

Studying Politics or Being Political? High School Students' Assessment of the Welfare State

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- This article examines and discusses students' understanding the welfare state, vis-à-vis intrinsic and extrinsic goals.
- The data consists of 71 accounts on welfare regimes prior to teaching and was elicited through a projective task.
- The results display an understanding of the welfare state consistent with extrinsic goals, i.e. as an issue to engage with as a political being, rather than as a disciplinary issue.
- The article argues that students' difficulty to recognise the difference between 'politics' and 'the study of politics' is problematic in regard to intrinsic goals, but not necessarily in regard to extrinsic goals.

Purpose: This article examines high school students' understanding of the welfare state as a political issue and discusses how it can be approached in the classroom. The study was conducted within a social-science educational context and departs from a perspective from which educational goals can be seen as intrinsic (goals closely connected to the academic disciplines) or extrinsic (goals formulated by the political sphere, e.g. students' deliberation on political issues). These variant goals can pose a dilemma for teachers and students alike as they engage in highly political topics.

Design & methodology: To explain the structure of the dilemmas of teaching issues that can be understood politically in a social-science context, this paper focuses on students' assessment of such topics before teaching and how they generally reason different political views on the welfare state. The data consist of written documents produced by tenth-year students in response to two accounts of the best welfare state. Using a qualitative content analysis, the data were analysed to identify students' approaches to a political issue and their normative reasoning.

Findings: The results display an understanding of the welfare state that is consistent with extrinsic goals, i.e. as an issue to engage with as a political entity rather than exclusively as a social scientist. It was noted that students experience difficulty in recognising the difference between politics and the study of politics.

Practical implications: The study contributes to an understanding of the influence of normativity on students' thinking and represents an attempt to bridge the difficulty of combining intrinsic and extrinsic goals in social-science education.

Keywords: Social-science education, politics, political thinking, intrinsic and extrinsic goals, welfare state

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1 Introduction

This paper examines high school students' responses to a political issue encountered within social-science education – the welfare state. Social-science and other school subjects have versatile goals and are intended to qualify, socialise and offer opportunities for deliberation to students (Biesta, 2010). These goals can be described as either intrinsic or extrinsic: *intrinsic goals* are those that are closely connected to the academic discipline associated with the specific school subject. Social-science is an interdisciplinary subject and is predominantly connected to the academic disciplines of political science, sociology and economics. Thus, intrinsic goals are mainly linked to the qualifying dimension, i.e. advancing students' ideas and the understanding of the principal substantial and procedural concepts of the disciplines (Husbands, Kitson, & Pendry, 2003, p. 29; Strandler, 2017). However, *extrinsic goals* also exist, namely, the aims formulated in the political sphere that specify the values and ideas that society desires students to imbibe. Besides, these societal aims also allow students to engage in public deliberation and take a stand on political issues. Thus, in the classroom, social-science teachers must make allowances for academic investigation and for students to explore political ideas. These goals do not precisely contradict one another; however, their coexistence can lead to dilemmas for teachers and students as they engage in highly political topics. To unearth the structures of this dilemma, we must come to understand how students reason politics, both in disciplinary terms, with regard to social-science as a discipline, as well as in terms of individuals as political beings.

Research on teaching and studying political issues in connection with the roles of values, emotions and ideology is scarce in social-science education (Lundholm & Davies, 2013; Sheppard, Katz, & Grosland, 2015). However, a closely connected body of research on political cognition and attitude persistence in connection with knowledge can be found in the literature on political science. Taber (2011) concludes that citizens generally maintain their present beliefs and do not tend to change them when presented with new information; i.e. they keep biased knowledge even when evidence presented to them contradicts their existing understanding. This appears to be particularly true for a wide range of controversial, prominent issues, including gun control and drugs (Taber & Lodge, 2006; Taber, Cann, & Kucsova, 2009). In addition, people who have strong convictions display reluctance in coming to terms with new information. In educational research, studies on issues such as the environment and evolution (Sinatra, Southerland, McConaughy, & Demastes, 2003; Rickinson, Lundholm, & Hopwood, 2009) demonstrate similar results. This body of literature notes three challenges that students may encounter: reasoning knowledge, overcoming bias and correcting misconceptions. However, the existing conceptual change literature focuses on learning goals as being related to disciplinary thinking and not as learning outcomes related to extrinsic goals, such as being engaged in matters political. Finally, frictions between intrinsic and extrinsic goals have garnered little attention.

