

# Voter education

## The political education of Norwegian lower secondary schools

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The educational system plays a role in the broader political socialisation process. Even if this role is contingent, an important question remains as to how schools contribute to the integration of new generations in political life. This article aims at improving empirical knowledge about this contribution. In many Western countries such political education seems to focus on formal structure of institutions, constitutional frameworks, discussions of current issues and formal rights of citizens. The Norwegian national curriculum outlines a different political education, focusing on critical analysis of the political system, encouragement of many forms of political participation, examination of policy-making processes and policy contents. To what extent are these purposes of a critical, activist citizenry implemented at the classroom level? This question is analysed using both qualitative and survey data. The analysis suggests that formalism does not dominate Norwegian political education. Political parties, elections, comparison of party programs are most commonly the key elements in a political education closely related to the citizen ideals of competitive elite democracy.

### Introduction

Empirical research suggests that political education at school in Western countries tends to focus on formal structure of political institutions, constitutional frameworks, formal rights of citizens, debating current issues and moralism in various combinations (Patrick & Hoge 1991, Dekker 1994, Audigier 1999a, Minthrop 2002).

The Norwegian national curriculum for the 10-year compulsory education program outlines a different political education (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs 1996).<sup>1</sup> It requires that in addition to a presentation of political institutions, political education must

teach pupils how they themselves can influence politically and make a difference. The curriculum states that it must be taught how not only voting but also party activism, organisations, direct action and informal contacts are avenues to political influence. The curriculum repeatedly stresses that pupils must be educated to be politically engaged, active and interested in participating themselves. They must be familiar with formal and informal power relations and they must be able to understand and survey local government and local organisation processes. Pupils must be made familiar with and supportive of democratic ideals and principles. This article examines to what extent these curricular ambitions are realised as classroom practice.

Political competence is a complex category and knowledge is only one piece in it (Solhaug 2003).<sup>2</sup> The knowledge basis for citizen political participation must be understood as knowledge structures that make political participation meaningful and reasonable by placing it in a wider context and by making individual political activity intelligible. By means of such knowledge citizens may relate themselves to political life (Ichilov 1990, McGraw 2000, Monroe, Hankin et al. 2000). Knowledge structures are the results of individual perceptions and interpretations and may thus vary from one individual to the next (Merelman 1986, Torney-Purta 1992).

In order to develop these structures each individual must be exposed to ideas and representations of the political world (Niemi & Junn 1998). It is thus a crucial question what ideas about political participation citizens in general and adolescents in particular are exposed to, and how these ideas make political participation meaningful.<sup>3</sup> My study focuses on the following research questions:

- What types of political participation are presented to young Norwegians at school?
- How are the importance and meaning of these participatory arrangements in the political system presented?
- How is individual participation said to make sense for the individual?

## Conceptions of political participation

Democratic theory will serve as a theoretical framework for the analysis of different ideas on what political participation is and how it makes sense. Different conceptions of democracy offer different answers to the three research questions. David Held's typology will be applied although it will be supplemented by other works (Held 1996).

According to Larry Diamond, Schumpeter's model of democracy is a *minimalist model* (Diamond 1999). Political participation is by Schumpeter restricted to voting and political discussions between elections (Held 1996, p. 189). In elections voters choose among competing elites who are aligned in political parties competing for votes. Political participation is thus not a matter of influencing political issues but of deciding who will decide later on. A related version is that voters choose not only elite but also political program (Østerud 1991). In this case elections indirectly influence policy contents.

There are few constraints on elites once they (and their program) are voted into power. Minimalist, competitive democracy is in this respect close to the parliamentary chain of command (Olsen 1978). In this chain the people's representatives in the legislature control the government, which is in supreme command of the governmental apparatus and thus able to act fairly freely. Elections make sense because this chain transforms votes to public policy that concerns voters.

Held underlines that most writers in the liberal tradition see human action as a matter of self-serving action aimed at realising interests and preferences (1996).<sup>4</sup> Motivation to act politically is therefore instrumental on an individual basis. However, Schumpeter stresses that citizens are often irrational, uninformed and emotional and this implies that they might act on such motives as well.

*Pluralism* broadens the concept of political participation (Held 1996). Political processes are driven by a variety of political actors including governmental institutions, elected elites and a broad range of interest groups. In a Scandinavian perspective it seems reasonable to include both ad hoc groups as well as permanent interest organisations in the interest group category. Even if passive support for interest groups is an option, pluralism points to the importance of citizen activism in such interest groups. Held distinguishes between pluralism and neo-pluralism, the latter recognising political inequalities in society and acknowledging that economic interests often have a stronger say than other interests.

