Chapter 11
Participation, Education, and Democracy: Implications for Environmental Education, Health Education, and Education for Sustainable Development

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11.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on participation in the context of European and Nordic debates about whether education should be understood as an end in itself, as in the humanistic tradition, or instrumentally, to bring about social change. In the case of the latter, environmental education, health education, and education for sustainable development can each be understood as denoting initiatives and efforts that are driven by a shared ideal of improving the world we live in now, and for the future. As such, they are often seen as overarching education in the former, humanistic sense, particularly in relation to its legitimate purposes and modes. Whilst acknowledging this trans-educational function, this chapter sets out to recover the relevance of general education to ‘adjectival educations’ like environmental education, health education, and education for sustainable development, and vice versa, that is, in relation to efforts to educate pupils in a broader, humanistic sense. It asks what, after all, is the aim of our educational efforts, and how are we to assess their success and outcomes, particularly if we are to prevent ‘adjectival educations’ from being reduced to instruments of ideology or policy when the overarching goal is to foster deeper and more meaningful participation in education.

11.2 The Relationship Between Education and Social Objectives

While earlier chapters in this volume have illustrated common agreement that participation has become a buzzword in both education and development studies, recent struggles and debate are characterised by asking ‘where next’ with the term...
Some argue that participation is better replaced by another term. For others, it is a notion that still has relevance and potential. This chapter explores the second position, given that participation remains an important notion to environmental education, health education, and education for sustainable development. Reasons for this include that:

- The concept illustrates an important overlap between how each of these adjectival educations has come to be constituted (e.g. by participatory approaches and goals), as well as in terms of the overlap between their goals and approaches and those of general education in fostering similar objectives.
- While participation is constitutive of the idea of democracy, it can easily be reduced to a token; for example, as a means for legitimating arbitrary power.
- Participation has different conceptualisations and interpretations, in that it can be understood in strong, more radical senses, but also in weaker senses, with quite different implications for education and development.
- In both education and development, the possibilities for and practice of participation pose questions about the efficiency as well as morality of current activities, and it may be advocated as a requirement for either motivational or ethical reasons.

Current educational discourse can give the impression that education and health improvement, environmental protection, and sustainable development are linked together by instrumental relationships and functions. Here, education is perceived as a means rather than an end in itself. However, to separate means and ends can be artificial and fruitless because they are usually entwined, excepting extreme situations for the sake of discussion. Even if different pedagogical methods are sometimes discussed as alternative means to a specific end, e.g. reading skills, mathematical competence, sociological imagination, or democratic attitudes, the preference for some methodologies over others is most often based on the sound assumption that the methods are not means to identical outcomes. In education, means are not neutral tools; they are in themselves alive with experiential and formative consequences that cannot meaningfully be abstracted in their totality from the definition of the outcomes. We might then consider whether a more useful way to talk about means and ends in educational endeavours is as two extremes on a continuum. At one pole, education is interpreted as specialised training with no other aim than being the means to achieving a certain predefined objective (e.g. a profession or craft or skill). An appropriate term for this exercise in instrumentalism could be ‘instruction’ or ‘training’. At the other pole, education is understood as an end in itself. It is combined with certain fundamental values in relation to which this kind of education might be called a ‘means’, but here, this is understood in a more hermeneutic sense, for example, as a ‘precondition’, a ‘dimension of’, or a ‘perspective for’ developing or achieving some overarching goal or other. In this line of thinking, to be ‘educated’ is often interpreted as a precondition for becoming a ‘fulfilled’ self, of being able to actualise one’s potentials in a balanced or harmonious way, and of being able to become an active and integrated member of a modern democratic society.

The practices of most educational programmes and settings within and outside the formal educational system are located somewhere in between the two
poles of the continuum, and the evaluation of these practices differs substantially depending on the perspective taken upon it. Examining or evaluating an educational issue from the ‘means’ perspective can be very different from that from the ‘end’ perspective, especially when ‘education’ is considered as an instrumental or functional means for obtaining goals other than those of ‘education’ and the ‘educated and fulfilled’ person in society. For example, a programme about energy saving or battery collecting may be evaluated according to the amount of energy saved or batteries collected, or it may be evaluated with reference to what the students learned about society, their community, and themselves by being involved in these activities (Jensen and Schnack 2004; Breiting et al. 2005; Mayer and Mogensen 2005).