Departing from the theoretical framework of intrinsic and extrinsic goals (Husbands et al., 2003; Strandler, 2017), this paper examines students' approaches to, and understanding of, a highly political issue, namely, the welfare state, and discusses how intrinsic and extrinsic goals could be handled when treating political issues in the classroom. Previous research has arrived at a conceptual uncertainty regarding the various emotions that students might experience in



their discussions of politics (Sheppard et al., 2015), and this study is intended to contribute to discussions on one of these emotions, namely, ideological conviction, and the role it could have in understanding political issues. Elicited by a projective task (Barton, 2015), the data are supplied by 71 written accounts of two different welfare regimes (Esping–Andersen, 1990). The paper considers students' thinking before teaching, as well as their views on a political issue, rather than in deliberation and engagement with them outside of school. The following research questions are examined:

- How do students understand variant ideological accounts of the ideal welfare state?
- How can these approaches be understood in relation to intrinsic and extrinsic goals?

2 Theoretical Framework: What Should Social-Science Education Provide?

School subjects, including social-science, have versatile goals, which can be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic goals (Husbands et al., 2003; Strandler, 2017; Biesta, 2010). Intrinsic goals are disciplinary in nature, intended to qualify students by advancing their knowledge, skills and abilities in specific subjects and arenas. Extrinsic goals are, by contrast, societal aims formulated by the political sphere, which include socialising youth into a given society and giving them opportunities to come into their own. Biesta (2006; 2010; 2012) calls these goals qualification, socialisation and subjectification (derived from the German word *Subjektivität*. Biesta (2012) notes that it is a 'bit of a struggle to find the right concept' in English); these domains are separate but can be seen as a single entity in the context of the purpose of education in general and above all for each particular school subject. Biesta (2010) describes the frictions that exist among the dimensions, such as when disciplinary knowledge clashes with students' perceptions of the world and its societal issues. In agreement with Biesta, I suggest that for a meaningful determination of what constitutes good political education, all three domains must be engaged (Biesta, 2012). Naturally, each domain's goals must be formulated differently in the different contexts entailed by education's presence in the national political arena. Biesta (2012) writes of education in general; however, the model given can be used to understand the specific role of, and challenges to, social-science education concerning citizenship education.

2.1 Intrinsic Goals: Knowledge as Powerful Knowledge

The knowledge, skills and abilities imparted through qualification can be understood using Young's (2008; 2013) and Young and Muller's (2013) concept of 'powerful knowledge'. Young argues that curricula makers must turn their focus to the best available knowledge, i.e. the knowledge cared for and developed by disciplinary communities. Knowledge can of course always be questioned but the well-established principles and academic rules within a disciplinary knowledge community are responsible for the best knowledge that our societies can provide. Thus, school curricula should be based on the knowledge produced by these disciplines:

Subjects, I argued earlier, are re-contextualized from disciplines which are a society's primary source of new knowledge. The link between subjects and disciplines provides the best guarantee that we have that the knowledge acquired by students at school does not rely solely

on the authority of the individual teacher but on the teacher as a member of a specialist subject community. (Young, 2013, p. 15)

Young's argument is two-fold. First, it concerns social justice. Everyone has the right to obtain a given amount of knowledge, and it should not be limited to an elite. In this sense, public schools play an important role in providing all students with the best knowledge available. Second, if education is based on this knowledge, it can guarantee that students are not left to the sole authority of an individual teacher. For Young (2013), specialist knowledge is important (and powerful) because it enables students to transcend the limits of their everyday experiences and unreflective opinions. Young's argument for the power of knowledge is not subject-specific but rather a discussion of what exactly constitutes powerful knowledge in various subjects. Counsell (2011) and Biddulph and Lambert (2017) have begun this work in education in history and geography. In previous work (Sandahl, 2015; cf. Newmann, 1990; Barton, 2017), I have proposed important procedural concepts for social-science, such as evidence, inference, structure–agency and perspective, which can open up students' understanding of social-science topics and take them beyond their everyday experience. It is commonly argued that this disciplinary knowledge is unnatural in relation to everyday understanding and must be taught explicitly in schools (Sandahl, 2015; Wineburg, 2007).

