

Cecilia Arensmeier

## Different Expectations in Civic Education: A Comparison of Upper-Secondary School Textbooks in Sweden

- The article examines social studies textbooks for different tracks in upper-secondary school in Sweden.
- Limited attention is devoted to democratic values and civic engagement, apart from voting.
- Academic-track textbooks are often more challenging in terms of conceptual understanding and analytical training.

**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to examine civic education in Sweden with regard to equality, by comparing curricula and textbooks for social studies in different tracks in upper-secondary school.

**Method:** The study is based on qualitative text analysis, with quantitative features. The analysis maps themes covered, the extent and depth of thematic coverage, and amount of emphasis on conceptual understanding and analytical training.

**Findings:** The results point to some similarities between the tracks; limited attention is given to democratic values and civic engagement, apart from voting. Clear differences are found in amount of information and complexity. The most basic textbooks target the vocational track, while (some of) the textbooks for the academic track have an elaborated focus on complex conceptual understanding and analytical training.

**Practical implications:** The findings indicate different expectations in civic education. Vocational students receive more limited opportunities to develop civic abilities, which might negatively affect the exercise of citizenship and increase political inequality.

### Keywords:

Civic education, political equality, social studies, textbooks, conceptual understanding

### 1 Introduction

The democratic ideal rests on a belief in everyone's intrinsic equality and ability to make informed decisions (Dahl, 1989). The second claim can be seen as the Achilles heel of democracy. Theorists from Plato to Schumpeter (Schumpeter, 2000 [1943]) have recurrently warned of the risks of putting power in the hands of the unenlightened, and similar worries are being raised after the electoral success of populist parties in Europe and the USA. Education has thus always been a key issue for democracy.

Most democracies have tasked their schools with providing some kind of civic education (Côté, Sundström, & Sannerstedt, 2013; Sundström & Fernández, 2013), though the forms differ. Some countries have a whole-school approach, making civic education the responsibility of all teachers and subjects. Others assign the responsibility to subjects like history and social studies. Another solution is to give specific courses in civics, or to work with these issues as extra-curricular activities (Schulz et al. 2017; Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito 2010; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). There is also variety at the level of individual schools. In some contexts, elements of civic education are present from the start, while others primarily introduce it at the secondary level.

*Cecilia Arensmeier*, PhD in political science, is an instructor and researcher at Örebro University, Sweden. Her research mainly concerns civic education and education policy.

*Department of Humanities, Education and Social sciences, Örebro University, 701 82 Örebro, Sweden*

*Email: [cecilia.arensmeyer@oru.se](mailto:cecilia.arensmeyer@oru.se)*

What civic education means is not self-evident either. One conceptualization differentiates between civic value-orientations, knowledge and abilities (Arensmeier, 2015). Schools can be assigned to work with all three dimensions, or emphasis can be put on one or the other. The most contested aspect generally concerns value-orientations and the role of the state (Sundström & Fernández, 2013). This aspect is not examined in this article, however. Instead I focus on civic knowledge and abilities.

The kind of civic education students are offered might influence their capacity to exercise their citizenship. More developed education and teaching in this respect can pave the way for greater competence and activity, and vice versa. This could be an enhancing factor in the general pattern found in many studies between level of education and political participation (Campbell, 2009; Persson, 2013; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 1999; Verba & Nie, 1972).

The aim of this article is to examine civic education in Sweden with regard to equality, by comparing social studies curricula and textbooks for different tracks in upper-secondary school. Three research questions (RQ) are posed:

1. What similarities and differences in content, extent and depth exist in social studies curricula and textbooks for different educational tracks?
2. What similarities and differences regarding conceptual understanding and analytical training are visible?
3. What do the differences imply in terms of civic expectations, and what consequences can this have for political equality and the exercise of citizenship?

The backbone of the article is the textbook analysis, which compares five textbooks for each track. The content is categorized by themes, number of pages devoted to topics, and level of information (RQ1). Level of attention given to conceptual understanding and analytical training is also determined (RQ2). More specific methodological considerations are presented and discussed below.

Political equality is understood as equal opportunities to act as a citizen, a goal that, when “taken in its fullest sense ... is extraordinarily demanding” (Dahl, 1989, p. 115). All existing democracies obviously fall short of this ideal, but it is important to stress that an emphasis on *opportunity* requires more than equal political rights. The analyses of curricula and textbooks will provide a basis for discussing political equality in terms of civic expectations regarding different student groups (RQ3). Informative and complex text coverage together with a focus on conceptual understanding and analytical training will be understood as implying high expectations about students’ present and future civic capacity, while basic coverage and little attention to concepts and analytical skills will be interpreted as indicating limited expectations.

## 2 Conceptualizations of civic education outcomes

Civic education has rather wide boundaries, and “no internationally adaptable education-theoretically founded and empirically proven proficiency model for civic and citizenship education is available” (Zurstrassen, 2011, p. 7). This paper examines civic education in terms of content knowledge and cognitive ability. Previous conceptualizations of these dimensions are presented in this chapter, before being translated into an analytical framework in section 4.3.

### 2.1 Content knowledge

One way to pinpoint civic knowledge content is to differentiate between *polity*, *policy* and *politics*. In this conceptualization, *polity* refers to constitutional and institutional regulations, *policy* to political ideas and content areas, and *politics* to political processes and actions (Wall, 2011).

Another conceptualization is found in the largest survey in the field of civic education, the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study, (ICCS). This theoretical framework (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Losito & Agrusti, 2015) has four content domains: *Civic society and systems* concerns formal and informal societal organization, with the key dimensions citizens, state institutions and civil institutions (schools, media, corporations, religious institutions, various groups, organizations); *Civic principles* concern ethical foundations like equity, freedom, sense of community and rule of law; *Civic participation* emphasizes people’s actions to exert influence at different levels of community – their decision-making, engagement and participation; *Civic identities* gives attention to people’s roles in society and how they perceive them (self-image, connectedness).

A related framework is used in a comparative textbook study in an EU-funded research programme (Constructing Active Citizenship with European Youth, Catch EyeU, [www.catcheyou.eu](http://www.catcheyou.eu)). Merging some aspects, four main content themes can be derived from this framework: *Political institutions*, with emphasis on the EU (including historical perspectives); *Active citizenship*, with special attention to youth participation; *Sense of belonging* to different political levels, and relating to other people (intercultural awareness); and *Political issues* of particular interest to youth (e.g. bullying, unemployment, drugs).

Based on these conceptualizations an analytical framework is elaborated, focusing on *civic ideals* and *institutions, involvement* and *political content issues*. These labels will be further specified in the analytical framework section.

### 2.2 Cognitive abilities

Another aspect of civic education concerns cognition. ICCS differentiates between *knowing*, i.e. being able to recall, define, describe or exemplify, and *reasoning and applying*, which covers abilities like interpreting, relating, integrating and evaluating (Schulz et al., 2015). In an article about political science education it is argued that when *conceptual understanding* and *analysis* are brought to the fore, “civic education is nothing more than understanding” (Mauro, 2008). A study of students’ difficulties with ICCS-items (Arensmeier, 2015) also gives special attention to substantive and more complex conceptual understanding, and to the analytical ability needed to identify issues of a principle nature.

Conceptual change in social science learning has been described as acquiring “new ways of thinking and understanding”, and it is shown that teaching strategies like simulations and group activities may contribute to more sophisticated conceptual perceptions (Ramirez & Ramirez, 2017). Obtaining conceptual understanding also requires, however, an introduction to abstract and scientifically oriented language, typically found in written texts (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013). Further studies indicate that both text-processing activities (McCulley & Osman, 2015) and explicit teaching of concepts and problem-solving (Twyman, McCleery, & Tindal, 2006) can enhance learning. Training also familiarizes students with argumentation, identifying and reasoning about values (e.g. Marttunen, Laurinen, Litosseliti, & Lund, 2005), and strengthens their ability to see things from different perspectives and to relate events to each other (e.g. Twyman et al., 2006). Civic education has further been argued to be a suitable place for practising persuasive and argumentative writing, where articulation of ideas, analytical skills, use of concepts, structure and systemization, are vital aspects (Brett, 2014).

To sum up, two main cognitive dimensions in attaining new ways of thinking in civic education are identified: the interrelated aspects *conceptual understanding* and *analytical ability*. The extent to which this is provided by the textbooks will be examined.

### 3 Civic education in the Swedish context

Sweden is an interesting case for studying civic education and equality. After decades of progressive educational policy with a strong emphasis on democracy and education as equalizing tools, the most recent reforms have caused increased differentiation. Maintaining equivalence, not least in the field of civic education, remains a prominent ambition, however.