It is important to emphasise that this distinction is analytical rather than, say, ontological (a point we will return to later). That is, the value of making this analytical distinction lies largely in its ability to promote clarification and evaluation of the status of practices, but also in the options it presents for grounding the debate in terms of a humanistic tradition, rather than solely in terms of its role in pursuing or realising an instrumentalist agenda. In other words, the differentiation challenges us to engage discussions about what is, after all, the purpose of our educational efforts, and what is relevant when we want to assess their ‘effectiveness’ or ‘efficiency’ (e.g. who gets to define and contest these terms, and how). In what follows, the distinction will be used to inform wider reflections on participation, education, and democracy in relation to environmental education, health education, and education for sustainable development, by focusing on how they relate to education in general, alongside their role in bringing about social change.

**Environmental education, health education, and education for sustainable development as education**

Environmental education, health education, and education for sustainable development can each exemplify initiatives, activities, and efforts driven by a goal to better the world. In such cases, education is often seen as a means to something else than education itself.

Problems in contemporary Western society are often identified in relation to the health of people, ecological issues about their relationship to nature, and challenges connected to the lack of the sustainability of economic development and many political and sociocultural processes. Many of these problems are experienced (initially) as very local and personal; they are often manifested as individual and maybe even private difficulties. However, when the individual cases become more widespread or frequent, personal troubles are transformed in scale and interpretation, constituting examples of public issues of social structure (Mills 1959).

Take the example of a few overweight people. This situation may be considered problematic in terms of their own health and well-being, and their social surroundings. However, as the average number of overweight people rises, it may be considered a
social phenomenon and thus a societal issue. In the same way, the occasional extinction of a few species of plants and animals may be regarded as a local, intermittent problem, while an acceleration of extinction rates and effects may be seen as a threat to a habitat’s, ecosystem’s or in some cases, the earth’s biodiversity, and thus represents a serious challenge for humanity.

Besides the sheer number of cases, the characteristics of the people affected, as argued by the environmental justice movement, can also make a difference as to whether something is considered an individual/local issue or a social one. For example, the increased polluting of a watershed or the progressive deterioration of the urban or natural environment around many factories and industrial areas may be an immediate problem for the workers and the local community, but when it spreads to the areas where the owners and other better-off people live, it might start to be considered a societal issue (Galtung 1972).

Societal issues often become political issues when they draw the attention of political activists and representatives and are acted towards with political means, such as through policy, legislation, and regulation. The most difficult political challenges, which can include those related to health and the environment, may call for education to be used as a complementary tool to develop not only the necessary awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the issue, but also to support the development of the ‘right’ attitudes and ‘responses’ in terms of the behaviours, habits, and ultimately, lifestyles, of people.

This illustrates the tension in interpreting education as an instrument that can solve some societal problems, or is fundamentally of value in and of itself. In a way, both views are appropriate and possible and not necessarily in contradiction. However, the evaluative criteria for judging success differ in important ways. It makes a lot of difference if you look for indicators for success in such things as visible and measurable changes at a social level – such as decreases in the number of overweight people, a lower number of cases of drug abuse, and reduction in pollution levels or energy consumption. These examples can be contrasted with the less tangible or immediate outcomes for individual and social learning, or those that may not be amenable to indicator measures or instrumentation (Breiting et al. 2005; Mayer and Mogensen 2005).

Of course, it is possible to have school projects dealing with health or environmental issues reporting considerable benefits or effects in terms of ‘improved health’ or a ‘cleaner environment’, without any reflections on the broader educational value of the project activities and the learning outcomes for the participating pupils. Viewed from the other pole of the continuum and evaluated from the general educational perspective, many school-based health and environmental projects can be considered inadequate because while they may prove effective in changing a health-related habit or improving the local environment in the immediate and typically short term, they do not enhance, let alone demonstrate a measurable gain in longer-lasting pupil learning or competence applicable to changing situations (Jensen and Schnack 2004; Clift and Jensen 2005).