2.2 Extrinsic Goals: Deliberation and Taking a Political Stance

Subject knowledge and disciplinary thinking can play a crucial role in students' preparation for civic life. However, schools have other assignments as well, as noted above. Historically, socialisation has been a prime assignment for schools as they foster citizens of a nation state: they are responsible for passing on social, political and cultural values and behaviours to support society's preservation. For scholars such as Biesta (2010), subjectification has, historically, been insufficiently emphasised. Those in the sphere of facilitating students' education should of course pay great attention to student individuality by allowing their values to matter and not always predetermining the answers. However, this does not mean that students should only give their own opinions on societal affairs; they should rather meet others' opinions and experience opposition towards their own worldviews. Progressing towards becoming an emancipated individual is not merely a process that is gone through by an individual; it requires plurality and difference. Teachers' most important task in subjectification is to allow students to express themselves and experience challenges to their perspectives from their peers. Where education only gives the accepted answers and does not allow students to be recognised as independent and capable, it limits itself to qualifying and socialising for an existing societal order.

In citizenship education, this allowing of challenges is presented in the form of deliberation, which typically involves political debate on controversial and unresolved societal issues. Within this tradition, school offers a unique arena for the expression of different perspectives – even segregated schools are more pluralistic and offer more perspectives than the students' home environments (Parker, 2008; Hess, 2009). Consequently, school is ideal for deliberative discussions in a context where students can discuss issues and experience real ideas – it is a democracy in the making (Hess, 2008; 2009; 2015; Englund, 2000; 2006). An education in social-science that focuses on this domain would centre the perspectives of students in the

beating heart of classroom activities, where teachers would function principally as moderators and facilitators of deliberative discussions and students would have the opportunity to share and discuss societal issues. An important part of these discussions is plurality – students realise that ideas and worldviews exist that are different than their own.

2.3 Friction Between the Goals

In Sweden, social-science is the school subject that bears the most responsibility for political education from years one to 12 (compare Sweden [Sandahl, 2015] with other Nordic countries [Christensen, 2011; Børhaug, 2011] in this regard). It is an interdisciplinary subject that has no specific disciplinary equivalent; however, it is taught based on knowledge from political science, sociology and economics. It was politically created as a school subject in the wake of the Second World War, and it has always had disciplinary content and citizenship goals, which are intended to strengthen civic participation. In the present Swedish curriculum, citizenship aims are described as a cross-curriculum goal, which is centred in the subject of social-science (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011). Thus, social-science teachers are expected to address disciplinary knowledge, along with providing space for political and societal debate, in the classroom. This dual mandate can create friction between intrinsic and extrinsic goals (Biesta, 2010; Sandahl, 2013). Discipline-based teaching does not preclude discussions but gives primacy to academic knowledge, thereby risking the alienation of young people from attempting to try, unaided by others, political ideas, and share their experiences of the political world (Barton, 2009). Teaching that is based in deliberative ideas, on the other hand, does not exclude teachers' intervention in cases where students' ideas are based on misconceptions but nevertheless accords primacy to students' own meaning-making with regard to societal issues, thereby risking the equation of opinions to facts (Lee, 2005).

3 The Welfare State and Previous Research in Relation to Political Issues

This research project examines part of a module on the welfare state in the Western world. As a topic of enquiry, the welfare state spans social-scientific disciplines, including political science, sociology and economics. Pierson (2000) describes the origin of interest in the welfare state for social sciences as follows:

because it so clearly reveals the significance of political choices. Variations in public social provision have big effects on social life, contributing to substantial cross-national differences in outcomes such as income inequality, women's labor force participation, and levels of unionization. (Pierson, 2000, p. 791)

As a study area in social-science curricula, the welfare state includes financial aspects and the different effects on social life in different welfare regimes. Esping–Andersen's (1990) typology of the liberal, the conservative and the social-democratic regimes characterises the range of regimes, which have similar internal logics (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011). In context, this means that welfare states are to be studied and analysed not only as instrumental arrangements but also with a view to the fact that welfare programmes are political expressions of moral conceptions and values (Kildal & Kuhnle, 2005); i.e. they inhabit a contested political issue.