#### 3.1 A whole-school approach to civic education – with special responsibility for social studies

The Swedish schools have been assigned a democratic role since the breakthrough of democracy a century ago. The emphasis varies over time (Englund, 1986; Lundahl & Olson, 2013), but a whole-school approach to civic education has generally been applied. With some adaptation to age groups, the wordings in national curricula are similar from preschool to upper-secondary school. Civic education, or “the democratic mission” as it is often called in Swedish (Hakvoort & Olsson, 2014), first of all includes fundamental values, like inculcating “respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based” and encouraging “respect for the intrinsic value of each person” (Swedish National Agency for Education/SNAE, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). A second component addresses abilities and behaviours, like understanding and empathizing with “the circumstances and values of others” (SNAE, 2011b), taking “personal responsibility” (SNAE, 2011a) and participating “actively in societal life” (SNAE, 2013).

Thirdly, civic knowledge content and cognitive abilities are more specifically accounted for in the curricula for civics (compulsory school) and social studies (upper-secondary school). Students are, for example, expected to learn about political systems, rights, ideologies, social relations, economics and globalization, and to develop skills like argumentation, inference making, and critical examination of sources. Civics and social studies are often viewed as having the primary responsibility for all three aspects of the “democratic mission”.

After nine years of compulsory school, most Swedish youth start upper-secondary school (*gymnasium*). Swedish upper-secondary school is divided into two educational tracks: academic and vocational. Each main track contains several programmes (e.g. science programme, vehicle and transport programme). The foundation subjects Swedish, English, maths, physical education, history, religion, social studies, and science studies (or specific science subjects) are included in all programmes. All subjects are divided into courses, and the number of subject courses differs between tracks and programmes. Foundation subjects in the vocational track are generally given at a basic level. Vocational students for example are required to take a 50-credit course in social studies, while the academic track includes at least 100 credits (the social science programme requires up to 200 more credits). Similarly, a 100-credit English course is mandatory for all students, while the academic track also includes advanced English courses of 100 or 200 credits.<sup>1</sup>

Taken together, the signals are mixed. The whole-school approach to civic education and social studies as a foundation subject in upper-secondary school, highlight the goal of equality and the significance of the democratic mission. The more limited mandatory course for vocational students, on the other hand, indicates more limited civic demands and expectations.

#### 3.2 Reducing, maintaining and increasing difference

Over time, the Swedish educational system has been reformed, with equality as an overarching goal (Ball & Larsson, 1989; Imsen, Blossing, & Moos, 2017). A unified nine-year compulsory school system was implemented in the 1960s, and the various types of secondary education were successively incorporated into the gymnasium system. In 1994, the curriculum for vocational education was extended to improve students’ eligibility for admittance to higher education. Social studies was also made mandatory, in order to reduce the civic gap. The reform did not, however, turn out successfully in this respect; differences between the tracks in levels of political participation, political knowledge and political attentiveness prevailed, pointing to the importance of pre-adult socialization (Persson & Oscarsson, 2010). Limited socializing effects of social studies have also been shown elsewhere (Broman, 2009).

In recent decades a stronger differentiation has been re-introduced in the Swedish school system. A 2011 upper-secondary curriculum reform returned to a sharper distinction between tracks (Alexandersson, 2011; Nylund, 2013). Eligibility for higher education was made optional for the vocational track, reducing mandatory course requirements. A clear example is social studies. A 50-credit course is now mandatory for vocational students, compared to the 100-credit course that was compulsory for both tracks during 1994-2010, and which remains so on the academic track.

Democracy and equality issues played a limited role in the political debate about the 2011 reform (Adman, 2015). The new curriculum downplays democratic goals in the vocational track, placing greater emphasis on employability (Nylund, 2013). Practical skills and programme-specific vocational subjects are given priority over academic skills and subjects like languages, aesthetics and social studies (Nylund, 2010).

The increased differentiation of the school system has also been reinforced by earlier reforms, in particular the introduction of publicly funded independent schools, some of which are run for profit, and voucher-like free school choice in the 1990s. The between-school variation of grades in lower-secondary school has increased (Östh, Andersson, & Malmberg, 2013), and segregation between schools in terms of migration background and educational achievement has been reinforced (Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016).

International research further underlines that general socio-economic factors are significant for school achievement, also in the field of civic education. Students from more advantaged homes and with well-educated parents perform significantly better on standardized tests (Schulz

et al., 2010; Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). This pattern is persistent in Sweden (Skolverket, 2001, 2003, 2010a, 2010b, 2017), where educational track also seems to be an important divider (Ekman, 2007). Research further points to differences between the tracks in political efficacy (Sohl & Arensmeier, 2015) and political participation (Persson, 2012). It is important to underline that track cleavages also mirror differences in socio-economic background; study choices often preserve existing socio-economic gaps (Persson & Oscarsson, 2010).

That teaching may differ between educational contexts is also indicated in Swedish research. One study shows how students enrolled in a social science programme are treated as capable, potentially active citizens. They are exposed to nuanced and problematized pictures of democracy, and engage in analysis and discussion. Students in a so-called introductory programme (aiming to qualify for a regular – predominantly vocational – programme) are, in contrast, almost perceived as “failed citizens”. Facts about the political system and the importance of obeying the law and voting dominate the teaching (Gustafsson, 2016). Teachers can, however, also have different expectations about the citizenship potential of students within the same educational context (Carlsson, 2006).

### 3.3 Differentiation and equivalence

Thus, in the last decades there has been a development towards a more differentiated Swedish school system. The former equalizing ambitions in civic education – that in practice seemed hard to fulfil – are one area that has been toned down, for example by reducing the social studies course-load in the vocational track. Equivalence, however, is still emphasized in policy documents, and an overarching goal is the creation of knowledgeable, equally capable democratic citizens. The curriculum for upper-secondary school prescribes the following, for example:

[E]ducation in each school form should be equivalent, irrespective of where in the country it is provided. [...]

It is not in itself sufficient that education imparts knowledge of fundamental democratic values. It must also be carried out using democratic working methods and develop the students’ ability and willingness to take personal responsibility and participate actively in societal life. [...]

It is the responsibility of the school that all individual students: [...] satisfy the preconditions for taking part in democratic decision-making processes in societal and working life. [...]

The goals of the school are that all students individually: [...] can consciously determine their views based on knowledge of human rights and fundamental democratic values, as well as personal experiences. (SNAE, 2013)

This somewhat ambivalent picture of civic education in Swedish upper-secondary school provides an important foundation for the curricula and textbook analysis.

## 4 Method, material and analytical strategy

This section presents methodological considerations, the empirical material and an analytical framework for the textbook analysis.

### 4.1 Text analysis

The study uses content analysis, a research technique for making inferences from texts. I predominantly use qualitative text analysis, which is characterized by close reading of a relatively small amount of text, re-articulation into new analytical narratives, and awareness that the researcher’s social and cultural understandings influence interpretation (Krippendorff, 2004). The analysis of social studies curricula is restricted to descriptions, with emphasis on similarities and differences between the tracks. The textbooks are subject to a more elaborate analysis, with content categorized in terms of themes covered, level of information/complexity, and degree of conceptual and analytical emphasis (see section 4.3).

The approach has some quantitative features as well. Quantifications in qualitative research can reveal internal generalizability, diversity and patterns, and provide additional input for interpretations, without of course abandoning the interpretative foundations or implying preciseness in measurements (Maxwell, 2010). A simple page count is done to get an overall picture of the coverage of different themes in the textbooks, and this depends on qualitative categorization. The ordinal scale used to describe level of complexity, and of conceptual and analytical emphasis (basic, moderate, in-depth), is also qualitatively determined.

### 4.2 Selection of textbooks

The analysis includes the curricula for the mandatory courses in social studies in the vocational and academic tracks respectively, and five textbooks in social studies for each track. Even though schools today work with many teaching methods and materials, textbooks still play an important role (SNAE 2006; Ivarsson 2017). The book selection is based on purposive sampling, derived from the research questions and intended to grasp variation (Bryman, 2012).