Neo-pluralism retains the notion of an open political system in which most people can organise and make a difference. However, to make a difference does not mean simply to have it one's own way. Influence is a matter of partial influence – alongside other actors – in at least some issues. Nevertheless, political motivation is also in the pluralist account instrumental. However, citizen political influence is dependent on organisation and collective action.

From the 1960's *participatory democracy* challenged pluralism and introduced a broader concept of political participation and of its

motivation (Lafferty 1983). In addition to representative arrangements and interest groups this theory argues for direct democracy at the local level (Held 1996). First of all within political parties and organised interest groups.<sup>5</sup> Second, in local government structures. Third, at the work place and finally as self-government in neighbourhoods and voluntary associations.

Instrumental political motivation is important in participatory democracy, and this perspective recognises the importance of organisation for political influence. But writers like Carole Pateman and Hannah Arendt also emphasise that political participation has a potential for moral, intellectual and social development for all participants (Lafferty 1983). This may also motivate political participation.

*Deliberative democracy* is an ideal of democracy as a free deliberation on values, objectives and strategies that are in the interest of the entire political community (Eriksen 1995, Gutmann 1999). In such deliberations the best argument must prevail and power is not to be applied. Arguments that only refer to self-interests are not legitimate. Deliberations may characterise most forms of political participation and processes. However, deliberative public debate is seen as an important type of political participation. In public debate proposals and ideas will be tested, i.e. it must be examined whether they are in the best interest of the entire political community.

Political deliberations are expected to influence public policy contents because such deliberations will provide a common understanding for specific policy making. Instrumental political motivation is implied here, but the interests of groups and individuals are seen as related to common interests. However, it could also be argued that self-development is an important motivation for participating citizens because becoming part of a broader community is a matter of developing the self.

## Research review

Available research on political education in schools in Western countries is mainly based on curriculum studies and textbook analyses. François Audigier (Audigier 1999b) sums up some of these studies, and concludes that political education falls into a one or a combination of the following main types.<sup>6</sup> First, moralism emphasising civic deeds like paying taxes, obey the laws and serve in the armed forces (Audigier 1999a, Audigier 1999b). This hardly emphasises political participation at all, even though the duty to vote may be a component here. Second, a formalistic political education emphasising the for-

mal structure and procedures of the main political organs. Other writers also find signs of such orientations in their research and/or reviews (Patrick & Hoge 1991, Dekker 1994). It is difficult to say what democratic conceptions such formal arrangements reflect. But in most countries the structures and procedures of representative, competitive democracy are probably key issues. Third, political education may take the form of debating current issues in a critical fashion, as also Russel Farnen points out in his review (Farnen 2001). This may be linked to various forms of representative democracy because voters must debate to vote in an informed way. It could be related to deliberative ideas of democracy, depending on what types of discussions that take place. It could also be related to pluralism and participatory democracy because discussions play a role here as well. Fourth, a frequent emphasis is the legal rights and obligations of citizens (Audigier & Lagelée 1996, Anderson, Avery et al. 1997). Such rights may point in the direction of many conceptions of democracy.

This body of research is based on textbook and curricular texts. There are very few studies of what happens in the classrooms. Of course, textbooks and curricula do not determine classroom practice, and an important question is to what extent these tendencies can be found in practice? There are a few studies where teachers are interviewed about how they teach citizenship (Davis, Gregory et al. 1999, Audigier 1999b). These teachers tend to minimise teaching about political life, and instead focus on how to live together in class and at school in a respectful, tolerant way. This deviates from what one would expect in the light of textbooks analyses, and underlines the need to examine what happens at classroom level.

Norwegian curriculum research points out that the curricula are marked by a democratic turn from the early 1970's (Eikeland 1989). Before this turn, Norwegian curricula were first patriarchal in their treatment of individual citizens and the state. In the post World War II years, a more technically oriented problem solving and cooperation oriented conception of politics dominated until the democratic turn referred to above. The objective of politically active citizens is changed in the curricula after 1970. Active citizens must be empowered to participate in many ways and the curricula urges schools to counter elitism and conformism in political life. Pupils must be encouraged to assess whether society is democratic or not, and democracy is more than formal arrangements, it is a way of life. In these ambitions traces can be seen of both neo-pluralist democracy, participatory democracy and even deliberative democracy. Halvdan Eikeland refers to and is inspired by a parallel study conducted in Sweden by Tomas Englund (Englund & Svingby 1986). In his examination of Norwegian text-

books on political education in the same period, Svein Lorentzen concludes that there are traces of these ideas as well as remnants of older traditions of emphasising the formal set-up of representative competitive democracy (Lorentzen 2003). The Norwegian case is therefore of particular interest for its attempts to alter political education.

