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Being Engaged and Knowledgeable: Social Science Thinking Concepts and Students' Civic Engagement in Teaching on Globalisation

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Abstract: The question of whether or not school makes a difference in preparing students for democratic citizenship has been debated for a long time in political science and curriculum studies. These discussions are mostly based on the results of international surveys measuring students' political attitudes, values and participation. However, we first need to define what kind of prepared citizens are needed. This article takes on the definition issue and presents new perspectives by exploring how teachers in Social Science (Samhällskunskap) and their students in Sweden reason about engagement when they address complex societal issues such as globalisation. Based on interviews with a number of teachers and students I will argue that in order to understand what is going on in school we need to interpret Social Science teaching in terms of first- and second-order concepts, where the second-order concepts could be seen as "how to think like a social scientist". I will make a case that there is a didactic dilemma for teachers trying to educate students who are both trained in disciplinary thinking and leave school as politically engaged. However, this dilemma is not unsolvable and I will hold a position that it might contain answers to some of the questions that political scientists deal with in terms of engagement.

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Introduction

> *Civic engagement begins with feelings.*
> *Knowledge and feelings are not opposites. It*
> *is important not to lose your feelings when*
> *you're learning about political issues.*
>
>
> *Professor Ronny Ambjörnsson (In*
> *Mannheimer & Ambjörnsson 2007: 254)*

Walking up the stairs to the auditorium was a little agonising for Lisa, an upper secondary teacher in Social Science (Samhällskunskap[1]) at one of the inner-city schools in Stockholm. In the auditorium some one hundred students were preparing for the final day of a role-play set in the United Nations General Assembly. The students were about to finalise the debates and negotiations about a new climate protocol that had been the focus for about a month of lessons, workshops and lectures. Lisa's agony was not based on worries about the students' performances, but more about the learning outcome in terms of impact after the negotiations came to a dead-end. What would the students think about world politics after taking part in the role-play? Would they think that there is no point in trying to engage in politics?

Lisa's thoughts on her teaching reveal an important aspect of the two-sided assignment in Social Science education: teaching for both knowledge and engagement/participation. But what does it mean to be engaged in a school setting and what is reasonable to expect from Social Science education? In academic research there has been a growing interest in studying youths' political attitudes, values and participation, and their relationship to civic education in school (Ekman & Pilo 2012, Olson 2012). The general worry has been described by Joakim Ekman (see Ekman's article in this issue): young people are becoming increasingly disengaged by politics (cf. Dalton 2004) and there is a concern that schools' civic education in all western countries fail in their role to prepare young citizens for an engaged democratic life. There are those who have contested this image by emphasising that western democracies have undergone changes as societies and that citizens engage in new ways compared to some imagined "golden age" of democracy in the west. Some of these identified changes have been an increasing individualisation with engagement in single issues rather than political programs, and that citizens take democracy for granted and therefore do not feel a strong need to participate (Putnam 2000, SOU 2000:1, Dalton 2004). Several studies conducted with different methodologies have

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1 There has been some discussion on the best translation of "Samhällskunskap", but I would argue for the term Social Science, even though it might lead us to believe we are describing the academic field of social sciences.

come to the same conclusion: schools' impact is small compared to other variables such as socio-economic factors (Ekman & Zetterberg 2011, Torney-Purta 2002, Almgren 2006, Ekman 2007, Broman 2009).

Two major groups have been identified amongst the young in this research: active and passive citizens. Active citizens are quite easy to describe, these are the ones who "live politics", perhaps as members of youth leagues/NGOs, in more temporary contexts such as Internet groups or as "political consumers" (Amnå 2010, Micheletti 2010). But what does it mean to be passive? In recent years many political scientists have begun questioning whether or not there are some problems in the studies of youths' engagement, especially in the international surveys that have been conducted. Is there only one way to be passive, or can we find a political interest amongst some of the passive citizens? Many have tried to introduce new labels, such as "attentive citizens" for those citizens that are interested in politics and societal issues, but who are not active (Geissel 2007). The Swedish political scientists Erik Amnå and Joakim Ekman (2012) have, in recent years, worked with a new typology to try to find these youths in the national surveys that try to measure political engagement. They have described citizens in four ways: active, stand-by, disengaged and disillusioned. Active citizens have already been introduced above. Stand-by citizens are those attentive citizens that are not necessarily politically active in a traditional way, but they are politically enlightened and self-confident. If they were triggered by some societal event, they could go from stand-by to active citizens (Ekman & Pilo 2012:207). The more dormant citizens can be found in the last two groups. Disengaged citizens do not have an interest in politics, while disillusioned citizens are outspoken in their hostility towards politics, almost anti-political (Amnå 2010). The research group around Ekman and Amnå are now studying the surveys from the point of view of this new typology and the preliminary findings show that many of the passive students can instead be labelled as stand-by (Amnå & Ekman 2013, forthcoming).