What is at risk here is making one’s focus solely that of a shared commitment to improving the world in and through environmental education, health education,
and education for sustainable development, and the ideological motivation to do so. Such a situation can easily end up reducing these ‘educations’ to an instrumental logic related to some kind of social engineering. An alternative is to step back and recognise the compound status of these adjectival educations, that is, to emphasise and examine the educational dimension of environmental education, health education, and education for sustainable development. This is the focus of the next part of the chapter, in which I discuss this status in relation to participation in general and adjective forms of education, and the possible tensions and achievements they might encounter in the life of a school.

11.3 Why Participation? Efficiency Versus Morality

To return to an earlier theme, within international development theory and practice, participatory ideas have become widespread and have almost gained the status of an imperative. The ‘rise of participation’ began during the 1980s with increasing critique of the shortcomings of top-down approaches to development. Since then we have witnessed an almost Kuhnian paradigm shift towards the endorsement and practice of participatory approaches to community development (see Chapter 3 by Reid and Nikel, this volume). In a recent book, Robert Chambers describes this as participation constituting the new paradigm of development (Chambers 1997), and the situation is characterised by bottom-up change, democratisation, and empowerment.

We can note here that the concept of ‘empowerment’ plays a particularly significant role in health education (Tones and Green 2004; Clift and Jensen 2005). The use of this particular terminology is interesting in this context owing to its built-in reference to power, which arguably lies at both the heart and reality of participation. For good reason, power and issues relating to power (inequalities, distribution, gradients, its exercise, and so on) have become the battleground for much recent discussion of participation in the development field. Cooke and Kothari (2001:4), editors of the collection on, ‘Participation: The New Tyranny?’ make a frontal attack on current practices of participation in the field, stating that ‘tyranny is the illegitimate and/or unjust exercise of power; this book is about how participatory development facilitates this.’ They also argue for an increased recognition of the tyrannical potential of participatory development, perceiving this as systemic rather than merely a matter of how a specific practitioner operates.

Most of the debate about the ‘paradigm’ of participatory development has focused on methodological issues and questions about the use of different tools, and this has been ongoing within the field since its early days (see, for example, Rahnema 1992). Cooke and Kothari (2001) however, have accomplished a much more fundamental ideological analysis and critique, culminating in the picturesque and provocative title of the last chapter, by Heiko Henkel and Roderick Stirrat, on: ‘Participation as Spiritual Duty; Empowerment as Secular Subjection’.
While the rationales for adopting a participatory approach in both development and educational programmes vary in several ways, a useful distinction may be drawn between the arguments that reference efficiency and those that invoke morality. Participation itself is, of course, not something simply ‘out there’ to be discovered and analysed; on the contrary it is a very complex phenomenon and to analyse it also requires focusing on the very construction of a reality. Thus it can require asking critical questions such as whose reality is relevant when we talk about participation, and what is understood by that the very term, ‘reality’. So, even if Chambers seems to take the question: Whose reality counts? as a rather simple and almost rhetorical confrontation with the colonial tradition, it may also be the starting point for an advanced postcolonial critical reflection on the power structure of the Western or Northern, reality, with its built-in, perhaps taken-for-granted notions of human rights, empowerment, and participation.

These questions about power can also foreground considerations of their equivalences across both development and education. For example, in both arenas participation may be a part of ethically grounded democratic ‘power equalisation’. Also, in both fields, participation can be used as an efficiency-driven strategy of self-governance. However, even in the case of the ethical rationale for participation there is not an easy and straightforward answer to the question ‘whose reality counts’. To give one example: when the modern conception of education (as Bildung in German) is understood in a democratic perspective, it automatically implies a kind of political education, in which the overall ideal is the development of ‘action competence’ and participation is interpreted as co-determination (Schnack 2003). Yet when democracy and education are then exported to the developing world as part of an international development project, the cultural clashes that we may also find within the Western world itself regarding these terms and goals are often magnified. For example, my Nepalese students find the whole philosophy of participation interesting and fascinating but tend to acquire a knowledge of it in a sort of parallel learning; as a Western ideology with little relevance for Hindu culture. It took me some time to realise that their apparent problems in appropriating the ideas of participation were actually due to sound cultural reasons and intentional resistance rather than learning difficulties (cf. Chapters 10, by Breiting, this volume). There is a lesson to be learnt here, and not only in relation to development and the developing world: namely, whose reality counts in education?

