Methodological material on
democratic discourse in schools

TALKING POLITICS



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Swedish Agency for
Youth and Civil Society



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Introduction

Politics is all around us, even in school. Students encounter political messages in their day-to-day lives through news outlets and social media.

For political parties and other associations, schools are an important channel for reaching young people – potential new members and voters – especially in an election year. As well as being a place where children and young people acquire knowledge, school is a meeting place and somewhere they spend much of their time. School may be the first place that a student meets a local politician or another young person who has chosen to engage in politics, or where they learn about the workings of society and their rights according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A school that is open to the surrounding community, where political parties and other organisations are welcome to meet the students, can be a place where new ideas are awakened, ideas that students in various ways carry with them for the rest of their lives. At school, we can also take advantage of students' existing engagement and take issues that are important to them as a point of departure.

When we discuss politics in school and invite political parties to visit, other issues are also raised. How can the school ensure that every party is welcome on the same terms? As a teacher, how can you ensure that issues are addressed from all perspectives? What does it mean for a school to be a place where discussion is permitted, and at the same time a place that is not values-neutral?

Talking Politics is aimed at Years 7–9 and upper-secondary school. Its purpose is to make it easier for schools to work systematically and qualitatively with political discourse. It can also offer support to teachers working at schools that invite political parties to visit.

Perhaps your school has a long history of working with political parties but you are looking for fresh ideas? Perhaps you are a teacher who has been handed responsibility for planning the school's party-political debate for the first time and you are looking for methods and tips on how to go about it? Hopefully, this methodological material can support or inspire you to develop your work with political information and a party-political presence in your school.

ABOUT THE MATERIAL

It is you, the teachers and other staff who work at your school, who are the experts when it comes to your organisation and what works best for you. So, *Talking Politics* should not be viewed as the final word on how schools should work with political information.

The working methods, examples and discussion topics presented here can be used in many different ways and the process will not always be linear. Take your own organisation as a point of departure and use the material as you see fit to develop your existing work.

The material is divided into five chapters, the first of which describes the democratic assignment of Swedish schools, after which we examine what one should bear in mind before, during and after democratic and political discussions in the classroom. We conclude by passing on some wise words, thoughts and advise on various approaches to democratic discourse in schools.

COLLEGIAL LEARNING

This methodological material takes up issues that you can discuss with your teaching colleagues. Feel free to view the school's work with political information as an opportunity to work together as a faculty. Develop teaching by setting aside time to jointly evaluate your work and discuss the issues and themes raised in the material. This methodological material is intended as a resource for all teachers, not just those who teach civics. It is designed to stimulate the entire school to create space for political discourse.

Collegial learning is an important factor for success. This implies that teachers should collaborate by systematically analysing and evaluating both their own and each other's work in order to acquire new knowledge. While collegial learning can take many different forms, the Swedish National Agency for Education underlines that it should be long-term, systematic and based on research and local experience.

Your own experiences of school are a vital source of fresh insight. So, take the opportunity offered by collegial learning, among both teaching and other staff, to create an environment in which everyone feels secure enough to evaluate, discuss and share ideas about how you can develop your own work.



LEARN MORE

Learn more about collegial learning in the publication *Forskning för klassrummet – vetenskaplig grund och beprövad erfarenhet i praktiken* [Research for the Classroom: A scientific basis and proven practical experience] (Swedish National Agency for Education 2013a).

https://www.skolverket.se/publikationsserier/forskning-for-skolan/2013/forskning-for-klassrummet?id=3095

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They will be offering sound advice and good ideas about democratic discourse and methodology in schools.





THE SCHOOL'S CORE VALUES AND DEMOCRATIC ASSIGNMENT

In this chapter we present the core values and democratic assignment of Swedish schools, systematic quality management and why it is important to talk politics in your educational activities. Knowledge of governance documents and guidelines will help you feel secure when you invite political parties to visit your school and will support your work to fulfil the organisation's democratic assignment.

As well as providing students with knowledge of democratic values and human rights, schools shall use democratic working methods in which both students and staff exert influence over the school's activities and work/study environment.

The school shall foster democratic citizens; this happens when the school's activities and environment are permeated by basic democratic values and respect for human rights (www.skolverket.se).

Here, we present the governance documents and guidelines of relevance to political discourse in schools. When discussing how you should work in your school, it is useful to have a common grasp of the applicable governance documents and guidelines.

ABOUT, THROUGH AND FOR

That your work in school is values-based means that, in meetings between students, colleagues and parents, our attitudes are based on democratic values. Teaching democratic values is not simply a matter of explaining what democracy is; we must also demonstrate it in practice (www.skolverket.se).

The assignment of schools to promote democratic values can be described with the words *about, through* and *for.*

When working with political parties in schools and in this material, there are elements of all three. As students learn more about the parties and meet them in real life, they learn *about* how a democratic society works. By including students in the planning and implementation of these meetings – by allowing them to moderate debates, for example – they will learn *through* putting democratic methods into practice. And as you study and practice source criticism, analyse party policy and do values exercises, your students will learn *for* democracy; i.e., for their own ability to actively participate in society (Swedish National Agency for Education 2013b).

Students learn **about** democracy and how the party-political system works **through** democratic working methods such as debate, providing them with knowledge **for** democracy.

Participation in schools' mock elections to the Riksdag and European Parliament is one way to explicitly discuss politics and meet the schools obligation to promote democratic values. These school elections help students to understand how elections work and why it is important to vote, as well as providing an opportunity to discuss the democratic system and their own opportunities to influence their community.

Civic skills are built on *values, knowledge* and *ability*. Discuss how political information and the presence of political parties in your school contributes to, or could contribute to, your students acquiring civic skills.

GOVERNANCE DOCUMENTS AND GUIDELINES

Swedish schools are tasked with both conveying knowledge and instilling democratic values. The task of instilling democratic values cannot be separated from everyday school work. It is an ongoing process permeating all areas of school life (Swedish National Agency for Education 2013b).

As well as teaching the subjects on the curriculum, schools must also prepare students for a future life as an active citizen. However, children and young people also have rights in the here and now. Pursuant to the Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800), education shall:

- promote extensive contacts and social bonds and provide students with a solid foundation for active participation in society (Education Act Chapter 10 Section 2); and
- convey and underpin respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society rests (Education Act Chapter 1 Section 4).

Education shall be designed in accordance with fundamental democratic values and basic human rights such as:

- the inviolability of human life;
- the freedom and dignity of the individual;
- the equal worth of all people;
- gender equality; and
- solidarity between people. (Education Act Chapter 1 Section 5).

Students must develop the skills they need to exercise active citizenship in a democratic society. In practice, these civic skills consist of:

1. the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society rests according to law, including tolerance, gender equality, solidarity, respect for human rights and diversity and for our shared environment;

2. the necessary theoretical knowledge to actively participate in society, including knowledge of politics, society and how democracy works; and

3. the necessary practical skills and abilities to live and work in a democratic society, such as literacy, basic mathematical skills, communication skills, the ability to retrieve information and critical thinking. Students must learn to assess and manage the constant flow of information in society, as well as gaining practical experience of taking responsibility, participation and exercising influence and training in working in democratic forms.

(Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2012)

INVITING POLITICAL PARTIES INTO YOUR SCHOOL: WHAT ARE THE RULES?

Inviting political parties to visit your school is one way to work on the school's democratic assignment and its interaction with the surrounding community.

A 2018 amendment to the Education Act, Section 5a of Chapter 1, clarifies the rules that apply when political parties are invited into schools. This provision states that:

"The head teacher shall decide whether political parties should be invited to participate in educational activities. If political parties are invited, the number may be limited to all of the parties represented in the Riksdag, the assembly in one or more municipalities or the European Parliament."

OBSERVE THE PRINCIPLE OF OBJECTIVITY AND IMPARTIALITY

Section 5a also states that a head master may further limit the number of political parties invited to the school, as long as the selection is made on objective grounds. This provision is based on the principal of objectivity and impartiality in Article 9 of Chapter 1 of the Instrument of Government, with which the school must comply. So, when political parties are invited into a school it must be done in an objective and impartial manner (Chapter 1 Section 5a Education Act).

It is important to bear in mind that the selection of political parties must not be made with the intention of excluding a given party because of its political opinions. To do so would be in contravention of the principle of objectivity and impartiality.

Independent schools are also bound by the principle of objectivity and impartiality and the provisions of the Education Act when they invite political parties to take part in their activities.

CAN THE SCHOOL LIMIT THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PARTIES IT INVITES?

As long as there are objective grounds for doing so, a school may limit the number of political parties it invites to participate in its activities. The school may limit its invitation to all parties represented in the Riksdag, the municipal, county or regional assembly or the European Parliament. The school may also issue invitations based on some other criteria, as long as the selection is made on objective grounds; for example, invitations may be limited to the parties entitled to central or local government party support, or to parties entitled to ballot papers at the expense of the state.

WHO DECIDES WHETHER POLITICAL PARTIES SHOULD BE INVITED TO THE SCHOOL?

The head teacher decides whether political parties should be invited to participate in the school's educational activities and whether the number of parties should be limited. The head master may choose to delegate this authority to another member of staff.

It is always the school that invites political parties to participate in its educational activities, even if the initiative comes from one or more of the parties. The invitation is issued in the interests of education and not the political interests of the parties in question.

IS IT NECESSARY TO OFFER POLITICAL PARTIES THAT ARE NOT INVITED THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO STUDENTS?

No, as long as the head teacher has objective grounds for selecting the parties, there is no requirement to offer other parties who have expressed an interest in attending such an opportunity.

The head teacher may however decide to allow the parties to provide such information in writing, on a book table or by participating in educational activities in some other way. Here too, the head teacher's decision must be objective and impartial.

IS IT MANDATORY FOR THE SCHOOL TO INVITE POLITICAL PARTIES TO PARTICIPATE IN EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES?

No, school is not a public place and political parties have no right to visit schools to disseminate their message.

The Swedish National Agency for Education (circular 17:70, 2017) has underlined the duty of schools to provide students with an overall picture of the Swedish political system, its parties and their policies. Inviting parties to take part in teaching activities at the school is a good method for providing a multifaceted image of how democracy and our political system work.

In the opinion of the Swedish National Agency for Education, schools should encourage political parties to visit and take advantage of the opportunities such cooperation offers.

"Democracy is best defended through open debate and discussion. When parties and elected representatives are offered the opportunity to visit schools, and students themselves can see, hear and discuss with those who are politically active, students may develop a greater interest in social issues and politics."

Source: Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), *Politiska partier i skolan – vad gäller?* **[Political Parties in School: What are the rules?]** (https://webbutik.skr.se/sv/artiklar/politiska-partier-i-skolan-vad-galler-2.html)

You can find further information about the rules on political information in schools on the Swedish National Agency for Education website at skolverket.se (https://www.skolverket.se/regler-och-ansvar/ansvar-i-skolfragor/politisk-information-i-skolan) and in SALAR's information on political parties in schools (https://skr.se/skr/skolakulturfritid/forskolagrundochgymnasieskola/vagledningsvarpavanligafragor/politiskapartier.207.html).

SCHOOL IS NOT VALUES-NEUTRAL: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

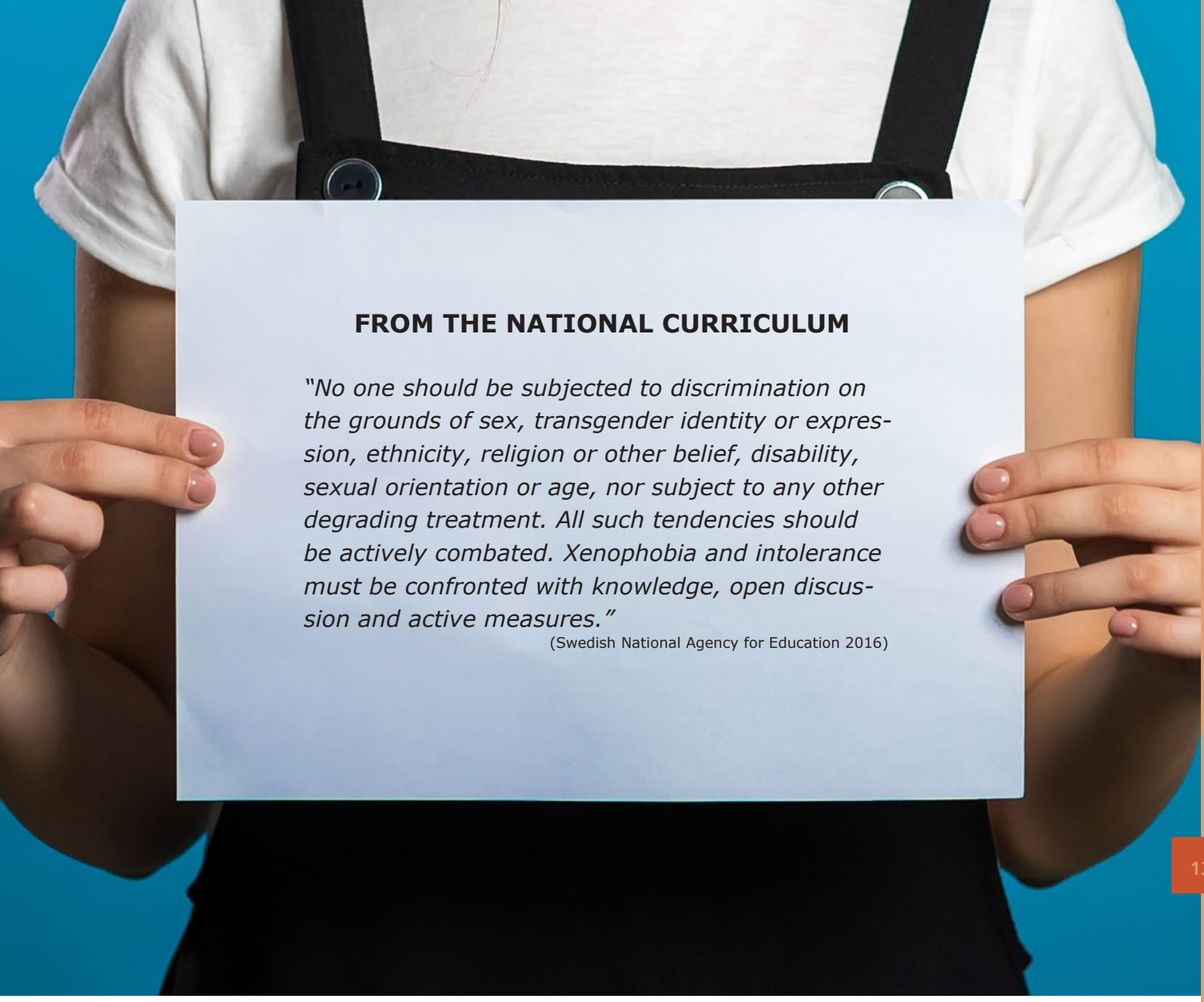
While diverse opinions and open discussion should be welcomed in schools, the school must never be values-neutral and democratic values must be defended. When we say that school is not values-neutral, we mean that it is not neutral when it comes to the democratic values that shall permeate all aspects of school life. In school, no one shall be discriminated against and xenophobia shall be confronted with knowledge and discussion. While students may have undemocratic opinions or viewpoints on various human rights, the school is never neutral when it comes to fundamental democratic values; the school stands for and shall convey these values. This implies that, as a member of the school staff, you have a responsibility to respond to and disassociate yourself from any values and opinions that contradict those fundamental values. It also implies that everyone at the school has the right to be treated with respect.

