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ARTICLE

Pupil influence in Swedish compulsory schools, a way of 'learning' and 'living' democracy

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to describe and analyse pupil influence in four Swedish schools. This is done against the backdrop of the changes that have been made in the Swedish curriculum for compulsory school as well as theoretical perspectives on democracy and power. The article is based on empirical findings from four compulsory schools in two municipalities in northern Sweden. The material was collected through semi-structured focus group interviews and the scanning of documentation from the schools. Although the Swedish Education Act stipulates that activities in the school must be designed in accordance with fundamental democratic values, many Swedish schools have difficulties working with issues of pupil influence. The conclusions of this study are that a proactive attitude among teachers towards the participation, engagement and motivation of pupils is an important element in a didactics that furthers both the democratic goals and the knowledge goals of the school. It is furthermore important that teachers have a theoretical and practical understanding of democracy and reflect on their views concerning democracy in the implementation of their teaching.

Keywords: Democracy, policy change, power, pupil influence

Introduction

Our interest in pupil influence has its basis in the relationship between the Swedish school system's task of promoting knowledge and its concurrent requirement to bring up pupils in democratic working forms and values. This interest also encompasses teachers' choices concerning working methods and strategies (i.e. how teaching is organised), as well as the rules and regulations that provide the framework for the school's work. Understanding pupil influence in Swedish schools requires an interest in the interaction between different actors in the various arenas for activity and action that exist in schools. It also requires an interest in the context of education in a democratic society (Dewey, 2018; Gutman, 1987). The aim of this article is to describe and analyse the perspectives of teachers and school management concerning pupil influence based on the changes that have taken place in the Swedish national curriculum for compulsory school. The article also highlights perspectives on democracy and power. This interest is theoretically rooted in the intersection between curriculum theory and didactics (cf. Sundberg, 2007; Wahlström, 2015). This article presents the empirical findings at four compulsory schools from two municipalities in northern Sweden where pupil influence was studied as a question of both democracy and knowledge in a practical, didactic and pedagogical context.

Pupil influence as a mandated task

One of the government-mandated tasks of the Swedish school system is to give young people an understanding of the working forms and values of a democratic society. This task is highlighted in various governing decisions impacting the schools. The mandate to perform this task derives from more general international agreements, such as the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as more concrete documents, such as the national curricula. The Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800, Section 4) stipulates that school activities should be performed in accordance with fundamental democratic values. The act further prescribes that the schools must aim for children and pupils to acquire and develop knowledge and values, as well as promote the all-round personal development of children and pupils into active, competent and responsible individuals and citizens. The Swedish curriculum for compulsory school [LGR 11] reinforce knowledge and democratic tasks by stressing that '[d]emocratic working forms should also be applied in practice and prepare pupils for active participation in the life of the society' (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011:8). It follows from this that the school must ensure that pupils not only learn democracy but also live democracy through educational practice. The Swedish National Agency for Education emphasises that: 'The school's task to promote the learning of children and young people cannot be separated from the democratic task. Rather, there is much that underline that these are both promoted by the same general factors' (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2000:14).

In Sweden, three arguments have been presented in favour of pupil influence (Official Reports of the Swedish Government (SOU), 1996:22). It is argued that pupils should have influence because influence is a human right, as the school has a mandated task to foster democratic citizens, and influence can be seen as a prerequisite for learning. Pupil influence is encapsulated in both the knowledge-promoting task and in the democratic task of the schools, and it can be understood as both an objective and a means. This means that our interest in pupil influence should not be understood as the same as that in pupil democracy (i.e. opportunities for pupils to participate in various decision-making bodies in schools, opportunities to influence decisions in schools via pupil organisations, etc.). We see pupil influence as a didactic strategy for learning, enabling or strengthening pupil participation, enabling pupils to assume responsibility for their education. This is linked to the fact that pupil influence is also prescribed by the law and curricula. Our perspective also differs from the perspective of student voice in that it is more extensive compared with consultation and students' initiatives (see e.g. Robinson & Taylor, 2007).