The idea of ‘general education’ (Bildung, Allgemeinbildung)

Following on from the key ideas of the Enlightenment and modern conceptions of democracy (such as the ideals of emancipation, autonomy, and equity), general education has become both more important and more ‘general’. In the modern continental European tradition, such general education can be seen to be both comprehensive and extensive in relation to three key dimensions (Klafki 2000):

1. Scope: it is education for all and everybody

2. Aim: to develop a wide range of human competences (cognitive, emotional, physical, social, etc.)

3. Content: it is related to topics and issues of general rather than special interest.

The third of these dimensions presupposes a further differentiation between:

(a) Vocational education or training (in German: Ausbildung; in Danish: uddannelse), which relates to the societal differentiation of (job) functions.

(b) General or liberal education (in German: Bildung; in Danish: dannelse), which refers to what is of relevance for all of us as members in a (democratic) society, or in the world.

It is important to note that in this view, general education (Bildung) cannot be simply reduced to a question of effectiveness (e.g. how effective the education is in achieving predefined objectives or goals in forms of attitudes, knowledge, and skills). Education in this sense also refers to a kind of formation and open-ended development of the person. Furthermore, we could also consider how in relation to content, health education, environmental education, and education for sustainable development might be or are framed as important aspects of a general education, in theory and practice.

However, rather than unpack those themes here (though see Schnack 1995b and 1998), I will focus on how participation plays a significant role in the logic of this framework. To begin with, while democracy may be defined in many ways, it can be assumed that their key referents, such as the equal distribution of power and the participation of laypersons in debates and decisions about issues of common concern, constitute prominent and shared features. Thus, it is argued, one of the duties of general education in a democratic society must be to give all members of society access to the opportunities, structures, and activities that will build up understanding of issues that, in principle, concern all members of the society, such as questions about health, environment, and sustainable development.

This can be reframed as a curriculum principle, taking those challenges facing humanity into consideration as one of the criteria for selecting the content of education (Schnack 1995a), not forgetting that what is considered as being of concern to us all is subject to the Zeitgeist (foregrounding the need to be aware of historical context), but also a playground for political, cultural, and ideological positions and their influence on decision-making.

On this point, Wolfgang Klafki, a prominent representative of the German Didaktik tradition, argues for a curriculum that is grounded in what he calls the ‘key problems/characteristic of the period’ (Schlüsselprobleme). Klafki contends that general education must contain a historically mediated consciousness of the central issues of the age, and, as far as it is possible, those of the future. He further emphasises the need to accept that we all share the responsibility for these kinds of problems and should develop a readiness to participate in the solutions of the problems (Klafki 1985). For Klafki, during the mid-1980s the five key issues (Schlüsselprobleme) that concerned general education were: (i) peace; (ii) environmental issues; (iii) socially created
inequalities; (iv) effects of technology, especially ICT; and (v) I-You relationships between people. Accordingly, the embedded potential tension throughout the five is between, on the one hand, an individual’s claims or rights to happiness and fulfilment, and on the other, inter-human considerations and respect for others.

**Participation and General Education**

In relation to the *Schlüsselprobleme*, it is important to emphasise that the main point is not the precise choice and number of key issues, or for that matter, their continued or continuing relevance, but the logical link that can be made to participation, which stems from the democratic orientation of this *Didaktik* (curriculum theory). A useful way to illustrate this is by using Klafki’s summary of his conception of *Bildung* (general education). Here, *Bildung* is viewed as an end in itself, articulating three interrelated notions:

- **Selbst-bestimmung** (self-determination)
- **Mit-bestimmung** (co-determination/participation)
- **Solidarität** (solidarity)

To clarify, *Solidarität* is of course, not solidarity with ‘everyone’, but to emphasise being for and with the weak and disabled, who do not necessarily have the opportunity or equal potential to display self-determination and co-determination (in effect, an anti-fascistic point) (Klafki 1985).

Also, the dual options for *Mit-bestimmung* arise because sometimes the term is translated very literally into English as ‘co-determination’, or alternatively as ‘participation’. This uncertainty with *Mit-bestimmung* presents an attractive double possibility for participation in an educational context, namely, distinguishing between participation as taking part, and participation as having an influence. In Danish, this is readily illustrated as the language has at least two different senses of participation, that is: (i) *deltagelse* which implies, to take part in (as opposed to being an onlooker) and (ii) *medbestemmelse* which implies, to be involved in decision-making and to have a say (see also Reid and Nikel, Chapter 3).