Research on students' reasoning political issues and the role of values, emotions and ideology in relation to knowledge has been scarce in social-science education (Lundholm & Davies, 2013). However, a rich body of literature exists on political cognition and attitude persistence concerning knowledge within political science. In a review of the literature, Taber (2011) remarks that 'citizens are rarely, if ever, dispassionate when thinking about politics', noting that they are prone to keep their existing present beliefs rather than changing them when confronted with new information. Although people do attempt to weigh evidence objectively, feelings and emotions play a crucial role in their processing of information; this is defined as biased knowledge (Taber et al., 2009). In that study, people were found to tend to acknowledge facts in accordance with beliefs (confirmation bias) and discard information contradicting their opinions (disconfirmation bias). Over a wide range of (controversial) issues, such as affirmative action, gun control and drugs, a pattern is noticeable – people question arguments, sources and evidence when they pose a threat to prior beliefs (Taber & Lodge, 2006; Taber et al., 2009). Furthermore, those with stronger beliefs or ideologies exhibit stronger resistance to new information and more reluctance to search for arguments that are against their own opinions.

Values and beliefs play an important role in young people's learning over a wide range of disciplines, such as the study of evolution in science education (Sinatra et al., 2003) or environmental issues (Rickinson, Lundholm & Hopwood, 2009). In social-science education, the lack of precise conceptualisation of what emotions mean in studying about societal issues has been exhibited by several researchers (Lundholm & Davies, 2013; Sheppard et al., 2015). In general, students' encounters with scientific and disciplinary topics in school pose challenges. In education and psychology research (Sinatra, Kienhues & Hofer, 2014), three major challenges have been identified: first, the challenge of reasoning knowledge and how knowledge is constructed (epistemic cognition); second, the challenge of overcoming bias (motivated reasoning); and third, the challenge of overcoming misconceptions (conceptual change). Motivated reasoning corresponds to findings in political science (Taber, 2011), and studies suggest that it is common in the social sciences as well (Kahne & Boyer, 2017a, 2017b). In the literature, emotions are often seen as the driving force that supports engagement and motivation in learning but also as directing the focus of that engagement (Rickinson et al., 2009). Kahne and Boyer (2017b) find that knowledgeable students display a greater amount of bias than do their less-informed peers. However, the results of research into changes of opinion generally correspond to the intrinsic goals of school subjects, not to their extrinsic goals, such as deliberation or students' political positioning; these goals are also central for school curricula (Biesta, 2010; Englund, 2006).

4 Methods

This study focuses on a particular dataset that was collected during the course of a broader research project at an upper-secondary school. For this project, the researcher followed a class of tenth-year social-science students as they worked through a module on Western welfare systems. This module was crafted to advance students' disciplinary reasoning, in particular



their ability to use second-order concepts such as causal analysis and perspective taking (Sandahl, 2015; Barton, 2017). The module was also explicitly intended to challenge students to adopt new perspectives and to question positions that they had taken as a given. The lessons were planned in collaboration between the author and the teacher, and content material and specific tasks were laid out in alignment with curriculum requirements to promote students' ability to perform the following tasks:

- a) analyse social issues and identify causes and consequences using concepts, theories, models and methods from the social sciences and
- b) search for, critically examine and interpret information from different sources and assess their relevance and credibility. (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011, p. 2)

The module also included segments in which the students were asked to express the personal values, feelings and ideas they had in connection with the material, as well as the lessons on the welfare state, orally and in writing. The module included 12 lessons, and on eight occasions, the students were asked to keep a log connected to specific questions and tasks. The teacher conducted the actual teaching; however, the author was present at all of the lessons in one of the classes and helped facilitate the performance of certain class tasks. The teacher also gave the same teaching module to two parallel classes. The author was not present at those classes but had access to the students' logs. In total, there were 86 documents.