Many Swedish schools report difficulties working with pupil influence issues (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2006b, 2013). A number of evaluations and studies have also pointed to shortcomings regarding pupil influence in schools and how it could be understood (see Eriksson, 2019). Swedish schools do not, according to these studies, live up to the expectations stated in the governing documents regarding pupil influence. Rather, pupil influence affects and is affected by, we contend, different dimensions of learning encounters. Pupil influence includes various collective and individual, as well as formal and informal dimensions of work in schools, which cannot be separated from the issues of didactics and power with regard to both policy and practice. According to Wahlström (2018), with policy, we mean basic ideas about how an activity should be run. Policy includes basic principles and how they are formulated as problems and possible solutions. Furthermore, the concept not only encompasses politically formulated agendas (law, curriculum) but also can apply to the education processes in schools. In complex and demanding daily school life, where intentions concerning pupil influence are to be put into practice, it is not always obvious how the requirements concerning pupil influence are to be met.

National Policy change

It is clearly stipulated in various governing documents for Swedish schools that pupils should have influence over their education, including the contents, working forms and methods of instruction. The ambition of a democratic school has followed the Swedish school system for a long time. State policy texts emphasizing the importance of 'the self-governance of apprentices' appeared as early as 1914 (Folkundervisningskommittén [Public Education Committee], 1914:60). In the years following World War II through the present, the school system's socialization task for democratic values has been given somewhat differing significance in state policy texts in relation to the task of generating a well-educated labor force. Yet it has always been included as essential content (Richardsson, 2010, Englund, 2000, Ekman & Todosijevic, 2003, Selberg, 1999). The two latest Swedish national curricula for primary and lower-secondary schools ('The 1994 Curriculum for the Compulsory School System' [LPO], 1994, and 'Curriculum for the Compulsory School, Preschool Class and School-Age Educare' [LGR], 2011) state that the public school system should be based on a democratic foundation and that activities should be designed in accordance with fundamental democratic values. Much of the text in the introductory chapters of both curricula is similar. Both have the same wording concerning the rights and obligations of pupils, for example. However, there is a significant difference with regard to pupils' responsibility and influence in schools. LGR 11 takes a decidedly more passive approach to pupils' ability compared with LPO 94. LPO expresses a view of learning in which pupils' own active participation is a prerequisite for knowledge formation. LPO 94 also stresses the importance of real influence (i.e. that the democratic ambitions must surpass information and participation to include involvement and influence). LPO 94 thereby challenges the unilateral power of the teaching profession and of the school (as an institution). In LGR 11, pupils are defined as objects, not subjects. They should be encouraged (by someone) to further develop education and be informed (by someone). Within the scope of this, they should have the opportunity (not the right) to take initiative (not take part in decisions).

> "The democratic principles of being able to influence, take responsibility and be involved shall embrace all pupils. Development of pupils' knowledge and social awareness requires that they take increasingly greater responsibility for their own work as well as for the school environment and that they are also able to exercise real influence over their education. According to the Education Act, it is incumbent on all who work in the school to work for democratic working structures (Chap. 1 § 2)" (LPO 94, p. 22).

> "The democratic principles of being able to influence, take responsibility and be involved should cover all pupils. Pupils should be given influence over their education. They should be continuously encouraged to take an active part in the work of further developing the education and kept informed of issues that concern them. The information and the means by which pupils exercise influence should be related to their age and maturity. Pupils should always have the opportunity of taking the initiative on issues that should be treated within the framework of their influence over their education." (LGR 11, p. 13).

LPO 94 states that pupils should have influence in the school over the contents of education and the working methods and structures. In LGR 11, the question of pupils' knowledge formation moves from pupils' active participation to more of a school or professional responsibility. The teacher should prepare pupils for participation and co-responsibility, as well as for the rights and obligations that characterise a democratic society, which can be seen as an objective of pupil influence and responsibility. This is possible by informing them of these points. The question, then, is whether and how this perspective on the current Swedish curriculum for compulsory school (LGR 11) in terms of pupil influence (i.e. pupils as passive objects for information) can sustain the opportunity to live and learn democracy in schools (i.e. pupil influence as a means for didactic practices).