## Methods of research

The research questions will be examined in the light of two data sets. First, four teachers were interviewed about their teaching practices concerning political education in the span of 6. to 9. grade. The conclusions from the analysis of these data were then incorporated in a questionnaire, which resulted in a survey data set based on the responses of 254 teachers.

The interviews were conducted in mid 2000, and the interviews took approximately 1 ½ hours, except for one that lasted about an hour. These four teachers were selected from a list of teachers who had had students from the teacher training programs in their classes for practice periods. Teachers having students are expected to be more motivated than others and they are expected to be better able to express what they do and why they do it.

In the interviews I posed fairly open questions asking the teachers to describe how they taught politics. Next, the interviews focused particularly on what types of participation the teachers emphasised and how they presented these. Furthermore, the interviews focused on how participatory arrangements made sense in a broader context, and finally on what motivates the individual to participate. Particular emphasis was placed on trying to ask what the teachers did, and accepting their terms for describing it. Their terms and concepts were applied in follow-up questions.

It was underlined to all teachers that they would not be evaluated by means of specific criteria and that the approach was open and exploratory. Nevertheless, it remains a problem that teachers in interviews may present their efforts as more developed than they are. On the other hand, they often admitted not paying attention to things they realised were important. This improves reliability.

The analysis takes the form of first presenting what was the common trend for all teachers and then to analyse elements of variation. A key problem when examining what has been taught is that in most lessons there are a few main topics and many brief references to other topics. The main topics are those that the teacher stresses, explains, illustrates, asks questions about, and sometimes follows up in activi-

ties for the pupils. When teaching the main topics, the teachers also make short references to related topics without elaborating on them. In the interviews the teachers thus frequently said that they “mentioned” various issues whereas they emphasised others. It is likely that what most pupils perceive are the main topics, and that what is only mentioned is missed by the majority of them. In this article it will be reported also what is briefly mentioned. But the interpretation will be that this is not enough to say that the topic has been systematically taught and can be expected to be retained by the pupils.

The conclusions reached in the pilot study will then be analysed in the light of a survey data material from 254 teachers at Norwegian primary and lower secondary schools.<sup>7</sup> 135 schools were randomly selected from geographically defined strata. At these schools, all teachers who taught *Society subjects* were invited to respond. 254 did, but as the schools often failed to report how many teachers they had who taught the subject, the response percentage is uncertain. But it is low, as there are obviously more than 1–2 teachers teaching the subjects at most schools. The questionnaire included questions about what emphasis was placed on types of political participation, political processes, democratic principles, some of the main political organs and public policy.

## Norwegian political education

There is a major difference between three teachers teaching at lower secondary school and one teacher teaching at intermediate level. The latter expressed very strongly that pupils at this level were not prepared for or interested in political topics. His teaching was thus quite limited, he said. He gave some very brief explanations about what parliament and government was. His pupils had normally heard these terms and he explained in brief what they meant. In addition, he tried to work on some basic democratic principles. However, there were many issues he felt had to wait and thus I will on some points below refer only to the three other teachers.

### How to participate

Our first main question concerns what kinds of political participation the pupils were made aware of and how these forms of participation were described. Although the three teachers at lower secondary school differed somewhat in their choices of content, the similarities were prominent and will be discussed first.

*To be an informed voter*

The three pilot teachers all made elections the key issue in their teaching about politics in general, according to themselves. This was also the teaching activity that they described most in detail. Elections thus stood out as the major type of political participation in their teaching.

Every second year there is an election in Norway – national or regional and local. All three teachers scheduled teaching about politics to election time, and focus was on the governmental level that had elections that particular year. In other words, they switched themes between grades in order to teach politics when the mass media made elections a hot issue. The major learning activity, as teachers described it, was that the pupils selected a political issue in which they were interested. Then they examined party programs on that particular issue.

The teachers organised quite extensive pupil projects. First, the pupils worked on their own to define a socially and politically relevant issue. They then organised themselves in groups and on many occasions left school in order to find out what the political parties wanted to do. They sometimes contacted campaigners at party stands, they contacted a local party official for an interview, or they visited the local party office if there was one. In all cases they worked with the official party programs, in which they searched for the party's view on the relevant issue. They then all made a presentation of their results in class.

The teachers said that they normally supplemented this pupil investigation by giving some brief explanations that were necessary in order to understand the election at hand (the nomination process, the governmental bodies to which the people were to elect representatives and how election results decide who will be in the government).