Both meanings are important in a democratic perspective, in general and for education. However, even though they are interrelated they are often treated separately as two different pedagogical challenges. Of course, one may argue that the second interpretation (participation as influence) is always a special instance of the first one (participation as taking part); and, therefore, that the first one is

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1 A short series of invitational seminars called ‘Didaktik meets curriculum’, discussed the relationship between the German/continental tradition in educational philosophy and that of Anglo-Saxon perspectives. This resulted in three books, which also contain translations of German texts (Klafki and others) into English (Hopmann and Riquarts (eds) 1995, Gundem and Hopmann (eds) 1998, and Westbury, Hopmann, and Riquarts (eds) 2000).
the most fundamental one. On the other hand, the second and stronger meaning of co-determination is the more difficult one in practice, and it is too easily neglected even if it has important democratic learning potentials, particularly as these relate to questions of ownership, responsibility, fairness, handling conflict, and so forth.

**Participation interpreted in the Danish context – from co-determination to individualisation via differentiation**

This ‘double’ notion of participation has played a decisive role in the Danish pedagogical debate and reflections on practices of the classroom life, and since 1975 it has been incorporated in the national education legislation. Passed in 1975, the Danish ‘School Act for the Folkeskole’ (primary and lower secondary schools) contained a paragraph (Paragraph 16.4) that explicitly states that together with teachers, students are to be involved as co-determinants (having a say, in a strong sense) in the organisation, pedagogies, and methodologies of the teaching–learning process in the classroom, as well as its content. Even if the very words are not used in the Danish legislation, you might say that the Act requires students and teachers together to decide on, plan, and assess the practised curriculum, and this has been its typical interpretation.

The Act coincides with a relatively strong movement towards fostering greater levels of student participation in the 1970s and 1980s, in which participation was seen as not only an ingredient in active learning, experiential learning, and constructivism, but also in the stronger sense of co-determination. Since those times, responses to the Act have been divided, some teachers stating that it is very difficult or even impossible to achieve, while others indicating that it has become part of daily life in classrooms. For the latter, co-determination is regarded as always in an imperfect state of affairs, and consequently, it is a continuous learning process. While it is fair to acknowledge that co-determination has not become a predominant trait in the classrooms in the Danish Folkeskole, reports show that students do feel that they can influence the teaching, and that they have a say (Daniel et al. 1985; Nørgård 1992).

There is an important point of clarification to be made about this Danish experience: participation as co-determination is not understood as an additional time-consuming, disturbing, or distracting factor, but as a central and important part of the learning. The decision-making processes about the curriculum are themselves considered to be part of the curriculum. The school has a special obligation here; it is not only a democratic institution but also an arena for the experiential learning of democracy. Qualified democratic participation is learned by gaining experience with participation.

Why then was this interpretation of participation as co-determination introduced and stressed in the Act? On the one hand, it was viewed as a response to the
widespread problems in a lack of student motivation. In the 1970s, talk about a ‘crisis’ was common, and addressing ‘school fatigue’ became part of the vocabulary of educational debates and conversations. On the other hand, co-determination as genuine student participation was understood as a concrete expression of democratisation. In that sense it was viewed as a necessary element in fulfilling the ideal of ‘education for democracy with democracy’. In this respect, a strong focus on the collective aspect was prevalent: individual students had to talk, listen, argue, and compromise in order to reach joint agreements.

The policy statements about cooperation between teachers and students are still valid in the contemporary Danish context. The Act formulated in the mid-1970s was revised in 1993; the revised version (Section 4, Paragraph 18) opens with a statement saying that:

[T]he organisation of the teaching, including the choice of teaching and working methods, teaching materials and the selection of subject-matter, shall in each subject live up to the aims of the Folkeskole and shall be varied so that it corresponds to the needs and prerequisites of the individual pupil.