Power, democracy and teacher leadership

Opportunities to fulfil the requirements of the curriculum regarding knowledge about democracy as well as strategies for learning in teaching practice that represent pupil influence require a focus on the question of teacher leadership (i.e. that pupil influence is dependent on teachers' active classroom leadership).

There are many theories about leadership. Mintzberg (1979:353) argues that the discussion on leadership styles can be divided into what the leader is and what the leader does. Our interest in teacher leadership in relation to pupil influence focuses on the latter of these two words, which also explains our interest in didactics and power. By power issues, we mean here both formal and informal as well as hidden phenomena and the processes of influence in teaching and education. Lukes (2004) argues that power can be analysed from three dimensions: i) the ability to push through one's opinions by taking part in making decisions (power over decision-making), ii) the ability to affect what issues are discussed or not discussed (power over agenda), and iii) the ability to influence how others think (power over thoughts). In relation to pupil influence, the first dimension of power is directed at formal positions in the classroom (the teacher's decision-making power, role and tasks, as well as pupils' potential to make decisions), and the second and third dimensions of power are more informal processes (which issues are discussed or not discussed, which values/ school cultures are upheld in the classroom, etc.).

Stensmo (2008; 2012) describes teachers' leadership in the form of different categories of leadership styles in the classroom. The first category focuses on how pupils' or teachers' own classroom behaviour can be controlled, the second category on the inner motivation factors, and the third on the responsibility for one's own actions and choices. The various leadership styles, with their slightly different focal points on control, motivation and responsibility, can also be recognized in a description of democracy models. These can be divided into three main groups: elitist, participatory and deliberative models of democracy (cf. Dahl, 1989, Englund, 2003). Translated to the question of pupil influence, the elitist model involves an emphasis on formal representation in the form of a pupil democracy focus. The participatory model involves an emphasis on active participation and/or pupil-active work processes. The deliberative model involves an emphasis on shared discussions and on socialization processes related to basic values. The participation-oriented model of democracy can thus be said to focus on organisation, motivation and activism as a complement to the elitist model's formal decision arenas and organisation. This involves an interest in the different ways in which pupil influence can be created and found in daily school life in the form of opportunities for influence and participation in the classroom. The advantage of participatory democracy is usually said to be that engagement provides insight, awareness and knowledge. The criticism of participatory democracy can be summarized as chiefly dealing with inequality in terms of political resources. Without everyone having the opportunity to be involved, pupil influence equates to the participation of the already-resourceful pupils. The deliberative model of democracy can be summarized as focusing on how opinions are formed in shared discussions in schools (Roth, 2000). Communication is an important key word (Englund, 2003). Criticism against the deliberative model of democracy is tantamount to criticism against the participatory model. That is, it relates to the problem of resource equality. The deliberative model is also criticized for its consensus perspective (Reinikainen & Reitberger, 2004). That is, there is an assumption that there is a model of problem-solving on which the majority of participants can agree given that the deliberative process continues for a sufficient period of time.

Pupil influence according to a participatory and/or deliberative model of democracy is based on engagement and participation in its approaches. Teachers' work with pupil influence should not, under these models, be reduced to a mere question of making decisions and/or making legitimate choices for individuals. Schools' democratic value-based work via pupil influence issues would, it seems to follow, be strengthened by the active and enlightened participation of many. The question, then, becomes how pupil influence issues are organised in school practices. By understanding how pupil influence issues are organised, we can discuss whether a policy change in the current Swedish curriculum for compulsory school (LGR 11) in terms of pupil influence can sustain the opportunity to live and learn about democracy in schools.

