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Democratic Citizen fostering – Its Insiders and its Outsiders, A Call for Democracy to ‘leave home’

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Abstract

How to outline an education for a democratic citizenship beyond national boundaries? In times of globalization, and with intensified pressure from the European Union on its nation states to provide for a common European identity through education, this question becomes crucial for national policy making within Europe. In this text focus rests on Swedish Education policy, in order to shed light upon what is marked out for Swedish compulsory schools’ commission to foster democratic citizens at the end of the 20th century. On the basis of earlier done policy research, it is argued that the Swedish fostering agenda do tend to transcend the nation state. But, at the same time, certain groups of people tend to be included, while others are being excluded. It is argued that these including and excluding divides are based upon presupposed ethno-cultural properties.

How does one outline an education for a democratic citizenship beyond national boundaries? In times of globalization, and with intensified pressure from the European Union on its’ nation states to provide for a common European identity through education, this question becomes crucial for national policymaking within Europe. In this text Swedish Education policy will be taken as a case in point, in order to shed light on how this question is being handled in this specific national policy setting. It is argued that its citizen fostering agenda tends to be ‘contra productive’ in the sense that it is still situated in nation bound notions of democracy and education that include and exclude certain individuals and groups of people on an (ethno) cultural basis. It is further argued that these including and excluding features can be traced back to educational ideas about socialization. By touching upon what seem as a feasible leakage in the relationship between democracy and education, the aim of this text is to deepen the scope of education as an arena for fostering global citizen by questioning its politic-democratic significance.

A central task for Swedish schools, as well as for schools in other western democracies, is to foster democratic citizens. One core question in present societal and educational situation is how this task, settled by law, is handled in times of pluralism and globalization. Recent discussions about the future of education and of a global democratic citizenship have been fuelled by a worry about the ‘seemingly pervasive’ erosion of the social, political, economic and moral fabric of society, in the face of rapid economic and social change (Biesta, 2006). As concerns the Swedish context, which is taken as a case in point for the aim of this text, Swedish Education policy on citizenship seems to handle this worry in ways that may be considered as ‘contra productive’ in present times. First, I present some characterizing features of two current citizenship ideals in Swedish Education policy. Second, one feasible lack concerning the democratic salience of these ideals is highlighted and, third, I discuss this lack in terms of what might be surfaced as an unsatisfactory notion of a democratic life and of the relationship between democracy and education in relation to a globally encompassing democratic citizenry.

‘Swedification’ as a promise for Nation transcending Democracy

According to previous policy research, two citizenship ideals stand out as prevailing in current Swedish Education Policy concerning the schools’ commissioned role to bring up democratic citizens: one society centred ideal and one consumer centred ideal (Olson, 2008b). I will present these ideals in respect to the role of education that is offered by them when it comes to provide for democracy. This offer is inscribed in terms of ‘Swedification’.

Beginning with the *society centred* citizenship ideal, it can be described as an envisioned citizenship founded on an idea about democracy provided for by an adjustment of individuals and of education to a pre-defined democracy. The educational assignment related to this citizenship ideal tends to centre on democratic citizen fostering as a question of empowering children and young, as well as adults that are

subjects for education, with skills and qualities that are assumed to be democratic. This individually mantled democracy that is to be provided for through a 'proper' democratic education entails substantial goods alleged as inherent in the Swedish culture. This nation specific inherency consists of a correct conquest of the Swedish language. It also encompasses a moral cultivation that involves concepts like solidarity, respect for others, sympathy and mutual understanding (Olson, 2004, 2008b; Sigurdson, 2002; see also the Swedish national school curriculum Lpo94, 1998).