Elections were thus made a core topic, and elections were presented in terms of choosing among the alternative platforms of the political parties. These platforms were found in the party programs.

Some of the teachers also explained how one might make oneself heard in a political party: How to join, how to influence from within and how candidates for elections are chosen. One of the teachers also said he pointed out the existence of youth branches in political parties.

Concerning other arenas for political participation, the data material indicates that this was rather marginal in political education. None of the teachers mentioned this in their initial responses to questions about what they did. On follow-up questions about alternative forms of political participation they extended the range of



participation forms, but only vaguely so. Concerning interest organisations, two of them said that that could be interesting as a supplement but that they did not teach it. They further indicated, (or at least two of them did), that they sometimes touched upon action groups and direct contact with officials.

In addition to voting, the political activity which was most strongly pointed out to the pupils was to keep oneself updated on political issues in the mass media. The teachers stated themselves that they wished to encourage this. But perhaps more important was that they systematically included what was on the mass media agenda in their classes. One teacher said he emphasised that the pupils should be informed about ongoing political events, using the media regularly. His pupils had reading the newspaper as permanent homework.

An important reason for this emphasis, according to the teachers, was that they wished to link political education to what was on the mass media agenda and what was discussed in society. The teachers stressed that pupil interest and motivation to study various subjects could not be taken for granted. One of them was asked if he managed to motivate them to learn about politics, and he replied that

Well, you never get all of them along with your teaching.  
But I feel that I get more of them activated when it is a theme  
that is on the agenda (in the media) right now.

Interest in an issue that is normally outside the world of pupils might suddenly increase dramatically when it is on the mass media agenda, in the public debate and on the agenda for the everyday conversations of people that the pupils listen to.

Actually, the mass media agenda to quite some extent determined the contents of the political education. There were many statements in the material indicating that themes (i.e. focusing on elections and examination of party programs) were chosen because they “worked” with the pupils. And what worked was to adjust to the media agenda, as the following quote illustrates

Q: So, this year you decided to focus on the political parties and elections?

R: Yes, at the local level, because there was a local government election. And that is something to take into consideration when you make your choices from the curriculum. Is there anything that justifies your choice of this particular subject? I think, if it is not an election year, it is not normal to make the pupils work with elections even if it is on the curriculum for that year [...] I exclude

themes ... I can say that I picked that particular theme because it was possible to frame it as a practical work. Something on the agenda, something that happened now. That the pupils met by media.

The types of political participation that were encouraged and explained were thus voting and to follow the news. This comes fairly close to the requirements to voters in representative, competitive elite democracy. This voter must study party programs closely and find out which party he prefers. But he must also be informed about current issues and how political parties deal with important issues. Political activity beyond this is not required. Neither is political knowledge.

Critical discussions about political parties did not seem to occur. One teacher mentioned that the pupils were sometimes amused – and sometimes disgusted – by party officials who could not answer questions about what the party had written in their party programs. The teachers were then asked if they followed up such incidents with a discussion about whether the political parties function adequately. The response was negative. In general, critical perspectives were completely absent in the material, i.e. concerning the political system as such.

### *Democratic ideals and principles*

Democratic principles are a wide category. Many of them such as tolerance, respect for the opinion of others, the right to have an independent opinion and the right to express it are objectives for the entire educational project and are worked with in all subjects. But we may also envisage democratic principles that are taught in explicit relation to political education.

In general, democratic principles were not a priority in the teaching of these teachers, according to themselves. They did not give lectures on this. But they would occasionally focus on it in connection with other topics and activities. Consider how the teacher who organised role plays for his pupils described what happened.

Q: What goes on in the (simulated) council then?

R: There is a meeting, and discussion [...]

Q: Do they (the pupils while playing the play) get excited and mad at each other?

R: Yes they do. They do. And then the speaker has to stop excesses (he uses an expression that cannot be translated, but speaker intervention is what it means).

Q: And then some loose and some win in the final vote?

R: Yes.

Q: And the losers, how do they react?

R: Well, that differs. But it is fun, because sometimes they realise that they have lost their cause (before the final vote), and they accept it but they ... do get angry.

Two of the teachers, when describing how they explained the role of the political parties in connection with the program studies, stated that they explained that there was a limited amount of resources and different opinions about priorities. The result would please some and disappoint others. The conception of democracy at work here is the conflict of interests and the confrontation of such interests. Jarle Weigård and Erik O. Eriksen label this an interest aggregating view of democracy as opposed to the deliberative view (Weigård & Eriksen 1998).