One way to interpret this revision is to focus on its strong emphasis on the differentiation of teaching, typically expressed as individualisation in terms of teaching that meets the diverse learning needs of each individual student. However, while there is some reasonable awareness of the need for this and the practical difficulties of what can be a time-consuming task, the realisation of this ‘personalisation’ of learning pathways in the classroom remains a slow process. Typically it shows itself more as a variation in the teaching–learning process than as a principle for classroom practice. This is subject to change now owing to a heavy political pressure, followed by national tests and demands for continuous assessment and revision of learning objectives for each individual pupil (Carlgren et al. 2006). Nevertheless, the notion of ‘putting students at the centre’ of educational efforts was, and still is, a trend in Denmark; while in recent decades, the sense of the plural in ‘students’ tends to be understood as a move towards the singular via an accumulation of individuals (the additive plural), in contrast to a collective sense of the plural – a community of socially interacting individuals.

In all this, ‘differentiation of the teaching’ or simply ‘teaching differentiation’, in contrast to ‘pupil differentiation’, has now become the key concept. As opposed to pupil differentiation, it has been understood first and foremost as an idea about integration. For this reason, there has been a continuous debate about the balance in general education between individualisation and community – and solidarity-focused learning (Nielsen 1995).

One variation of the teaching–learning process that has contributed very much to the development of teaching differentiation and participatory learning has been the ‘project method’, where groups of students work together with problem-oriented projects. They choose an issue and formulate a set of questions that they investigate and, finally, make a report. Introduced into higher education and adult education in the second half of the 1970s (Illeris 1974; Berthelsen et al. 1977; Holten-Andersen et al. 1980), it soon became part of the progressive experiments
in the *Folkeskole* too (Daniel et al. 1985). In the 1993 School Act it officially entered the classroom, albeit via an ironic route through a paragraph about assessment (Paragraph, 5): ‘At the 9th and 10th form levels, the pupils shall carry out an obligatory project assignment, for which the assessment shall be given in the form of a written statement and by a mark, if the pupil so wishes.’ As a result, the policy-level status of the ‘project method’ helped to legitimise different versions of it, and led to its more widespread use, even in lower grades (as exams and assessment forms always influence the preceding teaching).

Given such developments over the last 20 years in Denmark and the influence of Didaktik on the Nordic education system, the final part discusses Nordic examples of attaching great importance to participation and democracy in the context of environmental education, health education, and education for sustainable development.

### 11.4 Adjectival Educations – Democracy – Participation: Nordic Examples

As stated in the opening part of this chapter, participation is a key notion in these three adjectival educations. It can be viewed as binding them together and each one with general education. It can also emphasise the relationship between education and democracy, given the view that democracy without educated people is an ‘empty shell’; and, education with no democratic dimension is little more than training or a tool for indoctrination.

The first generation of environmental education (Breiting 1993) in Denmark, as in other countries, was almost solely construed as conservation education and aimed at changing the behaviour of pupils. In reaction to this, members of the Research Centre for Environmental and Health Education in Copenhagen opposed this viewpoint by stating that environmental issues are better understood as problems generated in society and culture, rather than in nature. This position emphasises that at the heart of environmental problems lie conflicting human interests in relation to nature (Schnack 1984 and 1998). Consequently, a central feature of this perspective is that conflicts or problems are not in nature or between people and nature – they are between (groups of) human beings.

From this point of view, conceptions of the environment are always value loaded and by extension, often political issues, with questions of participation and democratic power distribution as crucial to this approach to environmental education as they are to general education; a position that has been examined in several development and research studies, conceptually and empirically, for example, the large-scale Nordic developmental and action research project MUVIN (Environmental Education in the Nordic Countries) 1992–1996 (Schnack 1995b, 1998; Breiting 1996; Breiting et al. 1999).

Similar developments were apparent in health education and health promotion in schools in Denmark over that period. The same Research Centre, now called
the Research Programme for Environmental and Health Education (RPEHE), worked with a distinction between two paradigms in health education: the moralistic and the democratic (Jensen 2000a), to emphasise the shift of focus of health education from behaviour modification with respect to health, to participatory, and action-orientated pedagogical approaches, aiming at enabling students to reflect upon and address the social determinants of health. As part of this work, the democratic paradigm has also been applied and evaluated conceptually and empirically, within the terms and experience of ‘The Health Promoting School’ initiative (Clift and Jensen 2005). In place of behaviour modification and referring to a broad and open conception of health and the aim of developing students’ action competence, the democratic paradigm focuses on a democratic, participatory pedagogical approach.