It is clear that these empirical conclusions and theoretical assumptions give us a good basis for an understanding of civic engagement among our young. However, there is surprisingly little research done with qualitative data. In order to understand what kind of engaged and participating citizens we can expect, we need to focus our attention to what is going on in school. This article takes on these issues by exploring Social Science teachers' and students' perspectives: How do teachers and students reason about engagement when they address complex societal issues such as globalisation? In this article I will argue that there is a didactic dilemma for teachers trying to educate students who both "know" social science and leave school as politically engaged. However, this dilemma is not unsolvable and I argue that the dilemma itself might hold answers to some of the questions that political scientists are interested in exploring.

School and Social Science Teaching

School has official tasks, but also unofficial ones. In Swedish school five different tasks deserve to be highlighted: knowledge, democratic socialisation, general fostering, detainment and sorting for higher education (Ahrne, Roman & Franzén 2003:177-187). The first two tasks are found in the curriculum while the others are tacit. In Sweden there is a general task for all teachers to foster students in democracy, but Social Science, history, geography and religious studies have a special attention on democratic content, values and attitudes. However, Social Science is the assigned subject with the major responsibility for political education in Sweden and the Nordic countries (Bronäs 2000, Christensen 2011 & 2012, Jensen 2012, Børhaug 2011:25, Ekman & Pilo 2012:58). Social Science is a specific subject, common in Scandinavia and the German states.

The subject's rationale in Scandinavia and Germany is quite different from school subjects such as citizenship in its focus on both teaching social science subject matter and strengthening the students' civic engagement. This mix of fostering democratic citizenship and teaching subject matter is a common theme in Scandinavia and Germany, sometimes referred to as "politische bildung tradition" (Detjen 2011, c.f. Christensen 2011 & 2012). This dual task has been a part of the subject since it was introduced in the 1940's, but as in the case of the general curriculum there has been a shifting emphasis between knowledge and fostering citizenship (Englund 1986, Bronäs 2003, Olson 2008). In Sweden, the academic disciplines that constitute the subject are political science, sociology, economics and human geography. It is a compulsory subject for all students in Grades 1-12 and in the present curricula Social Science mainly focuses on critical thinking, analysis and interpretation of contemporary society (Swedish National Agency for Education 2011).

Teaching in a space between critical thinking and legitimisation

As in all teaching, Social Science has to balance between legitimising society with its political institutions and emancipating the individuals through critical thinking (Apple, Au & Ganding 2009). Legitimisation or justification can take many forms in school: the most obvious are role expectations and mediating current societal norms but also how to view the world and what is considered as appropriate behaviour and appropriate values are included (Børhaug & Christopherson 2012:14-15). In a democracy like Sweden, schools' civic education is about creating a common notion of how to perceive the world and its members' identities to create a common ground for a democratic society. As Børhaug & Christopherson (2012) concluded, this would not be a problem if it were not for the critical thinking aspects of Social Science. Social Science is not only about socialising our youths into the norms of our present society, but also to develop their critical thinking (Klafki 1998). The term has been a buzzword in Swedish curricula since the 1970's, but it has never been explicitly explained, thus putting it in the hands of the teachers to interpret it.

Returning to the idea of balance, we can imagine different kinds of positions that teachers can or will take. The legitimising position is to present a view on society that

is authoritative – i.e. everything is as it ought to be, the political institutions are functioning and problems could be seen as the "exceptions that prove the rule". The non-problematizing view of society is perhaps hard to find in Scandinavian schools, but seems to be quite common in school textbooks in Social Science (Børhaug & Christopherson 2012 & Bronäs 2000). Critical thinking can take different forms in Social Science. It could be a mild version focusing on source criticism but it could also be a method to deconstruct the narratives of contemporary society. This pure critical thinking will address the issues of power and control that might be found in the political debate or within our institutions; this position would be a *post-modern* one. Both of these standpoints are problematic in Social Science education. Not problematizing our society in terms of political, social and economic challenges will not prepare youths for life; in fact, it could be confusing for them to meet the discourse outside school (Simonneau & Legardez 2010). Problematizing the issues too much by giving students examples of the failures of society (e.g. portraying the legal system through its scandals) might give them dogmatic views or, even worse, create a sense that they are not part of the social arrangement at all. So, how can teachers deal with the dual task of both teaching adolescents about contemporary society and at the same time preparing them for citizenship? How can they balance the line between legitimising society and teaching critical perspectives? I will argue that there are three very different approaches to this task.