Several of the teachers pointed out that when trying to explain democratic values and principles, that could best be done in relation to decision-making at class level and school level. These efforts were described in terms that were less conflictual. One emphasised the principle of representation, which the pupils' election of a representative to the pupils' council exemplified. One of the teachers said that he did not make democratic principles a teaching subject in class, but tried to make the pupils adopt such ideals by learning to act democratically among themselves. He stated:

... I have many times used the class as group. There can emerge disagreement. Different points of view about various issues. And many times I have linked this to society at large and our democracy. That you are allowed to say what you think, you are allowed to be heard, you should be allowed to join the discussion, take part in the debate. But one must also – if one arrives at the time when a decision has to be made – ... respect that one might be overruled by the majority. That one is in minority and has to accept that. And not say “then I don't care”, or “then I drop out”, or “then I boycott”. ... Situations that occur in the school community that are possible to link to the democratic ideals. ... And the kids understand that.

This teacher is closer to deliberative thinking in what he says, but he does not insist on consensus.

One teacher also argued extensively that by making the pupils' experience the starting point, quite a number of the abstract principles

of democratic society could be explained to pupils. I.e., by making principles that the pupils had developed themselves as a starting point. According to this teacher, pupils have an acute understanding of what is fair or just and of equality. Equality and fairness were principles they held in high regard. Applying such principles to social issues, preferably issues that the pupils had some knowledge about, was a way of expanding their thinking about democratic principles.

Democratic principles seem to have been mentioned and sporadically explained but not systematically taught the way elections were.

### Political participation in context

Various types of political participation do not make sense unless they are linked to a broader context. In the interviews teachers were asked what meaning participation, i.e. to vote and to keep up with the news, had in political life according to their teaching. Some of the teachers linked voting to public policy outcomes as elected politicians decide public policy. This is implied in the study of party programs whose main point was what the party in question would do on a particular issue. One of the teachers said that policy issues studied in connection to the elections were every now and then followed up during the following year. When asked about whether he and the class followed up issues studied in the party programs and how they were dealt with in the political decision making process he said:

It is limited to what extent we can enter that ... We are constantly short of time, you know. But we try to keep it warm, to repeatedly drop by the development of (the issue). What has happened this week and why etc. ... There are so many other themes to be dealt with, ... so that I feel I do not have enough time to go into that part.

One of the teachers said that when the pupils presented the results of their party program studies, the possible realisation and follow up of the proposals was sometimes commented. One teacher organised role plays for the pupils, where they simulated being a local council or the parliament. Another teacher said he did not do that himself but he knew that it was quite common to work that way.

However, policy making processes are not much elaborated. When asked whether they taught policy making processes in general the pilot teachers all stated that they did not. Several of them, however, added or indicated that they would have liked to do so but that time did not permit it. And as argued, some of them touched upon aspects

of political decision making processes, linking elected political representatives to policy outcomes as those who decide, alone.

To some extent the teachers linked election results to the struggle for power after the election. The teachers included the interplay between the political parties in elected bodies as they distribute positions after elections. When asked about whether what happened after the election was taught, some of the teachers pointed to the immediate changes in offices that follow an election. One said that he explained the differences between majority cabinets, coalition cabinets and minority cabinets, and (at the local level) how the election results influenced the composition of numerous local and regional government commissions, committees and offices.

Constraints on elected politicians were not a major issue except that all teachers provided rudimentary explanations about the formal structure of parliament, cabinet and about the formal division of responsibilities among them. Despite such efforts the teachers said that the formal structure was not a main issue in their teaching.

The role of voting and election results is thus not elaborated by the teachers. But in as far as they try to situate elections in the political system, it is a bout how elected political leaders are in charge and decide. This negligence of political processes is contrary to both participatory democracy as well as pluralism, and is closer to competitive elite democracy.

The point about watching the news was quite clearly elaborated by the teachers. It was a matter of making students see that politics was on the agenda. Of course it also makes sense because voters have to be informed about political issues. However, the teachers did not point this out as the main reason.

### Why is political participation worth the effort for the individual citizen?

In general, the teachers had difficulties responding to this question. One of them said explicitly that he had no answer to it, and really did not know how to justify political participation. The others partly argued quite determined that the general, abstract and somewhat moralist appeals that had dominated textbooks have no effect at all.