Within the society centred citizenship ideal, democratic education is conceived of as an education that is to provide for democracy by working upon the individuals' bodies and minds. This task seems to serve the higher aim to provide for the fixed aim to strengthen a collectively undertaken, symbolic "national feeling" pre-assumed to be democratic. Nevertheless, the citizen fostering agenda of Swedish Education policy also engrosses promises for an extended democracy beyond the nation state. This promise may be put as the individual's belief in that "what is good for me is good for the nation", and "what is good for the nation is good for the world". The crucial task of the democratically skilled individual thus may be to use her nationally encompassing language skills and moral traits in order to serve a wider, inter-national society by bringing on harmony and tolerance towards both fellowmen and strangers as the appropriate way to fulfil her democratic duties. What is at stake here is the conviction that cultural safety – to feel 'secure' within one's local and national context – is an important condition for one's morally flourishing, supposedly democratic, willingness to encounter not only what is known and familiar but also the strange(r) and unknown (Olson, 2008b, 2009a).

As concerns the *consumer centred* citizenship ideal, elucidated in current Swedish Education Policy, the democratic core tends to encompass less stress on the acquirement of substantial cultural goods, while certain 'attitudes' towards life and politics are given a more central role for a democratic citizenry and for education. Whereas the society centred ideal incorporates a specific set of moral values and predispositions for the individual to embody, the democratic endeavour of the consumer centred ideal entails a certain *gesture* towards life: the readiness and the possibility for the individual to choose – politically, culturally and economically. The role of democracy that is embedded in the educational offer of the consumer-centred ideal is related to an individual venture of choices. Furthermore, within this consumerist route (viz. Bauman, 2000, 2007) education for democracy seems to become a question of preparing children and youth for a life with satisfactory alternatives for them to choose among, in order to fulfil their private life objectives (Boman, 2002; Englund, 1999a, 1999b; Erikson, 2004; Olson, 2008a; Quennerstedt, 2008). But also a question of refining their sensibility towards their own needs, desires and objectives so as to prepare them for a life in a societal spirit of 'freedom-of-choice' considered as democratic.¹

What stands out as a global-oriented extension of the citizen fostering task, involved in the consumer centred ideal, is the hope that personal freedom, fated as a matter of the individual as a significant centre of democratic meaning and initiative, will function as a trajectory for a nation-transcending democracy. This hope may be put as the capability of each and every one to choose among different life alternatives that are presented within the frames of education. The envisioned collective extension of this democratic hope targets formal aspects of democracy. What is at stake is the individual's ability to mobilize collectively within and beyond the nation state for certain factual matters and their related formal voting procedures, which may include normative civic positions connected to current world state affairs (Klein, 2004; Thörn, 2002).

Hence, the altered conception of democratic activity in the consumer centred ideal in comparison with the society centred also has implications for the ways in which co-existence with other people is framed. While the society centred ideal stresses people's democratic duty and responsibility towards society as a way of encountering its 'known' and 'non-known' inhabitants with specific moral manners, the consumer centred one seems to dictate a smoother and more subtle alternative to such encounters with other people. Its freedom-to-choose conception of democracy actualizes an encounter with other people that is less impregnated with matters of whether the person in front of me is known to me or not, i.e. if she is known to 'my' understanding of democracy or not. Nevertheless, the person with whom I meet is 'made relevant' to me to the extent that she or he embraces my life style and way-of-living or not. Within the consumer centred citizenship ideal the endorsement of democracy in the meeting with other people is not founded on moral qualities, but on a certain 'life attitude'. This attitude is followed by awareness about one's rights and by a proper appreciation of choice, which are depicted as parts of a 'proper' democratic culture that may promote a democratic life within and beyond the nation state.

Excursus: 'Swedification' as delineating foundation for a Democratic citizenship beyond the nation state

Although in different modes, the two citizenship ideals in Swedish Education policy entail an educational vision of a globally encompassing democratic life that bestow 'Swedishness' a special importance for democracy and for a democratic citizenship that involves an openness for a global dimension. This means that Swedish society and Swedish schools not only constitute one proper and adequate training arena for the outcome of a desired democratic life, but *the* proper and adequate training arena for this life. This somewhat paradoxical national policy responds to the issue of educating people for democratic life that can transcend borders of the nation state is far from new or spectacular. Yet this paradox, which may be put in terms of the logic 'the more international the situation, the more national the preparation', requires further exploration.