In total, six Swedish publishers offer 34 books in social studies for upper-secondary schools. 27 are part of a book series. These series typically contain one book for the mandatory social studies course in the vocational track (1a1), one for the mandatory academic-track course (1b), and sometimes additional books for in-depth courses (2, 3). Some books are only available for one of the mandatory courses, and there are also additional books for specialized courses in international relations and international economics.<sup>2</sup>

Ten textbooks were chosen. Apart from including five vocational- and five academic-track books, the books were selected on the basis of popularity, to achieve a



spread between publishers, and whether they were part of a book series. Popularity was estimated by searching for social studies books on two of the largest online bookstores in Sweden, sorting the results by popularity or sales figures.<sup>3</sup> Five of the selected books appear on both top-ten lists, four on one of the lists, and one book is currently sold out. One of the books for the academic track covers both the mandatory social studies course (1b) and additional courses (2, 3). (See Table 1 for an overview.) Full reference details are found at the end of the article. All textbooks include exercises and assignments, and most offer some supplementary interactive online material. The analysis is restricted to the printed material, however. As evident from the table, the academic-track textbooks appear more updated. This might be another indication of a greater relative importance of social studies on the academic track.

**Table 1: Selection of books**

Vocational track books (V)	Publisher	Academic track books (A)	Publisher
V1: <b>Compass to social studies, 50</b>	Gleerups (2016)*	A1: Compass to social studies, 100	Gleerups (2016)**
V2: <b>Social studies 1a1</b>	Liber (2012)**	A2: Social studies 1b	Liber (2013)**
V3: <b>Midpoint social studies 1, 50 cr</b>	Studentlitteratur (2011)*	A3: Social studies 1: a sustainable society	Studentlitt. (2016)**
V4: <b>It matters: social studies, 50 cr</b>	Gleerups (2011)***	A4: Social studies 1b	NA förlag (2016)**
V5: <b>Social studies 1a</b>	Interskol förlag (2011)*	A5: Forum social studies 123	Sanoma (2013)**

\* On one top-ten list

\*\* On both top-ten lists

\*\*\* Sold out/out of stock

### 4.3 Analytical framework

The analytical framework was developed with reference to previous conceptualizations (section 2). Five main content dimensions and two cognitive aspects are distinguished. The textbook content is further portrayed in terms of extent (relative page count), and complexity, using a three-point assessment scale. The same scale is also used to determine the level of conceptual understanding and analytical training present in the books.

#### 4.3.1 Civic knowledge: five content themes, page count and three levels of complexity

Initially, a fourfold framework for civic content was developed, covering ideals, institutions, engagement, and political issues:

- Ideals: ideas, values and principles fundamental to democratic and free societies, criticism of the democratic ideal, essential values, outlooks and worldviews of different forms of governance, political ideologies and parties.
- Institutions: key democratic and political institutions in multi-level governance systems, including party

organizations, the judiciary and the media, international law and institutions like the EU and UN.

- Involvement: community, cultural and identity issues, citizens' political engagement in a broad sense (ranging from voting to ethical consumption and political discussion).
- Issues: vital political and civic content matters, like economics, labour market, welfare, crime, migration, international relations, security and sustainable development. Comprises facts, theoretical perspectives and ideological positions on specific topics.

As is often the case in qualitative analysis, an interplay between theory and empirical material was needed (Bryman, 2012). The coding immediately revealed the need for an additional fifth category: awareness of knowledge about society and social science research. The framework therefore also includes a fifth category:

- Insights about knowledge: informative sections on knowledge and social science research.

The boundaries between the categories are not razor sharp, but the coding has generally worked out well. It is, of course, important to mention that the thematic division does not imply a belief that civic education content can or should be divided into four or five equally extensive topic areas. The different content themes only illustrate that there are different aspects to consider. A simple page count (including text, pictures, illustrations, figures, exercises, assignments etc.) gives a quantitative measurement of the relative attention given to different themes.

The textbooks have also been evaluated in terms how informative/complex the text is. A three-point scale is used to determine the informational/complexity level of the content. This is inspired by an investigation of university textbooks in international studies (Smith, Kille, Scholl, & Grove, 2003), which in turn relies on a study of American government textbooks. The categories basic, moderate, and in-depth are used to describe coverage of different topics. Basic coverage means "limited reference to, and little information about the topic". Moderate coverage is when a topic is covered in a section of a chapter or through several references across chapters that together provide a "solid introduction" or "overview" of the subject. In-depth coverage is when the topic is "carefully and fully examined" in an entire chapter or a substantial part of a chapter (Smith et al., 2003, p. 422).

A somewhat modified version of this scale is used in the coding of the textbook content. Apart from adapting the level to what can be considered in-depth etc. for the upper-secondary school, numbers are used for the classification:

- Level 1, Basic coverage: limited information, no or sparse elements of complexity and problematizing.
- Level 2, Moderate coverage: informative overview, some elements of complexity and problematizing.
- Level 3, In-depth coverage: rather extensive information, and in particular recurrent elements of complexity and problematizing.

Since content themes are spread throughout the books, chapters are an inappropriate level of analysis. The books are treated as a whole, and each section that deals with a theme (sometimes entire chapters, sometimes parts of chapters) is given a level classification. A weighted, dominating, level is then determined for each theme and book. The total level of information is considered, which means that books that might for instance include some level 2 sections within a theme – but then exclude other aspects altogether – are characterized as level 1. See appendix for coding examples.

#### 4.3.2 Civic ability: two cognitive dimensions and three levels of attention

When it comes to civic abilities and cognition, the textbooks will be scrutinized with regard to:

- Conceptual emphasis: the way concepts are given attention; substantive conceptual knowledge (short definitions) or more complex conceptual understanding.
- Analytical training: the extent to which tasks require conceptual understanding, identification of principles, use of theories, models or different perspectives; are directed at solving social problems; or involve practising advanced argumentation.

The entire text, pictures, illustrations, figures, exercises and assignments will be examined, with a special emphasis on exercises and assignments. The level of the conceptual emphasis and analytical training will also be evaluated on the three-point scale:

- Level 1, Basic: mainly substantial definitions of concepts/no or limited analytical training.
- Level 2, Moderate: elements of complex conceptual understanding/analytical training.
- Level 3, In-depth: complex conceptual understanding/analytical training recurrent features.

#### 4.3.3 Overview of analytical framework and coding

Altogether, the analysis thus has two main focus areas, civic content knowledge (five themes) and civic abilities (two dimensions). Relative attention to content themes is measured by a page count, and level of information and complexity is determined on a three-point scale. The same scale is used to indicate the amount of emphasis given to conceptual understanding and analytical training (See Table 2 for a summary).

The practical coding was conducted using coloured Post-it notes and a digital coding sheet to register page count and level classifications. Overall comments and characteristics of each book were also included, along with pictures of some typical text pages and exercises. All coding was performed by the author, with elements of reliability checking.<sup>4</sup> The page count is rather straightforward (using whole pages as units). The classification of content requires interpretation but, as mentioned, this has generally caused little hesitation. Determining levels of complexity and emphasis on conceptual understanding and analytical training leaves the most room for interpretation. These aspects have therefore

been considered carefully, looking through each book several times to determine overall levels.

Table 2: Analytical framework

	Dimension	Classification
<b>Civic content knowledge</b>	<i>Ideals</i> : ideas, values, principles, worldviews, outlooks, ideologies etc. in democratic societies	Relative amount of attention (page coverage) Level of information and complexity 1. Basic 2. Moderate 3. In-depth
	<i>Institutions</i> : key democratic and political institutions, incl. the judiciary, media, international institutions	
	<i>Involvement</i> : community, identity, citizens' political engagement in a broad sense	
	<i>Issues</i> : vital political content matters (economics, welfare etc.); facts, theoretical perspectives, ideological positions on specific topics	
	<i>Insights about knowledge</i> : knowledge and social science research	
<b>Civic ability</b>	<i>Conceptual understanding</i> : short substantial definitions to more complex attention	Level of attention 1. Basic 2. Moderate 3. In-depth
	<i>Analytical training</i> : e.g. conceptual understanding, use of theories, identifying and reasoning about values, perspective-taking, problem-solving, argumentation	

## 5 Results

After examining the curricula for the social studies courses, I will present the analysis of the textbooks by first illustrating the civic knowledge content and then focusing on conceptual understanding and analytical training.

### 5.1 Comparison of curricula

As mentioned above, the 2011 reform included a reduction of social studies in the vocational track. In terms of credits, the course is now half as extensive as the corresponding academic-track course. As shown, however, the overarching curriculum goals for the upper-secondary school system as a whole are the same.

All subject curricula in upper-secondary school follow the same structure: the character of the subject is described, an aim is defined, and overarching objectives are formulated. The course curricula for the different subjects then specify the core content and also list general knowledge requirements for different grades.