Trying to Understand What they Do: Social Science in the Classroom

Even though Social Science has a prominent place among the mandatory school subjects in Sweden, very little has been done in terms of research on what is going on within the classrooms. In a recent study Christina Odenstad (2010) studied assessment documentation and found three types of questions in Social Science teaching. These made her conclude that Social Science can be described through three nouns: orientation, analysis and discussion. Odenstad's typology can be used to describe three very different approaches of teaching Social Science. The first is what we can call the *fact-based approach* where the value issues in Social Science are omitted. In this approach the world is described based on scientific knowledge. Problems or challenges can be addressed only after the objective facts have been presented. Once that is done it is up to the students to have an opinion about what to do. This approach thus centres on the facts of society and its members. Even though fact-based teaching seem to be predominant in Sweden (NU03 2005, Myndigheten för skolutveckling 2008) it is unlikely that teaching can revolve only around particulars. In fact, I would argue that the "truths" science delivers, especially in social sciences and the humanities, quite soon become debatable. The political scientist Bo Rothstein (2002) has, on several occasions, pointed out that it is easy to find the facts, e.g. unemployment rates, but that these facts are not interesting per se. What is interesting is how these facts are used. For Rothstein, science is about being wrong, but wrong in an interesting way so that it could be debated. Therefore, most facts are uncontested, like unemployment rates in Sweden. But other questions, like why there is

unemployment in Sweden, could be debated. Some would argue that the fact-based
approach prepares students for citizenship in giving them non-partial facts about
society, but I would say that teachers sooner or later have to address societal discourse
and the different positions that you would find in various political settings (cf.
Kincheloe, 2001). The second approach, the *deliberative approach,* focuses on
discussion and debate, thus allowing the students to learn factual knowledge at the
same time as they develop democratic skills. However, the focus is on discourse
climate and acceptance of different views. When students listen to each other they will
discover new perspectives and understand how other people think about societal
issues, thus enhancing their knowledge and skills as citizens (Englund 2000 & 2006,
Fishkin & Ferrar 2005). The approach has been heavily criticised for its normativity
and its emphasis on generic skills, but also for lack of empirical evidence that it works
(Fredriksson 2008). Professor Tomas Englund (2006) has a very ambitious list for
teachers to follow, but it is not a farfetched guess that it is quite rare to find a
deliberative classroom where all teaching focuses around deliberative discussions. As
many studies have concluded, discussion is a very common practise in Social Science
class, but as a part of teaching and not as its centre (Vernersson 1999, Odenstad 2010).

Without studying the activities in class, Torney-Purta (2002) concluded that the
best results were achieved when teachers addressed both content and skills. This
disciplinary approach, which focuses on analysis and interpretation, was at the centre
of my own research (Sandahl 2011) where I explored and analysed the reflections of
six teachers and their teaching about globalisation. Using a theoretical framework
used by many researchers in history education (Seixas & Peck 2008, Lee 2005) I
interpreted the content/skills in Social Science and argued that it could be understood
in terms of first- and second-order concepts and that they were crucial in order to
understand what Social Science teachers are trying to achieve.

The disciplinary approach: First- and second-order concepts

First-order concepts are all the facts, terms and concepts found in subject matter;
these are closely bound to the academic disciplines (i.e. economics, political science,
sociology, etc.). These concepts could be divided into two subgroups, where the first
group consists of terms that are propositional, e.g. "prime minister" and the other
group consists of colligatory concepts such as "power" (cf. Lee 2005). However, first-
order concepts are not enough to capture what the subject is about. To describe what it
means to work in a disciplinary way we need to consider second-order concepts as
well. These are ideas deriving from the social sciences on how to organise, analyse,
interpret and critically review discourses in society. They are not bound to specific
topics, but are used in all issues relating to social sciences. This model of
understanding, where contents and skills are seen as two sides of the same coin, have
been promoted before (Newmann 1990, Case 2005, Kinchloe 2001). However, it
should be pointed out that the second-order concepts that I account for here are
derived from the Swedish school subject of Social Science. I am well aware that these
could be used very differently in academic social science disciplines such as

sociology, economics and political science. In contrast to second-order concepts that
have been pointed out in history, the social science concepts come from school
practice and not academic practice. Having said that, we can move on to the second-
order concepts of Social Science that I identified in my previous work: *social science
perspectives*, *social science causality*, *social science evidence, social science
inference* and *social science abstraction.*[2]

Perspectives refer to the ability to take different points of views on contemporary
issues and that there are, in fact, few questions that contain "truths" (Rothstein 2002).
There are always different perspectives on various topics, both ideological and
intercultural standpoints. Working with students in class thus includes taking and
revealing ideological perspectives on different topics such as foreign aid or world
trade issues. It is also about taking and revealing different standpoints that are based
on different identities in nations or groups. From a Swedish point of view, that might
be to try to understand the role of ethical discussions in the political debate in the US
(e.g. abortion), something that Swedes do not debate before an election. Therefore,
trying to understand how people perceive the world in other places is crucial for
understanding the issue. Working in class with role-play, debates or other techniques
enable the students to question and scrutinise their own standpoints and practise
understanding "the other".