The Swedishness that is stressed as crucial for a decent democratic citizenry and the citizen fostering that accompanies this Swedishness in Swedish Education policy is marked out by an emphasis of two different knowabilities for the individual to embrace through education: a command of certain cultural codes that are being universalized (a common language and certain moral and cultural traits) and/or a gesture of life that is directed towards current logics of the market where choosing within circles of demand and enquiry is a feasible feature. Interestingly, the latter knowability seems to be linked to Swedishness. This is so because it involves the idea that the freedom-of-choice-attitude that is to be provided for as personal freedom is embraced and integrated in the Swedish politic-cultural context.

These knowabilities frame the role of education as to assure democracy by an appropriate training of people for a life in a supposedly democratic culture, the Swedish. The desired outcome of this educational engagement may be portrayed as a person who possesses democratic knowledge, values and gestures that are rooted, embedded or staged in a nation specific setting. In sum, the democratic promise that is surfaced within the two established citizenship ideals is situated in nation-bound references and life forms; no matter whether these references centre on the achievement of substantial cultural goods of children and young, or on their enculturation into a specific 'democratic' attitude towards life and their selves. In relation to the aim of this text, this promise is also a worry since people, life attitudes and experiences are being excluded from democratic citizenship.

Worrying 'Swedification' – Democracy as 'house holding' of insiders and outsiders

A feasible worry concerning the nation-bound educational citizen fostering agenda in Sweden is that it seems to fail to be democratic on its own command. This means that it tends to block the possibility for educational practices to function as democratic citizen-preparing arenas, as this agenda seems to break down vital and necessary all-encompassing mechanisms for people to join a democratic fellowship that can break through the borders of the nation state. Seemingly, it opens up for the contrary: for deepened fractions between people that are related to imposed inquires of whether the one whom I meet is known to me – i.e. to 'my democracy' – or not. Such fractions are far from 'shared experience between people necessary for testifying to global democratic hopes' (Biesta, 2009b). One question that comes to the surface in relation to these inquires, is what implication this citizen fostering agenda may have for certain individuals and groups, that is, who is being situated as an insider - as a 'democrat' according to this agenda - and who becomes situated as an outsider, as a 'not-yet-democrat'?

Democratic house holding and Outsidedness

To be properly educated for a sustaining democratic citizenship in Sweden means to uphold a proper Swedishness. Such policy derives from the idea of a democratic 'home' (Olson, 2008b) and the idea of democratic citizenship and of democracy as something that is 'resided', that is, that consists of walls and doors. One can either be inside or outside of this residence, and one's location determines whether one is acknowledged as a properly educated democratic citizen or not. The worry is that this idea 'gate-keeps' individuals whose experiences, values and life forms are not found(ed) to be compatible with this nation oriented housing of democracy.

The ones 'at home', the insiders of this nation related democratic endeavour are people that either consider themselves or are considered by other as sufficiently familiar with Swedish ways of speaking, acting and living (democracy). While the ones not 'at home' in this educational and societal venture, its outsiders, are individuals and groups of people that consider themselves, or are considered by others, to partake in *another* democratic 'household' than the Swedish (Dahlstedt, 2005).ⁱⁱ

The dividing-line between the insiders and the outsiders of the Swedish democratic residence sheds light on an imbalance that is unbearable for democracy. What is unbearable is, more precisely, that democracy seems to be founded on a geographically and, supposedly culturally, delimited ground that tends to exclude certain people from a 'valid' voicing of democracy and of a democratic citizenship. This is, I believe, to situate democracy on a discriminatory ground. To found democracy in a quest of finding-out whether the person next to me is, or can be, known to me or not makes it hard to feed the hope for unity between people. Instead, this basis for democracy, that also nurtures hope for a globally encompassing democratic citizenry, tends to tear people apart at the very 'gates' of their encounter with each other, no matter where this encounter takes place. Moreover, a democratic conviction that is founded on ethno cultural divides puts forwards an intolerable fate for education as promoter of nation transcending democracy.