Social studies is an interdisciplinary subject, with roots in political science, sociology, economics, and additional disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. The subject aim emphasizes things like knowledge about people's living conditions and understanding of various social and political issues. It further highlights active participation, critical and scientific ability, and a capacity to search for, assess, and process information. Five overall learning objectives are formulated for social studies (here somewhat shortened). The students are to be given opportunities to develop:

- Knowledge about democracy and human rights, including the functioning of different societies from local to global levels.
- Knowledge about how historical, ideological, political, economic, social and environmental conditions influence society.
- The ability to analyse social issues using concepts, theories, models and methods from the social sciences.
- The ability to search for, critically examine, and interpret information.
- The ability to express knowledge in various ways. (Skolverket/SNAE, nd)

Different social studies courses are subsumed within this general agenda. Vocational-track courses are the mandatory social studies 1a1 (50 credits), and the optional 1a2 (50 credits). For the academic track, social studies 1b (100 credits) is mandatory, while some programmes also include social studies 2 and 3 (100

credits each), and courses in international economics and international relations.

Course curricula for the two mandatory courses 1a1 and 1b are compared. The core content is largely identical, both in substance and wording. Additional themes and especially abilities are, however, emphasized in the 1b-course for the academic track. Even if there are also topics that are exclusive to the academic track, the comparison shows that the main divide lies in abilities. Students in the academic track are trained in critical investigation with the help of abstract concepts and theories, use of social science methods and analytical writing. For vocational students, basic oral and written presentations are sufficient, and the only analytical ability mentioned is critical assessment of information, especially in terms of credibility of sources. Table 3 provides an overview.

Table 3: Comparison of mandatory courses

COURSE CURRICULUM	CONTENT		ABILITIES	
	<i>Both courses</i>	<i>Exclusive</i>	<i>Both courses</i>	<i>Exclusive</i>
SOCIAL STUDIES 1A1, (50 CR) VOC. TRACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• democracy, political systems (incl. the EU)</li> <li>• distribution of power, citizens' opportunities to influence</li> </ul>	X		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• critical processing of information, reliability of sources</li> </ul>
SOCIAL STUDIES 1B, (100 CR) AC. TRACK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• media content, news assessment</li> <li>• human rights</li> <li>• international law in conflicts, humanitarian protection</li> <li>• the labour market</li> <li>• identity, social relationships, inclusion and exclusion</li> <li>• personal finances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• political ideologies</li> <li>• national and international economy</li> <li>• role of mass media and ICT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• oral and written presentations (e.g. debates, letters to newspapers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use of social science concepts, theories, models</li> <li>• investigation into social issues and conditions, using social science methods and criticism of sources</li> <li>• report-writing</li> </ul>

The courses social studies 2 and 3 (academic track programme with social science profile) do not add new content, but provide increased depth in some areas and further accentuate analytical ability. Course 2 emphasizes economics, historical perspectives on political development, actors and structures, analysis and methods. The last aspect is also emphasized in course 3, which devotes particular attention to globalization.

Using the terminology of the analytical framework, the course curricula for the two mandatory social studies courses direct attention to four of the content dimensions: ideals, institutions, involvement, and political issues. Some themes, however, are more clearly emphasized in the academic track. Political ideologies, economics and the role of media are given more attention. The fifth content domain, insights about knowledge, is present in the academic track as a precondition for training some abilities. The pronounced analytical mission of the academic-track course further signals more attention to complex conceptual understanding, and to developing capacities like identifying and reasoning about social values and principles, perspective-taking, and problem-solving. The course for vocational

students is, in contrast, directed towards basic factual and conceptual knowledge, and rudimentary argumentational and information-processing skills.

When it comes to civic knowledge and ability, the state can therefore be said to place different expectations on different categories of students. Those in the vocational track are not expected to be introduced to certain themes, or to be trained in analysing social and political issues. Whether actual teaching reflects course curricula is, of course, an empirical question that this article does not take on. Instead I examine a central form of teaching material, textbooks, to determine the extent to which they mirror the civic education prescribed in national policy documents.

### 5.2 Extent and depth of content

Figure 1 illustrates how much attention (page distribution) the books give to the five content themes. Again, it must be underlined that the content categories are not expected to take up equal space, and there is no obvious best distribution between them. Different social and political *issues* take up a substantial part of all books, with economics being the most extensive topic.



*Institutions* is another large theme, with a great deal of space generally being devoted to political institutions. Relatively speaking, little attention is given *ideals* and involvement. Earlier studies (Arensmeier, 2010; Bronäs, 2000) have indicated limited focus on this value dimension in Swedish civic education, and judged by the textbook content, this persists.

The *involvement* theme is dominated in most books by identity and culture. In several books (V2, V3, V5, A2, A4) involvement taking the form of civic and political engagement is restricted to suffrage and voting in the representative political system. Other books declare ambitions to devote much space to influence, and to considering young people’s everyday life, though without fully living up to this (V4, A3). Some books, however, contain a few assignments that broaden the perspective on civic

engagement and influence (e.g. V3, A4). Three books devote relatively more attention to civic engagement. A1 and V1, for example, include an interview that illustrates different ways of being political, and the most extensive book (A5) has a chapter titled “personal engagement” that covers different forms of civic involvement.

Sections or chapters concerning *insights* about knowledge are included in all but one book (V4). Some academic-track books describe research methods, with the most space being given in the most comprehensive books. These chapters are characterized by abstract descriptions quite isolated from content and practical exercises. Almost all books stress evaluating the reliability of sources. This is the only aspect of insights about knowledge in most vocational-track textbooks.

Figure 1: Content themes (number of pages within book)

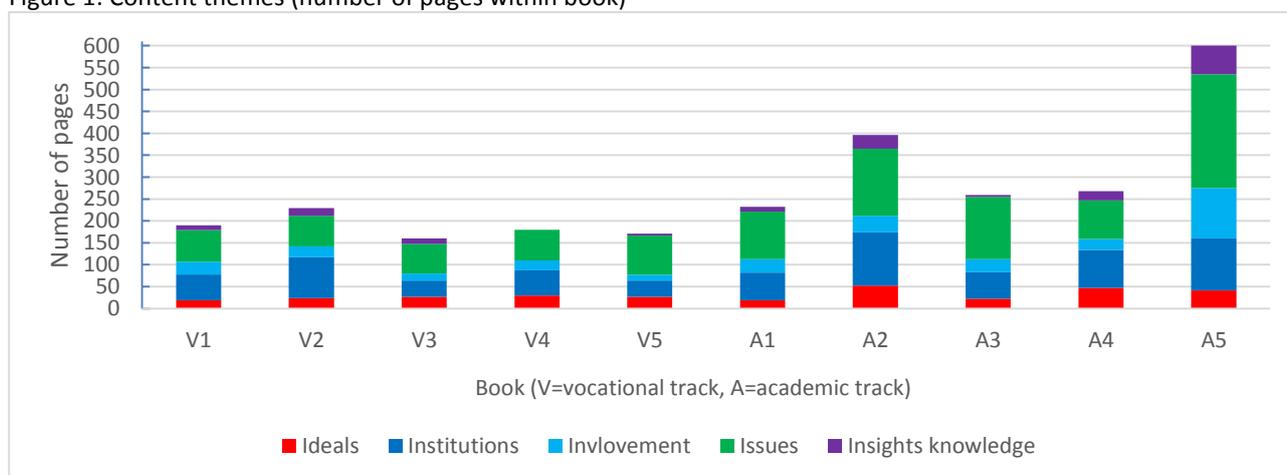


Table 4 displays relative measures of attention to content themes. This reinforces the picture of issues and institutions as dominating. Table 4 also contains assessed level of information and complexity per content theme and book. It is evident that the (generally shorter) vocational-track books are more basic. This holds in particular for books written solely for vocational-track students (V3-V5). Books from book series (V1/A1, V2/A2) resemble each other in a way that makes the vocational-track version a bit more informative and complex than other books for that track, and books for the academic

track slightly more basic than books written exclusively for the academic track.

The more extensive books for the academic track have room for more substance. However the texts only occasionally reach beyond level 2. They are partly more informative, with more facts and general descriptions, but rather few sections are characterized by additional complexity, problematizing or more advanced abstractions through concepts, theories or models.