The particular data for this study are from the first log entry from the first lesson of the module for all three classes. In preparation for this lesson, the author and the teacher prepared two accounts of how the ideal welfare state should be structured. These texts were intended to elicit (Barton, 2015) students' responses by allowing them to focus on something external, as 'visual, verbal, or written stimuli to encourage participants to talk about their ideas', (Barton, 2015). The texts were based on arguments presented by social-democratic and liberal think tanks – with the first text advocating a tax-funded, universal social-democratic system and the other promoting a more liberal, privately funded system. The texts had roughly the same number of words (554 and 568, respectively). The two accounts were distributed physically (on sheets of paper) and read aloud to the students, during which time they were asked to note comments, ideas and impressions of the texts (Mason & Boscolo, 2004). The students' thinking was the centre of attention rather than their engagement. Out of 86 students, 15 were not present or chose not to respond in the first log (N = 71); the logs varied in number of words: from 90 (C8) to 647 (B12).

A content-analysis model was generated to compose appropriate coding questions for the students' written accounts (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2009). The students' motivated reasoning was an important target (Sinatra et al., 2014) – determining how they reasoned with reference to their own political standpoints was an important objective. Motivated reasoning among the students was analysed using a continuum from opinionated/non-opinionated. Second, the students' epistemic approach was examined (Sinatra et al., 2014) – the construction of their arguments in connection with the texts they were responding to. This was analysed with reference to a continuum from descriptive to analytic. These content-analysis parameters allowed the researcher to operationalise the aspects and place students with reference to their approach to the topic – in an attempt to understand the issue from a

disciplinary perspective (intrinsic goal) or as a political debate that they partook in themselves (extrinsic goal). However, the understanding of the students was not always logical and consistent such that each student's response could be framed easily within a given stance. However, their individual answers can be based in different, contradictory worldviews simultaneously. This content analysis had the accounts coded in keeping with the most salient worldview contained in each written answer, i.e. according to the continuums described above.

5 Results: Four Ways of Understanding a Political Issue

All but one student responded to the two texts on the ideal welfare state using a normative stance, expressing a political view regarding which welfare system they preferred. However, their understanding of the issues at play and how they formulated their expression of the content of the texts were distinctive. A great deal of variation was found within each stance. Some displayed their opinions less overtly, while others did so to a greater extent. These variations are described below. The four stances seen were labelled a) the social-science stance; b) the politicising stance; c) the political-rhetoric stance and d) the non-political, descriptive stance.

5.1 The Social-Science Stance: Analytical and Non-Opinionated

Although the vast majority of the students recognised ideologies within the texts and could place them on a left–right continuum, not all approached the topic in a fully social-scientific way, distinguishing facts from opinions analytically. In the first stance, the most salient pattern was where students understood the texts as objects of analysis, thus meeting the main goal of social-science education. Twenty-one student responses were labelled as expressing this social-science stance; however, variation was seen within this group. Some students who took this stance did not take a strong position but distanced themselves from the political views expressed in the texts – rather trying to make sense of what the arguments were. They did tend to hold a belief; however, this was not an important part of their reasoning. Instead, they contemplated ways in which these different ideological perspectives could easily be turned into dogma or became political rhetoric:

It seems like both texts have the same goal, but their way forward is different. I saw two political sides very strongly when I read the texts, the right and the left ones. You can trace their arguments and see their logic, and I think it is important to understand both perspectives, and I think that most people are prejudiced like me and don't try to make sense of the arguments. To listen, take in the arguments, question them feels strange in the beginning and you stick to the beliefs you have. It's so easy to just see the political side you like. ...//... While you [the teacher] were reading, I wrote in my notebook: 'why does communism always lead to control and liberalism always lead to segregation?' (C23)