This fate may be brought into light as a distinction between 'outsiders' and 'insiders'. We might say that the policy proposal for a 'proper' Swedish democratic household, marked out in educational practice by people's (ethno) cultural conditions and familiarity with 'Swedishness' function as a conditioned framework for a civic relationship with a 'democratic territory'. This fate can be further investigated in terms of two exclusive missions related to this double constitution of an inside and an outside.

As touched upon earlier, the insider's democratic mission aims to open up for democratic co-existence with people, not the least with strangers that in some significant sense are remote to the nation state, by asking: "who is knocking on *my* (democratic) door?" How, then may the democratic mission of the outsider be sketched? The democratic 'task' for the outsider may be contoured as to uphold an established, symbolical, predefined democracy by a repetitious asking whether 'it's okay to come in now'? Through a constant refinement of knowabilities and familiarities with a supposedly Swedish democratic culture and its' life forms the question from the outside echoes: 'may I come in (to your democracy)?'

What is at stake, I argue, is that the democratic conviction not only needs its insiders' missionary pursuit in order to exist, but also its outsiders'. Indeed, the mantra of the insider's democratic mission seems important in order to maintain culturally embedded democratic rites de passage. However, the people on the outside of the Swedish democratic household uphold a similar function through their mantra. Hence, ethno cultural and other kinds of 'not-yet-ness' is as important for the educational venture of fostering democratic citizens in Sweden as are the properly educated democratic citizenry. Nevertheless, the testimonies of the individuals and groups that are situated at the outside of this democratic household bring to surface the breakdown of 'swedification' as an educational and democratic conviction.

In sum, the envisioning of a globally oriented democratic citizenship founded on Swedishness proves unsatisfactory when it comes to its consequences for people. Not only is this the case in relation to its' outsiders, i.e. to people that are not considered to be 'at home' in the Swedish life form and context, but also for its insiders, the ones 'at home' in this context. The worry is about the very foundation of democracy that tends to make it hard for people to live in democratic co-existence with each other further than the nation state. Insofar, the proposal for a nation transcending, democratic co-existence between people that is surfaced in contemporary Swedish Education policymaking on citizenship is contra productive.

The imbalance of the democratic fates of the insiders and the outsiders that is surfaced through previously done research on Swedish Education policy illuminates an absurd state of the matter: it creates a closure for a way of living that entails the 'fact' that the person in front of me is beyond my comprehension. Such a democratic belief is a hazard that we cannot afford in present times. Moreover, to delimit people on ethno cultural basis is unacceptable in times of pluralism and globalization. We need a democratic belief and a citizen fostering agenda that can resist current discomfited forces of nation-boundedness that nourish distance between people on ethno cultural or any other categorical basis that seems to bring on calls for socialization 'out from' democratic 'not-yet-ness'. What we need, I think, are altered ways of thinking about democracy and democratic life in relation to education.

Education for Democracy as something else than Socialization?

How, then can we approach the urging question of educating democratic citizens in a pluralistic world? Far from presenting any solution to this question I will reconsider some aspects of the relationship

between democracy and education that may be valuable to review. What is required, I suggest, is an educational policy on citizenship and a citizen fostering practice that *rejects* socialization as educational paradigm and guarantee for democracy. Following Biesta's (2009a, 2009b) Arendtian path it is the very idea of socialization that has to be reconsidered, in order to come to terms with this urging question.

This suggestion comes from a need to liberate education from any standard view of integration of ethno cultural 'others', as well as children and young, as not-yets in present historical, cultural and educational situation.ⁱⁱⁱ Such liberation might serve a specific and important aim: to support *change* of this situation and of societal conditions present in current conceptualizations of democracy and of democratic life. This liberation may serve as a way to transcend social, geographical and psychological boundaries that seem so hard to overcome through education (Bernstein et al., 1983). What is at stake is not to take away responsibility of schools and teachers to function as 'guides' for ethno cultural others and for children and young into the common, existing world. The main urge for rejecting socialization as dominating educational idea for democracy is rather to make a case for a democracy still to come, by supporting each and every one's 'coming into the world' (Peters and Biesta, 2009).^{iv}