Table 4: Relative attention given to themes (% of pages) and level of text (colour)

BOOK (NUMBER OF PAGES)	Vocational track					Academic track				
	V1 (190)	V2 (229)	V3 (160)	V4 (180)	V5 (171)	A1 (232)	A2 (396)	A3 (259)	A4 (268)	A5 (600)
Ideals	10	10*	17	16	16	8	13	8	18	7
Institutions	31	41	23	31	22	27	31	24	32	20*
Involvement	15	11	10	13	8	13	10	12	9	19
Issues	38	31*	42	40	52*	47	38*	55	33	43*
Insights knowledge	6	7	8	0	2	5	8	1	8	11

GREEN: 1. Basic level

BLUE: 2. Moderate level

(RED: 3. In-depth level)

\* partly higher level

### 5.3 Conceptual understanding and analytical training

Concepts are given attention in all books. Brief, rather shallow or abstract definitions of many concepts dominate most books. The level of attention is somewhat dependent on the general level of the text. As shown in

Table 5, the difference between the tracks is not very prominent. There is, however, a tendency for academic-track books to have a higher level.

Most books highlight key concepts, in italics or in bold type, and some combine this with short substantial

definitions in the margin. Exercises with a conceptual focus are also rather common. These typically ask for substantial definitions. This risks isolating the concepts, replacing understanding with vocabulary knowledge. The most basic level is found in books exclusively written for the vocational track (V3-V5). The generally more

informative texts in the academic-track books contributes to a more complex conceptual treatment. No book, however, is considered to be at level 3. Complex conceptual explanations occur occasionally, but are not a general feature of any book.

Table 5: Level of conceptual understanding and analytical training (colour)

BOOK	Vocational track					Academic track					
	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	
Civic ABILITY	Conceptual understanding	2	1*	1	1	1	2	1*	1*	2	2
	Analytical ability	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	3

GREEN: 1. Basic level

BLUE: 2. Moderate level

RED: 3. In-depth level \* partly higher level

Table 5 also assesses the level of analytical training. The difference between the tracks is somewhat more apparent here. All books for the vocational track are on the basic level, and two of the books on the academic track give in-depth attention to analysis. The books from book series (V/A1, V/A2), however, are generally all on the basic level.

Because their texts are rather lean, and mainly factual and descriptive in character, the most basic books provide limited possibilities for analytical training. The students are given few analytical instruments like nuances, complexity, theories, models, explicit perspectives etc., and the exercises typically either focus on facts or encourage discussion of personal opinions. Students are not offered tools to develop their opinions further. There are examples of books (V/A1, V/A2) whose content could partly pave the way for more analytical tasks, but this is only taken advantage of sporadically.

Three of the books for the academic track, on the other hand, contain more advanced analytical tasks. For instance, students are instructed to compare, sort, and adopt diverse perspectives, or to seek further information. Two books are considered to reach level 3 in this respect. Book A4 uses facts, perspectives and sometimes models from the text for analysis, or to inspire the collection of additional facts or arguments. Students are sometimes also encouraged to send their analyses to politicians. Book A5 often asks the student to make use of concepts, models, theories or conditions described in the text, or to adopt different perspectives in order to grasp issues. When students are encouraged to discuss, these books often associate this with analytical reasoning.

Tables 6 and 7 provide some illustrative examples of conceptual emphasis and analytical training at different proficiency levels.

Table 6: Examples of conceptual emphasis

CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING	EXAMPLES
<b>1. Basic level</b> Short substantial definitions (often in margins, separated from main text)	Political ideology can be likened to a collection of thoughts on how a country should be governed. (V4) NGO, Non-Governmental Organization, because it is independent from the state, non-profit and based on voluntary initiatives. (A3)
<b>2. Moderate level</b> Substantial conceptual explanations, to some extent further contextualized (in main text)	There are different kinds of governments. A majority government is formed by one or several parties that together hold more than half of the seats in parliament. A minority government is not supported by [...] A coalition government [...]. (V1/A1)
<b>3. In-depth level</b> General focus on complex conceptual understanding, concepts thoroughly embedded in extensive main text (predominantly occurs when text content also on level 3.)	Why does inflation occur? There are several reasons why prices rise. [...] This is called <i>demand inflation</i> . But inflation can also be caused by [...] This type of price increase is called <i>cost inflation</i> [...]. (Excerpt from four-page section dealing with inflation, A5)

Table 7: Examples of exercises and assignments for analytical training

BOOK	Politics	Welfare issues	Media
<b>1. Basic level</b> No/limited use of concepts, perspectives etc. from the text. Only opinions requested. (V4)	Would you rather vote for persons only, and not for political parties?	Which would you choose – more policemen, more teachers or more nurses?	How do you get news about what goes on in the world?  What are you careful not to write on Facebook?
<b>1. Basic – 2. Moderate level</b> Some use of concepts, perspectives etc. from the text. Still much emphasis on opinions. (V/A2)	Why do you think that you have to be a member of a political party to be elected? Is this good? Why/why not? (Level 1)	What do you think? Is it reasonable that the tax payers in rich municipalities contribute to helping people in poor municipalities? Why/why not? (Level 1)	Which of the theories do you think best describes opinion-making? Which of the media ideologies do you think best mirrors your opinions? (Level 2)
<b>3. In-depth level</b> Extensive use of concepts, perspectives etc. from the text. Expression of opinions associated with analysis. (A5)	Discuss advantages and disadvantages with party-based and person-based elections.  You are not satisfied with the political situation and want to start a new political party. What do you do? Find out the rules and regulations.	What is the difference between: a) general welfare policy, and b) institutional and marginal welfare policy?  What does welfare mean? Discuss different meanings of the concept, and different ways to measure welfare. What should a measurement include?	In what ways could Internet and social media be more democratic than the traditional media?  Does the media report objectively?

## 6 Concluding discussion: different expectations in civic education

This final section summarizes the empirical findings and discusses civic education and equality.

### 6.1 Expectations in curricula and textbooks

The course curricula in social studies for different upper-secondary tracks, place less ambitious civic expectations on vocational-track students, than on academic-track students. The largest differences concern training of analytical skills.

Although not clear-cut, these differences are also present in textbooks. The pattern is somewhat blurred by books from series. Vocational editions seem slightly “levelled up” in civic content, compared to books solely targeting vocational students. At the same time, conceptual understanding and analytical training appear somewhat “levelled down” in academic editions, compared to books directed solely to the academic track. The overall picture, however, is one of a higher level of both content and cognitive training in academic-track books.

Social/political *issues* and *institutions* are the content themes receiving the most attention. *Ideals* and *involvement* are given less space. Two topics vital for citizenship attract remarkably little attention: (1) fundamental democratic values (*ideals*) – where it can be asked whether the acceptance of values like equality is considered already secure; and (2) civic engagement (*involvement*) – where it is apparent that students are predominantly seen as voters. Both these aspects have been characteristic of Swedish textbooks for a long time (Bronäs 2000). Some books for both tracks, however, present a wider understanding of civic engagement, including students. The fifth content theme, *insights* about knowledge, is given no or only limited attention in vocational-track books (being restricted to assessing reliability of sources). In academic-track books, the theme appears rather abstract and isolated from practical exercise.

The *informative/complexity level* of the textual content generally signals lower expectations of reading and comprehension ability for vocational students, and stays at the basic level 1. The demands, however, are not especially high for academic-track students either. Their books are more informative, but only rarely go beyond level 2 (moderate).

Since the content is on level 1 or 2, it is not surprising that *conceptual understanding* is restricted to the same level. Short substantial definitions resembling vocabulary items dominate many books. Others are better at integrating conceptual understanding into the main text, thereby encouraging more complex understanding. Assignments can also benefit conceptual understanding, and the books with the most advanced analytical exercises sometimes incorporate complex conceptual understanding here. No book, however, reaches level 3 (in-depth) for conceptual understanding.

The largest overall difference concerns *analytical training*. All vocational textbooks are at a level 1, while some academic-track books provide rather advanced analytical training (level 3), making use of theoretical perspectives, comparisons, additional information etc. Vocational-track books and the two academic versions from series, are instead dominated by tasks where students are either to seek factual answers in the text or express their own opinions.

In summary, both curricula and textbooks can be said to express rather disparate expectations about students’ civic learning. Vocational students are not expected to do much more than learn a few new facts and words, vote, and express (pre-existing) opinions. Students in the academic track are also expected to learn these things, but are also offered analytical training, which can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of society, greater ability to structure information and arguments, and a better capacity to develop and act on nuanced, well thought-through opinions.

## 6.2 Reinforcing political inequality?

It is of course important to stress that curricula and textbooks do not determine what goes on in the classroom. Teachers are free to plan their teaching, and many different kinds of study materials exist. Empirical studies of students' views on democracy (Arensmeier, 2010) and tolerance (Arensmeier 2017) do, however, provide an additional indication of inequality in civic ability. Young people often talk about similar things, but students in the academic track are distinguished by greater confidence in discussing, larger vocabulary, more use of abstract concepts, and higher level of problematizing. That (some) teachers find it easier to engage academic-track students and that vocational students often need more support are also suggested in research (Ivarsson, 2017; cf. Gustafsson, 2016).