One of the teachers argued that whether political participation is worth the effort was a question that it was too early to examine with the pupils at this level. Perhaps the most elaborate answer several of the teachers gave was that the pupils had to experience for themselves, within the framework of pupil democracy at school and class

level that it makes a difference whether you participate or not. This implies that the point of participating is that the individual may make a difference for outcomes. One of the teachers pointed out that pupils' council tended to be left with only minor issues and in any case was always strictly supervised by the school management. No independent basis for power or influence was provided to these councils. There might therefore be a shortage of good examples.

In addition to instrumentalism as political motivation, the teachers also evoked the idea that it is necessary to be updated on what goes on in society. It is a matter of knowing what is being talked about, what is "hot" right now and of not being ignorant.

In total, individual political motivation is not much treated by the four teachers.

## Survey data on political education

The analysis of the qualitative data suggests a political education in line with competitive elite democracy. Larry Diamond labels this minimalist democracy (1999). This is surprising compared to the curricular guidelines. However, these conclusions have a very narrow empirical support, and it is of interest to see these findings in relation to a broader data material. 254 teachers responded to a questionnaire asking to what extent they emphasised a whole range of themes in their teaching about politics (see note 7). The teachers were asked what emphasis they placed on types of political participation, democratic principles, on political process and contents of public policy (table 1).

The survey data does not directly oppose the conclusions from the qualitative analysis but suggests some modifications of our model of political education practice. The concentration on elections as the main form of political participation is evident also in the survey data. 83 per cent of teachers said they emphasised this (in this section, having emphasised means that the teachers put some, large or very large emphasis on the issue in question).

The national government was also emphasised by a large majority of teachers, 74.6 per cent, but most of these, 58.4 per cent only put "some emphasis" on this. What was actually taught about the cabinet and the government is not mapped by these data. Considering the tendency to focus on formal structure and constitutional principles that has been found internationally (see above), and in Norwegian textbooks after World War II (Lorentzen 2005), it is a likely interpretation that teaching formal structures is what these teachers refer to. This is quite parallel to the teaching of the pilot teachers.

Table 1. Teachers' emphasis on political education themes, percentages.

	No emphasis	Little emphasis	Some emphasis	Great emphasis	Very great emphasis	Some, great and very great emphasis added	N
Politics	6.6	17.1	58.6	16.0	1.7	76.3	181
Elections	3.8	13.2	47.8	33.0	2.2	83.0	182
Direct action and interest organisations	10.4	44.0	42.3	2.7	0.5	45.5	182
Direct contact with officials	32.2	41.7	22.2	3.3	0.6	26.1	180
Express opinions through the media	29.7	39.0	27.7	3.6	0	31.3	195
Political debate/action in local community	37.4	37.4	20.1	5.2	0	25.6	174
Democratic principles	3.8	8.0	51.6	32.9	3.8	88.3	213
The national government	5.6	19.8	58.4	15.7	0.5	74.6	197
Political processes	15.9	36.4	38.1	9.7	0	47.8	176
Public policy contents	14.7	43.5	34.8	7.1	0	41.9	184
Conflicts in society	0.9	20.0	54.0	23.3	1.9	79.2	215
Regimes in other countries	8.5	22.6	54.3	14.1	0.5	68.9	199
Human rights, children's rights	0.9	6.8	34.2	48.7	9.4	93	234

A large majority of teachers also answered that they taught social conflicts, democratic principles and human rights in addition to elections and national government. More than 80 per cent of the teachers emphasised all these issues. Which conflicts is hard to say, whereas human rights are less ambiguous. Likewise, it is not possible to say what democratic principles teachers were referring to. It would be surprising if these teachers taught democratic values very profoundly. It is also possible that when teachers reported that they emphasised democratic principles and human rights, they referred to the fact that teachers normally encourage some critical thinking, respect for others and debate and voting as a means to reach decisions. This interpretation is in line with the pattern found in the qualitative material.

There is thus a large group of teachers who made elections an important issue concerning how to participate and who gave some explanations of the governmental institutions. They also provided some elements from human rights and democratic principles. This is a model that comes close to the teaching of the four teachers in the

pilot study, and it is a core model that most teachers report that they included in their teaching. This is the minimalist model. A substantial group of teachers did not expand beyond this model.