Discrimination, harassment and bullying are obvious examples of behaviour that contravenes democratic values and that demand that you as a teacher react. The head teacher and local authority have a responsibility to investigate and take action if a student is bullied. Racist and xenophobic attitudes also conflict with the school's core values.

When external organisations and parties are invited into the school, there is always a risk that they will express opinions that conflict with the school's core values, or bring with them material containing such ideas. Of course, racist, antidemocratic or offensive ideas can also reach students through social media or in the form of symbols. It is vital that the work of instilling democratic values permeates everything the school does. When it does, you will be better equipped if derogatory comments regarding gender or gender identity, class, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation are made in conjunction with a visit by political parties.

Statements may be made that cross the line into illegality, such as threats, slander or agitation against an ethnic or national group. These might be found in material distributed within the school, or they may be expressed by students or visitors to the school. If you are to intervene when opinions are expressed that conflict with the school's core values or when student's dignity is violated, whether by a fellow student or by a visiting lecturer or debater, all teachers and other staff must know where the line is drawn.

Please feel free to consult the Swedish National Agency for Education's information on working with democratic values. You can find further information on their website at https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/inspiration-och-stod-i-arbetet/stod-i-arbetet/arbeta-med-forskolans-och-skolans-vardegrund.



FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

"No one should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age, nor subject to any other degrading treatment. All such tendencies should be actively combated. Xenophobia and intolerance must be confronted with knowledge, open discussion and active measures."

(Swedish National Agency for Education 2016)

From time to time, issues that arouse strong feelings inevitably arise in school. These issues may create tension in the classroom that the teacher needs to deal with. Students need opportunities to discuss these issues, even if they are controversial. Teachers can also work together to develop their ability to lead such discussions. This is a vital part of the school's assignment to promote democratic values.

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society has prepared the manual *Prata demokrati för skolledare* [Talking Democracy for School Leaders] (https://www.mucf.se/publikationer/prata-demokrati-en-manual-skolledare). There is also support for head teachers in leading the school's work on such issues available on the Swedish National Agency for Education's website (https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/inspiration-och-stod-i-arbetet/stod-i-arbetet/kontroversiella-fragor).

WORKING IN THE LONG TERM

There is no reason to limit your work with political information and a party-political presence in school to election years. It is vital that the school works on these issues in a long-term and systematic manner. Systematic quality management is a continuous process during which staff jointly discuss the school's organisation based on four questions that reveal what is working well for you and where there is room for improvement:

- Where are we?
- Where are we heading?
- How do we get there?
- How did things go?

This is a circular process: the final question brings us back to a new description of our current situation (Where are we?), and so on.

The perspective gained from your systematic quality management can very well be used as a tool when you plan your work; for example, it can allow you to create an overview of your school's current situation and what parts of your existing work you need to develop in order work more systematically with political information and a party-political presence. Regularly discussing these questions in your systematic quality management may be useful in developing your school's procedures and working methods (Swedish National Agency for Education 2015).

WHERE ARE WE?

One good place to start your quality work is to, *together with staff and students*, gather previous experiences of working with politics in school. Maybe you have already conducted various kinds of surveys and evaluations on which to base discussions about where you are right now.

- How far did you come with the goals you set last time?
- What did you do that led you to reach your goals?
- Is this clear from the documentation you already have, or do you need to follow up or evaluate your work further?

The school may need to address issues related to its democratic assignment. This is easier if you have a common view of how knowledge and values are related. What values are involved and how are they embodied in and outside the classroom. Find out what knowledge is currently available to answer the questions:

- Do you know what applies and how best to work with it?
- Who has this knowledge?
- Do you need additional knowledge?
- Who makes the decision?
- On what issues is their scope for students to exert influence?

WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

To decide what you need to develop, you will need to analyse your earlier work and what it led to. The task of analysis is to make a credible assessment of quality in relation to the national goals and to identify factors that have influenced goal attainment.

Staff and students can then jointly formulate goals for the planned work with politics in the school. These goals should be linked to governance documents and the school's assignments.

- Which intended learning outcomes and central content fit in?
- Are there other goals beyond teaching itself?

The point of departure for setting goals can be your analysis and a common understanding of where the school currently stands on these issues.

To make goals easier to follow up, they need to be formulated in an action plan or some other document.



Good goals are specific and measurable. They are also reasonable in number and achievable. Generally speaking, a few specific goals are better than many ambiguous ones.



Based on the Swedish National Agency for Education's model. For further information, please visit the Swedish National Agency for Education's website

https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/leda-och-organisera-skolan/systematiskt-kvalitetsarbete/huvudmannens-systematiska-kvalitetsarbete

https://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/leda-och-organisera-skolan/systematiskt-kvalitetsarbete/systematiskt-kvalitetsarbete-i-skola-och-forskola

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Once your goals have been set, staff and students can plan the activities necessary to achieve them.

- Which subjects and teachers are involved and how?
- How are roles and responsibilities divided between individuals and groups (head teacher, other staff, students, student union and student council)?

You will find plenty of useful methods and tips in *Talk Politics*. Which methods do you choose, and why? Do you have experience of the methods or knowledge of how to use them?

HOW DID THINGS GO?

Follow-ups and evaluations are key elements of systematic quality management. After each teaching activity in which politics has played a major role, it is a good idea to evaluate whether and, if so, how you have succeeded in meeting your goals. This can be achieved using tools such as questionnaires and various forms of discussion. Activities such as participation in mock school elections and party-political visits are examples of topics for discussion. Teachers and students can discuss their perceptions and experiences of processes and activities based on the intended learning outcomes. Your documentation of this final step can then be used to establish your current situation.

- Did you set realistic and useful goals based on where you were last time?
- Did you choose the right methods to achieve these goals?
- Can you identify any success factors and areas for improvement?
- How do students feel that things went in the various stages of the process (before, during and after)?
- What changes can you see and how do these compare to your expectations when you started?

SWEDEN'S NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY OBJECTIVES AND A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

The objectives of Sweden's national youth policy are that all young people between the ages of 13 and 25 are to have good living conditions, the power to form their own lives and influence over developments in society. The objectives govern the work of government agencies and provide general recommendations for municipalities and regional authorities when formulating youth policy.

Many stakeholders find it difficult to put national youth policy objectives into practice. Experts on youth policy and the rights of the child have therefore developed a rights-based approach to youth policy in consultation with civil servants working in central, regional and local government.

This consists of six factors for success. In simple terms, this is a model that helps us progress from word to deed.



View of young people

That each young person is an individual with their own opinions, opportunities and conditions.

Knowledge of young people

Decisions about young people shall be based on knowledge about young people and their rights.

Participation driven by public authorities

Organisations that decide on matters concerning young people shall take the initiative to involve young people in those decisions.

Competence concerning young people

Basic knowledge about the living conditions of young people, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and national youth policy shall be available throughout the organisation.

Youth-driven participation

Structures and conditions shall be in place for young people to make proposals, ask questions, get help or make complaints.

Active governance

Procedures shall be in place to drive, support and monitor work, as well as to allocate financial and human resources.

The aim of a rights-based approach to youth policy is to clarify what is necessary to truly involve children and young people. What questions do we need to ask ourselves when considering the rights of the child and the perspectives of young people and how do we obtain knowledge of young people's living conditions on which to base decisions and processes that affect them?

The model works splendidly when developing the school's teaching activities and work with democracy, as a tool for management and teachers as well as civil servants and education administrators. For further information, please visit https://www.mucf.se/uppdrag/rattighetsbaserat-ungdomsperspektiv

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child became Swedish law on 1 January 2020 – the most important reform of children's rights in Sweden for 30 years.

WHY IS THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD SO IMPORTANT?

Working with children implies working with children's rights! This applies to everyone who meets and works with children, including in schools.

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD IS SWEDISH LAW

Sweden ratified the convention in 1990 and we have had a duty to comply with its provisions since then. From 1 January 2020, the Convention on the Rights of the Child is also Swedish law, a development that further strengthens children's rights. The United Nations has selected four articles from the convention as fundamental principles. Together, these form an attitude that one might describe as the convention's view of children.

- Article 2: Non-discrimination
- Article 3: The best interests of the child
- Article 6: The right to survival and development
- Article 12: The views of the child

All children and young people should be able to grow up protected by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and have the opportunity to learn about their rights in school, in society, in the home and among adults and other children and young people.

As children do not have the right to vote, it is even more important to ensure that it is possible for them to exercise their democratic rights and civil liberties. To this end, adults need to provide them with information, support and the conditions to engage with their rights.

The Ombudsman for Children in Sweden has prepared information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child for stakeholders such a schools. You can find knowledge, implementation support and legal guidance at https://www.barnombudsmannen.se/stod-och-verktyg/.



Before

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This chapter focuses on how you can jointly prepare, by discussing why and how you want to involve political parties in teaching activities and which methods you intend to use to discuss democracy and politics. If students, management, teachers and other staff know why – and have been involved in deciding the forms in which – political parties are to be welcomed into the school, the conditions for successful participation will be improved.

Student influence over the learning environment is also highlighted in the governance document *Curriculum for the Compulsory School, Preschool Class and School-age Educare* (Swedish National Agency for Education 2016). It would be advantageous for management, teachers and students to prepare jointly. In this chapter, we also discuss how the democratic discourse can be put to use.

There are many ways in which the school can meet its obligation to promote democratic values. One common method is to allow political parties and other organisation to visit the school and meet students. Naturally, there are many ways to go about this and it is you, as a headteacher or teacher, who knows your own situation best.

STUDENT INFLUENCE AND DEMOCRATIC WORKING METHODS

The duty to promote democratic values includes an obligation for the school to use democratic methods in its work. Student influence over the school and teaching activities is not a privilege, it is a right. Influence may be exerted during day-to-day operations or it may take structured forms such as a student council and class councils. It may extend to which rules apply when students are divided into groups (Swedish National Agency for Education 2013b). In *Talking Politics*, we therefore propose various ways in which students can be given influence over your work with political information in the school.

HOW SHOULD WE WORK?

Adopting one common and consistent approach will allow the school to view the bigger picture of students' knowledge development, your promotion and preventive work with core values and your assignment to foster democratic citizens. While a common approach does not mean that everyone has to do and think alike, it does mean that your work with democratic values is discussed within the entire staff group and that it is followed up.

One prerequisite for your school to adopt a common and consistent approach to the democratic assignment and core values is that you discuss the specifics of how you want to work in your particular organisation (Swedish Schools Inspectorate 2012).

Here, we present a few suggestions for material and discussion topics you can use in these discussions, as well as tips for those of you who wish to invite political parties into your school.



KEEP IN MIND!

Inform students and staff in advance of visits by political parties and make sure they are aware of the regulations that govern a party-political presence in schools, as well as the school's assignment and code of conduct. Bear in mind that not all of the opinions disseminated in the school during these visits will be shared by all students. It might therefor provide some reassurance to have received information about when, how and why the school has chosen to open its doors to political parties.

"Student influence over the school and teaching activities is not a privilege, it is a right."

PLEASE DISCUSS!

- How can you create a holistic view of your school's work with democratic values before you issue invitations to political parties? Consider how you work at present and how you would like to work to ensure that fundamental democratic values permeate all of your teaching activities.
- **Questions**
- Jointly discuss the school's core values and how each of you relates to these concepts. What consequences does this have for teaching?
- How do we interpret our assignment to promote democratic values in school?
- How do we actualise our democratic assignment in teaching activities?
- In what was does our teaching contribute to making students active citizens? Which working methods can we strengthen? What could we start doing, or stop doing?
- What values permeate everything we do at our school?
- How do these values affect our teaching and other activities and the school's organisation?
- Do we foster a climate of discussion, collegial or in the classroom, that permits a variety of opinions to be raised?
- How can we exchange experiences and learn from one another to develop our work to promote democratic values?
- How do we currently provide our students with both knowledge and skills?
- How do we currently ensure that our students can influence how we fulfil our democratic assignment, and how can we develop this?
- How can political parties help us fulfil our assignment to promote democratic values?
- Should we participate in mock school elections to the Riksdag and European Parliament and, if so, how?

Action plan checklist

GENERAL PREPARATIONS

- [ ] **WHY?**
  Why should we welcome political parties into the school? Formulate the reasons you consider it important that the school complies with regulations stating that all political parties shall be treated equally.

- [ ] **THE DEMOCRATIC ASSIGNMENT AND CORE VALUES**
  How does the visit adhere to the school's core values and democratic assignment?

- [ ] **RESPONSIBILITY**
  How are roles and responsibilities for cooperation with political parties and their presence in the school distributed among staff?

- [ ] **DECISION**
  How shall the decision about which parties should be invited to the school be made? Remember: all parties shall be treated equally.

- [ ] **INVITATION**
  How shall invitations be extended to the parties? By post, email, website, telephone?

- [ ] **DOCUMENTATION**
  Who is responsible for issuing invitations and registering interest from the parties, and how will this be documented? Remember: documentation may be important should a dispute arise about which parties were or were not invited.

- [ ] **SUPPORT AND RESOURCES**
  Do teachers or other staff require training or other resources to improve how the school works with political information and party-political participation in teaching activities?

- [ ] **INCLUDE YOUR STUDENTS**
  How will students be involved in and exert influence over activities attended by political parties? Through the student council and student union, or through class councils?

PREPARATION

How will classes be prepared for the visit of political parties to the school?

ANNUALLY OR ONLY IN ELECTION YEARS?

Is this a continuous process or will you conduct specific initiatives during election years, such as participating in mock school elections?

COMMUNICATION

DOCUMENTATION

How will the school's work with political parties be documented? Appoint one or more people to take responsibility for documentation.

COMMUNICATE YOUR WORK

How will you communicate your work with political information in the school to colleagues, students and parents?

RULES

How will you inform political parties and other organisations about the rules for their visit to the school?

RESPONSIBILITY

Who will be the school's contact person(s) for the political parties?

ACTIVE INFORMATION

Should information be posted on the school's website? Should active contact be made with the parties?

INFORM THE SCHOOL

How will students and staff be informed about the decision to invite political parties into the school?

WHEN WILL THIS INFORMATION BE RELEASED?

How and when will students be informed that one or more parties will be visiting the school?

MEDIA

Should the media be invited to attend specific activities?

CLARIFICATION

If political parties are to participate in the school's activities, clarify the conditions under which they have been invited and that this is in compliance with regulations regarding the equal treatment of political parties.

SECURITY

SECURITY PLAN

Does the school's security plan need to be updated to cover visits from political parties?

RESPONSIBILITY FOR SECURITY

Who is responsible for security during the political parties' visit to the school? Name and contact details?

AUTHORITY

What authority do teachers and the headteacher have to intervene in the event of disorder at the school during a party-political visit?

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO?

What should the school do if a party breaches the terms of the agreement, such as sending more representatives than agreed on or if the party's communication offends students?

HOW WILL AN ACTIVITY BE CUT SHORT?

Under what circumstances might you need to ask representatives of political parties to leave school premises and when and how should planned activities be cut short?

STUDENT SUPPORT

How will the school support students in the event of disorder in the school or if a student takes offence?

POLICE

When is it appropriate for the school to call the police?

BOOK TABLES

- [ ] **EXHIBITION AREA**
  Is there space for book tables and for the parties' representatives to speak to individual students?

- [ ] **INFORMATION AREA**
  Is there somewhere for parties to hang posters and hand out leaflets?

- [ ] **NUMBER OF REPRESENTATIVES**
  How many representatives can each party send?

- [ ] **STAFF ATTENDANCE**
  What kind of staff presence is appropriate at book tables?