Reference must also be made to the socio-economic patterns in educational choice in Sweden, and the fact that upper-secondary school seems to uphold pre-existing socio-economic divides when it comes to political participation (Persson & Oscarsson, 2010). One could also ask, however, whether civic education also *reinforces* political inequality. Social studies textbooks for the academic track are overall a bit more informative and demanding in terms of conceptual understanding, and some are substantially more advanced in terms of analytical training. Many of the exercises, predominantly in the books for the vocational track, focus on students' personal opinions ("What do you think?").

An open classroom climate, debate and deliberation (Englund, 2006) are often highlighted as beneficial to civic education, and there is also empirical support for this (Andersson, 2012; Torney-Purta, 2002). It is also necessary, however, to address progression in learning. The concept of critical thinking, defined as the capacity to analyse, assess and improve lines of reasoning, can serve to illustrate this (Paul, 2005). If assignments are confined to expressing prevailing opinions, without employing tools of thought – such as identifying or using conflicting perspectives, abstract concepts, new factual circumstances etc. – then a student's thinking will not progress. New input can of course emerge in discussions among students, but to rely solely on peers or individual teachers to provide this seems like a vulnerable strategy. Empirical evidence suggests that strategically planned learning activities that challenge existing beliefs are beneficial for developing more sophisticated conceptual understanding (Ramirez & Ramirez, 2017). It is also relevant to underline the importance of written text, where more abstract language is typically found (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013).

There are thus several downsides to an overly strong emphasis on "what-do-you-think" type exercises, stripped of analytical features. Focusing on opinions might hinder rather than promote further analysis. It does not encourage students to distance themselves from their initial thoughts, to scrutinize, reconsider or develop their opinions – to think about their thinking. A continuous demand on young people to express their opinions might also be experienced as an uncalled-for exposure of

unconsidered or private thoughts. *Not* revealing your view, or saying that you do not (yet) know, must also be endorsed.

Apart from learning, an increased emphasis on analysis might also strengthen political self-efficacy. Civic education aiming for political equality must pave the way for *all* students to expand their knowledge and thinking. It is unclear why students in vocational programmes are assumed to have such limited analytical interest or capacity. While admittedly it can be challenging to teach in environments characterized by low motivation, ability or self-esteem, such (assumed) limitations can be addressed by starting at a reasonable level, rather than avoiding the matter altogether and thereby allowing some students to lose even more ground. But if the state, in its policy documents, refrains from expecting vocational students to develop certain civic abilities, why would textbook authors or teachers attempt to do this?

## References

- Adman, P. (2015). Vem värnar om skolans demokratiuppdrag?: en textanalys av 2009 års svenska gymnasierreform [Who defends the school's democratic mission?: a text analysis of the 2009 Swedish upper-secondary school reform]. *Nordic Studies in Education*, 35(02), 102-115. Retrieved from [//www.idunn.no](http://www.idunn.no)
- Alexandersson, M. (2011). Equivalence and choice in combination: The Swedish dilemma. *Oxford Review of Education*, 37(2), 195-214. doi:10.1080/03054985.2011.559379
- Andersson, K. (2012). *Deliberativ undervisning: en empirisk studie* [Deliberative teaching: an empirical inquiry]. Göteborg: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen, Göteborgs universitet.
- Arensmeier, C. (2010). The democratic common sense: Young Swedes' understanding of democracy: theoretical features and educational incentives. *Young*, 18(2), 197-222. doi:10.1177/110330881001800205
- Arensmeier, C. (2015). Swedish students' conceptual knowledge about civics and citizenship: An interview study. *Citizenship Teaching & Learning*, 11(1), 9-27. doi:10.1386/ctl.11.1.9\_1
- Arensmeier, C. (2017). Young people's views on tolerance. In E. Lundberg (Ed.), *Mechanisms of tolerance: an anthology*. Stockholm: The Living History Forum.
- Ball, S. J., & Larsson, S. (1989). *Education, politics and society in Sweden: The struggle for democratic education: equality and participation in Sweden*. London & New York: The Falmer Press.
- Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: robust vocabulary instruction*. New York: The Guilford Press.

- Brett, P. (2014). Discovering argument: linking literacy, citizenship education, and persuasive advocacy. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 13(4), 61-72.
- Broman, A. (2009). *Att göra en demokrat?: demokratisk socialisation i den svenska gymnasieskolan* [Making a democrat?: democracy socialization in Swedish upper-secondary schools]. Karlstad: Karlstads university.
- Bronäs, A. (2000). *Demokratins ansikte: en jämförande studie av demokratibilder i tyska och svenska samhällskunskapsböcker för gymnasiet* [The face of democracy: a comparative study of images of democracy in German and Swedish social studies textbooks for upper-secondary school]. Stockholm: HLS.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Campbell, D. E. (2009). Civic engagement and education: An empirical test of the sorting model. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(4), 771-786. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00400.x
- Carlsson, L. (2006). *Medborgarskap som demokratins praktiska uttryck i skolan: diskursiva konstruktioner av gymnasieskolans elever som medborgare* [Citizenship as the practical expression of democracy in school: discursive constructions of upper-secondary school students as citizens]. Växjö: Växjö University Press.
- Côté, I., Sundström, M. R., & Sannerstedt, A. (2013). The state of the debate: A media analysis of the debates on liberalization and citizenship education in France, Sweden, and England, 2001–2010. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 8(2), 215-228. doi:10.1177/1746197913483686
- Dahl, R. A. (1989). *Democracy and its critics*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Ekman, T. (2007). *Demokratisk kompetens: om gymnasiet som demokratiskola* [Democratic competence: upper-secondary school as democracy school]. Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet.
- Englund, T. (1986). *Curriculum as a political problem: changing educational conceptions, with special reference to citizenship education*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Englund, T. (2006). Deliberative communication: a pragmatist proposal. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38(5), 503-520. doi:10.1080/00220270600670775
- Gustafsson, S. (2016). *Medborgarskapande på olika villkor: självbild, skolkoder och syn på kunskap i den svenska gymnasieskolan* [Citizenship making on different terms: self-images, school codes and views of knowledge in Swedish upper-secondary school]. Lund: Lunds university.
- Hakvoort, I., & Olsson, E. (2014). The school's democratic mission and conflict resolution: voices of Swedish educators. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 44(4). doi:10.1111/curi.12059
- Imsen, G., Blossing, U., & Moos, L. (2017). Reshaping the Nordic education model in an era of efficiency: Changes in the comprehensive school project in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden since the millennium. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 61(5), 568-583. doi:10.1080/00313831.2016.1172502
- Ivarsson, J. (2017). National Report 6.2: workpackage 6, Sweden. *Catch EU-project*. Örebro: Örebro University.
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lundahl, L., & Olson, M. (2013). Democracy lessons in market-oriented schools: the case of Swedish upper-secondary education. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 8(2). doi:10.1177/1746197913483684
- Marttunen, M., Laurinen, L., Litosseliti, L., & Lund, K. (2005). Argumentation skills as prerequisites for collaborative learning among Finnish, French, and English secondary school students. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 11(4). doi:10.1080/13803610500110588
- Mauro, R. M. (2008). Political science education and the conceptual analysis of ideology: A pedagogy and curriculum of understanding. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(1), 55-72. doi:10.1080/13569310701822255
- Maxwell, J. A. (2010). Using Numbers in Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(6), 475-482. doi:10.1177/1077800410364740
- McCulley, L. V., & Osman, D. J. (2015). Effects of reading instruction on learning outcomes in social studies: A synthesis of quantitative research. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 39(4), 183-195. doi:10.1016/j.jssr.2015.06.002
- Nylund, M. (2010). Framtidsvägen: vägen till vilken framtid för eleverna på gymnasieskolans yrkesprogram? [The future path: which future does it lead to for students in vocational programmes in upper-secondary school?]. *Pedagogisk forskning i Sverige* 15(1), 33-52. Retrieved from [journals.lub.lu.se](http://journals.lub.lu.se)
- Nylund, M. (2013). *Yrkesutbildning, klass och kunskap: en studie om sociala och politiska implikationer av innehålls organisering i yrkesorienterad utbildning med fokus på 2011 års gymnasiereform* [Vocational education, class and knowledge: a study about social and political implications from the organization of content in vocational education, with focus on the 2011 upper-secondary school reform]. Örebro: Örebro universitet.
- Östh, J., Andersson, E., & Malmberg, B. (2013). School choice and increasing performance difference: a counterfactual approach. *Urban studies*, 50(2), 407-425. doi:10.1177/0042098012452322
- Paul, R. (2005). The state of critical thinking today. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 2005(130), 27-38. doi:10.1002/cc.193

