

is a slow process. Sweden is no exception in that regard and there is now another round of discussions about 'pupil democracy'. It is stipulated by Swedish law that pupils should be able to influence their own education in accordance with their age and maturity. The national curriculum encourages students to take personal responsibility for their studies and working environment, to exert progressively more influence on their education and the activities of the school, to learn about the principles of democracy and to take part in democratic co-operation. Teachers are encouraged to contribute to a democratic atmosphere and to welcome pupil participation.

This policy has been developed on the basis of three key arguments. First, that participation is a human right, a point which was further emphasised in the Convention. Second, that it is an important task for the school to make students understand and respect democratic values. It is all the more important that these values are prominent in school. The third argument is about pedagogic effectiveness, that participation is a condition for an interactive learning process.

Certain structures have been developed to give a framework for democratic procedures in the schools. Each class is recommended to have 'class council' meetings run by the pupils themselves and each school to have a 'school council'. The students are also encouraged to appoint 'environmental representatives' among themselves to monitor the general working conditions in the school.

Evaluations of these steps have not indicated a huge success. In general, pupils still feel they have little influence in school. They consider themselves badly informed about curricula and education targets and that consequently they can hardly have a meaningful say. However, four pupils out of ten think they actually can influence work during lessons. The formal structures have had problems. They have been accused both of 'tokenism' – with the pupils having no genuine influence – and the precise opposite – with elected pupils

having been given responsibilities which are too heavy. The attitudes of teachers have not always been constructive.

A major conclusion has been that the democratic spirit must develop during ordinary work in the classroom itself. Though the formal structures can be supportive, it seems clear that informal dialogue in the classroom is the starting point. Regular evaluations and exchanges about previous lessons are important in order to allow students to be involved in the planning of their learning.

There are interesting examples of schools where the teachers have made efforts to open a genuine discussion on the question of what knowledge the pupils wanted to obtain, and thereafter, to allow lessons to be directed according to that response. The experience is that such attempts can break a vicious circle of boredom and hostility.

The emphasis in Sweden on the continuous classroom dialogue, rather than on the formal structures also seems to be the result of a changing concept of democracy. There is now a stronger emphasis on 'direct' participation when possible, rather than on 'indirect' representation. Pupils want to have a direct influence on their own learning situation, here and now. This makes teachers even more important for the functioning of school democracy and, indeed, the experience is that their role is crucial.

However, there is also a more political and formal aspect of pupil participation. This is how the chairperson of the Pupil's Organisation in Sweden defined his vision of the democratic school, distinguishing between power, participation and influence:

A democratic school gives the pupil power over his or her own learning process. It allows pupils to participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of their education. It gives pupils an influence on larger issues of education policy.