- [ ] **INFORM STUDENTS**
  How will you inform students that there will be book tables in the school?

DEBATES AND SEMINARS

- [ ] **STRATEGY**
  When will these be held? Date, time and place. Annually for all students? Within specific subjects?

- [ ] **STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE**
  What is the purpose of the debate or discussion and how should it be structured?

- [ ] **RESPONSIBILITY**
  Who is responsible for planning? Teachers and/or student representatives.

- [ ] **MODERATOR**
  Who will moderate the debate or discussion? Teacher, student, external moderator?

- [ ] **INFORM AND FOLLOW UP**
  How will you prepare and follow up with students?

THEME DAYS

- [ ] **STRATEGY**
  When and what kind of theme days are held at the school?

- [ ] **RESPONSIBILITY**
  Who plans theme days? Teachers and/or student representatives?

- [ ] **DECISION**
  How does the school decide which individuals and organisations to invite?

- [ ] **CONTENTS**
  Which themes and activities should be included in the theme day?

- [ ] **HOLISTIC THINKING**
  How do theme days tie in with teaching in general and your holistic approach to political information in particular?

OUTSIDE SCHOOL

- [ ] **CAMPAIGN HUTS AND STUDY VISITS**
  Campaign huts and study visits may be included in teaching activities. How can you work with these and to what ends?

EVALUATION

EVALUATION

How will you evaluate work with political opinion forming in the school? How and to what ends should you evaluate within the staff group and together with students?

FORUMS FOR REFLECTION

How will you ascertain the views of students on the presence of political parties in schools and what forums are available for such a discussion?

INFORMATION CHANNELS

How can you make use of the intranet, class councils, general meetings, noticeboards, student council/union and other student associations in your evaluation?

INVITING POLITICAL PARTIES TO YOUR SCHOOL

In the chapter "The school's core values and democratic assignment", we describe some of the rules that govern visits to schools by political parties. Even if the municipal assembly or school board has prepared guidelines for how the school should manage a party-political presence on school premises, it is for the head-teacher to decide whether to permit such a visit based on existing statutory provisions.

While it may be in the school's interests to invite political parties to participate in teaching activities, there is also a strong interest among the parties themselves in visiting schools to recruit new members, meet potential voters or simply to impart their political message. In the first case, when the school invites political parties to participate in teaching activities, it is important to have a clear framework to ensure that invitations are issued in compliance with statutory requirements. In the second case, it may be the youth wing of a political party that calls the school and asks if it can visit next week and set up a book table. It is then important to treat all parties in accordance with applicable guidelines (skolverket.se).



A school is not a public place and the headmaster bears the ultimate responsibility for the work environment and for ensuring that the school is safe and secure. It is always the school that invites political parties to participate in its educational activities, even if the initiative comes from one or more of the parties. The invitation is issued in the interests of education and not the political interests of the parties in question.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Should the school have any fears that a visit by a political party may lead to disorder, it may be a good idea to inform the police about the visit and that you have received indications that it may lead to civil disorder on school premises or outside. You and the police can then perform a joint risk analysis and, based on the results, decide on any preparations that may be necessary. Remember, if any criminal offence is committed you must contact the police.

If disorder does arise, it is important that you know what authority the headmaster and staff have to intervene. School management has both the right and duty to intervene if any opinions are expressed that prevent order from being maintained in school, or if the opinion expressed is in itself a criminal offence or constitutes bullying or harassment. That said, the school does not have the right to prohibit the expression of an opinion simply because it is contrary to the fundamental democratic values for which the school stands; under such circumstances, the school's freedom of action is limited to educational and fostering methods.

Anyone who expresses an offensive opinion about others risks being prosecuted for slander or criminal insult. A person who, in a statement or other communication that is disseminated, threatens or expresses contempt for a population group by allusion to race, colour, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, sexual orientation or transgender identity or expression is guilty of agitation against an ethnic or national group. So, in such cases a criminal offence may be suspected. There is a lack of statutory regulation regarding how school staff should act when a criminal offence is suspected and a judgement should be made on a case-by-case basis as to whether or not the matter should be reported to the police. If you are unsure whether to report a suspected offence, you can contact the municipality's legal counsel or the police for advice (www.skolverket.se). In situations where a student may feel that their integrity has been violated, the school's equal opportunities plan can also provide support. Does your school have sufficiently clear procedures in place if a student is being bullied or feels that their integrity is being violated?

WHEN THINGS GO RIGHT

When you have arranged a much-appreciated activity to promote democratic, political discourse, tell people about it, both within your school and your municipality. Sharing positive experiences reinforces all of you in your continued efforts! Sharing any setbacks and the solutions you came up with will also reinforce your work.



Consider how you intend to deal with the media should the occasion arise. If you do suddenly find yourself in the media spotlight, it will be invaluable to have thought things through at management level in advance, including how you will handle the situation and who should answer journalists' questions.

COMMUNICATION AND INTERNAL SUPPORT

Communication with and support from colleagues and students is an important element of preparation when you are planning to invite politicians to visit your school. Here are a few suggestions for activities.

INFORM STUDENTS AND STAFF

It is a good idea to make sure that all students and staff are aware of the school's policy for working with political parties and when and under what circumstances they will be invited to the school. This is one way to ensure support and that students, teachers and other staff have time to prepare.



- Inform your school newspaper, if you have one. They might be interested in writing an article about the visit by political parties.
- Record a simple video with the headteacher, teacher or students who issued the invitation to political parties and disseminate the video throughout the school. This will present an opportunity to underline the importance of democratic political discourse in schools and to explain the process for party-political visits.

INFORMATION TO POLITICAL PARTIES BEFORE THEY VISIT

As well as informing everyone who works at the school, it is also important to consider how you intend to inform political parties and other organisations about the rules at your school before they visit you.

Make sure that all parties are aware of the school's regulations. All of those invited must respect your code of conduct and the conditions under which the school has agreed to their participation. It may, for example, be a good idea to limit the number of representatives from each party at book tables and to insist that each representative provide a telephone number to the responsible member of staff so that they can be contacted during the day or after the visit.

ALLOW STUDENTS TO PLAN PARTY-POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AT THE SCHOOL

Once you have decided the circumstances under which parties are to be permitted to visit the school and issued invitations, why not hand over the planning to students?

- Perhaps you can hand over responsibility for planning the party-political debate to students or a working group consisting of both students and teachers?

Planning activities for party-political participation in school can contribute to achieving learning goals such as increasing knowledge of democratic principles, developing the ability to work in democratic forms and taking responsibility. Remember to clarify what students can decide on and the boundaries of their influence and responsibility (Swedish National Agency for Education 2016).

PREPARE STUDENTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF TEACHING

As a teacher, you have ample opportunity to prepare students prior to a party-political visit to the school. If your students have a basic knowledge of the parties' policies and of political ideologies, it will increase their ability to critically question what party representatives say when they visit the school. It is also a good idea to provide students with the opportunity to reflect on and discuss their own views on various issues before the parties visit.

There are various ways to prepare students for party-political visits to the school within the framework of teaching activities. Discussions about politics and source criticism can play an important role before party-political debates or book tables. Perhaps you can collaborate with the school librarian to integrate source criticism of political material?

START FROM THE STUDENTS' OWN KNOWLEDGE

Before political parties visit the school, you can discuss issues related to democratic values and party policy. The knowledge, experience and curiosity of your students is an invaluable resource that you should use when preparing for visits. Starting from what your students already know or issues on which they have opinions can create interest and engagement.

Bear in mind that, even before the parties visit your school, your students will know a lot about them. Some students may even be politically active. Many students have opinions about the political parties and their policies, even if they might formulate them in different ways.

This may also be an ideal opportunity to discuss how students receive their information and how they can evaluate their sources. You can find source criticism exercises from page 58 onwards.



Generally speaking, it is a good idea to consider the purpose of the exercises and discussions you lead and how they will achieve that specific purpose. Are you exercising your students' critical abilities or is the exercise intended to introduce a new theme? Is there a risk that the exercise will stray from your original purpose?

EXERCISE: EXPECTATIONS AND FEARS

One avenue to explore when you work with party-political visits is to examine the expectations and fears they give rise to. You can do this in classes, with stu dents in general or among colleagues. You can also examine this in work teams or in a project group tasked with preparing the annual party-political debate in the school's auditorium. Here is a proposal for a simple method for examining fears and expectations, regardless of which group you choose to work with. This is also a way to include students, thus helping you achieve the curriculum goal of students exerting influence over their education and the internal work of the school.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Decide what to include in the exercise and make sure everyone is aware of its limitations; for example, is it a strategy for dealing with fears and expectations raised by a party-political presence in the school in general, or a one-off activity such as a party-political debate or theme day?
- Clarify the topic by writing it on a whiteboard or flipchart; i.e. *"Fears and expectations raised by a party-political presence in the school"* or *"Fears and expectations raised by next month's party-political debate in the school auditorium"*.
- Distribute post-it notes in two different colours, such as green and pink, to all participants.
- Ask each individual to write their expectations of the activity in question on the green post-it notes, one expectation per note. Expectations might be *"I hope to learn more about the parties' policies on nuclear power"*, *"I hope that the activity makes social studies more tangible as a subject"*, or *"I expect to have fun"*.
- On the pink post-it notes, ask the participants to write down their fears; for example, *"I worry that it may be disorderly and disrupt the school day"*, or *"I fear that the politicians will do nothing by bicker with each other during the debate"*. Once again, one fear on each note.
- Depending on the group and situation, the participants can either place the post-it notes on two different pages of a flipchart, one for fears and one for expectations, or the group leader can collect them and do so. Read out the fears and expectations that have been raised and group those that are similar, so that you have a clear picture of the kinds of fears and expectations within the group. Discuss what the school can do to meet the expectations and ensure that the fears are not realised.

You now have a good overview of the people's expectations of a party-political presence in your school, as well as the fears that it raises. Compile this information and use it when formulating the school's strategy for working with political information or in planning specific activities. The issues raised can also provide vital input when reviewing the school's code of conduct or developing equal treatment and nondiscrimination work. Be clear with participants, whether students or staff, about how the fears and expectations they share will be passed on within the school and how they will receive feedback.

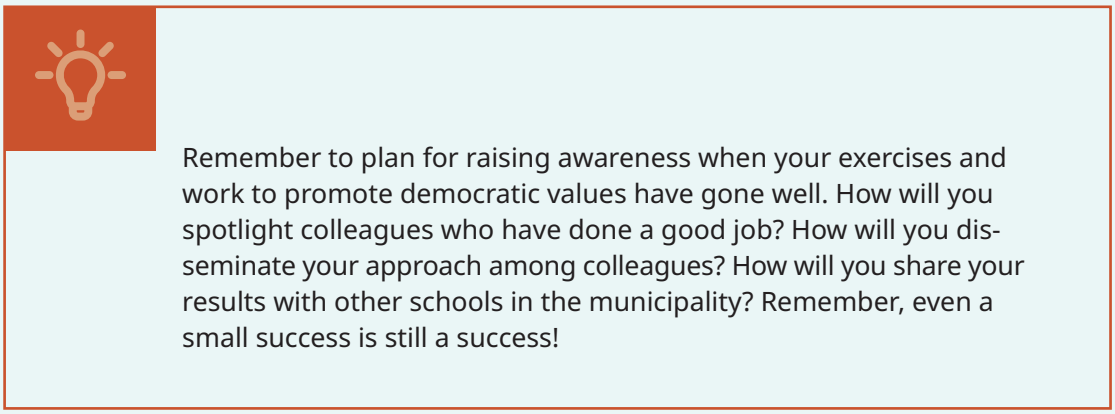
PERFORM A RISK ANALYSIS

You can use the fears raised to perform a risk analysis. Compile similar fears so that you have fewer themes to work with. Place each fear or group of fears in a 2×2 matrix based on the likelihood of the fear being realised and the level of damage it is likely to cause to the school and students.

Risk analysis on the following scales: likelihood of realisation, and likely damage.

	Unlikely to happen	Likely to happen
Minor damage	A	B
Major damage	C	D

- An action plan should be prepared to prevent the realisation of all fears that fall into category D, both likely to happen and likely to inflict major damage.
- You also need to decide on an appropriate response to fears in categories B and C: what should you do to minimise damage if they are realised?
- You should also keep an eye on fears in category A. The 2×2 matrix is a quick and simple decision-making tool that helps you to prioritise your preventive work.
- Document all fears and expectations and save them for your evaluation of the completed activity or your ongoing work with a party-political presence in the school. You can then return to the topic with those who participated in the exercise and ask them whether they feel that their fears and expectations were realised.



Remember to plan for raising awareness when your exercises and work to promote democratic values have gone well. How will you spotlight colleagues who have done a good job? How will you disseminate your approach among colleagues? How will you share your results with other schools in the municipality? Remember, even a small success is still a success!

NOT JUST FOR CIVICS TEACHERS

Discussing politics and political parties is all part of the job for civics teachers, who according to the civics course syllabus for Years 7–9 are required to cover topics such as political ideologies and how differences between political parties have developed, Sweden's political system and where different decisions are made and how these affect individuals, groups and society as a whole. Lessons must also address current societal issues.

Inviting and welcoming political parties into schools is a vital element of developing students' civic skills. It provides knowledge about how society functions and gives students the opportunity to exercise active citizenship in real meetings with politicians.

However, there are many other subjects on the curriculum that can be enriched by political discourse and the participation of political parties in teaching activities.

EXAMPLES FROM SECONDARY SCHOOL (YEARS 7–9) COURSE SYLLABUSES

- Teaching in **biology** should deal with current societal issues involving biology, the impact of people on nature, locally and globally, and public discussions on biological diversity, such as in the relationship between forestry and hunting.
- Teaching in **physics** should deal with the supply and use of energy historically and currently, as well as possibilities and limitations in the future.
- Teaching in **chemistry** should deal with people's use of energy and natural resources, locally and globally, as well as what this means in terms of sustainable development.
- Teaching in **geography** should deal with where different goods and services are produced and consumed, and Migration and urbanisation and the causes and consequences thereof.



- How can we work across subjects when we invite political parties to visit the school?
- Do all teachers feel involved in visits by political parties? If so, in what way? If not, why not? How can we include more people in these activities?
- Based on course syllabuses, what specific opportunities do we have to include political parties in subjects other than civics?

- Teaching in **history** should deal with revolutions and the emergence of new ideas, new classes in society and political ideologies.
- Teaching in **crafts** should deal with working environment and ergonomics, covering such areas as sound levels and work positions.

NOT ONLY IN ELECTION YEARS

Given the school's assignment to promote democratic values, it is beneficial to work with fundamental values and democratic methods continuously and in the long term. Although general elections are only held every four years in Sweden, and European elections every five years, there is absolutely no reason to limit the school's contact with political parties to election campaigns. To do so would mean that many students would miss out on such opportunities; it would also be to ignore the fact that the public discourse on democracy, democratic values and politics is a continuous process in society, something that should be reflected in the school's work.



Is there anything you work on more intensively during election years, such as participating in mock school elections? Discuss how you can extend this work as a continuous element of teaching activities, even when it is not an election year.



The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society has prepared a democracy package for schools, containing tools and materials to assist you in discussing democracy with young people in school and outside: https://www.mucf.se/demokratipaketet

YOUR ROLE AS A TEACHER AND DISCUSSION LEADER

Schools must promote democratic ideas and encourage the expression of diverse opinions. Unless uncomfortable views that conflict with the aims of the national curriculum are allowed to come to the surface, we cannot respond to them. Talking about politics and values places demands on your teaching skills. While it present a tremendous opportunity to raise issues that allow you to shape exploratory discussion that can stimulate your students' curiosity and deepen their understanding, you also have a responsibility to ensure that the issues are examined from all sides and that arguments can be met with counterarguments. You can also propose alternative ways of looking at a problem.