- Persson, M. (2012). Does type of education affect political participation? Results from a panel survey of Swedish adolescents. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 35(3), 198-221. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9477.2012.00286.x
- Persson, M. (2013). Education and political participation. *British Journal of Political Science*, 45(3), 689-703. doi:10.1017/S0007123413000409
- Persson, M., & Oscarsson, H. (2010). Did the egalitarian reforms of the Swedish educational system equalise levels of democratic citizenship? *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 33(2), 135-163. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9477.2009.00244.x
- Ramirez, M. A. R., & Ramirez, T. M. (2017). Changing attitudes, changing behaviors: conceptual change as a model for teaching freedom of religion or belief. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 16(4), 97-108.
- Schlozman, K. L., Verba, S., & Brady, H. E. (1999). Civic participation and the equality problem. In Skocpol, T. & Fiorina, M.P. (1999). *Civic engagement in American democracy*. Washington DC: Brookings inst., 427-459.
- Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Fraillon, J., Kerr, D., & Losito, B. (2010). *ICCS 2009 International report: civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lower-secondary school students in 38 countries* Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, IEA.
- Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Fraillon, J., Losito, B., & Agrusti, G. (2015). *IEA International civic and citizenship education study 2016: Assessment framework*. Amsterdam: IEA.
- Schulz, W., Ainley, J., Fraillon, J., Losito, B., Agrusti, G., & Friedman, T. (2017). *Becoming Citizens in a Changing World: IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study 2016 International Report*. Amsterdam: IEA.
- Schumpeter, J. A. (2000 [1943]). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Smith, C. B., Kille, K. J., Scholl, C. W., & Grove, A. K. (2003). How do textbooks represent the field of international studies? *International Studies Review*, 5(3), 421-441. 10.1046/j.1079-1760.2003.00503023.x/full
- SNAE [Swedish National Agency for Education/Skolverket]. (nd). *Social studies*. (English translations of subject curricula). Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2001). *Ung i demokratin: en studie av ungdomars demokratiska kompetens* [Youth in democracy: a study of young people's democratic competence]. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2003). *Ung i demokratin: gymnasieelevers kunskaper och attityder i demokrati- och samhällsfrågor* [Youth in democracy: upper-secondary school students' knowledge and attitudes about democratic and social issues]. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2006). *Läromedlens roll i undervisningen: grundskollärares val, användning och bedömning av läromedel i bild, engelska och samhällskunskap*. [The role of teaching materials in teaching: compulsory school teachers' choices, use and assessment of teaching materials in art, English and civics]. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2010a). *Morgondagens medborgare, ICCS 2009: svenska 14-åringars kunskaper, värderingar och deltagande i internationell belysning* [The citizens of tomorrow, ICCS 2009: Swedish 14-year-olds' knowledge, attitudes and participation in an international light]. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2010b). *Skolor som politiska arenor: Medborgarkompetens och kontrovershantering* [Schools as political arenas: citizens' competence and dealing with controversy]. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2011a). *Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre 2011*. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2011b). *Curriculum for the preschool Lpfö 98: revised 2010*. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2013). *Curriculum for the upper secondary school*. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- SNAE. (2017). *ICCS 2016: kunskaper, värderingar och engagemang i medborgar-, demokrati- och samhällsfrågor hos svenska 14-åringar i ett internationellt perspektiv*. [ICCS 2016: knowledge, values, and engagement in civic and citizenship issues among Swedish 14-year-olds from an international perspective]. Stockholm: Skolverket. Retrieved from [//www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)
- Sohl, S., & Arensmeier, C. (2015). The school's role in youths' political efficacy: can school provide a compensatory boost to students' political efficacy? *Research Papers in Education*, 30(2), 133-163. doi:10.1080/02671522.2014.908408
- Sundström, M., & Fernández, C. (2013). Citizenship education and diversity in liberal societies: Theory and policy in a comparative perspective. *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 8(2), 103-117. doi:10.1177/1746197913483635
- Torney-Purta, J. (2002). Patterns in the civic knowledge, engagement, and attitudes of European adolescents: the IEA civic education study. *European Journal of Education*, 37(2), 129-141. doi:10.1111/1467-3435.00098
- Torney-Purta, J., Lehmann, R., Oswald, H., & Schulz, W. (2001). *Citizenship and education in twenty-eight countries*. Amsterdam: IEA.

Twyman, T., McCleery, J., & Tindal, G. (2006). Using concepts to frame history content. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 74(4), 331-349. Retrieved from [//www.jstor.org/stable/20157435](http://www.jstor.org/stable/20157435)

Verba, S., & Nie, N. H. (1972). *Participation in America: political democracy and social equality*. New York: Harper & Row.

Wall, P. (2011). *EU-undervisning: en jämförelse av undervisning om politik på nationell och europeisk nivå* [Teaching EU: a comparison of teaching about politics on national and European level]. Karlstad: Karlstad university.

Yang Hansen, K., & Gustafsson, J.-E. (2016). Causes of educational segregation in Sweden-school choice or residential segregation. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 22(1), 23-44.  
doi:10.1080/13803611.2016.1178589

Zurstrassen, B. (2011). A sceptical look at the quantitative education research in civic and citizenship education. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 10(3), 6-15. doi:10.4119/UNIBI/jsse-v10-i3-1171

#### Analysed textbooks

V1: Eliasson, M. & Nolervik, G. (2016). *Kompass till samhällskunskap, 50p* [Compass to social studies, 50 cr]. Malmö: Gleerups.

V2: West, D. (2011). *Samhällskunskap 1a1* [Social studies 1a1]. Stockholm: Liber.

V3: Nilzon, M., Roslund, M. & Öberg, I. (2011). *Mittpunkt samhällskunskap 1, 50p* [Midpoint social studies 1, 50 cr]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

V4: Harstad, F., Heaver, S. & Öberg, J. (2011). *Spela roll: samhällskunskap 50p* [It matters: social studies, 50 cr]. Malmö: Gleerups.

V5: Lundberg, F., Olsson, L. & Arvidsson, K. (2011). *Samhällskunskap 1a1* [Social studies 1a1]. Malmö: Interskol förlag.

A1: Eliasson, M. & Nolervik, G. (2016). *Kompass till samhällskunskap, 100p* [Compass to social studies, 100 cr]. Malmö: Gleerups.

A2: West, D. (2011). *Samhällskunskap 1b* [Social studies 1b]. Stockholm: Liber.

A3: Göthberg, P., Hultman, G., Söderberg, I., Wollinger, J. & Yngvesson, Y. (2016), *Samhällskunskap 1 : ett hållbart samhälle* [Social studies 1: a sustainable society]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

A4: Eriksson, J., Thornström, P. & Kesselfors, J. (2016). *Samhällskunskap 1b* [Social studies 1b]. Malmö: NA förlag.

A5: Brolin, K. & Nohagen, L. (2013). *Forum samhällskunskap 123* [Social studies 123]. Stockholm: Sanoma utbildning.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> All programmes in upper-secondary school amount to 2500 credits. Foundation subjects take up 600 credits on the vocational track and 1100-1250 on the academic track. The credits for a course are supposed to reflect the "workload".

<sup>2</sup> Four publishers (Gleerups, Liber, Sanoma, Studentlitteratur) offer one to four books series each, and a few independent books. Two publishers (Interskol, NA förlag) have only one or two books for social studies.

<sup>3</sup> The search was made in February 2017 on [www.adlibris.com](http://www.adlibris.com) and [www.bokus.com](http://www.bokus.com).

<sup>4</sup> The article is an offshoot of a textbook analysis conducted within work package 6 (WP6, "Representation of the EU and youth active EU citizenship in educational contexts") in the EU-funded research program "Constructing Active Citizenship with European Youth" – Catch EyoU. Four of the books analysed in this article were included in a comparative study within WP6. In that study, two books were coded by the author and another researcher, with good inter-rater agreement. Worth noting, however, is that the focus of that analysis differed to some extent from the research interests of this article.

