions about disciplinary problems or the planning of a school trip.

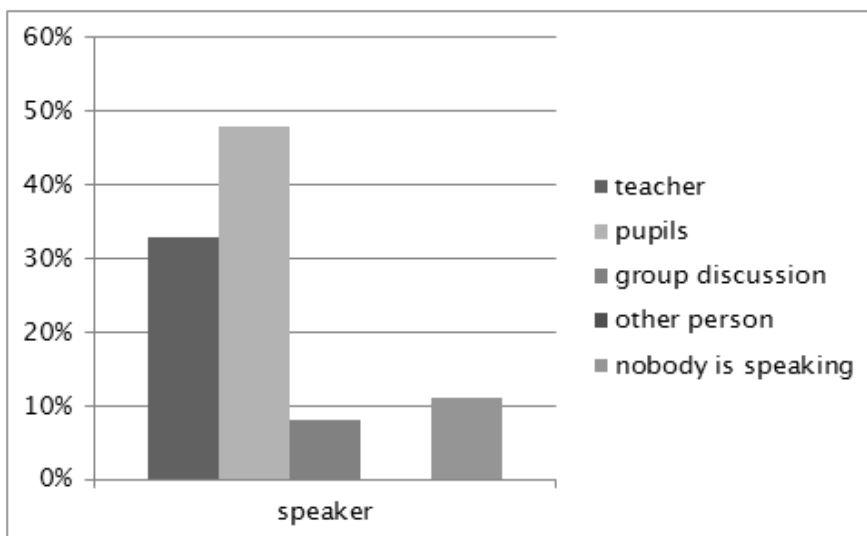
In the class councils, teachers very often facilitated discussions or activities. While the teacher facilitated around thirty percent of the class council, the pupils facilitated only during eight percent of the lesson (see fig. 6).

Figure 6. Coding of the videotaped class councils: facilitation of the discussions and activities (N=14)



On average, the pupils had more time to speak than the teacher had. For almost fifty percent of the class council, the pupils spoke, and the teacher spoke for about thirty percent of the lesson. In another ten percent of the class councils there were group discussions or phases where nobody spoke (see fig. 7).

Figure 7. Coding of the videotaped class councils: speaker (N=14)



## 7 Forms of Class Councils

In Table 2 three forms of class councils are shown: teacher dominance, facilitation, and participation. The naming relies on the assumption that the teacher style in the class council is of central importance for the form of the class council.

The axes “speaking time of pupils” and “facilitation” are chosen because they refer to areas where pupils can develop communicative competence. The development of communicative competences is central for the socialization of individuals becoming full members of society (Miller 1986). In the theoretical chapter we described why participation by deliberation contributes to political socialization. Deliberations in class councils imply diverse opportunities for pupils to develop communicative competences under two conditions which are related to the teacher style. First, pupils need enough speaking time to articulate their views and opinions. Second, facilitation by pupils reduces formal hierarchy between teacher and pupils. These two conditions are indispensable to exhaust potential of deliberation in class councils.

Data from video analysis was used to allocate the class councils to the four forms. No example was found for low speaking time of pupils and shared facilitation between teacher and pupils. Speaking time of pupils is considered low when the pupils speak during less than fifty percent of total time spent in plenum, excluding the time they spent in partner or group work. Class councils have a shared facilitation between pupil and teacher when there is at least some facilitation by a pupil. There is no case in our sample with complete facilitation by a pupil; the teacher always facilitates at least some parts of the class council. Two cases that had been allocated to the form “teacher dominance” in table 2 were removed. One class council was not comparable to the other class councils due to a situation of crisis in the class and school community which dominated the content of the class council. The other removed case was not comparable with other class councils concerning structure and contents.

Table 2. Forms of class councils

		Speaking time of pupils is	
		low	high
Facilitation	by teacher	<i>Teacher dominance</i>	<i>Teacher facilitation</i>
	shared between pupil and teacher		<i>Teacher participation</i>

In our sample we could observe four class councils characterized by teacher dominance, two cases of teacher facilitation, and six cases of teacher participation. Comparing the data of the video analysis, clear distinctions between these three forms emerged. The following descriptions rely on these distinctions taken from the descriptive statistics of the video analysis.

### 7.1 Teacher Dominance

The teacher dominates the class council, providing contents of discussions and acting as a facilitator. Pupils sit at their usual places similar to other lessons. A written protocol does not exist. The class spends a lot of time discussing requests brought in by the teacher and hardly any time for discussions of requests made by pupils. Content and reference levels of discussions often are not clearly defined. Story-telling about experiences and events external to school life take quite a lot of time. Discussions are typically about the planning of school activities like school trips or project weeks. Contents like discipline, participation, or conflict resolution hardly exist. Deliberations in the plenum are sometimes interrupted by partner or group work. Decisions are taken by voting or by decision of the teacher.

### 7.2 Teacher Facilitation

The teacher acts as a facilitator all the time and may additionally take notes for the protocol. Pupils sit in a circle during the class council. There is very much discussion about requests made by pupils but almost no discussion about requests brought in by the teacher. Discussions are about development, implementation, and refinement of class rules and to a much lower degree about matters of participation. Class level as reference level for discussions is prevailing. Decisions are taken by consensus, voting or by decision of the teacher.

### 7.3 Teacher Participation

The teacher partly acts as a normal participant without facilitating. Pupils form a circle during the class council. There is a lot of discussion about topics taken out of the protocol and about requests by teachers and pupils. Contents of discussions often concern matters of participation or discipline, to a lesser extent class rules. The reference level of discussions is the class. Exchange about individual well-being inside the class is an important factor. Decisions are taken by consensus, voting, by decisions of minorities or the teacher.