A party-political presence in the school can lead to controversial issues being raised in the classroom or the school in general. Controversial issues can also infiltrate the school environment when students ask questions that are part of the wider public discourse. These may be issues that you find difficult to discuss and deal with. There will always be controversies in society and they present unique opportunities to develop the civic skills of your students, opportunities that cannot be replicated by textbooks or traditional evidence-based teaching (Swedish National Agency for Education 2010).



As a teacher, you are in a position to stimulate reasoning that adds complexity to the subject and challenges students to think more deeply, rather than simply taking a position for or against. To do so, you will need to be comfortable deviating from your lesson plan and spending time on an issue raised by a student, something that is especially important if the issue in question might be perceived as sensitive or controversial. Initiating an in-depth discussion need not be any more difficult than taking a moment and giving due consideration to what you students have to say, then asking a follow-up question such as "What exactly do you mean?".

HAVE THE COURAGE TO TAKE A GOOD HARD LOOK AT YOURSELF

Regardless of whether or not you are inviting political parties to participate in the teaching activity, when you are planning to talk about and lead discussions on democracy and democratic values with your students it can prove valuable to turn your gaze inwards. Take a look at yourself because, of course, your attitudes, your values, your knowledge as a teacher may influence how you formulate questions and even which questions you feel comfortable, or uncomfortable, asking.

One method for addressing this issue is norm-critical pedagogy, which is both an individual and collective process. Norm criticism is a matter of linking the individual, group and society, rather than focusing on particular individuals or groups. A norm-critical approach implies that the school's staff and students will examine

and question their own roles in perpetuating norms based on factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class and disability, and how these relate to defining, evaluating and ranking people. A norm-critical approach may be advantageously employed to highlight restrictive norms such as gender stereotypes and norms associated with disability, ethnicity and skin colour. A norm-critical approach also allows us to create new, inclusive norms (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2015).

As a teacher, you can use norm criticism as a method for examining your own attitudes and identifying teaching behaviour that in various ways perpetuates or reinforces norms. When you work with norm criticism, you need to ask yourself how your own identity, cultural background and experiences influence your teaching.

- Which norms am I conveying?
- What objective do I want to achieve and how do I get there?

Taking a good, hard look at yourself and criticising your own actions and relationships can be a challenging process. To see oneself in context is therefore a fundamental element of norm-critical pedagogy and must be viewed as a continuous learning process.



Make sure you have sufficient time and, ideally, have common rules in place so that the conditions for discussion are clear to everyone. Common rules might include:

- we listen to what each other has to say;
- there are many possible answers to any given question;
- not only is it fine to change one's opinion when someone makes a good point, it is even a good thing;
- we help one another;
- we are curious about what other people think and we ask questions;
- we want to understand each other and the subject under discussion;
- we stick to the point; and
- we offer our own opinions rather than referring to what others think or how things ought to be.

As teachers, it is also vital to see our 'mistakes' in the classroom as opportunities for development; they help us to identify our own blind spots when it comes to norms, so that next time we can do better. This approach demands a certain humility of the teacher and is only made possible by working with students, rather than teaching in front of them (Bromseth & Darj 2010).

QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK YOURSELF

- What experiences am I carrying with me?
- What are my own democratic values?
- What is my political affiliation?
- How does this affect the questions I ask and the perspectives I choose to highlight?
- Might there be occasions when what I say, the questions I ask and the examples I give unknowingly offend students?

QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT DISCUSS IN THE STAFF GROUP

- What does it mean when we say that the school is not values-neutral?
- What kind of values do the school's teachers embrace? How might this affect our work to promote democratic values?
- How might the party-political affiliation of teachers affect how the school imparts political information?
- Who are we? What norms and values do we signal? How might this affect the discourse in the school?
- How should we act when opinions are expressed that conflict with democratic values or when students are offended by one another, by staff or by invited guests?



Learn more about norm-critical pedagogy: *Normkritisk pedagogik – Makt, lärande och strategier för förändring* [Norm-critical Pedagogy: Power, learning and strategies for change] (Bromseth & Darj 2010); *Öppna skolan! Om hbtq, normer och inkludering i årskurs 7–9 och gymnasiet* [Open Up the School! On LGBTQ+, norms and inclusion in Years 7–9 and Upper-Secondary School] (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2015); and *Break the Norm!: Methods for studying norms in general and heteronormativity in particular* (The Living History Forum & RFSL Ungdom (The Swedish Youth Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights) 2011).

YOU HAVE A MANDATE, GRAB THE CHANCE!

There are many different ways to discuss democratic values. You can stimulate your students' curiosity and assay their interest, or go straight to debate and argumentation.

In her book *Att bygga en demokrati i skolan* [On Building a Democracy in the School] (Lodenius 2012), Anna-Lena Lodenius emphasises that teachers must have the courage to address xenophobia and racism. Lodenius has prepared a list of sound advice:

• Take the initiative

If offensive opinions have been expressed at school, take the initiative to discuss the matter in whatever forums the school offers: the classroom, in lessons, on class councils and among staff. In so doing, you demonstrate that antidemocratic opinions do not go unnoticed in the school and that you take the matter seriously. Whomever takes the initiative also decides what is discussed and on what terms.

• Ask questions

Is the statement – about a societal group, for example – actually true and where did the information come from?

• Be fair

Treat everyone equally and with respect, even the individual who has expressed a racist opinion. Respond to what the person says, not them personally.

• Listen and counter their arguments

If you listen to someone, they are more likely to listen to your counterargument.

• Puncture lies

Racist and xenophobic statements often contain lies about ethnic or national groups. Discover the facts and puncture the lies that reinforce prejudices based on sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age.

• Don't be scared

Practice makes perfect. Even if it may be daunting to speak up and confront such opinions, it become easier each time you do so; you will also encourage others to do the same.

• Be patient

One conversation won't change deeply held views; see it as a process.



During

IMPLEMENT TOGETHER!

Now, the time has come to implement the various school activities involving political parties, such as party-political debates and book tables. In this chapter, you will find methods, tips and discussion topics for use with students or in staff groups. There are also a number of concrete tips for those entrusted with the glorious task of moderating a party-political debate. We also look at how the school can actively involve students in the visits, thus increasing the chance of a worthwhile encounter between politicians and students.



One important element is to practice critical thinking and prepare students for the party-political debate or other activity. These exercises are in no way intended to replace teaching activities that deal with how society functions or political parties and ideologies but rather as a complement to such lessons.

The methods and discussion topics presented here can be used at various stages of your work; for example, in the planning stage and testing exercises with colleagues, or for initiating political discussion with pupils before, during or after the teaching activity. The aim is to ensure that party-political participation and political information does not pass without comment, but that political messages are the subject of critical and reflective discourse with students in the classroom.

There are a number of exercises and discussion topics under the following categories:

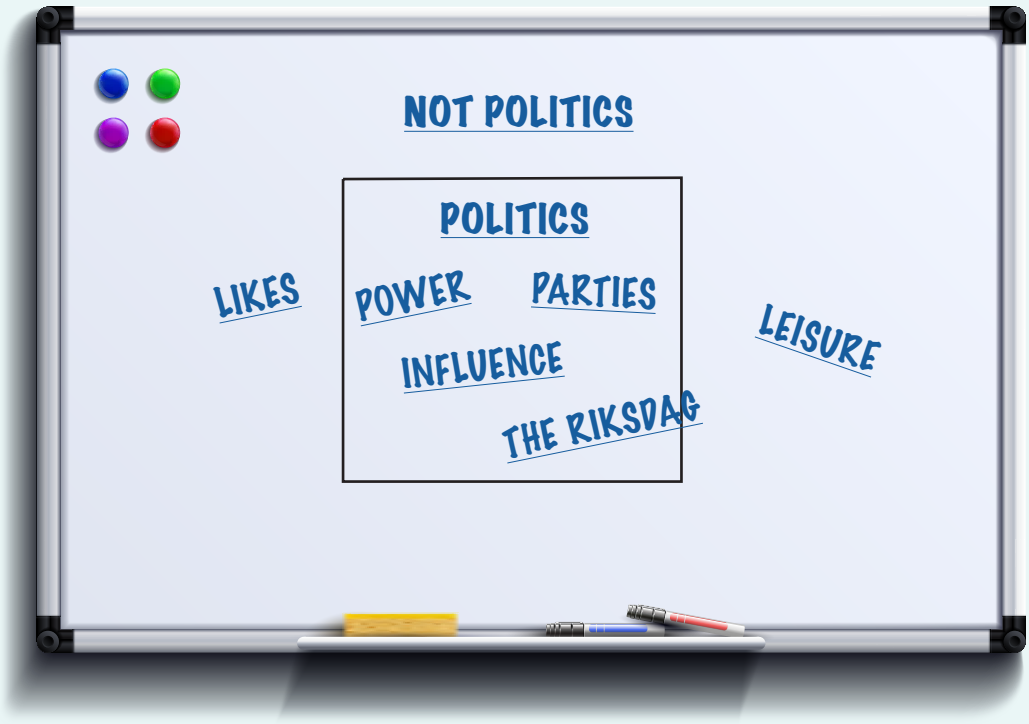
- Talking politics
- Values exercises
- Source criticism
- Debate
- Book tables

TALKING POLITICS

Presented here are various exercises that can be used to initiate political discussion.

EXERCISE: BRAINSTORMING POLITICS

The associations different people make to the word *politics* are not always obvious and so a brainstorming session about what politics is can produce some interesting material for discussion.



INSTRUCTIONS

- Draw a box on the board and write the word *politics* in it. Ask your students to brainstorm ideas about what politics is. The ground rules for brainstorming are that the floor is open to everyone and there is no need to analyse one's thoughts before speaking.
- If they have trouble getting started, you can sit them in pairs in hives to discuss what politics is before you begin the brainstorming session.
- Write down all of the participants' contributions in the box on the board.
- After a while, write *this is not politics* outside the box. Ask your students to brainstorm ideas about what politics **isn't**. Write all of the students' suggestions outside the box.

- Allow the students to finish brainstorming and then discuss what you have written on the board, or you can discuss suggestions as and when they come up.
- Initiate a discussion about politics based on the suggestions you have written on the board. Remind your students that not only is it fine to change one's opin ion when someone makes a good point, it is even a good thing. Ask your own questions or use the list below. It is important to ensure that nothing offensive is said or written down during the exercise.

QUESTIONS

• *Does everyone agree that everything in the politics box is politics and that everything outside is not politics?*
• *Are their circumstances under which something outside the box might become political?*
• *Is there a clear line between what is politics and what is not?*
• *In what different ways can we consider what constitutes politics?*
• *Is this affected by how interested you are in politics?*
• *If we did the same exercise again in five years, would we get different results? If so, in what way?*

VARIATION ON BRAINSTORMING

You can also ask students to write their suggestions on post-it notes, one suggestion on each note. Ask students to place the notes inside or outside the box, depending on where they think it belongs. You can then move the post-it notes as the discussion develops. Some results may change places, or perhaps be both inside and outside the box.



PLEASE DISCUSS!

Many young Swede's have an interest in societal issues, politics and their community. This interest has increased over the past decade, especially among girls.

The percentage of young people who respond that they are inter-ested in politics (42 %) is smaller than those who are interested in societal issues (61 %) (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society's national youth survey 2021, Fokus 21).

Ask your students to discuss why they think that more young people say that they are interested in societal issues than politics.

EXERCISE: WHAT ARE POLITICIANS ACTUALLY SAYING?

This is an exercise in critical thinking that also encourages students to speak to politicians who visit the school. If no party-political visit is planned, you can watch a televised party-political debate instead. This exercise can also be used in other contexts when working on students' ability to critically review and question the communications we encounter in society, whether that be an advertisement from a company that wants us to by a product or messages from political parties or other organisations.

INSTRUCTIONS

Split the class up into small groups assign a political party to each group. Ask them to collect different messages from "their" party by writing down things the party's representatives have said when visiting the school. If the exercise is performed in conjunction with a party-political debate, students can write down the policy points made by the party's representative during the debate. You can also encourage them to interview the representative after the debate. If a book table event has been arranged at the school, encourage students to interview the party representatives staffing the book table. Students can then present the parties' policies to the class.

QUESTIONS

- *What is the message?*
- *Which target groups (young people, older people, the unemployed, students, the business community and so on) do you think the message is aimed at?*
- *What do they want us to feel? Threatened, afraid, outraged, happy, touched or angry?*
- *What do they want us to think?*
- *What do they want us to do?*
- *Given what they say in the message, what kind of world do they want to see?*
- *How do they see people? Good or evil, independent of dependent on others?*
- *On what facts do they base their message? Are there other facts that suggest an alternative view and a different message?*



Visit **ungidag.se** for statistics you can use in teaching activities. Ung idag is a web based monitoring system with information and statistics about the living conditions of 13–25 year olds in Sweden. The statistics are based on indicators to create an overall picture of young people's living conditions over time.

PLEASE DISCUSS!

- How are the messages similar and how do they differ?
- Do the parties want similar things?
- If they do have the same objectives, how does what they say about how to achieve them differ? For example, can two parties seeking to reduce unemployment have different messages about how this should be achieved?
- Perhaps the parties cite different unemployment figures. How can this be?
- Which messages do you find most effective and why?
- Which messages do you find most attractive and which most credible? Why?

Ask your students to prepare their own messages aimed at a given target group, such as students, teachers or local politicians. Students can write their messages on a large poster, perhaps with illustrations, and put them up in the classroom or corridor. End the lesson with a class discussion on how students think such messages influence us? What messages reach us during our lives and how do they affect the decisions we make?



VALUES EXERCISES

Values exercises can be a useful tool for initiating discussion about democracy and politics. These exercises will help you to initiate the discussion and the participants to practice thinking about and expressing their opinions and listening to others. It is also a good way to practice justifying one's own viewpoints and respecting those of others.

There are various kinds of values exercise and here we present proposals for how they can be structured.

Values exercises suit all contexts in which the teacher wants students to think for themselves and formulate their conclusions on a given subject. As the teacher, you decide how the exercises should be utilised and which subjects and questions are best suited to your group. Values exercises often give rise to a wide range of thoughts and discussions that need to be given due consideration.

One important thing you need to bear in mind when leading a values exercise is that there may well be social processes ongoing within the group, with uneven power dynamics that may have an impact on the exercise. Under certain circumstances, where the risks outweigh the benefits, values exercises may be inappropriate. Begin from the premise that you know your class best.

PROPOSED GROUND RULES

- Everyone decides their own position and is responsible for their own views.
- Respect each other's opinions.
- Do not dismiss other people's opinions: listen, discuss and try to understand them.
- If you do not understand what somebody means, ask.
- It is always fine to change your opinion during a discussion. Formulating your own ideas and reflecting on other people's arguments contributes to new ideas.
- The purpose of the discussion is not to convince others that your opinion is the right one, but to practice adopting a point of view and reflecting on a theme and your own opinion.
- There is no right answer.
- Values exercises are not a way of exhausting a subject through discussion; there will not be time to say everything but the discussion can be followed up later.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO BEAR IN MIND WHEN YOU LEAD A VALUES EXERCISE

Remember that a values exercise demands active leadership on your part. Remain neutral: you should neither encourage nor condemn the values expressed during the exercise. Your task is to ask follow-up questions and give people the floor, thus creating a climate for discussion in which everyone can have their say.