Methodology

The methodological approach used is based on an abductive strategy (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2008). We have been oscillating between theories and empirical findings to structure our understanding of the field using four schools as empirical cases. The aim was to understand pupil influence in practice and to show the policy structure content in these practices. The empirical data collection was conducted via semi-structured focus group interviews (the interviews lasted about 120 minutes) with teachers and school management at the participating schools. Two focus group interviews were conducted at each school, one with school management and one with educational staff. Each focus group consisted of 4-7 people. The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed. The guide for interviews was based on four parts to understand ideas in relation to actions, a) needs, b) priority, c) resources and d) knowledge reversal. This is a policy analytical approach that is 'a methodology in which researchers construct empirically the networks within which filed-level decision-making actors carry out their activities…' (Ham & Hill, 1984, s 107). Materials as public documents that described the schools' profiles and organisation were also collected. The empirical material was sorted into to three themes of strategies in school practices involving pupil influence.

Pupil influence in schools – empirical findings

Below is an account of the material from the four schools that provides an overall picture of the collected material. Principally, the interviewed and observed school leaders' and educators' descriptions of their work with pupil influence are summarised into three themes:

- pedagogical methods
- learning environments
- realisation of knowledge-promoting tasks and assessment processes

The pedagogical method theme consists of addressing and starting with the individual as the point of departure in the learning process. The learning environment is about getting pupils to function together, which involves managing group processes and organising school activities in accordance with schools' commissions. The last theme, which concerns knowledge-promoting tasks and assessment processes, puts the school's task in the spotlight and is therefore considered to have an overall system focus. The categories in each theme describes various approaches or perspectives of schools' teachers and management concerning how practical work with pupil influence issues is conducted.

Pedagogical methods

Pedagogical methods show that there are differences in the practical work performed with regard to pupil influence. In the interviews methods such as thematic work in mixed-age groups was described. Methods that makes it possible for pupils to pose questions based on their own experiences and everyday realities. Age integration was described in two senses in the conducted interviews: as creating conditions for individualisation based on children's levels of development and knowledge, and as promoting better conditions for pupils to learn from and with one another. Pupil-active methods were mentioned as involving pupils in the learning process—for example, in the planning of work in a specific subject area. One teacher described it in the interview in the following manner: 'to capture the issues, develop them further and open up for pupils question. For example, how should we work on this theme, what do you think?'. Another teacher commented in the interview that 'I would feel that I was on the right track in a job to increase pupils influence if I got the pupils to ask me questions as a teacher'. The ambitions of getting the work done in class councils and in other formal forums to be more effective was also described.

Pedagogical methods can be categorised into the following main groups:

- *Pupil perspective* which includes pupil activity, as learning cannot be considered possible unless pupils are personally active. It also includes individualisation, a point of departure in the pupil's own experience and abilities. It furthermore includes context, which should be understood as the context of the learning process that corresponds to the knowledge that pupils are expected to develop.
- *Choices* in the sense of pupils' decision-making space, that pupils can themselves take a position on and prioritise matters related to activities in schools. This also includes opportunities for variation. Variation is deemed important for addressing differences among pupils as individuals and for the situational adaptation of learning by 'seizing the moment'.
- *Discussion* that invites pupils to dialogue and to use discussion as a method to help pupils to exert influence on the content and organisation of learning.

The content of the categories indicates that none of the mentioned methods on its own can be deemed sufficient for fulfilling schools' tasks related to living and learning democracy through pupil influence. In one of the interviews, a teacher commented that "I think that is the most difficult thing, that everyone really should get theirs because they need so different". Variation in methods thus becomes important. Pupil influence seems to require each teacher's conscious contemplation and appraisal to address the aims, requirements and expectations related to pupil influence. One teacher expressed this by saying "to find the pupil's interest in our goals, that our goals should be in line with the pupils' will and interest. I think that is a difficulty, or a challenge, I should say".