The final example in this section concerns the overlaps between environmental education and education for sustainable development (ESD) in Swedish schools. Here, three ‘selective traditions’ have been identified: the ‘fact-based tradition’, the ‘normative tradition’, and the ‘ESD’ or ‘pluralistic tradition’ (Sandell, Öhman, and Östman 2003; Öhman 2004). All three can be related to democracy, though in different ways. While the fact-based tradition may prepare for democratic participation after education, the normative one presupposes a kind of democratic consensus process before education. For Sandell et al. (2003:177) in the ESD tradition:

[T]he democratic process is an integral part of the education process and is situated in education – the critical discussion on different alternatives and their implications is an essential part of education itself.

Without calling the first two ‘undemocratic’, the third approach may be viewed as the only one that represents a ‘democratic education’ in theory as well as practice, in that it is the only one that tries to educate for democracy with democracy.

In summary, if environmental education, health education, and education for sustainability are to be ‘democratic education’, the concept of participation has to be an integral part of the pedagogical philosophy – not only for efficiency reasons but also for ethical and educational reasons. At the same time the key concepts in these three areas, such as sustainable development, health, and democracy, have to be dealt with as open notions and consequently made the object of discussion and (re)construction in the teaching–learning processes. In a democratic, participatory education you cannot teach health, sustainable development, or democracy. The meanings of the concepts are open and contested and with an expression of John Huckle (1996:3), a key function of education is ‘to help people reflect and act on these meanings and so realise alternative futures in more informed and democratic ways’.

11.5 Key Issues for Research

Among the many educational questions and challenges discussed in this chapter, four key issues can be identified for further research:
Methodological problems related to empirical study of the decisions made in classrooms

When research participants (teachers and students) are asked about their experience by researchers, depending on how the questions are formulated, the responses will differ. In one study (Christensen and Schnack 1992) students were asked the following: Who has decided on the topic or issue you are working with? Participants most often responded that they did not know or did not remember. It is as if the process of co-determination – when it is not a special project but quite normal life in the classroom – is a subtle process, and researchers and evaluators should be very cautious so as not to misinterpret what is going on. It might, however, for sound educational, research, and development reasons, be a good idea to make the process more explicit.

Forms of participation in different phases of the teaching–learning process

Thus it might also be a beneficial to be more conscious and explicit about the different aspects or elements of the participatory process. Inspired by the analysis of the original concept of ‘work’, RPEHE researchers have looked at the phases of identifying a need (or a problem), getting an idea or designing a vision, sharing ideas, creating a plan, doing something according to the decided plan, assessing the results and reconstructing the plan, and so on. Jensen (1983) has argued that broadening the landscape of student participation to more phases than those typically experienced will be an essential aspect of democratisation, and more studies would be relevant in this area. One such attempt has looked into the gradations of participation and different varieties of student participation (Jensen 2000b). This suggests that student participation can differ across phases – for good and bad reasons – and sometimes without any apparent reason at all.

Tensions between standardised, objectified curriculum, and participation

Worldwide policy trends towards more specified objectives and standardised assessments are developing at the same time as increased expectations of child-centred pedagogy and learning for citizenship. The potential tensions between these two sets of interests may be actualised in different ways. From the point of view of democratisation, investigations into this field will be very important. Conceptual clarification, comparative studies, as well as participatory action research or dialogue research will be very relevant.
As we live in an era of assessment and evaluation, the focus tends to be more on educational outcomes than processes. This is a problem when participation and democratisation are primarily understood in terms of their status as a means rather than an end. It is very difficult and time consuming to evaluate genuine participation, and it is almost impossible to generate end point quantitative criteria of any use. More research has to be done in this field to qualify the discussion of what can sensibly be meant by ‘evidence-based knowledge’ or ‘evidence-based practice’ in relation to participation and democratisation in education. For example, when it comes to evaluation, it often seems too easy to change the focus from education to observable or spectacular outcomes. In the area of ‘green schools’ or ‘eco-schools’ this is a well-known issue as the problem presents itself in what counts as the criteria for awards and celebrations (Ward and Schnack 2003). Further research is needed not only to qualify the (self-)evaluation process, but also to study how educational measures or quality criteria (Breiting, Mayer, and Mogensen 2005; Mayer and Mogensen 2005) work and influence the participatory pedagogies and processes of the schools.

References