Before the exercise, it is a good idea to consider the various issues that may arise and the opinions and values that may be expressed and how you will respond to them. Participants take a position in the exercise and this is made clear by where they choose to stand. This may result in a participant being singled out as the only person with a given opinion. Your role as discussion leader is to ensure that the discussion is not about which side is right, and that the majority group in which everyone thinks alike does not dominate the classroom.

Although one of the ground rules for the exercise is that there is no right answer, this does not mean that any opinion whatsoever can be expressed in the subsequent discussion. While the point of the exercise is to justify one's position, just as in any other discussion in the classroom it is never acceptable to subject someone to degrading treatment; in this exercise too, as the discussion leader you must respond to any anti-democratic opinions that may be expressed.

One obvious way to reduce the risk of one student standing in a corner alone during a four-corner exercise is for the teacher to stand in that corner during the discussion.



The purpose of the discussion is not to convince others that your opinion is the right one, but to practice adopting a point of view and reflecting on a theme and your own opinion.

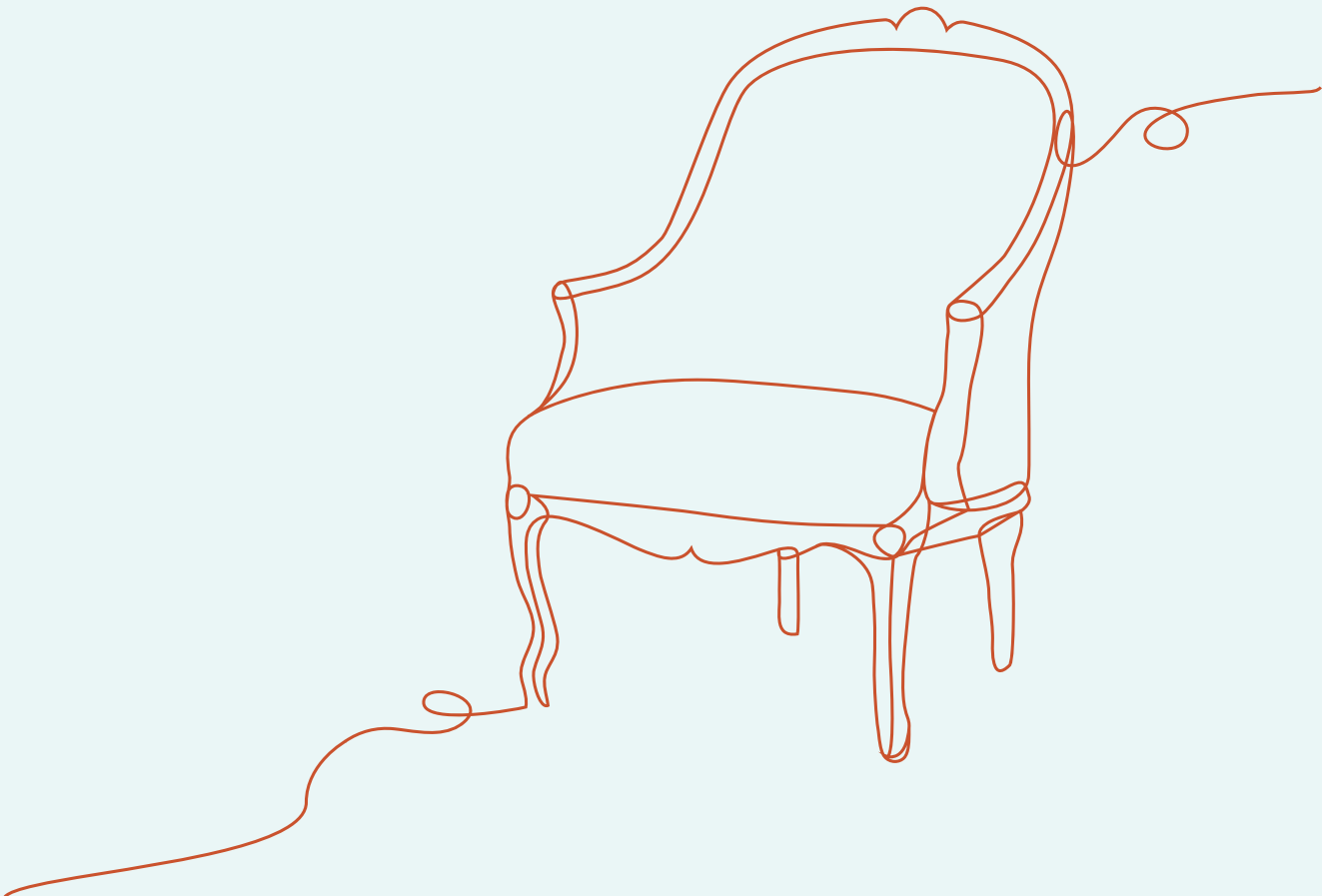
EXERCISE: THE DEMOCRACY HOT SEAT

The Hot Seat is a quick exercise that can be used to inject more energy into the group, or perhaps as an introduction to a longer discussion or theme work.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Place the chairs in a circle. Make sure you have one more chair than participants. Even if only one person agrees, they can change places.
- The students sit on the chairs in a circle. You read a statement. If they agree with the statement, they can remain where they are; if they disagree, they must stand up and change seats; if they are undecided, they can remain in their seat with their arms crossed. Explain that you will be seated in the circle with the students but that you will remain in the same seat.
- After each question, ask a few students why they made their choice. Tell them that they do not need to explain if they do not want to. Encourage the students to discuss their choices. Keep an ear out for any taunts or nasty comments and take issue with these immediately. It is important that everyone feels secure during the exercise.
- Continue reading statements. Leave room for reflection and discussion after each question.

Choose statements that you feel are best suited to your class. Always keep a few statements in reserve in case the exercise proceeds more quickly than expected. Before making the statements below, it may be a good idea to warm the class up with slightly more neutral statements.



SUGGESTED NEUTRAL STATEMENTS

- Having a lie-in is better than finishing school early.
- Fruit is also candy.
- I like the winter.
- I would panic without my mobile phone.

SUGGESTED STATEMENTS

- Sweden is democratic.
- Everyone can say what they think at our school.
- Everyone's opinions are of equal worth/Everyone's opinions are equally respected (in our school/community/municipality).
- I am able to influence important societal issues.
- We who live in rich countries have a greater responsibility for the environment than people in poor countries.
- Protesting is more effective than voting.
- It is important to vote.
- The majority is always right.

Feel free to prepare your own statements! That said, you should avoid negations such as 'not' or 'none', as these can be difficult to understand and take a position on. You should also avoid formulating statements that may provoke a discussion that problematises or maligns a specific group of people.



If one or more of your students has a disability that prevents them from taking part, you can choose another method that all students can use to indicate whether or not they agree with the statement, such as hands on head or holding up a piece of paper. Just make sure that you use the same method for all students.

EXERCISE: POLITICAL THERMOMETER

The Thermometer exercise uses a scale to determine the degree to which students agree with a statement.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Move the furniture so that everyone can move freely around the room. Try drawing a physical line between two walls using a ribbon on the floor and mark the zero point somewhere in the middle. The two sides of the room represent plus and minus. Like a thermometer, the line has degrees on either side of zero by which students can indicate the degree to which they agree with a statement.
- Before you begin, make it clear that as the teacher you will remain neutral and not bring your own values into the exercise. If anyone asks where you stand, answer as honestly as possible and demonstrate that you take the question seriously.
- Read a statement and define the two extremes of the scale. After each statement, ask a few students why they made their choice. Tell them that they do not need to explain if they do not want to. Encourage the students to discuss their choices. Keep an ear out for any taunts or nasty comments and take issue with these immediately. It is important that everyone feels secure during the exercise.
- Continue reading statements. Leave room for reflection and discussion after each question.

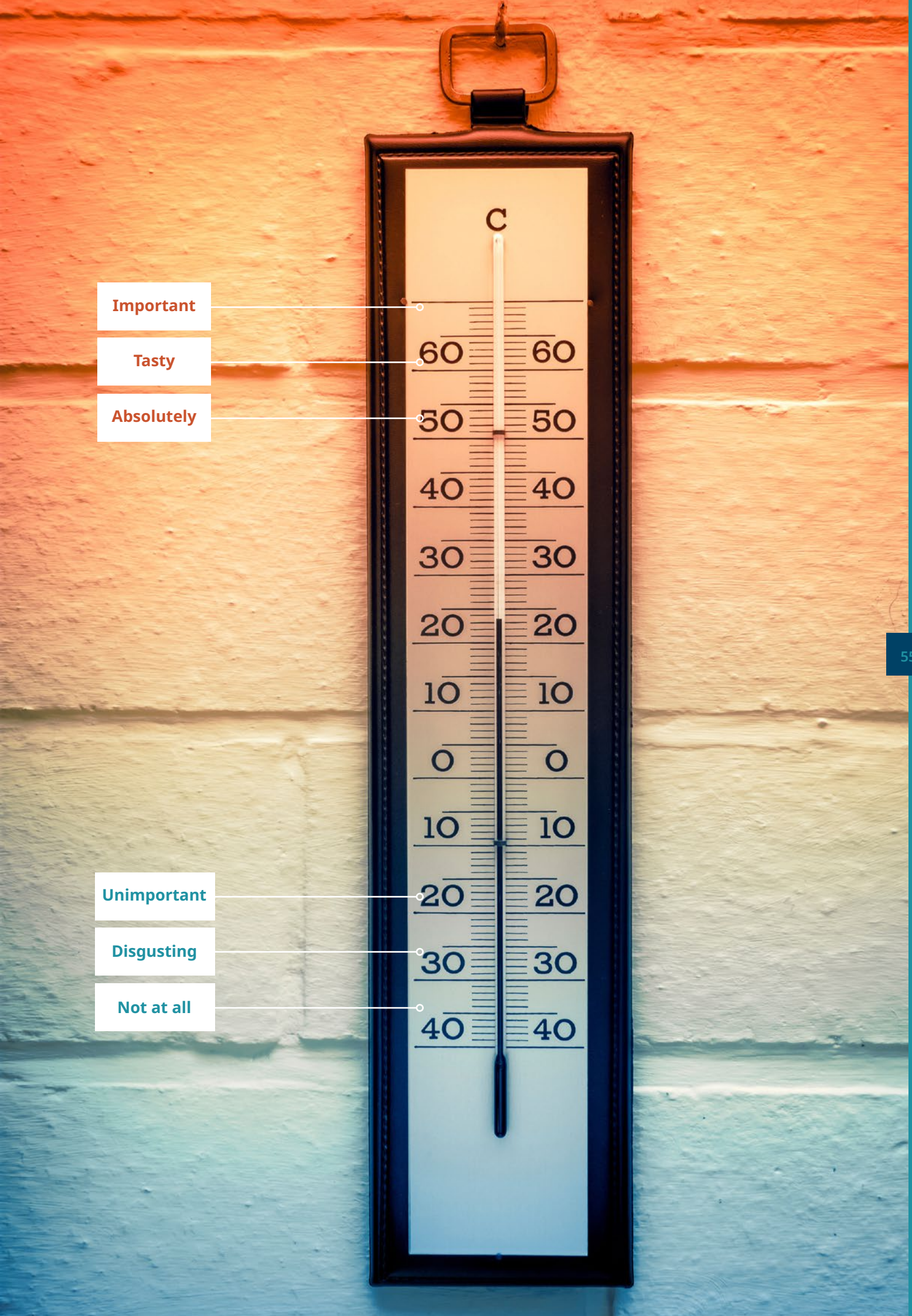
Choose statements that you feel are best suited to your class. Always keep a few statements in reserve in case the exercise proceeds more quickly than expected. Before making the statements below, it may be a good idea to warm the class up with slightly more neutral statements.

SUGGESTED NEUTRAL STATEMENTS

Fruit is candy	Absolutely	Not at all
Lie-ins are...	...important	...unimportant
Ice cream is...	...tasty	...disgusting

SUGGESTED STATEMENTS

Can young people influence politicians?	Absolutely	Not at all
Do you feel that politicians who sit in the municipal assembly represent you?	Absolutely	Not at all
Politics is...	...important	...unimportant
I trust information on the internet...	...completely	...not at all


Important
Tasty
Absolutely
Unimportant
Disgusting
Not at all
C
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
10
20
30
40

SOURCE CRITICISM

Opinion formation is central to democracy, whether designed to influence what individuals and groups think about a given issue or how they act. Interest groups, politicians and political parties expend a great deal of time and energy shaping and influencing public opinion. For a political party, the ultimate goal is to convince people that their policies are correct and to vote for them in an election. Opinion formation is also important to a democratic society.

Teaching democracy in school is all about providing students with the tools they need to play their part in a democratic society, to analyse arguments and debate and actively participate. Source criticism is a tool for assessing information. Helping students to develop their ability to critically review facts is one of the school's objectives.

WHAT IS SOURCE CRITICISM?

Essentially, source criticism is a collection of rules for interpreting sources and assessing how reliable they are, so that we can find out what is true, or at least what is likely to be true.

The Swedish Internet Foundation gives three reasons why it is important to be source-critical:

- You do not want to be fooled.
- You do not want to (inadvertently) fool someone else by sharing incorrect information.
- You do not want to be someone's pawn by unknowingly pushing their agenda.

https://internetkunskap.se/ordlista/kallkritik/



PLEASE DISCUSS!

You can include exercises in everyday source criticism in lessons in several different subjects, for example in art, where critical examination is actually included in the syllabus. Look at and discuss various images. These can be news photographs, images used by political parties and other organisations to communicate a message, or advertisements and marketing material.

- In what ways can images be altered?
- Is it possible to see whether an image has been edited and, if so, how?
- Why are fashion photographs edited and retouched?
- What is it acceptable to alter and what is unacceptable? Why?

You choose the sources you want to use to meet your needs. There is nothing wrong with using a subjective source, as long as you are aware of its subjectivity. When you want to find out what different political parties have to say about a given issue, their websites are good sources. However, if you simply want the facts, you might be better off searching for a more objective source. When we are critical of our sources, we safeguard democracy.

FOUR PRINCIPLES OF SOURCE CRITICISM



1. Authenticity: Check that the source is what it claims to be. Who is behind it, how was the information obtained and what is the intention of disseminating the information? The fewer of these points you can verify, the less credible the source is.



2. Time: Find out when the source was created. Generally speaking, the closer a source is to the event it describes, the more credible it is likely to be. This is because our memories have a tendency to change as time passes.



3. Dependence: Investigate whether the source is dependent on other sources. Is it a primary or a secondary source? Has the source been influenced by rumour? As a rule, it is always a good idea to seek out the original source.



4. Tendency: Investigate whether the source is motivated by personal, financial, ideological or other interests. If this appears to be the case, it is reasonable to suspect that it will present a false or distorted view of reality, perhaps by omitting certain facts that do not fit its agenda, exaggerating others or disseminating downright lies.

Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2021
https://www.msb.se/sv/amnesomraden/msbs-arbete-vid-olyckor-kriser-och-krig/psykologiskt-forsvar/kallkritik/

EXERCISE: POLITICAL PARTIES AS SOURCES

While political parties are undeniably subjective sources, they are still the best source if you want to know their stated objectives and policies. One important point that you can raise and discussed in the classroom is that there are different ways of describing reality and what this implies in terms of understanding what the parties say. Remember to weigh the information provided by the parties against information you have retrieved yourself from more neutral sources.

When assessing the credibility of a source such as a political party, it is also important to divorce your own sympathies from what might reasonably be assumed to be true. Even the party you sympathise with may withhold information that conflicts with its interests, and thus with your own opinions.