Learning environments

Learning environments emerged in the conducted interviews as being important in the work with pupil influence. This includes both social and physical learning environments. The existence of a supportive organisation and the importance of a common view regarding approach and knowledge were highlighted. Just as under the pedagogical methods theme, there was a somewhat different emphasis on, and content of, the learning environments set in relation to the question of pupil influence. What emerged as a common pattern was to address and see pupils as individuals to have positive approaches, as well as to build good relationships between teachers and pupils. Creating well-functioning groups and a feeling of community at schools was also described as important. Teachers' leadership in the classroom was emphasised as very important due to the responsibility they have for the learning environment.

Learning environments as a basis for the work done with pupil influence can be categorised into the following main groups:

- *Approach*. A positive approach to how pupils are addressed and treated is seen as a prerequisite for pupil influence. This includes building good relationships between teachers and pupils, which is also described as teachers' confidence in pupil's ability to be independently proactive and in pupils' own initiative and ability to take responsibility, plan and evaluate.
- *Integration*. Both age and subject integration were expressed. Integration could be used to strengthen the relationship between individuals and groups, and it also encompasses work with whole entities. Differences are thereby allowed to enrich the whole with regard to content and the knowledge context in the learning process. Security and belonging are considered to be important for creating a positive social climate. According to the interviews, these are key prerequisites to fulfilling both the democratic task and the school's task of promoting knowledge.
- *Leadership* includes how teachers and school management handle daily encounters with pupils, staff and relatives, as well as teachers' and school leaders' responsibility for how the learning environment is organised. The physical environment is to be organised by teachers to strengthen relations and to support the knowledge commission. This was described as consistent with a sociocultural perspective on learning.

Pupils' ability to take independent positions as well as to take initiative and cooperate was highlighted in the interviews as important to work with. Through the conscious organisation of the learning environment, pupils can be offered time for self-development and enrichment. Space for personal encounters—for example, where teachers 'see' pupils and have time to listen to their views—is considered to be an important factor for promoting pupil influence through the learning environment. One teacher expressed this in the interview by saying, 'I think for the students, that's exactly what they often want, someone who sees and hears them and who wants to absorb what they want and have as their wish'. The aim is for the school to represent an open climate where everyone can express his or her opinions and make his or her voice heard.

In summary, the two themes we have outlined thus far describe the importance of managing both individual perspectives and collective processes in the work done with pupil influence. The physical environment and leadership emerge in the empirical material as important for pupil influence ambitions. The categories under pedagogical methods and learning environments can also be seen as directly and indirectly affecting one another and thus as constituting prerequisites for one another. Under the third theme, the realisation of knowledge-promoting tasks and assessment processes, we highlight how they also address societal and institutional interests. This can, then, be discussed overall according to the policy change introduced with LGR 11 in which pupils, in terms of influence, are described as objects rather than subjects.

Realisation of knowledge-promoting tasks and assessment processes

In the theme of the realisation of knowledge-promoting tasks and assessment processes, transparency is stated as an important component. Transparency is, for example, creating an understandable context for pupils concerning schools' goals and activities (pedagogical methods and learning environment theme) as an opportunity to support intentions with pupil influence. Familiarity with the school's activities and organisation is furthermore viewed as being a prerequisite for creating a feeling of security and belonging for pupils (learning environment theme). An important prerequisite for pupil influence, according to school management and teachers, is that teachers must improve their own knowledge of the contents of the curricula and course syllabi to be able to communicate it with pupils. In relation to this, it is also described that the work must be anchored on a conscious view of knowledge. Transparency is the most prominent category of all the themes in the material.

Motivation and processes that support motivation are also mentioned as important. Motivation is partially linked to transparency. Having information and awareness concerning goals and grading criteria is seen as motivating for pupils. This is described as being possible to create by working with pupils' perspectives, working with the individual interests of pupils, and accommodating various learning styles (pedagogical methods theme). Both the social and the physical learning environments can support motivating processes, for example, through role modelling. The concrete tools stated as being important for knowledge and assessment in relation to pupil influence are individual development plans, verbal and written assessments, action plans, the surveying of knowledge in various ways, documentation and pupil self-assessments. The interviewed teachers and school leaders also stated that the pupils should be given insight into what they can influence and what this means.