There is a tiny group of 15 teachers who did not emphasise neither elections nor the governmental institutions. They are so few they could represent errors. Assuming they are not, they are interesting because it might be that they deviate from the minimalist model of the majority and have developed alternative approaches. However, the material does not support such an expectation. They did not emphasise any of the alternative content variables that they were measured against – like political contents, discussing political issues that are on the agenda, direct action or the media in politics. The only thing they emphasised at all was democratic principles and human rights/children's rights. This can be interpreted in at least two ways. It could be that these teachers systematically worked with the democratic vision, its ideals and arguments and with its foundations in human rights. An alternative interpretation is that these teachers concentrated on other issues in their teaching. But most teachers generally try to make pupils think for themselves, be critical, tolerant and open to debate. These teachers could be reporting this when they answered that they taught democratic principles and human rights. Data does not allow us to say which interpretation is correct. Assuming that the latter interpretation comes closest to reality, we might label this purely symbolic political education, assuming that the first one is correct we could label it the philosophical model aiming only at democratic values. What values that might be remain unknown.

There is a large group of teachers who reported to have expanded teaching beyond the minimalist model. 45 per cent emphasised interest organisations and direct action, 26.1 per cent taught direct contact with officials. A similar proportion also emphasised expressing opinions through the mass media or in political discussions in daily life. Thus, in addition to the minimalist model these teachers emphasised a broader range of political actors and a broader array of participatory forms (direct action, interest organisations, direct contact with politicians and bureaucrats and the mass media). But as can be seen in table 1, most of them only put some emphasis on these themes, and very few of them emphasised all these additional issues in combination. The fact that most of these teachers emphasised only some of these themes is shown in table 2. The correlations between emphases on these elements are moderate. Table 2 also shows that there are no negative correlations among these elements. There are thus no signs of distinct and competing patterns of how to expand beyond the minimalist model.



Table 2. Correlations (Pearsons r) between themes beyond the minimalist model.

	Direct action and interest organisations	Direct contact with officials	Use the mass media	Political debate/action in local community	Political processes	Contents of public policy
Direct action & interest org.						
Direct contact with officials	0.42!					
Use the mass media	0.23*	0.47!				
Debate/action in local comm.	0.30!	0.32!	0.28!			
Political processes	0.33!	0.30!	0.40!	0.32!		
Contents of public policy	0.31!	0.32!	0.47!	0.28!	0.57!	

+: $p < 0.05$ . \*: $p < 0.01$ . !: $p < 0.001$ . -:cannot be calculated.

There is only a tiny group of 9 teachers who reported that they put a lot or much emphasis on policy contents, political processes, direct contact with decision makers, discussion and activity on the local community, direct action and interest organisations in addition to the minimalist model. As they are very few they might be errors in the material, but their existence is plausible. This little group came close to what we might label an activist model of political education, with elements from pluralist and participatory democracy conceptions. The importance of interest groups and direct action is in line with both conceptions. The participatory aspect can be seen in direct action but even more so in the teaching of political processes and policy contents. This is so because that is what the citizen engaged in direct participation needs to understand in order to participate directly.

Between the minimalist model and the activist model there is a continuum where a large part of the teachers are found. Emphases on the various issues that bring the teaching closer to the activist model are positively correlated. This probably indicates that we do not deal with competing models.

The distinction between the minimalist model and the activist models does not mirror a two-step education where the minimalist model is presented in the sixth grade, when the curriculum first puts it on the agenda and the expanded models come in grade 8 and 9 when the theme reappears. Many minimalist teachers actually teach at 8th or 9th grade.

There is, however also a sign of deliberative ideas in the sense that discussions are emphasised by some. But it is difficult to say what discussions this might refer to and thus to what extent the principles of deliberative democracy are at work in these discussions.

## Summary and discussion

The main trend in Norwegian political education makes voting a priority. Voting being based on the study and comparison of party programs. To keep up with the news is also an important activity. Elections are related to the political process by fairly elementary explanations of how election results decide who will be in parliament and the government and therefore in control of politics. Voting thus stands out as a quite powerful political act. This main trend parallels competitive elite democracy, or the minimalist model. How participation makes sense at the individual level is not a topic that is systematically treated, at least not by the pilot teachers.

The focus on the news is in line with the deliberative view emphasising public debate. It would be very surprising if keeping up with the news did not imply that the pupils discussed issues on the mass media agenda in class. The crucial question is what forms such class discussions take. Even spectators discuss what they see. Discussions qualifying for participation in public deliberations imply that certain principles are adhered to. Data does not tell whether this is the case.

To varying extents, many teachers expand their teaching in the direction of an activist model emphasising more participatory forms and elaborating more on the various stages in the political process and on policy contents. Studies of political process and policy content open up a possibility that pupils develop a more nuanced view of how various actors might play a role at different stages in the decision making process in addition to elections. It is also likely that studies of policy-making processes reveal some of the constraints on democratic policy making but data does not allow us to say to what extent these potentials are developed by teachers who teach these topics. This teaching does not reject elite competition in elections but add elements from pluralism and participatory democracy.