**Appendix**

Examples of content and level of information/complexity (translated excerpts)

THEME	BASIC LEVEL (1)	MODERATE LEVEL (2) OR IN-DEPTH-LEVEL (3)
<b>IDEALS</b>	<p><i>Democracy – what is it?</i></p> <p>Democracy is a fuzzy concept. It is used in a number of contexts and means different things for different people: student democracy, corporate democracy, social democracy and so on. A short explanation of the concept of democracy might look like this:</p> <p>The word: The word democracy is originally Greek and means rule of the people.</p> <p>The power: Democracy is a way of making decisions. In a democracy, the decisions must be in line with what most people, the majority, think are right.</p> <p>The human: Democracy is also a way of looking at oneself and at other people. A fundamental democratic idea is that all people have the same value. Most people, the majority are not allowed to treat the others, the minority, in whatever way they want.</p> <p>(Book V4, p.19 – level 1)</p>	<p><i>The hallmarks of Democracy</i></p> <p>Democracy means “rule of the people”. As late as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the word democracy was still used as an invective. At that time, it was totally unthinkable to let “uneducated people” make crucial decisions about laws, taxes, war and peace. Most commentators thought that rule of the people would lead to chaos, irrational decisions and selfishness.</p> <p>Today, we know that democracy is fully possible. Both society and the methods of democracy have, however, developed quite a lot since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Today we demand the following of a democratic society:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The people rule [...]</li> <li>2. The majority principle [...]</li> <li>3. Political pluralism [...]</li> <li>4. Political freedoms and rights [...]</li> <li>5. Respect for human rights [...]</li> <li>6. Rule of law and division of power [...]</li> <li>7. A well-functioning public administration [...]</li> </ol> <p>[Each bullet point contains about as much text as the introductory paragraph]</p> <p>(Book A4, p.99ff. – democracy chapter mainly at level 2, occasionally level 3)</p>
<b>INSTITUTIONS</b>	<p><i>The role of the media</i></p> <p>We initially stated that the media mediates information. That is a simplified picture. If we look more closely at what comes to us through newspapers, TV, radio or Internet, the picture is much more varied.</p> <p>Sometimes it is descriptions of news events, for example parliamentary elections. How did it go? Which parties got smaller, which got bigger? Here it is pure information.</p> <p>But before the election, newspapers discuss different political issues, why each one is an issue, what it contains, who has said what and so on. Sometimes, these kinds of comments are intended to state a <b>view</b> – that is, to form a particular <b>opinion</b>. [...]</p> <p>Another example of the different roles of the media is when TV programmes <b>investigate</b> the actions of politicians or corporations [...]</p> <p>Finally we also know that the media play an important role as <b>entertainment</b>. [...]</p> <p>(Book V5, P.138 – level 1)</p>	<p><i>The mass media</i></p> <p>Mass communication takes place through the mass media. These are for example newspapers, TV, films, posters, Internet, e-mails, letters and flyers. Mass media play a significant role in current society. They keep us updated about what is going on in the local community and the world. They enlighten us about where to find the cheapest products, and help us deliver messages to many people at the same time.</p> <p>But the media also has a <i>democratic mission</i> by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Auditing the rulers.</b> The mass media is often labelled <i>the fourth estate</i> [...]</li> <li>• <b>Generating and encouraging debate.</b> Different opinions and views should be heard in the mass media. [...]</li> <li>• <b>Informing</b> [...]</li> <li>• <b>Commenting</b> [...]</li> <li>• <b>Facts</b> [...]</li> <li>• <b>Opinions</b> [...]</li> <li>• <b>Fiction</b> [...]</li> <li>• <b>Entertainment</b> [...]</li> <li>• <b>Sports</b> [...]</li> <li>• <b>Advertising</b> [...]</li> </ul> <p>(Book A5, p. 516f. – media chapters generally level 2)</p>
<b>INVOLVEMENT</b>	<p><i>How can you exert influence?</i></p> <p>Let us start by sorting out all the possibilities you have to influence government policy. As you have seen, a new government is elected every four years. The political parties play an important role here. The person who serves as prime minister is appointed by the elected members of parliament. Members of parliament are elected on behalf of their parties. The voters decide how many members each party shall get in the parliament. You can influence this. The first thing you can do is to vote for the party that best fits your opinion. Then you can also influence who will lead the government and what policies they will pursue.</p> <p>(Book V3, p. 111 – level 1)</p>	<p><i>How can you make your voice heard?</i></p> <p>All societies are based on cooperation. Far back in time we took turns guarding the fire or the city wall. Today, we cooperate in most contexts, from "tifo" in the sports arena to protecting the environment. A free country also gives us numerous opportunities to influence our own future and the future of society.</p> <p>In a democracy, every person’s vote is counted equally. Rich and poor, famous and infamous, old and young – every vote counts the same on election day. Most votes wins.</p> <p>Every vote is important. Sometimes, an entire election can be determined by a small number of votes. When George W. Bush was first elected president [...]</p> <p>Sweden has had universal suffrage for both women and men since 1921 [...].</p> <p>Nobody <i>has to</i> vote in a Swedish election. It is voluntary. [...]</p> <p>(Book A3, p. 64f. – level 2)</p>



ISSUES	<p><b>Agenda 21 work</b></p> <p>Sustainable development is a concept you often encounter in the environmental debate. It simply means that we need to find a way to live that is sustainable in the long run, that we must consider future generations and not over-exploit and destroy our environment. Put simply, to achieve sustainable development we need to save more and waste less.</p> <p>Sustainable development was discussed at a big UN conference about environment and development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. [...]</p> <p>An important part of Agenda 21 is the <i>Polluter Pays Principle</i>, that is, that the polluters have to pay the costs. [...] All Swedish municipalities have a local Agenda 21 office and a programme for the local environmental work.</p> <p>(V4, p. 160 – level 1)</p>	<p><b>The limits of growth</b></p> <p>As long as the population grows, it is important that the economy grows. [...] But doesn't growth have limits?</p> <p>Today, several environmental problems are visible, suggesting that there are ecological limits to the economic progress. The view on growth has become increasingly split.</p> <p>Some are of the opinion that unrestrained economic growth in rich countries is the biggest threat to Earth. According to this view, the current "use and throw away culture" is not sustainable in the long run. Moreover, environmental concern is low in poor countries seeking economic development. Taken together, this puts Earth's resources under too great pressure. This is why <i>sustainable development</i> is increasingly talked about today, meaning that economic development needs to be sustainable in the long-term.</p> <p>Others claim that economic growth increases welfare and that it thereby boosts democratic development. They think that war and unrest originate from lack of resources. Societies characterized by growth can more easily establish peaceful relations [...] The market economy can, together with laws and economic sanctions, master environmental problems [...]</p> <p>(A5, p. 214f. – level 3)</p>
INSIGHTS ON KNOWLEDGE	<p><b>Working with societal issues</b></p> <p>When inquiring into societal issues you work with information from different sources. Since some of the information you find can be biased and false, it is important to learn how to critically review the information. [...]</p> <p>A source is written, oral or digital information, which has something to say. [...] An important starting point is to adopt a critical approach to the information found in different sources.</p> <p>Primary and secondary sources [...]</p> <p>Source-critical method</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Examine if the source is authentic [...]</li> <li>2. Who is behind the source? [...]</li> <li>3. What's the purpose of the information in the source? [...]</li> <li>4. Is the source up-to-date? [...]</li> <li>5. Is the content biased? [...]</li> <li>6. Who is the target group for the source? [...]</li> <li>7. Compare the sources you find [...]</li> </ol> <p>(Book V5, p. 145f. – this section qualifies as level 2, but since this is the only content in the book that concerns insights about knowledge, the book is categorized as being on level 1 on this theme)</p>	<p><b>Principles for source criticism</b></p> <p>That an investigation is called scientific is of course no guarantee for this actually being the case. [...]</p> <p>There is therefore good reason to take a sceptical position – in particular in relation to anything that can be suspected of being disguised <b>propaganda</b> or <b>marketing</b>. [...]</p> <p>Another type of material to watch out for is so-called <b>pseudoscience</b>. This refers to perceptions and opinions couched in scientific language to give the impression that conclusions were reached by scientific means. To conclude, it is always reasonable to be critical of sources and to make independent evaluations of credibility. In this review process, four source-critical principles, or "rules of thumb", are common starting points.</p> <p>Authenticity [...]</p> <p>Time [...] <b>simultaneity</b> [...]</p> <p>Dependence [...] <b>primary source</b> [...] <b>secondary source</b></p> <p>Tendency [...] <b>biased</b> [...]</p> <p>(Book V2, p. 22ff.; A2, p. 25ff.)</p>

GREEN: 1. Basic level

BLUE: 2. Moderate level

RED: 3. In-depth level