Causality in Social Science education means that teachers and students work with a
model of analysis using causes and consequences to explain contemporary issues.
Using simple templates students can investigate different topics and sort causes and
consequences in political, economic and social terms as well as consequences for
individuals, groups and societies. Here, teachers also work with the core (for social
scientists) concepts of agency and structure. Many issues in Social Science are
contemporary and causality therefore also deals with what could be done, in terms of
measures. Seeing that measures could aim at either consequences or causes is an
important part of this second-order concept.

Evidence and *inference* are closely linked. Using models for analysis, like the one
above, students come to conclusions that should be based on facts and not beliefs. In
short, they need to present evidence and practise working with different sources in
social sciences. An important part of this is critical thinking and working with bias.
Together with perspective-taking, this is a potent way of scrutinising political and
economic issues. The last second-order concept is *abstraction*, which involves
working with theoretical models that social scientists use to simplify complexity and
create understanding of our societies. Common abstractions are used frequently in
economics but can also be found when teachers work with class-related issues or
differences in social order in different countries. In the last example, Robert Putnam's
theories can be used to understand the world (e.g. Putnam 2000). An important aspect

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2 For further discussion on second-order social science concepts, see Torben Spanget Christensen´s article in this
issue.

in Social Science is for students to learn how to understand an issue by moving back
and forth between the abstract and the concrete.

To summarise, I argue that teaching and learning Social Science is not just about
learning the facts pointed out in the curricula or in the textbooks. It is also about
learning how to interpret, analyse and discuss society from a social science
perspective. In order to reach these goals we need to understand the importance of
using second-order concepts. When students work more scientifically they develop a
way of thinking about society and they have to challenge the set opinions they have
about different topics. Therefore, I argue that the second-order concepts are important
for achieving students that are critical thinkers. Also, that critical thinking is crucial
when students discuss issues in class, because learning to listen to each other and
debate controversial issues is an important part of Social Science (Hess, 2004, 2009),
but it has to be rooted in scientific ways to analyse and interpret societal issues. If it is
not, then there is really no difference in the discussions in class from the ones that
students have with their friends at a café. The school subject of Social Science needs
an explicit profile; otherwise, it will lose its legitimacy and risk being reduced to a
topic for small talk or a conveyer of facts. Students' opinions and thoughts are
important but it is the Social Science teachers' task to qualify their discussions and
their knowledge by using second-order concepts. Therefore, I argue that these
concepts could help teachers to balance their teaching between knowledge and
fostering democratic ideals.

Methods of Research

The aim of this study is to explore how Social Science teachers and students reason
about engagement in relation to studying societal issues in Social Science class. To
achieve this aim, I conducted interviews with six teachers. The focus on particular
teachers was then used to generate themes in their voices to create an understanding of
Social Science in general (Hays 2004:218, Yin 1994). As in most case studies, I
focused on interviews (Hays 2004:229). The interviews were conducted during a span
of two months with experienced teachers in upper secondary schools. Each interview
revolved around the educational material that the teacher was asked to bring to the
interview (about the method used, see Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007:356-361). In
addition, we talked about the classroom situations, mainly in terms of students'
discussions and subject matter in the teacher's teaching on globalisation, which I had
observed prior to the interview. This method of stimulated recall made it easier to talk
about real teaching and not only the *ideas* of teaching globalisation (Stough 2001).
One of the themes from the case study revolved around the issues on the discouraging
of students' engagement, which is presented in this article.[3] Students situated in
another school than the teachers discussed this theme on another occasion. The

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3 For a full description of the methodical considerations in the case study, see Sandahl (2011). Also, the teachers'
statements have been published earlier in Sandahl (2011).

students were interviewed as well, but not individually. By allowing the students to
discuss some themes within the group it was possible to present different views and
allow the students to complement each other with additional reflections (Cohen,
Manion & Morrison 2007:373). The four students were all in their final year in upper
secondary school. They are all high achievers in social science subjects with a
particular interest in global issues.

Being Engaged and Knowledgeable: Teachers' and Students' Voices on Globalisation Issues in Social Science

Returning to Lisa's agony as she walked up the stairs, we are going to aim our
focus on the voices of teachers and students in Social Science education. The teachers
emphasise the importance of first and second-order concepts, but also point at the
problems that sometimes arrive when that scientific approach and the teachers'
objectives to make the students engaged clash. In many cases, when students arrive in
class their world is black and white. The set opinions that they bring with them from
home meet the teachers' agenda with multiple perspectives and inferences based on
evidence. It is present during the entire Social Science course, but significantly so in
globalisation issues. Teaching globalisation in upper secondary mainly revolves
around developing issues like world poverty and international relations (Sandahl
2011). One of the teachers, Marie, sees these tendencies toward dogmatism in the
beginning of the academic year:

> It is easier to see the world as black and white. Easier to have an opinion, I
> guess. A lot of students are like that when the start the course… I guess it's
> natural when you're sixteen. I think it's our job to open their minds and see
> that there are other dimensions.