As pointed out in the introduction, the Norwegian curriculum suggests a political education which is different from what is reported in international research. In this body of research, political education is composed of one or several of the following elements. First, moralism emphasising civic deeds such as willingness to pay taxes, obey the laws and serve in the armed forces. Second, a formalistic political education emphasising the formal structure and procedures of the main political institutions. Third, political education may take the form of debating current issues. Fourth, political education might be left aside completely, or reduced to pupil participation at school and class level (Dekker 1994, Audigier 1999a, Minthrop 2002). Concerning the last hypothesis – negligence – this is very marginal in

Norwegian schools. It is difficult to say to what extent political education is moralistic, but it seems clear that it is less concerned with formal, structural aspects of political institutions. Discussing current issues is to some extent found also in Norwegian schools, but it is difficult to say what type of discussion this is. Thus, Norwegian political education does not deviate as much from what is reported as the national curriculum makes us expect. The major difference seems to be the emphasis that is placed on political parties, their conflicting views and competition for support. This is the main content of Norwegian political education. It is possible that this is taught elsewhere in Europe but it is not well documented by empirical research. It is furthermore possible that it does not occur because in some countries partisan political conflicts are less accepted in school. There are reports on such resistance to bring politics into the schools in for instance France (Percheron 1993).

Some researchers stress that there is no canon, no established, consensual model which define what political education is and should be (Audigier 1999a). Consequently, political education must be expected to vary and to be quite irregular. The material considered in this article suggests that informally, a canon of political education has developed. It is centred on political parties, informed by competitive elite democracy and moderately supplemented with elements from pluralism and participatory democracy in a harmonious, system-loyal spirit.

The structural conditions for citizen political participation are changing. Democratic politics have been developed in the framework of the nation state which is now changing due to globalisation processes. Globalisation dramatically alters the possibilities for meaningful citizen participation. Political education will have to adjust to this, but there are no traces of such changes in my data material.

Adrienne Sørbom discusses the implications of late modernity on how people relate to politics (Sørbom 2002). In her analysis, a main point is that people channel an increasing engagement in social problems to direct problem solving and self governance at the local level. As such, it is a theory of how people turn away from politics at larger scale and by means of established political institutions. But it is also possible to see late modernity theory as a theory about how people relate differently to traditional forms of political participation. They will be more self defining and reflexive also in traditional forms of engagement and they may activate or deactivate much more rapidly.

It is surprising that developments such as these do not seem to enter political education. They may of course have entered other activities at school. In this perspective Norwegian political education seems to be conservative.

The majority of teachers thus teach political education fairly much in line with the requirements of competitive elite democracy. This may also be labelled voter education. An activist model inspired by neo-pluralism and participatory democracy is taught by a minority of teachers. A large group of teachers situate themselves between these two poles, i.e. they make minimalism the core and add some elements of activism.

Voter education and activist education must be added to constitutionalism, moralism, negligence and debate of current issues as types of political education that might be combined in various ways.

### Notes

1. From first to tenth grade, pupils every year study a subject that might be translated as “society subjects”. This subject is composed of three equal parts: history, geography and social studies. Social studies include some economics, cultural anthropology, political science, and sociological issues. During ten years of compulsory schooling, a total of 855 lessons in “society subjects” are given to pupils (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Church Affairs, Education and Research 1996). The social studies part is primarily oriented towards socialisation and politics, even though other citizenship education themes are also included.
2. Of course, political participation depends not only on such competence. It also rests on other individual properties such as socio-economic status and economic resources. Furthermore, social structure facilitates or prohibits political participation. Finally, political institutions may themselves allow for more or less political participation (Aardal 2002).
3. In this article, political education will refer to how schools make ideas about these issues available for pupils. Educational efforts may raise other political issues as well. In this paper, however, political education is focused on education about how the individual may participate politically in a meaningful way.
4. There are important exceptions, John Stuart Mill for instance also underlined the developmental potential of political participation.
5. Pluralism implies citizen activism in interest groups, participatory democracy expands this notion.
6. Audigier at one point sums of available research in four types: moralism, formal organisation, debating current issues and political education by means of democratising the school or classroom (1999b). Elsewhere in his work he refers to other orientations, and he thus identifies more than the initial four. I base my review on his extended categorisation.
7. The survey study on social studies was a component in a large evaluation of how the curriculum reform of 1997 had been implemented. Concerning social studies, a broad range of issues in addition to political education were examined. The findings on social studies are available in the report *Evaluering av samfunnsfag i Reform 97* (Christophersen, Lotsberg, et al. 2003).

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