A claim may be a half-truth or slanted representation that, while it may appear impartial and objective, can still be misleading, as the information has been chosen specifically to impart an image of reality that suits the purposes of the source. Information can also be one-sided without being misleading; for example, a source may choose to describe reality from a single perspective.

One way to assess information from sources you suspect of bias is to compare it with an opposing source. If your source is a political party, compare it with a party at the other end of the political spectrum. The information that the government and the opposition agree on is probably, but by no means certainly, true. To assess the credibility of a biased source, try to obtain confirmation of the information from at least one source that is equally but oppositely biased, or from an unbiased source.

QUESTIONS

- Which statistics on, for example, youth unemployment and child poverty do the various parties choose to highlight?
- Compare the opposition with the governing parties. Do they cite the same figures to describe reality?
- If not, how do they differ and why do you think they do so? Find the statistics yourself from sources you believe to be neutral: what do they say?

Source evaluation checklist

IS THE SOURCE SUBJECTIVE OR BIASED?

- Are values imparted in the information the source provides?
- Does the source represent someone's interests and, if so, whose?
- Do other sources provide conflicting information? How credible is this conflicting information?
- Can you confirm the information with another, independent source?
- How do you think the facts presented have been chosen?
- Is the choice of facts skewed? Does the image presented of reality change if you add other information?
- Have relevant facts been withheld? From what perspective have the facts been chosen?

WHO IS BEHIND THE SOURCE?

- ☐ A public authority
- ☐ An interest group
- ☐ A business
- ☐ A private individual
- ☐ Someone with a command of the subject
- ☐ Someone you trust
- ☐ Don't know/impossible to ascertain
- ☐ Other:

WHEN WAS THE SOURCE CREATED?

- Generally speaking, the closer a source is to the event it describes, the more credible it is likely to be.

WHY WAS THE SOURCE CREATED?

- ☐ To present information
- ☐ To present facts
- ☐ To convince you of something
- ☐ To influence opinion
- ☐ To sell a product or service
- ☐ To entertain

DOES THE SOURCE HAVE A MESSAGE?

	YES	NO
Is there a clear purpose behind the publication?	☐	☐
Is the information credible?	☐	☐
Does it concur with what you already know?	☐	☐
Is there a hidden message?	☐	☐
Are the facts verifiable?	☐	☐
Is information missing?	☐	☐

The checklist is based on material prepared by the Swedish Internet Foundation, *Källkritik på internet* [Source Criticism on the Internet] (Alexandersson 2016), and the Swedish National Agency for Education's publication *Fakta om källkritik – en handledning i allmän källkritik och källkritik på internet* [Facts on Source Criticism: A guide to general source criticism and source criticism on the internet] (www.skolverket.se).

The Swedish Internet Foundation offers several digital lessons on source criticism:

https://digitalalektioner.se/amnesomrade/digital-kallkritik/

https://internetkunskap.se/ordlista/kallkritik/

EXERCISE: A FOUR-CORNER EXERCISE ON SOURCE CRITICISM

Values exercises can be a useful method for discussing various considerations in source criticism with students. Here is a suggestion for a four-corner exercise to encourage reflection over their trust in various sources.

INSTRUCTIONS

Ask the following questions together with the three given answers and one open answer alternative. Each answer corresponds to a corner of the room. Students answer the question by standing in the corner of the room that they feel corresponds to the right answer. Walk around and ask follow-up questions to the students in each corner.

QUESTION

News spreads that the Swedish Prime Minister has accepted a bribe from the Australian ambassador.

– Which of the following sources are you most likely to believe?

Corner 1: Your headmaster says that it is true.

Corner 2: Your local newspaper writes that it is true.

Corner 3: Several of your close friends write that it is true.

Corner 4: Open corner, own alternative option.



For further inspiration and lesson ideas, visit https://www.mediekompass.se/lektionstips/vad-i-medierna-kan-man-lita-pa/

QUESTION

Your teacher states that the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has only been Swedish law since January 2020, whereas it has been law in Finland and Norway for much longer. This sounds odd and unfair.

– How do you find out whether your teacher is telling the truth?

Corner 1: You google the answer.

Corner 2: You read the convention.

Corner 3: You telephone UNICEF or Save the Children and ask them; after all, they work with children's rights.

Corner 4: You ask where the teacher obtained their information? (Well, teachers are only human and may disseminate false information from time to time. However, on this occasion the teacher was absolutely correct, but it is never wrong to question someone's sources!).

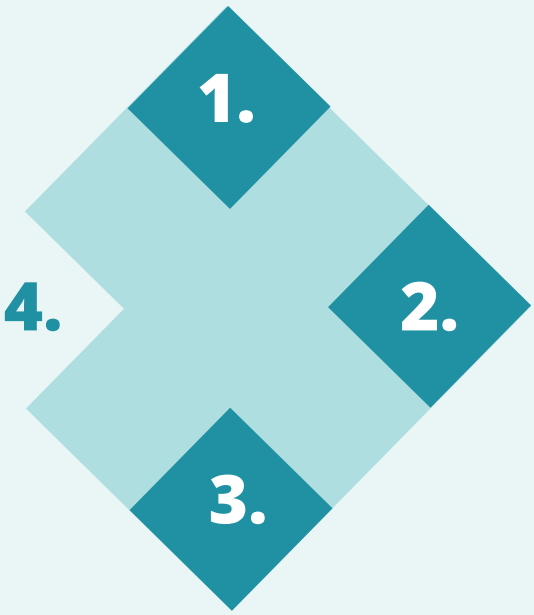
QUESTIONS

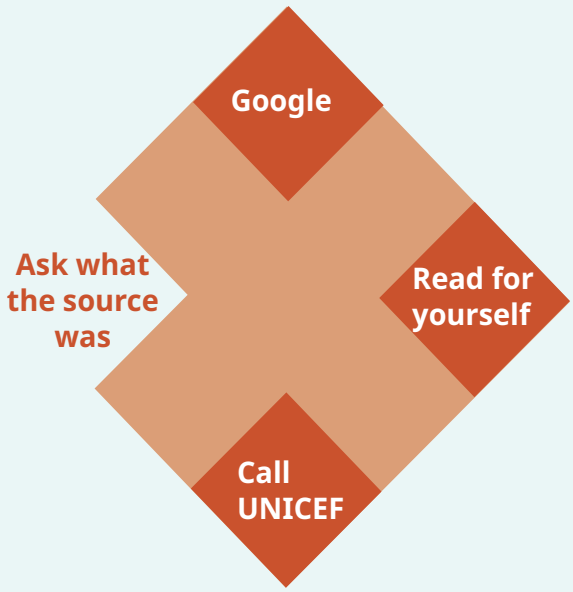
• Is one corner empty? If so, why?

• Why do students trust some sources and distrust others?

• Why do we choose different types of source and what can this lead to?

• What are the strengths and weaknesses of the different types of source?





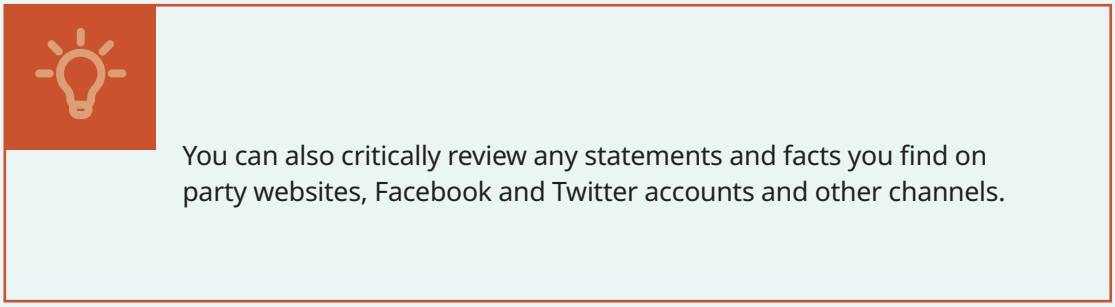
EXERCISE: EXAMINE PARTY-POLITICAL INFORMATIONAL MATERIAL

INSTRUCTIONS

If it is an election year, examine the election posters or leaflets produced by the political parties to get their messages across. Collect as much material as possible from the various parties and attempt to critically review the facts presented. Split the class into groups and ask them to critically review the facts the parties present, then compare with official statistics from Statistics Sweden or other sources that the students deem trustworthy.

QUESTIONS

- Are the facts stated in the material true? How can you tell?
- Which facts are brought to the fore? What is said? What is unsaid?
- In what other ways can we examine reality?
- Could the message have appeared different if based on other facts?
- What do you think the people who see the posters or other information from the parties think? How are we affected by this information?
- What are the consequences if a party disseminates half-truths, lies or exaggerations?
- Is it acceptable for the parties' posters and other material to contain exaggerations and half-truths? Is it possible to require the parties to tell the truth? Why? Why not?



You can also critically review any statements and facts you find on party websites, Facebook and Twitter accounts and other channels.

EXERCISE: SOURCE CRITICISM ONLINE

The internet is an invaluable source of information, contacts, discussion and review. Social media has also made it easier to get in touch with experts or those at the centre of events happening far away when you have no insight yourself. That said, there is an enormous amount of information available and it is vital to critically examine the source. Much of the information may be slanted and it is easy to find sites that confirm one's own biases. Anyone can post anything they like online. Information spreads rapidly, as do rumours and falsehoods. Videos and photographs may be fakes or advertisements. There are even sites that deliberately disseminate misleading information.

INSTRUCTIONS

Ask your students to search "climate crisis", "causes of unemployment", "equality between men and women" and "integration policy" and write down what they find.

QUESTIONS

- What types of site did they land on? News articles, blogs, political websites, forums?
- Where these impartial or partial?
- Was the information they found slanted? If so, in what way?
- Did they find conflicting information?



Bear in mind that political information on the internet and social media extends well beyond the political parties' websites. There are countless interest groups, trade unions, think tanks, newspapers, blogs and companies with their own interest in disseminating a given political view.

PRACTICE CRITICAL THINKING:

- What is considered normal?
- Who or what is portrayed as a problem?
- Who are they writing for?
- What is taken for granted or brushed over?

EXERCISE: SOURCE CRITICISM ONLINE AND ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat and TikTok are based on content produced by users.

As a user, you will be reached by a great deal of information that you need to evalu ate. Social media also allows you to see how many times a post has been shared and liked, making it more of a challenge to remain critical of the content.

Social media is an important platform for disinformation. An Oxford University study found that during the French presidential election of 2017 a quarter of all political stories shared on Twitter were based on misinformation (Swedish Internet Foundation 2021, https://internetkunskap.se/kallkritik/darfor-ska-du-bry-dig-om-kallkritik/).

INSTRUCTIONS

Split your students into small groups to discuss source criticism of internet content. Ask each group to present the results of their discussion to the class. Discuss the results with the class.

QUESTIONS

- Who and what do you trust?
- How do you critically review sources when you search for information online?
- Do you trust what you read in blogs? Why? Why not?
- Is it easy to identify what is advertising, what is true and what is false?
- What do you consider when you share other people's texts, videos and photographs?
- What kinds of political information are disseminated online?
- How do different stakeholders use the internet to disseminate their view of reality?
- What do you share on social media?
- How do you check that the information you link to is true?
- Do you trust the information shared by your friends?
- Have you shared political opinions?
- Have you shared something that is not true?

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is a national initiative coordinated by the Swedish Media Council. It can help you as an educator to learn more about source-critical thinking and provide knowledge of the media landscape in which we live in a relevant and inspiring manner.

https://www.statensmedierad.se/pedagogiska-verktyg/tips-till-pedagoger/mik-for-mig---digital-lektionsbank

EXERCISE: ARRANGING BOOK TABLES

While arranging book tables is a classic method for inviting external parties into schools, there are also other events such as fairs, etc. In brief, a book table event involves inviting political parties to set up tables on which they can display leaflets, pamphlets and other materials during a certain period and in a certain location. Representatives of the party staff the table to hand out leaflets, answer students' questions and recruit new members.

TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY AND USE BOOK TABLES AS A RESOURCE

Book tables and the party-political representatives that accompany them are an invaluable, multipurpose teaching resource. Feel free to give your students assignments that involve searching for information or speaking to the politicians.

In civics, this could be answering a number of questions about the parties and their policies on topical issues. Students reading media studies can practice their interview technique on the politicians and write short articles. In the sciences, students can question the politicians about their party's environmental policy. In Swedish lessons, students can study the parties' information material and analyse it to find out how to write a politically convincing text.

There really is no limit: it should be possible to find connections with all subjects on the curriculum. The big advantage of giving students a specific task to fulfil is that you will encourage them to visit the book tables and speak to the politicians, and you will improve the quality of the meetings.



DEBATE

One common method for bringing political parties into the school is to arrange a party-political debate. Here are a few suggestions for how a debate can be structured and what you need to consider if you are moderating a debate or leading a related discussion.

EXERCISE: A CLASSIC DEBATE

A classic party-political debate generally involves a panel of invited party representatives sitting in a row on stage in the school auditorium, a classroom or other suitable venue and debating various topics for a set period of time. The debate is chaired by a moderator. A classic debate often begins with the moderator asking a brief question to all debaters, possibly of the yes/no variety. The moderator will then guide the panel through a number of predetermined topics.

VARIOUS WAYS TO MAKE DEBATES MORE INTERACTIVE

A debate will be more interesting if you can involve the audience. There are any number of ways to involve students listening to debates and here are a few tips on how to go about it (Lacinai 2009).

- Ask students to present the topics and issues at the beginning of the debate. This can be achieved by asking a different student to give a brief oral or visual presentation of each topic for debate, setting the agenda and formulating why the subject of question is important to them.
- Ask students to prepare questions in advance. For example, each student can write their question on a piece of paper and these can all be placed in a box from which the moderator draws questions to be interjected during the debate. This will permit students who are too nervous to ask questions in person to have a say.
- Encourage questions and comments from the audience during the debate. Among the advantages of pausing to take questions from the audience are that it allows students to influence the course of the debate and allows debaters the time to answer the students questions and the issues these raise. Placing questions at the end of the debate risks running out of time to answer the questions.
- Allow students to text questions to a number distributed before the debate. The person who receives the text messages is then tasked with passing them on to the moderator so that they can be answered by the debaters.
- Ask student representatives to summarise the debate at the end of the activity.

Allow students to decide whether the debaters are using difficult words or breaking the debate rules; for example, the students can hold up signs or otherwise indicate when debaters use unnecessarily complicated words or break the rules by resorting to personal attacks or insults. It is then your role as moderator to note these protests and clarify the student's meaning; for example, if a complicated word has been used, you can ask the person who used it to explain its meaning. Make sure that students do not abuse this opportunity to lodge a protest. Before the debate, discuss with your students the circumstances under which they may use the method and ensure that they understand the responsibility this places on the audience (Lacinai 2009).

WHAT DOES A MODERATOR DO?

Your main role as moderator is to ensure the debate or panel discussion is factual, focused and comprehensible to the audience. This is important if the debate or discussion is to be successful, but it does demand some preparation on your part if you are to be a good moderator on the day. The moderator also has a responsibility to ensure that the debate is entertaining and enjoyable for the audience, as well as that various aspects of the issues are raised, that all debaters have a chance to speak and that when they do they keep to the agreed rules.