Another teacher, Henry, also has this experience that students come to class
thinking they only have to discuss societal issues and that they sometimes want simple
answers. Often these answers that students seek are impregnated with ideological
values. Taking on the issues using second-order concepts can be very frustrating for
students when they discover that there are no simple answers. Henry also points at the
grading criteria and states that the students have to use different perspectives in order
to achieve higher grades. Henry believes that it is easier for students who understand
the grading criteria:

> I believe that many times this is quite agonising for the students. They want
> to know the answer. They want simple answers. At the same time… You can
> see, in exams and essays, that students who can take different perspectives
> are also the ones that are awarded higher grades. Talented students see this,
> and for them it works just fine.

The students also pointed out that the grading criteria in Social Science always make them think about perspectives. One of the students, Anna, says: "It's like all the grading criteria say that you can't rush to conclusions, you need to see the complexity involved. That's what it says in, like, all the social sciences". The students also discuss that they started in school with a general feeling that they could change the world, and that it was a shared feeling amongst their classmates. However, that changed during their time in school.

Losing Engagement

For Henry there is always a tightrope between allowing the students to hold on to their views and making them take other perspectives. For him engagement is closely linked to being a little bit naïve. He compares the students' idealism with the optimism in political youth leagues where young politicians think it is easy to change societal affairs. Henry is saddened by this "killing of engagement", but also believes that Social Science education aims at problematizing the issues:

> There are students who really want to change the world. Kids in this age do that and some are really, really enthusiastic and it's so easy to knock them off their pedestal – not saying that's what I do...//... but in asking them to analyse their view... I guess it's fine that they believe they can change the world... It's really easy being engaged in topics when the world is all black and white; when answers are easy to get. But that's not reality. I think that's what we Social Science teachers point out. I guess it's sad that we kill their engagement, like when they're trying to do something for the low-income countries with charity or what else. If you think about it, it's like the parties' youth leagues... They're radical and know exactly what to do, but when they grow up to become politicians it's all flattened... I guess it's a tightrope to encourage their engagement and idealism to change the word, and at the same time make them realise it's not that simple. That "you can't just change that, that's not the whole picture" and so on.

Perspective taking is one of those important second-order concepts that the teachers emphasised, especially since they experience that students come with a worldview painted in black and white. Marie underlines that this position becomes hard to stand by when they learn more and work with the issues. It concerns Marie that the students in this process seem to lose their engagement and political confidence. Still, Marie cannot see any viable alternative; Social Science must focus on the entire complexity in every societal issue. Marie argues:

> That's one of my major concerns... that we're creating this feeling of powerlessness. I want to do the opposite; make them understand that they can change things. It's really hard...//...but the alternative... to not give other perspectives, that's even worse. If we don't present them with different points of view... I mean... Globalisation doesn't just have one path. You have to learn to deal with all of this and make up your mind. If you don't

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*give them the full complexity and they still believe that it's all black and
white, we wouldn't have gotten anywhere. There's a risk (of making them
feel powerless), but we have to do it.*

One of the other teachers in the study, Jens, has similar experiences. Sometimes,
working with second-order concepts almost puts a halt to the students' will to engage
politically. The passion for political issues fades away and every issue becomes
flattened. On the other hand, Jens argues that ideological passion stands in the way of
learning about society:

*Everything tends to be flattened in Social Science. You might have a student
who's involved in one of the youth leagues. If you can't see other
perspectives than the ones taken in a certain ideology that will halter your
learning in Social Science and make it difficult to understand the very
society you live in. That's the way it is, even if they are very engaged in
ideological issues within the party. In that way Social Science is sort of
lame. You want it to be more passionate sometimes. You give them exams
sometimes with questions like "take a stand in this particular question" but
the answers are always "on the one hand…on the other hand"…//…they're
cue-seekers in that sense. Sometimes I just want to discard all these
perspectives.*

Returning to the students, they also considered themselves naïve upon arrival in
upper secondary school, believing that they could change the world. Daniel, one of the
students, still believes that to be naïve is something good. For Daniel, political passion
is an important agent to make room for political change. However, he meets
opposition from his classmate Anna:

*Daniel: I believe it's good being naïve. That you're thinking, "I can change
the world". It's a little naïve to say that, but in the same time it's something
good.*

Interviewer: What's good about it?