The theme can be categorised into the following main groups:

- *Response* is about how pupil assessments should contain feedback. The purpose of this is to foster development, and it is also seen as contributing to providing pupils with the tools they need to influence their own learning and work in school. Teacher competence as subject competence and as an awareness of schools' tasks is considered to be important for pupil influence, and so is teacher leadership.
- *Creating* motivation among pupils is described as being important in the work done with pupil influence when it generates pupil activity. In addition, motivation and participation are regarded as being linked. Motivating processes are seen as important in relation to both knowledge-promoting tasks and to democratic tasks.
- *Transparency* means that the pupils obtain information and can be made aware of schools' goals and activities. This is described, for example, as explicitly highlighting goals and aims in relation to individual and collective processes in school practice. For teachers, this

> encompasses the idea that the perspective on knowledge is considered to bring together schools' knowledge-promoting tasks and democratic tasks as both objectives and means. This is all about the abilities and social competence that are part of the knowledge-promoting tasks and that are also seen as important abilities in relation to democratic tasks. These abilities can be exemplified with being able to take responsibility, exert influence by making one's voice heard, argue and be active in one's own learning process.

How a teacher handles daily encounters with pupils and colleagues is fundamental for the results of pupil influence processes. The above enumeration could be described as communication in various forms by creating a space for discussion and meetings in a school and, through these encounters and dialogues, highlighting pupil influence as a working approach. Being listened to is viewed as leading to a feeling of having influence for pupils.

Leadership in the classroom was mentioned in the interviews with both school management and teachers as an important component for dealing with issues of pupil influence. Pupil influence is seen as a question of teachers' approach to pupils (i.e. if pupils feel that they are being treated right, if they feel that they are being listened to, and how they experience the contents of the activities). Leadership, say teachers and school management, is about creating good relationships and a climate for learning—for example, getting pupils to function and work together in groups. Pupils regard a teacher's ability to truly listen as an important starting point for positive leadership. Listening is about addressing and attending to pupils, and about the teacher placing the pupils' ideas before the teacher's own planning. It is about being flexible. With a flexible approach, teachers can create variation in methods to accommodate the pupils' wishes. Flexibility can also create the opportunity to capture existing variation in the pupil group, which can be utilised as a starting point for learning in a broad sense. Active leadership is seen as a factor for success, encompassing both responsiveness and the ability to find the optimal in every pupil.

A teacher's leadership responsibility is also linked to giving pupils guidance and sometimes even limiting the choices available. Clarity includes showing what knowledge and values should be learned, and a task of leadership is to clarify for pupils the frameworks that exists for activities. In the interviews, the requirement for clarity was mentioned as significant, and one important dimension of leadership, according to school management and teachers, is the task of providing guidance and feedback. The ability to 'see' all pupils is thus an important responsibility for school staff.

Although teachers are responsible and should lift responsibility from pupils, they should also delegate, develop and demand a certain responsibility from them. This means daring to give responsibility to pupils, to get pupils to take responsibility, and sometimes making adjustments afterwards. In the minds of teachers, their teaching should capture and be based on pupils' interests and experiences. At the same time, teachers have the task of challenging pupils. This is a difficult didactic balance. For the teacher, the challenge lies in being clear and active without limiting pupils' activity and opportunity to influence. This means that different pupils need to be permitted to have different opportunities to influence their learning, and in this, the teachers' ability to both determine and distribute influence is an important issue.