Such reflections were common among the expressions of the social-science stance. The students often underlined the importance of different perspectives, and they approached the texts in an analytical way, trying to understand them in a political context, i.e. as political texts. The student quoted above (C23) did not take a clear position although it was easy enough to understand what ideology was preferred. The student below (A7) took a stronger stand but

separated personal preferences from reasoning, motivating the political position by expounding why the student held a particular opinion in this case:

I saw that they are different in their line of argument. They're political texts without any arguments against their own case but could be seen as advertisements for ideas. In that sense, they both sound great because they're selling their vision of a perfect society with a happy end for all where citizens are happy and equal. However, being a Swede I've only had experience of the Swedish system and I mostly agree with that system. (A7)

The student demonstrated self-awareness in the expression of how the students' lived experience in a social-democratic system influences the student's preferences – if you only have experience of one welfare system, it is hard to relate to other ones. The student was, however, able to compare the more liberal welfare system in the US to the Swedish system. Other students who took the stance expressed why they chose one text over another with more ideology; however, they were also very aware that these were ideological choices:

The texts were very different in their approach and had strong arguments for their cause and showed evidence for their cause in different ways. The arguments were mostly used to pinpoint their own cause and contradict the other side's arguments. With the ideology I hold, the other text does not take social background into account. From my perspective I think it is more realistic to have high taxes in order to make sure that everyone can have an education and equal opportunities. (B1)

Examples such as these demonstrate an understanding among students that made their own ideological views secondary when compared with the analysis; the students had particular arguments for their choices, such as the use of taxes to ensure equality, reduce class distinctions or help vulnerable people from living on the street. However, the common denominator for the social-science stance was an analytical approach to the texts – the students tried to make sense of the arguments and to contrast the texts. However, the reasoning was not always non-opinionated. Some students who took this stance took no strong position but most demonstrated an understanding that this should be explained by personal preference and that such preferences had consequences for their stand, thereby expressing a kind of 'bias awareness'.

5.2 The Politicising Stance: Analytic and Opinionated

The consciousness of bias that the students who took the social-science stance exhibited was not as clearly present among students who took other analytical answers. The 18 who chose a politicising stance were aware that they had ideological beliefs; however, emotional reasoning affected how they approached the texts. This student (A13) saw good arguments in both texts and demonstrated a degree of consciousness about the chosen stance:

My opinion from the start is that a tax-funded system is necessary in order to create an equal and fair society. ... I reacted to the other text's arguments 'that private entrepreneurs can make welfare more efficient' and that's just wrong. The authors also based their arguments on 'freedom', which I interpret as an emotional argument. That made me think. Even though I believe that the state should 'meddle' to make things better, they had a point that people should also be able to decide for themselves. I prefer the first text because of my ideological

view. And I believe that the problems we're in are because of the right-wing government we used to have. (A13)

The student's argument in this case was based on the students' beliefs in specific societal values such as equality and fairness, but immediately, the student decided that the arguments in text 2 were just wrong. There was an understanding of the point of arguments regarding freedom, but problems were to be blamed on the liberal/conservative government. Finally, the student ended the argument asking whether there were 'some arguments that I like in the second text as well – perhaps the market should have a role to play after all?', which indicates a sort of confusion regarding where the student stood. Her analytical stance was somewhat coloured by her emotions regarding the political issue at hand.

However, most answers from students taking this stance showed a higher degree of analysis, demonstrating content knowledge and strong political interest. The student below (A6) provided elaborate arguments in favour of a social-democratic welfare state (guaranteeing the right to a good quality of life in terms of housing, food, healthcare and education); however, these answers were framed within the understanding that welfare is part of the Scandinavian system and that the other side only cared about profit. Furthermore, the student only briefly engaged with the arguments in the second text, stating that a market solution is not realistic:

Out of the two ideas presented in the texts, I find the tax-funded system the best. The public supply money according to their incomes and society distributes money back in form of healthcare, infrastructure, schools and other things that are part of the welfare system. I'm not a communist, but I find Marx's principle fair: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'. If you compare this to the market solution where profits are supposed to fix welfare problems, it doesn't work. Furthermore, there are democratic complications. The state can claim that they're acting on behalf of the people, while corporations only act according to the wishes of their board members. (A6)