*Daniel: If you think you could change the world, perhaps you can change
your neighbourhood. If you don't believe, you can't change anything. I think
you need to aim like really high to change anything… If people believe in
changing the world then the world could be changed. No one does that
anymore: believe they can…*

Anna: I don't agree. If Obama can't change the world, how can we?

> *Daniel: That's because he thinks he can't. He's like the rest of us: saying
> that the world is like too complicated and that's why we like, have to fight
> wars.*

The students all agree that many students in their age were quite politically
engaged, e.g. participating in political demonstrations and manifestations in the
beginning of upper secondary school. However, that faded away during the first and
second year. Emma, one of the students, takes her own experiences to give a picture
on how that happened for her:

> *Emma: I just remember that in the first year, and maybe in the second year, I
> went out to (participate in) political manifestations. We went out for these
> "light manifestations" in the middle of the winter and it was freezing cold.
> Still I did it! I wanted to fight for something, try to change things. Now, it's
> like… It's just something I don't do. I still care. Like the thing they planned
> last month (student march)… I stayed home to catch up with my homework.
> My engagement has gone down, really.*

> *Interviewer: Why's that? What made you engage before?*

> *Emma: It's a good question. I don't know.*

Complexity and the Ugly Game of Politics

One of the teachers, Lena, emphasises that teaching about globalisation tends to
focus on major problems, those problems that are really hard to tend to in world
politics. One such example is the conflict in Israel-Palestine. For Lena it is important
to try to highlight the positive examples in world politics, even though they are
sometimes hard to find:

> *Sometimes when we watch documentaries and films I feel that it becomes
> very dark and heavy. What we talk about are always problems. Sometimes I
> try to find the positive examples, but they're hard to come by. It easily turns
> into political comedy about the issues. We have invited people to talk about
> the success stories, like women's rights. It's important to give them positive
> examples. I don't know… You should probably talk to the students…//…
> Still, you can't sweep things under the carpet. You need to try to understand
> the issue, but at the same time not give up on the idea that something can be
> done.*

The students also talk about the complexity of issues as a reason for losing
engagement and political confidence. Emma's inability to answer why she lost the will
to engage started a discussion amongst the students on what lies behind that lost
engagement. They point to the lack of time and that many students tend to focus on

their studies in their final year, and that other activities come first, like practicing
sports or being in a band. Anna, the most verbal student, points to classes in Social
Science and especially to issues of globalisation. She exemplifies with the "aid trap"
that states that third-world countries are unable to develop on their own due to heavy
reliance of aid from the west. Even though the students feel they want to engage in
such issues, it feels futile for them:

> *Anna: It makes you blue sometimes. Like, "the aid trap". Nothing matters.
> Some things we do are quite positive, but others are negative. Like when we
> studied development issues in Africa. The teachers wanted us to argue – in a
> paper – for possibilities for the countries. It was really hard when all you've
> found is, like, the terrible past as colonies and the health situation.
> Especially with AIDS and stuff.*

> *Emma: I feel… Even if you… don't consider those horror stories, I think you
> can do something, but still. You feel quite small and that it's all really
> complicated.*

> *Anna: It doesn't help to walk out in the streets to protest. No one cares,
> nothing happens. It's not school's fault that you feel like this – I guess it's
> just the way it is.*

Anna, an expert in seeing the negative side, gets some opposition from the other
students, but holds on to her feeling that there is no point in being engaged. Even
though she agrees that a bit of naïveté is good she elaborates her argument and says
that there is no point in trying to change politics since it is all based on national
interests and agendas. She gets some support from Peter who thinks that the process of
becoming knowledgeable is overwhelming and that it is hard to stay engaged when
you learn about the issues:

> *Anna: I agree (that it is good to be naïve), but still. All the politicians just
> talk about this and that… I'm not saying that they're in it for the money,
> but… My friend always says: "If politicians really wanted to stop famine or
> bring down infant mortality rates then it would have happened a long time
> ago". There is some truth in that…//…they haven't put money into issues
> that are really crucial. The UN works with their millennium goals, but it's
> too slow. It needs to be speedier. Sure, it's all complicated but if people
> really wanted to change things… People care about their new shoes
> instead…//…and the climate issue is all based on national thinking. If
> everyone just ignored that things could be done. But they just think about
> their own money and their own country: "No, we can't increase the price on
> petrol because then no one will vote for me". That's the way American
> politicians think.*

> *Peter: It (losing the will to engage) probably happened here in school. When
> you first arrived, you were like "I'm going to change the world". A lot of us
> had hopes and energy. After some time you learn about the problems. It's
> not that it can't be done, but you get a lot of it (knowledge) at once. It's
> overwhelming. Sometimes it's hard to see hope these days. I guess that
> happened in school…*