The moderator should also help the audience to understand and listen to the debate, by asking the questions the audience wants answers to. Repeat questions that come from students in the audience, so that you are sure both that you and the panel have understood them correctly and that all students have heard them. If any of the debaters is reticent to answer a question from you or the audience, be persistent; ask the question again or if anything is unclear ask the person to clarify what they mean! If you do accept questions from students in the audience, make sure the politicians actually answer them. Ask the student who asked the question whether they are satisfied with the answer and, if not, ask the panel to answer it again. Do not be afraid to ask a question that might seem stupid or naive; these are often the questions no one else dares to ask.

PREPARING TO MODERATE A DEBATE

It is important that the group of teachers and students arranging a debate on school premises prepares rules for the debate. This may, for example, be based on the school's code of conduct.

PROPOSED RULES

In debates at our school we:

- distinguish between the issue and the person, meaning that we respond to the other person's arguments, but do not attack them personally;
- respect one another and have zero tolerance for sexism, racism or other degrading treatment;
- keep to our allotted time; and
- avoid or explain difficult words.

It is the responsibility of the moderator to ensure that the rules are followed during the debate and to remark if any of the debaters break them by, for example, launching a personal attack. If everyone at the school has agreed on the rules for the debate, it makes it easier for the moderator to interrupt the debate by saying, for example: *"Let me interrupt you there as you have broken the terms of our agreement. Personal attacks are not permitted in this debate. Please keep to the issues".*

Familiarise yourself with the political parties who will be taking part in the debate by reading their websites and policies. In an election year, read their election platforms. Find out where each party stands on the issues that you have decided should be debated. As the moderator, when you are familiar with the various parties policy positions, you will know the areas in which they think alike and where they disagree and it will be easier to ensure that differing opinions emerge during the debate.

Find out about the debaters. Call them in advance or speak to them when they arrive for the debate. As the moderator, it is always a good idea to get a sense of the individual debaters; if someone gives the impression of being overly talkative, you can be prepared to interrupt them should the need arise. It is also useful to have some idea of their level of experience: are they new to the party and is this their first debate, or have they been involved in many debates. As the moderator, you may need to inject some balance into the debate so that everyone has the opportunity to speak regardless of their level of experience. Reflect on your role and ransack your own opinions.

- Might your views and perspective lead you to emphasise and give more time to certain opinions rather than others?
- How can you avoid doing so?

Plan the debate. How will the debate commence, how much time will be allocated to each topic and how will the debate be concluded? Write a script for the debate. Leave plenty of space in your script to note key points made by the debaters and to write down any questions that come to mind during the debate so you remember to ask them.

Proposed basic script for a debate between politicians who sit on the municipal assembly:



Stick to the timetable! And make sure the debaters do the same. If you have decided that each debater shall have two minutes to answer a question, make sure they stick to their allotted time. One way to achieve this is to hold up an amber sheet of paper when they have 30 seconds left and a red one when time is up.

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

As moderator, it is a good idea to consider the types of questions you intend to ask. There are open questions, then there are closed questions.

Open questions

Who, what, how, when and why. These questions encourage debaters to develop their answers.

Closed questions

These questions require the answer yes, no or don't know. They can be very useful when you want to pin down a debater from whom you are having trouble getting a straight answer. Example closed questions:

• Do you intend to raise taxes?

• Will the municipality be building a new swimming baths?

Feel free to follow up a closed question with an open *how* question

'How?' is the best question in the world as it demands that the politician develops how their party intends to achieve something. Most people agree on the need to reduce unemployment, but how? After all, this is the interesting thing and should be what determines whether or not a party receives the voters' support. Start with a closed question to ensure an answer, then follow up with an open *how* question to develop the answer.

Ask pointed questions

Politicians have a tendency to skew their answers to get their own message across, rather than answering your question. They may respond by telling you what they would like to do, even if that has little to do with your question. Try to corner them so that they have to give concrete answers:

"That's all very well, but what I'm interested in is whether you are prepared to renovate that particular sports facility?"

Avoid bringing your own values into the question

Try to formulate questions without bringing your own values to bear. You should also avoid framing questions as statements of fact, as this allows the person you are addressing to focus on debating your opinion rather than answering your question. Listen attentively to what the debaters have to say and it will be easier to ask follow-up questions. Listen to the debate rather than thinking about what to say next.

Round off the debate

Round off the debate with a summary of what has been said. You can do this yourself in your role as moderator, or before the debate starts you can assign the task to a student. Thank the panellists for taking part and, not least, the students for listening and, hopefully, actively participating by asking questions.

ANALYSE

One fun way to learn more about argumentation and rhetoric is to analyse a real debate. In preparation for your debate, for example, you could split the class into groups and ask them to analyse different ways to formulate an argument. During the debate, listen and note the different types of argument used, such as arguments based on sense or sensibility, and who employs them.

QUESTIONS

- Does anyone resort to personal attacks or employ master suppression techniques?
- Which debaters use which debating techniques?
- How long do the various debaters speak in total?
- How much time did female party representatives have compared to their male counterparts, or young representatives compared to older?
- Or did the big wig from the municipal council hog the most time?

This may provide an interesting basis for the class to discuss different debating techniques and who dominates a group. Perhaps you can arrange for part of the debate to be filmed for subsequent analysis and discussion in the classroom. You may well come across some interesting patterns.



Prepare the debaters for the kinds of issues that will be addressed. The debate will be more interesting if the debaters have good answers to every question.



Is rhetoric on the curriculum? If so, ask students to analyse the debate.

After

EVALUATE AND FOLLOW UP!

By now, you have already discussed how to work with political information in your school and implemented some party-political activities. Now you need to invest a little time evaluating and following up your efforts, something that is at least as important as planning. This chapter contains various methods for evaluating ad following up activities, so that you can figure out what went well and what elements you feel could be developed.

In this chapter, we present evaluation methods, a method for following up teaching activities involving political parties and a method for using the results pf mock school elections as a basis for discussing democracy. It also includes a discussion exercise for looking at youth representation in politics and participation in elections.

EVALUATION IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS PLANNING

There are any number of ways to evaluate your work. The most important thing is that you do so and that doing so results in learning, development and doing things better next time.

There are various reasons to evaluate your efforts. It will provide you with useful information about where there is room for improvement and what you can do different next time, but it will also make everyone feel (and be) involved as their opinions are taken into account. It is also part of individual learning. By ventilating the thoughts and feelings an activity, project or debate arouses, the individual can learn more about the subject and themselves.

EXERCISE: QUICK EVALUATION USING POST-IT NOTES

As the purpose of evaluation is to contribute knowledge about what we can do better or differently in future, it is a good idea to make sure that the ideas proposed are documented for use when the school sets about improving its work with political information.

If you want to quickly evaluate a classroom discussion or conduct a brief evaluation during an ongoing event or in a break during a theme day, a post-it note evaluation is a useful way for you as a teacher to assess the situation in the group.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Distribute post-it notes to participants, for example to all students during a break.
- Ask them to answer a specific question on a post-it note and then collect the notes.

QUESTIONS

- How does it feel right now?
- What would you like to talk about in more detail?
- What is the best/worst thing and why?

As the teacher, this will give you a quick overview of the situation and what you can change when the activity continues. Give feedback after the break so everyone knows whether and, if so, how you have changed the activity after the evaluation; for example, say *"Many people were keen to continue the discussion on feminism, so I thought we could begin with that before moving on"*. Be sure not to point out any specific student.



EXERCISE: EVALUATING A SPECIFIC ACTIVITY

This is a quick and simple method for evaluating what you do well and where there is room for improvement. It is well suited to evaluating a one-off activity such as a debate or theme day. Before you begin, make sure everyone is clear on exactly what is being evaluated, such as the debate we held on Tuesday.

INSTRUCTIONS

- The exercise can be performed in small groups, the entire group or individually. One suggestion is to perform the exercise in small groups then summarise for the entire group..
- Give each group a flipchart and ask them to divide the page into three columns. The columns can be illustrated with traffic lights (green, amber, red). In the left column, write “stop ”, in the centre column “keep going” and in the right “start”.
- Ask the groups to discuss and write down what they feel did not work for the activity and we should therefore stop doing, what worked satisfactorily and we should therefore keep doing and, finally, what they felt was missing and we should therefore start doing.
- Ask each group to read what they have written for the entire group, so that everyone is aware of the opinions raised in the evaluation.

EXERCISE: FOLLOW UP

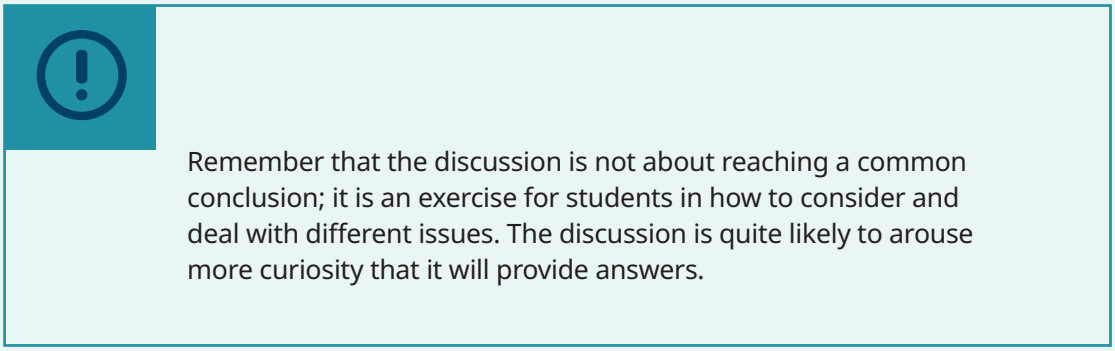
Discuss party-political visits with students in a range of subjects: civics, Swedish, psychology, philosophy and so on. Discussion with students can be a method for evaluating party-political visits and to continue working through issues that arose during teaching activities such as party-political debates.

Allow your students to steer the discussion by preparing them to listen out for new issues and themes during the debate. As a teacher of Swedish, for example, you might ask them to be alert to the various rhetorical devices used by politicians, while a teacher of philosophy can ask students to listen to politicians' attitudes to free choice. Try to avoid asking questions that elicit a yes/no response; set problems and questions without a given answer.

INSTRUCTIONS

Ask your students to write down questions they would like to discuss further and bring these up in a subsequent lesson. When the time comes to continue the discussion, write all of the questions on the whiteboard and allow the students to choose what they want to talk about. Students can give a brief presentation on why they think their question is interesting; perhaps several students have asked the same or similar questions, in which case you can combine them if the students have no objections.

To decide which topic the group should discuss further, give all students three stickers, magnets or a whiteboard pen and ask them to mark the subjects they would like to discuss further. They can dispose of their three choices as they see fit, from placing all three beside one subject to giving one each to three different subjects. The subject with the most votes will be the topic of discussion.



Remember that the discussion is not about reaching a common conclusion; it is an exercise for students in how to consider and deal with different issues. The discussion is quite likely to arouse more curiosity that it will provide answers.

EXERCISE: DISCUSS THE RESULTS OF THE MOCK SCHOOL ELECTION

If you have held a mock general election in school, the results can be a great place to begin discussing subjects such as how democracy works, the various issues on which students made up their minds and the role of young people in a democracy. Even though the results of your mock election have no influence on how the country is governed, it is important to take them seriously. After all, your students have put their time and energy into voting.

QUESTIONS

- What was the voter turnout and what persuaded the students to vote?
- Was it easy or difficult to decide who to vote for? Why?
- Do you feel that it is important to vote in the school's mock general election? If so, why? If not, why not?
- What have you learned from voting in the school election?
- What issues were important when deciding which party to vote for? Why were those particular issues crucial?
- What issues do you think young people consider important?
- What issues do you consider important? Why?

If the mock school election shadowed a real general election for the Riksdag and municipal and regional assemblies, discuss the results in those elections with your students.

QUESTIONS

- What differences and similarities can you see between the school election and real election results?
- What might have caused the differences?
- Did it matter to you that the school election was a mock election; would you have voted differently in the real election?
- How did the result in our municipal election differ from the election to the Riksdag? Why do you think that is?
- What issues do students think are important to adults when they decide which party to vote for? Are these different issues than the ones you consider important?
- Is it important to vote?
- Are there other ways to exert influence?



The principle of secrecy of voting extends to students voting in a mock school election, meaning that students are under no obligation to reveal who they voted for during classroom discussions.

It may be interesting to review the results of mock school elections held in both your own school and the rest of the country.

THE INTEREST AND ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLITICS AND SOCIETY

The objectives of Swedish national youth policy are that:

all young people between the ages of 13 and 25 are to have good living conditions, the power to form their own lives and influence over developments in society.

In a written communication from the Government on youth policy (Skr. 2013/14:191), it is established that young people shall have the same opportunities as other citizens to participate in the democratic process and to influence conditions in both the personal sphere and society at large. One point of departure is that young people's active participation is not only important from a rights perspective, but also because the experiences and perspectives are a resource and asset when reaching decisions (Skr. 2013/14:191).

Use the following information to discuss young people's political representation and participation in elections and society as a whole. Unless otherwise stated, the information below has been retrieved from ungidag.se.



The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society has issued several reports on the living conditions of young people. In addition to the website **ungidag.se**, you can also find in-depth analysis and discussion of youth influence in the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society's report *Fokus 19* (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2019). If you would like to learn more about young people's societal engagement, we recommend the report *Fokus 21* (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2021). Information regarding the attitudes and values of young people is available in the report *Unga med attityd 2019* [Youth with Attitude] (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2019).

EXERCISE: DISCUSS YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS

- In the 2018 election to the Riksdag, 86 % of young adults in the age group 18–24 chose to vote. The corresponding figure in thee 2014 general election was 82 %. The percentage of young people voting has increased steadily since 2002.
- In the 2019 election to the European Parliament, voter turnout among young adults in the age group 18–24 fell by 2 percentage points to 44 %, with young women slightly more likely to vote than young men (48 and 41 % respectively).
- The percentage of young women voting is higher than the percentage of young men in all elections.
- Voter turnout among young adults has increased in all national elections in Sweden. Young adults in the age group 18–24 are most likely to vote in general elections to the Riksdag, with 86 % voting in 2018. Young adults with a high level of engagement in society and firm opinions on important societal issues are more likely to vote than their less engaged peers (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2021).
- The percentage of young adults who vote in municipal and regional elections has increased over time.

QUESTIONS

- Is it important to vote?
- Why does a lower percentage of young adults vote in European elections that in elections to the Riksdag?
- Does voter turnout reflect young people's interest in politics?
- Why are young women more likely to vote than young men?
- From an international perspective, Sweden has high voter turnout: why do you think this is?
- Is voting the only way to exert influence? If not, what other means are there?

EXERCISE: DISCUSS YOUNG POLITICIANS

- Nine out of ten candidates elected to the Riksdag in 2018 were in the age group 30–64.
- In that same election, only 5 % of nominated candidates were in the age group 18–24, a decrease compared to the 2010 and 2014 general elections. In regional and municipal elections, the percentage was 4 %. A slightly higher percentage of young men than young women are nominated at all levels.
- Of those elected to the Riksdag in 2018, 1.4 % were young adults in the age group 18–24. This was a decrease from 2014, when the age group accounted for 2.3 % of those elected. In 2018, the percentage of young men (1.1 %) was higher than that of young women (0.3 %).
- In elections at all levels in 2018, young people were underrepresented among those elected in proportion to the number of young adults in the age group 18–24 who are entitled to vote.
- While the percentage of young adults elected to national, regional and municipal assemblies has increased at all levels during the twenty-first century – from just over 2 % in the 2002 elections to 4 % in 2014 – this trend was reversed in 2018, when the percentage of young adults elected declined at all levels.
- Young people are more likely to resign from elected office before the end of their term than older elected representatives. During the mandate period 2014–2018, approximately four out of ten young members of municipal and regional assemblies resigned. The equivalent figure for the age group 30–64 was two in ten. At both levels, young women were more likely to resign during the mandate period than young men.
- Young and foreign-born citizens are underrepresented among those with paid commissions of trust in municipalities. The situation is similar in regional authorities. (SCB, 2019)

QUESTIONS

- Is it important for young people to be represented in the Riksdag and on municipal and regional assemblies? Why is it important, or unimportant? How might this affect the decisions taken?
- What are the opportunities for and obstacles to young people entering politics?
- Is there anything you can think of that might lead to more young politicians remaining in office for the entire mandate period?