The forms “teacher domination” and “teacher participation” were observed in all three school tracks and grades. “Teacher facilitation” seemed to be performed by sixth grade classes that were composed recently, looking for class rules as a basis for everyday life during the next few years. In higher-level secondary school the positive round at the beginning of class councils (in positive rounds pupils tell positive experiences from the last week) did not exist. In general, we assume that rituals are especially important at the beginning of class council lessons. Forming a circle with the chairs is one possibility of breaking normal school routine; announcing the class council as a place for participation and deliberation enables teachers and pupils to switch roles. In a circle, the teacher is not sitting in the centre but is a normal participant, which favors interactions of pupils (Ritz-Fröhlich 1982).

## 8 Discussion

The idea of class councils is relatively old, but the concept has not been implemented on a large scale as an instrument for citizenship education. In the last decade, the situation has been changing and class councils have been placed in the curricula of some Swiss cantons. In the theoretical literature and education policy many aims and hopes for the implementation of class councils can be found. However, little is known about the goals teachers pursue, which opinion the pupils give, and what happens in class councils. In our research project, we tried to find out something about these issues.

In this article, we focused on participation by deliberation. As we argued before, effective deliberations in combination with a general openness for discussions are important determinants for political socialization. The formal hierarchy between teacher and pupils and the informal hierarchy among pupils are reproduced by the distribution of speaking time and by facilitation of class councils. A lot of speaking time for pupils is a necessary requirement to develop communication skills.

The results of our study show that almost all the pupils (about 95%) liked or rather liked the class council and they also liked to participate in class councils. Interestingly, a relevant fraction of the pupils don't care about participation. Around thirty percent of the pupils thought that votes and elections were a waste of time and almost twenty percent thought that the teacher alone should decide what happens in their class.

In the answers of the pupils to the questionnaire we can also see that they had some concerns. Almost forty percent of the pupils said that sometimes or often there was not enough time to discuss their issues in the class council. Around twenty-five percent of the pupils thought that decisions only sometimes or seldom were made by the majority of the pupils. And over seventy percent of the pupils said that at the end of discussions, the decision was sometimes, often or always made by the teacher.

The analysis of the class councils shows that the facilitation and also the speaking are often done by the teacher. But the comparison of the class councils indicates that there are also big differences between the lessons. There are class councils where pupils use around seventy percent of the total time in plenum for their speeches. At the other end are class councils where pupils hardly speak one third of total time in plenum.

As a conclusion, we can say that pupils have a positive attitude towards class councils, but they also have some concerns. If we consider the amount of speaking time and the possibility of facilitation as a criteria for participation by deliberation, the results need to be interpreted rather critically: the teacher often dominates the facilitation, the communication, and the decisions. As an explanation for these results, we think that it is difficult for the teachers and the pupils to switch roles for just one lesson.

From several research projects (Gautschi et al. 2007; Baer et al. 2009, 2011; Seidel 2003) we know that the teaching is usually rather traditional, with a large amount of whole-class teaching and teacher-class dialogue which is led by the teacher. A class council that gives the opportunity to speak and to facilitate to the pupils, the teacher and the pupils need to act differently than they are used to from other lessons. This switch is not easy to handle and as



we can see from our results, it does not happen adequately. In our view, citizenship education can happen in classroom communities, but we need to provide teachers with more support in how they can realize more effective class councils. The results of our research study can give some hints how we could do so.

The gap between ideals and practice is a constitutive characteristic of class councils and of education in general. Our study shows that there is no class council with perfect participation, where the teacher takes the role of a normal student and where decisions are taken unaffected by formal and informal hierarchies. It is not even desirable to deliberate in a perfect world of participation because opportunities to learn something out of malfunctions and bad performance by reflection would vanish.

The following suggestions concerning the arrangement of class councils are taken from the comparison of the three forms of class councils: "Teacher participation" is closer to the ideal of participation by deliberation than "teacher facilitation." In the form "teacher domination" pupils have the least opportunities to develop communication competence by arguing and facilitating.

Sitting in a chair circle during class councils seems to enhance speaking time and participation of pupils. Forming a chair circle may be a ritual which helps to switch roles for the teacher and pupils. Communication, especially deliberation, is made easier when everyone can see directly in the eyes of the other members of the class.

Because it takes time to be prepared and to participate in deliberations, class councils normally should not be interrupted by partner or group work. In the observed class councils it was always the teacher who arranged partner or group work which inhibits students from deciding about the course of action.

Openness to a wide variety of contents is required. It helps to collect requests of pupils during the week for the class council to avoid domination of contents by the teacher.

Voting is not necessarily the best form of decision; a variety of decision making procedures may be more adequate. Adapted to the kind of request it is reasonable to aspire to reach consensus or to leave the decision to a minority of the class which is affected by the problem or committed most to the resolution of the problem. If the teacher facilitates, requests by the teacher should be reduced or avoided to leave enough room for pupils in discussions.

Learning opportunities for pupils writing protocols and facilitating discussions should be employed. It is not a question of age, facilitating is an extremely difficult task for people of all age. Protocols are important instruments to control decisions taken in class councils and can reduce time pressure by postponing decisions to the next class council, which happened frequently in the form "teacher participation."

Class councils are trans-disciplinary and participatory forms of citizenship education compatible with Swiss curricula. There may be no effect on political and electoral participation but that is not the point with class councils. Central to deliberative democracy are autonomous individuals with communication competences which enable them to participate in public will

formation and decision-making, e.g. in class councils, school parliaments or job meetings. The same competences are needed for political or electoral participation. Our suggestions for teachers are to enhance learning opportunities for pupils by augmenting speaking time and facilitation.

With our study, we gained insight into the school practice of class councils and could find some indication of deliberative practice. Nevertheless, further research is needed to reconstruct in detail the extent and quality of deliberations in class councils.

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