Prepared for Engagement

There is a pause in the group after Anna and Peter's statements. They seem to think
about what they have said. Peter finishes his thoughts on hope disappearing:

> *Peter: …then when you digest what you've learnt… hope returns.*

> *Anna: Still, people are so selfish. It's so sad.*

> *Peter: But take the role-play on climate change that we did. You really learn
> to understand why it's so hard to reach an agreement. Why the US or China
> act the way they do.*

Peter argues that you need to understand the complexity and the different
perspectives that countries have on the issues. He remembers the role-play on climate
negotiation and his argument makes the others think in a different way. They turn
towards the possibilities that Social Science education has on their future as political
beings. I ask them if they feel that it is a problem that teaching makes them feel
hopeless. Even Anna turns her own argument around stating that she would rather be
knowledgeable and not engaged than naïve and engaged. Peter continues by saying
that knowledge is really the key to be able to engage for real:

> *Anna: No, it's the way it should be. We're supposed to understand that it's
> not that easy, you know – "Abracadabra, problem solved". I'd rather be the
> pessimist… No, not the pessimist… I don't want to be naïve not getting why
> things are the way they are… It's better than being naïve not understanding
> anything. Just because I sound really negative doesn't mean that I don't
> believe in changing things.*

> *Daniel: Exactly! You can either say that "Well Obama can't change things"
> but you can also say "Gandhi could". So why can't we? …//… As soon as
> you start thinking, "It's too late"… that's like the thing you learned in the
> climate role-play… I mean, that's like insanely depressing. It's probably
> true with all the carbon monoxide in the air, but still… As soon as you think,
> "It's too late", then there's no point in being engaged anymore. But if you
> think it's not too late, then there are thousands of reasons to do something…*

The students now come to discuss the issue from another perspective, that it is about growing up and seeing the world more realistically. They all point to Social Science education as one of the reasons for changing their way of thinking. The difference is that they now consider it something positive. The new perspectives and the realisation that the world is complex and quite hard to change make them look for other arenas where they can make a difference. Daniel starts by explaining what he is critical against in the democratic world order:

> *Daniel: I guess you become critical against the idea of how democracy works these days. But you're not critical against the idea of democracy. I mean… Most companies have a bigger economy than countries do. That makes you think, like: "They're the ones with real power". Then you question that we're living in a democracy, but you´re not questioning democracy. It's the system. That's what you're questioning.*

> *Anna: When I was young I wanted to become a politician. I thought it seemed fun, but nowadays… Now I know that they have to lie to people and say things like "We can fix this", even though they know (that they can't). If you watch political debates they like blaming the other (political) side: "It's their fault"…//… I think that if you really want to change things you need to debate on your own and be part of other free political organisations. Then you don't have to lie.*

> *All: (agree)*

> *Emma: I think that if you lose your engagement and your interest to… (engage). That you start as rather naïve and then you become hopeless, saying: "It's too complex", but then you realise that you <u>can</u> be engaged, but in another way than you first thought.*

Daniel is not critical against democracy as an idea, but on how it functions in society. All of the students have plenty so say on the democratic deficit that they see in society and they do not believe that formal politics is the best way to engage in politics. There are other options but these students have not decided what these are. But they know that the options are there.

Discussion

If we base our interpretation of Social Science on social-science second-order concepts, I believe we can begin to understand what teachers are trying to achieve in their classrooms. They want the students to start thinking like social scientists, i.e. to interpret the political, economic and social issues in contemporary society using tools like evidence, perspective-taking and causality. These will be used to develop the students towards critical citizenship where they can understand that there are different

answers to political questions and that Social Science is not just about having
opinions; in fact, it is about analysing and interpreting complex issues. There is also
an underlying goal for the teachers to make the students use these skills, not just for
critical thinking, but also for political involvement. The problem that arises is that the
students, while learning to explore issues, learn to understand the complexity of
political life and how hard it can be to solve the problems that societies face. It is
especially evident in globalisation issues where international constraints force states to
negotiate and thus compromise. Exercises like role-play revolving around climate
issues or writing papers on poor countries' situations and the bypassing of those states
by the economic superpowers tend to give students a view of globalisation
characterized by realism, a Machiavellian world. Here, we are facing a didactic
challenge for teachers to navigate between giving a fair view of the world while not
creating a sense that there is no point in trying to do something.