As a basis for discussing drop-out rates among young politicians, read Statistics Sweden's report *Elected Representatives in Municipal Councils: A study of how they view their terms in office* (Statistics Sweden 2013).

EXERCISE: DISCUSS THE ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLITICS

- Barely four of ten young adults between 16 and 25 years of age are interested in exerting influence over issues concerning their municipality, while barely two in ten feel that it is possible to reach municipal policymakers with their opinions.
- At 5 %, the percentage of young people in the age group 16–24 who are members of a political party is the same as for adults. Around one in three state that they would consider joining a party.
- Seven of ten have performed what they consider to be a political act at some time over the past 12 months, most commonly supporting opinions on societal issues expressed online or on social media, something that six of ten have done. Discussing politics and supporting opinions online has become more common among young people over time (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2021).
- Among young people in the age group 16–25, 61 % say that they are interested in societal issues, young women (66 %) to a greater extent than young men (55 %), while 42 % say they have an interest in politics, with no statistically significant difference between the sexes (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society 2021).
- Over two thirds of members in political youth associations are under 23 years of age. Most of them are at school or university.

QUESTIONS

- Why do you think young people join political youth associations?
- Why are relatively few young people members of political youth associations while many more state that they are interested in societal issues and politics?
- Is it important that the parties' memberships represent different ages and backgrounds?
- Have you considered, or do you have experience of, getting involved in politics?
- A smaller percentage of young people say they are interested in politics than in societal issues. Why do you think this is? Is there any difference between political engagement and engagement with societal issues?
- What forms can political involvement take?
- What forms of involvement are available to those seeking to influence society?
- Many young people would like to present their ideas and influence municipal policymakers, but a smaller percentage feel that they are able to exert influence. Why might this be the case? Are there ways to develop the work of the municipality to promote influence and participation?



A number of municipalities conduct surveys to gauge the opinions of young people in the municipality, many of them using the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society's youth questionnaire Lupp®. It may well be that your municipality has conducted such a survey, in which case it would provide an ideal basis for discussion in your school.

EXERCISE: WRITE A CITIZEN PROPOSAL

In many municipalities, residents can submit proposals directly to politicians if they feel that change is warranted. These are called citizen proposals. Anyone who is registered at an address in the municipality can write and submit such a citizen proposal, regardless of their age and citizenship. This means that the opportunity is also open to minors and disenfranchised minorities. Writing a citizen proposal can be used as an exercise in democracy. It provides insight into the opportunities available to both citizens and non-citizen residents of the municipality to directly effect change in local government.

MUNICIPALITIES THAT ACCEPT CITIZEN PROPOSALS

In 2019, six of ten Swedish municipalities had a citizen proposal programme, while seven of ten arranged at least one citizen dialogue. Nine of ten municipalities also had a citizen's council (Statistics Sweden 2020). You can find out whether your municipality accepts citizen proposals by visiting the municipality's website. Once there, you can also find out what a citizen proposal needs to include for the municipality to consider it.

CONSIDER, DISCUSS AND WRITE

A citizen proposal suggests some specific change that you wish to see in your municipality that is related to the municipality's operations and areas of responsibility, such as schools, culture, care of the elderly and people with disabilities, parks and recreation, sports facilities and pedestrian and cycle paths.

Ask students to consider whether there are any changes they would like to see in your municipality and then discuss as a class. For instance, what issues are important to young people in the municipality?

- Could the school environment be improved or class sizes reduced?
- Do young people need more leisure activities?
- Should the municipality invest more in legal graffiti walls, areas for spontaneous sports, additional lighting to make streets more secure or better public transport for young people in rural areas?

It is not possible to address multiple issues in a single citizen proposal. To do so you must write a separate proposal for each. A citizen proposal may not relate to the exercise of public authority in relation to an individual, nor can it contain undemocratic or racist content.

PLEASE DISCUSS!

- While there is ample opportunity to submit a proposal, not all citizen proposals will result in the desired change being implemented by the municipality. Discuss why the municipality might implement some proposals and not others.

- Are there certain issues that conflict with one another, so that decisions must be prioritised?
- What priorities might affect how policymakers assess a citizen proposal?
- Which issues are important to policymakers in your municipality?
- In what ways can you influence policy in your school, municipality or nationally?

FOLLOW THE PROCESS!

- When a citizen proposal is received by the municipality, the municipal assembly will consider the matter in its meeting and decide which departmental committee should decide on the proposal.

365 DAYS

- The municipality is required to examine all submitted proposals within one year. You will receive an answer regarding whether the municipality intends to implement your proposal as soon as the matter has been processed.
- In some cases, the person who has written the proposal will be asked to present it to politicians before the committee meeting at which it will be discussed. This presentation can be oral or in writing.



SOUND ADVICE

In this chapter, we offer some sound advice and good ideas about discussing politics and democracy in school. Which strategies work, or don't work? How should we respond to xenophobia? What should we consider when inviting political parties into the school?

WITH 'VIOLATIONS' AS A YARDSTICK

Emma Arneback is a docent of education at Örebro University's School of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences.

Arneback is author of the doctoral thesis *With 'Violations' as a Yardstick: Planned responses to expressions of racism in upper secondary schools* (Arneback 2012).

"The school is not values-neutral as we have a very clear assignment to promote values."

How do schools respond to xenophobia?

"In my experience, schools deal with the issue responding to xenophobia in very different ways. When it comes to politics in school, some schools choose to leave well alone; they want to keep the school as safe as possible so they try to avoid anything that might be painful. And then there are schools that take the opposite view. Because this is such a tangible issue in society at large it is important to give it space in school; it is important that the school is a democratic arena and that difficult questions are addressed in teaching activities. This leads to schools making different choices when it comes to whether or not political parties should be welcome in school.

As these visits can lead to challenging situations for both teachers and students, there is a risk that more schools will choose not to invite parties and instead address the issue on their own."

What effects do the different strategies have?

"In my opinion, an avoidance strategy can present risks in the long term as it ignores political and moral issues that reverberate in society, making them non-issues in school and robbing students and young people of opportunities to discuss them with politicians. That is not to ignore the fact that situations may arise in which the issue is so infected that it puts students at risk, in which case restricting communication is the only choice. For example, I am aware of schools that have chosen to halt activities in situations where feelings have become heated; where they have said that we cannot cope with this right now. It is no easy choice, but we take a risk when our default strategy is to put a lid on things."

How can a school prepare?

"With both short and long-term measures. The issue of core values is with us all the time; it is a matter of how we socialise and work together in school and how we discuss loaded societal issues. But if we are talking about short-term preparations, it is important to be well informed, that we all discuss the limits of freedom of expression in the school for students, staff and visitors. So that we prepare together with students and that teachers can work to facilitate political discourse but also be prepared to step in if the discussion violates someone's dignity. As I said, there is a risk that more and more schools will choose to deal with the issue alone. We may read about political parties, or visit their campaign huts, but they will not be allowed on the premises if there is a risk of being forced into complex judgements, but judgements that I believe are vital if we want a school that can foster democracy."

What does it mean when we say that the school is not values-neutral?

"The school is not values-neutral as we have a very clear assignment to promote values."

So, where do we draw the line for freedom of expression in school?

"It is precisely this that is so complex, as freedom of expression in school is based on the provisions of the Swedish Education Act and Discrimination Act, which are much stricter than the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression. When someone considers that she or he has been harassed, or that their dignity has been violated, the school has a duty to ensure that it does not continue, and it is impossible to know that this will arise in advance. I cannot know when I admit an individual from a given party into my classroom that someone will be offended. However, a situation may arise in which it is obvious that what someone is saying is offensive to someone, and then I must be prepared to intervene. This implies that, as a teacher, you must be present in every situation."

When political parties are on school premises, as an educator how should one act in the classroom to prevent anyone's dignity being violated, and how should one act if it does happen?

"First of all, it may be pertinent to inform political parties about the legislation governing schools and make it clear where the boundaries are, so they are aware that if they cross the line, as a teacher I will call a halt to the discussion. However, if one looks at violations in general and how teachers deal with them, it is important to be empathetic. It is unlikely that someone will put up their hand and say 'excuse me, I feel violated'. As an educator, you need to recognise it as and when the situation arises. Be aware: how is this discussion affecting my students?"

What strategy is successful in dealing with xenophobia?

"That depends entirely on the context and the student group in question, but I find that dialogue is always key to making progress; to be able to listen, discuss and pick the bones out of an argument. That someone feels like I'm listening to them regardless of what I say, but also to stand for what I say. If, for example, I say something negative about minority groups in society, that cannot be allowed to go unchallenged, it needs to be unpicked and scrutinised: what are you saying, what facts do you base it on, why are you saying it, what do you mean, who do you want to be? As an educator, there are many questions you can ask to ensure that people don't just throw words about, but must take responsibility for and discuss their opinions in various ways."

THE SWEDISH FEDERATION OF STUDENT UNIONS

Josefine Fälth is chair of the Swedish Federation of Student Unions.

"Getting involved in a student union is one tangible way of practicing democracy."

In your opinion, how can a school work successfully with political issues and discussion?

"First and foremost, teachers need to be given a stable foundation during their training so that they can cope with the assignment of promoting democratic values that Swedish school's currently have. Many teachers feel that they lack the necessary foundation. The organisation of students and opportunities for them to independently practice democracy are also important components of opening up to political issues and discourse.

School management also has the opportunity to welcome political parties into the school and ensure that students and politicians meet within the school's walls in an entertaining and educational manner and with respect for the school's democratic values. This includes arranging school elections and debates with party youth associations."

Schools have an assignment to promote democratic values. How important do you think that is?

"The school's democratic assignment is extremely important. It provides all students and young people with an opportunity to learn about and even to truly practice democracy, regardless of their circumstances at home. Getting involved in a student union is one tangible way of practicing democracy. That said, if the school's assignment to promote democratic values is to be equitable, we need a common image of how it is to be performed. There are currently very few schools with a clear organisation, consensus and division of responsibilities when it comes to their democratic assignment.

The school's assignment to promote democratic values helps students to strengthen their knowledge of and engagement with the democratic process. The school also has a compensatory assignment that in many ways goes hand in hand with their democratic assignment. This compensatory assignment involves adapting teaching to compensate for disparities in students individual educational conditions and, in terms of government and political parties, the knowledge gained at home looks very different indeed. While some students may never have touched on the subject, others have parents who discuss the subject at the dinner table every night. Here, the school's compensatory role of offering knowledge is especially important, as it has an impact on the student's ability to actively participate in society."

What recurring challenges has the Swedish Federation of Student Unions seen in how schools work with political discourse and democracy?

"The Swedish Federation of Student Unions promotes the free and independent organisation of Swedish students. This implies that student unions are founded on democratic principles, with the students themselves electing their representatives through membership in a student union. However, the Swedish Federation of Student Unions has noted restrictions on students' right to organise in some areas.

We also see challenges in that student unions are not admitted to schools due to fears that it may lead to bullying and harassment. This is a democratic problem that also leads to schools missing a unique opportunity to create a platform for young people's participation and the preconditions for them to become active citizens on equal terms."

What has the Swedish Federation of Student Unions seen that appears to be working well?

"It is apparent that those schools that work systematically with quality and where students play a natural part in the school's democratic assignment also work well with democracy. The Swedish Federation of Student Unions always advocates good cooperation between the student union and school management. Good cooperation and responsivity to the wishes and needs of students simplifies governance and benefits students and staff."

SWEDEN'S STUDENT COUNCILS

Chiara Bergmark, chair of Sweden's Student Councils

"As a student, having the opportunity to ponder, form one's own opinion and then also be part of the event is crucial to building up democratic self-confidence."

In your opinion, what should schools consider when inviting in political parties?

The most important thing when inviting politicians [into the school] is to be clear about one's reasons for doing so – i.e., so that students can participate in planning the visit and preparing the debate – but also to speak in advance of the visit about the nature of the debate and why it is being arranged. All students need to understand the implications of the visit. It is also important that students are given time and opportunity to read about the various parties and familiarise themselves with the issues that one has agreed will be addressed. It is not simply a matter of students having the best possible conditions for participating in and understanding the debate, they also need to feel included and involved. As a student, having the opportunity to ponder, form one's own opinion and then also be part of the event is crucial to building up democratic self-confidence that will serve them well for the rest of their lives. It is therefore important that the school shows confidence in their ability to grasp difficult issues and engage in political debate. They need to be taken just as seriously as adult voters. It is also important to ensure that during the visit there is mutual exchange between teachers and students. And last, but by no means least, it is important to follow up the visit.

How should one go about allowing students to influence this work and work as a team?

It's all about opening up a discussion with students. It may sound simple, but it's not something one can take for granted everywhere. Headteachers, teachers and other staff need to make time to listen to what students have to say; create forums that make it possible for students to discuss the visit. I would also like to highlight the fact that the inclusion of the student organisations at the school should be a given. To a large extent, student participation in and influence over party-political visits also falls under the umbrella of the school's assignment to promote democratic values. We know that when students are allowed to influence their schooling, whether that be the work environment or teaching, the result is better for everyone. Research suggests that increased student participation improves the work environment for students and the school's staff. In this context, it's a matter of

engaging students in politics. If students are allowed to exert influence, if they are included in the work before and during, then it is more likely that they will engage with political forums and interest among students for politics and societal issues will increase. Working successfully with core values will make students more secure in themselves and in their own opinions. This makes it easier to raise and discuss issues.

How do you think schools can best deal with situations in which a debate or party-political visit results in a disturbance or students feeling offended?

Above all, it's a matter of discussing how one will react to a disturbance or students taking offence in advance. This must be part and parcel of your preventive work before the visit. Every school also has a legal obligation to have an equal opportunities plan. While this should make clear what routine action is to be taken when a student feels that their dignity has been violated, it is important to prepare a separate plan with students before a visit by politicians. Discussing sensitive issues can be difficult. This is something everyone needs to be aware of. Even if students are to be included in preparing the plan, it is important to point out that responsibility lies with the school's staff.

What might such a plan look like?

That's up to each school, but it's a matter of discussing matters such as what makes a good debate climate, what's permitted and what we consider unacceptable. How should we react if someone says something we disagree with? And what do we do when someone behaves in an offensive or discriminatory manner? If students are to feel safe and secure, they must be made aware of the measures that will be taken should such a situation arise. When conducting preventive work, one should also go through where students can turn to if they do feel offended, how to conduct a respectful discussion and what the risks are. In my opinion, many problems can be prevented if one prepares questions for politicians in advance.



KNOWLEDGE GROWS WITH US

The Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society is a government agency where the living conditions of young people and the conditions of civil society are always in focus. The knowledge that grows with us is used by policymakers when they prioritise investments in the areas of youth policy and civil society. We disseminate our knowledge in meetings with people at national and European level. We also distribute central government grants that make it possible for organisations of all sizes to conduct their operations. Our international operations also provide young people with opportunities to volunteer, study or practice in other European countries.

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