To support outsiders' comings into a pre-established democratic society like the Swedish is to shore up the opportunity for this society, as well as for other societies, to anew itself and its ways of living and acting democracy through education. What can it mean then to educate for a democracy to come, that is to take newcomers' becomings into account? This question does not lend itself easily to levels of practical implementation, but may serve as a corrective to any democratic 'certainty' within the realm of education. It may also invite us to consider educating for democracy as a serving, the teacher's serving of the newcomers' 'voicing' (Olson, 2009a) of their own words and measure makings concerning democracy. This voicing requires not to treat them as democratic not-yets, whose task is to refine their manners and to reconcile into a reified 'inside' of democracy that consists of specific skills and values and attitudes, but an openness and sensitivity to the ways in which these people possess potential for creating something new and different from the known in terms of democracy. Such voicing is not to confuse with the common educational assumption that newcomers are to train for a democratic life and culture by engaging in democratic processes and practices that are to generate a democratic person (Biesta, 2009a, 2009b). Such, (often moral) education seems to point back to the idea of democracy as Swedishness, as it embraces a particular set of moral qualities and dispositions.

Instead, the newcomers' voicing, which may be considered as a way of learning from and through democracy, instead of learning for and about democracy (Olson, 2009c), is to be seen as part of an ongoing, friction filled route without guarantees of outcome measurable in any educational quality test. This voicing is by no means 'freed' from cultural, political or economical affairs, but rather part of these affairs, as they are part of the public space in which education is involved (ibid). Furthermore, rejection of socialization as hegemonic idea in educating for democracy is not to consider ethno cultural difference and children and young as superior states or beings in relation to renewals of democracy. Instead, they should be considered as a valuable offer in the efforts of breaking up with the 'tyranny of the majority' (Biesta, 2009a) and with preconditioned nation orientation concerning democracy and democratic life.

Far from presenting a proposal of how to carry this offer into effect or action in educational practices, I want to claim that this offer grants us the opportunity to *destabilize* current conceptualizations of democracy and of democratic citizenship. To destabilize democracy might be seen as a way to fertilize the hope for a redirecting of the relationship between education and democracy in a way that can 'open up' democracy once more for ethno cultural others and for children and young. The destabilizing of democracy, related to the rejection of socialization as educational paradigm and guarantee for democracy, carries the promise for democratic existence *beyond* ethno cultural fractions, something that lures in the backyard of many nation-bound educational systems in Western democracies.

In sum, rethinking education for democracy as a rejection of socialization may be seen as a generous offer to education and educational policy making: an offer that suggests a deepening of the prospect of the *potential* of education as a public space, where the searching for renewal of democracy is at the core of these practices; and, where this searching is considered as an ongoing activity that is intimately connected with a certain task of society (most often manifested by teachers' educational practices). Hence, the search to provide for newcomers' becomings into known and pre-established democracies is, I think, partly found to be in the hands of ethno cultural others and children and young, whose

comings are significant for democracy still and always to come.

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ⁱ This democratic educational task is thought to be supplied for through an education that stress 'factual' knowledge, such as empowering the individual with knowledge about formal democratic structures and systems, and of human and customers' rights (Olson, 2008b). It is also thought to be supplied for through a general familiarity with a 'Swedish' way of living where freedom of choice is given a central role in current conceptualizations of democracy on different levels in Swedish education system (Erikson, 2004; Hwang, 2002).

ⁱⁱ This dilemma of the 'housing' of democracy in Swedish education policy and practice is recognized and touched upon as an educational problem in a central Swedish official report on Democracy (Prime Minister's office, 2000).

ⁱⁱⁱ There are indeed several differences between ethno cultural others and children and young in relation to issues about democracy and education. Nevertheless, they share one thing that makes them compatible to each other in relation to this text: they embody the outsider's or newcomers' position in Swedish Education policy on democratic citizenship.

^{iv} A rejection of socialization demands a rethinking of psychological perspectives of education for democracy, such as socially and psychologically established categories and polarizations like immigrant - emigrant, child - adult and so forth. Such developmentalistic concepts have to be rethought in relation to education as, according to Biesta (2009a), they tend to make it hard for schools and teachers to think differently about school and the people that are subjects for education.