Should teachers worry about this challenge, and is it possible to overcome? Both
teachers and students in this study suggest that there may be a positive side in being a
little naïve in terms of engagement, and that it is easier to have opinions when you do
not have to consider all the perspectives and complexities of the issue. Being naïve
means that there might be a chance that you really engage in political issues. On the
other hand, both the students and teachers emphasise that there is something important
to learn in dealing with issues of globalisation through second-order concepts. The
teachers think that this is their task and that it is not possible to "sweep the issues
under the carpet"; they think that the issues must be taken seriously in their teaching.
When the students discuss this they conclude that taking on the issues seriously seems
to be the only option. Anna expresses that she would rather be a realist who
understands the problems than be naïve and ignorant. I believe teachers can learn from
this; if we do not address the issues and take them seriously it is unfair. Not taking on
the global issues with all their complexities and controversies is dishonest to the
students and can make them discouraged and confused once they leave school. That
would be a disservice to them, both as students and as citizens. If teaching should
revolve only around facts and a distorted picture of globalisation, the students would
become deeply confused when they face globalisation as controversial in the political
debate (cf. Simonneau & Legardez 2010).

The goal of the school system in general is to prepare students for life in, through
and after school (Olson 2008 & Lundahl 2011). In Social Science, an important goal is
to prepare them for a political life, for the students to grow politically. As educators a
reasonable strategy might be, "Yes, of course it hurts when buds burst," as the
Swedish poet Karin Boye once wrote. The world is not a bed of roses and there is no
reason to picture it in such a way. If Social Science teachers do their job the students'
discouragement is not the end of the world. It can be used in class to highlight the
problems and talk about them; teachers can simply allow the students to play out their
frustration and discuss strategies for how it might be possible to navigate in the sea of
politics. After all, core concepts in Social Science are agency and structure.

However, the educational goal of Social Science is not primarily to graduate
students as activists or prospective members of youth organizations, there are other

platforms for that. Rather, I would argue that we should prepare them for participation by developing their skills so that they can think critically, analyse carefully and test their arguments with evidence. The aim could be understood as teaching students for a stand-by mode, where they are empowered with knowledge and skills to take on the world. The main effort of schools should be to encourage the disengaged and disillusioned students to become interested stand-by citizens. One important skill that students need to develop is to take different perspectives on our society, thus enabling students to see the complexity that societies have to handle. This opens up possibilities for discussions that take on both critical aspects and legitimising issues. Students need to analyse this complexity and discuss if perhaps it is crucial for societies to gather around some common principles and institutions, many of them fallible. Also, teaching needs to address issues of critical thinking and the fact that not all critical thinking is based on scientific thinking. Many "critical thinkers" in history have based their arguments on prejudices and emotions, without evidence to support their inferences. A disciplinary approach gives teachers tools to take on those kinds of contemporary narratives as well. In the end, it is in the hands of the teachers to decide on the choices that have to be made, but I believe that the current Swedish curriculum has some good points in its focus on disciplinary concepts and that this approach will help teachers to tackle the challenges they face in the classroom. One such challenge is to balance teaching between critical thinking and legitimising society. If teachers see this challenge and appreciate what is at stake in their teaching every day, second-order concepts might work as tools to take on that very challenge.

Social Science education is not the answer to why people become politically engaged; there are other and stronger forces at work. Studies show that Social Science education has little effect on the whole, but perhaps we have unreasonable expectations on what can be done. I would argue that these students might be considered as passive in surveys but still, when they talk about politics, they are knowledgeable and have some kind of "enlightened understanding" (Dahl 2000:96). The argument here is that I believe that political scientists should direct some attention to what is going on in Social Science classes. Even though Social Science is an interdisciplinary subject, most questions involve issues of democracy and politics. Teaching Social Science is not just about teaching the facts, or fostering students to be tolerant and learn how to cooperate. The fostering of democratic ideals is more sophisticated than that; students learn to take on the world using second-order concepts that should be very familiar to a political scientist. The multi-perspective and critical stance they hopefully bring with them from school are possibly not the qualities that are being measured in the surveys, or perhaps that very critical stance can help us understand students' answers. If students learn to master second-order concepts there is a potential that they are empowered as "good citizens" in the democratic discourse. Can we hope for more after 80 hours of Social Science in upper secondary school? Students demonstrate that they also see these dimensions, even if they express the frustration they undergo during the process. We need to have reasonable expectations what school can do in terms of political engagement.

Developing students as interested and knowledgeable stand-by-citizens is "good enough". After all, according to the old Latin aphorism, knowledge is power.

So, how did it turn out for Lisa? As she suspected, the students were quite discouraged about the game of world politics as the role-play ended as most climate meetings do: without resolutions. Reading the papers the students wrote to conclude the project she could see that they learnt a lot about globalisation and world politics – they were in stand-by mode for participation. Also, she took the opportunity to talk to the students about these discouraged feelings in the debriefing and ended the project with inviting a former student who now works as an award-winning activist in an NGO. Given the problems addressed in this article, I believe that was a good strategy and that she should be satisfied with the learning outcome of her teaching.

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