An important component of teachers' leadership is the difference between reactivity and proactivity. It is easier for teachers to recognise and capture pupils' spontaneous initiative than it is for them to incite initiative as a basis for action. It is easier for teachers to be reactive in the sense of proceeding based on pupils' initiative than it is for them to proactively create points of departure for teaching and learning. A routine offer to pupils to make choices between the given alternatives or stopping at the pupils' own initiative constitutes a reactive approach that is not conducive to pupil influence as a didactic practice. In an inactive or reactive approach from teachers, pupil influence risks being reduced to, at best, the already-resourceful pupils dominating the classroom, or, at worst, everyone's loss. Being reactive as a teacher can mean that only the already-resourceful pupils will achieve influence. In one interview, a teacher commented that 'I think of these silent pupils, many times talented but silent. It is important that, if they do not raise their hand, that you still ask them questions, that they are heard so that they do not just sit silent. You have a responsibility to make sure everyone gets their voice heard, even if they don't raise their hand, and others you have to stop'.

Pupils who have a lack of interest or a lack of responsibility for their own schooling and choose not to be active thus jeopardise their opportunities to influence their own school situations. Counteracting this requires active leadership in the classroom and in the school at large from both school management and teachers, as well as other school staff. It requires proactivity and adopting a consciousness of the environment for learning and deliberate roles that includes perspectives on both the individual and collective levels, as well as citizenship. Teaching based on freedom of choice and individualistic understanding is thus described by Forsberg (2000) as problematic, and Solhaug (2013) stresses that both learning and democracy are collective processes.

Pupil influence is described, on the one hand, as being open to pupil initiative, listening and being flexible, and on the other hand, it is having clear frameworks and showing clear leadership. This entails a balancing act for the individual teacher, where it becomes important to be able to raise an awareness of different strategies and analyse these from the perspective of power and didactics. In relation to power, its second dimension, regarding issues on the agenda, and its third dimension, regarding the influence of interests and thoughts that may be concealed, become important when it comes to communication, organisation and how pupil influence is constituted in relation to different perspectives and values. Attention to policy changes and policy issues, including in relation to different education ideals, becomes important as well (Eriksson, 2019). Our study contributes a different way in which to understand pupil influence that widens what could be understood within the perspective of student voice. It is important to be able to understand how power relations support basic values so that democratic inclusion is not limited to being understood as a control function (Fielding, 2001). Power needs to be studied not just as a question of self-determination (Robinson & Taylor, 2007). Instead, it is important to study power as a social process (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006).

Conclusions

A proactive attitude towards the participation, engagement and motivation of pupils is an important element in didactics that furthers both schools' democratic goals and their knowledge goals. However, how pupil influence is constituted in teaching (i.e. how the interaction between teachers and pupils is formed), how the activities are organised and how it can be understood in relation to different values and theoretical perspectives when it comes to teaching and education are important to illuminate (see Eriksson, 2019). In such a context, teacher leadership and a reflective teachership—for example, how teachers develop pedagogical methods in the classroom based on how different pupils learn, collaborate and work individually and in groups (cf. Granström, Hammar, 2012)—becomes important.

The discussion in this article takes is based on the relationship between the school's task of promoting knowledge and its concurrent requirement to bring up pupils in democratic working forms and values. We have discussed this through an interest in a Swedish policy change concerning pupils' influence and perceptions of power. We contend that the school's intertwined democracy and knowledge tasks, as well as living and teaching democracy, can be translated to issues related to how communication factors, organisational factors and motivational factors are handled in practice as parts of proactive classroom leadership.

The interaction between teachers and pupils is a key component of the issues of pupil influence. The ability of pupils to exert influence over and to be involved in teaching and learning is dependent on the issues of teachers' perspectives concerning their leadership and how they choose to act. Solhaug (2013) and Solhaug and Borhaug (2012) also emphasise the importance of teachers having a theoretical and practical understanding of democracy and citizenship, and they stress that they need to reflect on their views concerning democracy in the implementation of teaching.

We can summarise our empirical findings concerning pupil influence by stating that it places very high demands on teachers' proactive leadership in the classroom. In an inactive or reactive approach from teachers, focusing on listening to pupils, pupil influence risks being reduced to, at best, the already-resourceful pupils dominating the classroom, or, at worst, everyone's loss. The issues of didactics, power and existing policy can build a foundation for proactive action when they are integrated to strengthen pupil influence as a way in which to live and learn democracy.

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