The student's ideological preference was stated as fact and not as a premise for a particular argument, and words such as 'obvious' underlined this style of thought – the student believed that the only conclusion is the one that is to be reached in the way it was done here. However analytical the response was, it was nevertheless argued from a fixed position. Nevertheless, some students who took this stance expressed some uncertainty as they contrasted the two arguments. The student below (B5) dismissed the second text, but at the same time, certain problems in the preferred ideology were acknowledged:

My conclusion: the second text, on a liberal model, might sound great, but it doesn't work and becomes really unfair. I understand the freedom argument, but often it's on someone else's expense. On the other hand, we have problems with authoritarianism in socialism... I believe that a strong state with a planned economy is better though, maybe with better ways for the democracy to function – perhaps with more direct democracy. (B5)

Other students taking this stance demonstrated a more personal understanding of the welfare system – basing it on their specific life experiences. The student below (C25) expressed the understanding that the texts reflected two different approaches and that they are typical for two (clashing) ideological ideas that are represented in the debate in contemporary society and then swiftly linked this to personal experiences:

I have relatives in the United States, so I know a lot about their system, which is based on the private sector. I have seen what terrible consequences that system creates for people without access to public health and some people can't even afford an education. This is something I'm not OK with, and I think that the only solution is a strong welfare state. I'm extremely lucky to live in Sweden where I have free access to health care – something that is extremely important in my case. Also, about the free medication I get here, if I had lived in the United States, I would have had to pay 100,000 krona [approximately 10,000 Euro] for the medication I need. So, I like the current system better not only when I think of myself but also when I think of others. (C25)

However, this student, in reflecting upon personal experiences, expanded them and acknowledged their truth for others as well. This expression of a more analytical approach was typical in many responses; however, they nevertheless engaged with the texts as political beings, distinct from their peers with a social-science stance – for the politicised stance, the extrinsic goals of social-science education are more explicit.

5.3 The Political-Rhetoric Stance: Descriptive and Opinionated

Other students used less analytical language while still reading beyond the literal content, becoming more involved in the argument, a stance that was expressed by 22 students, but again, there was a certain variety among them. The student quoted below (C18) employed a more everyday analysis, based on the lived world, to explore how a more liberal model would affect the students' own family:

When I read the second text, I had a chilling feeling inside. Honestly, that kind of thinking is creepy and has become more common in Sweden today – we are more or less set on capitalist (market) solutions ... I almost feel offended being a second-generation immigrant myself ... I'd say that individuals who don't need any help would profit from a freer system because they are already in a good financial situation. But for someone like me, living with a single mom and three siblings, it would be almost impossible to get on without welfare. Unless the single parent works herself to death, hits the brick wall, becomes worn out etc. But then, that parent still needs public health that they are supposed to find money for and that will make it impossible to support four children! (C18)

In this example, the expression of the student's emotions was more important than trying to understand the texts. Political ideas from elsewhere led the student to have negative feelings, and the student was almost offended. The focus of this response was text 2, and arguments from the student's own experience were only implicitly held to be valid for other people.

Some students who took this stance displayed greater heights of analytical language, and they made inferences from the texts, such as linking them to different political ideologies; i.e. they were reading beyond the literal content. Still, the political stance is immediately clear. The student below (A2) illustrated this position. In the summary, the student wrote that the two texts demonstrate different ideological stands, but at once assumed a position against the more liberal text:

The first text wants a society for everyone without private entrepreneurs making money out of tax-funded means. The other texts claim that lowering taxes will create more jobs, but how do we know? If they're wrong, the tax revenues will drop and the welfare state will collapse.

Some people are dependent on government funding for a reason, and new jobs can't always fix their problems. Revoking their funding would be a punishment for them without allowing them to contribute through work. ... It would be a vicious circle for them. (A2)

Students taking this stance recognised that the texts represented different ideological approaches to the welfare state; however, they responded by criticising the political perspective with which they had the strongest disagreement. Some students who took this stance, such as the one mentioned below (C11), refused to even treat the argument seriously:

The first text is promoting a solidarity system, collectively funded with taxes. Left-wing. The other text is the opposite. That person talks about freedom and individuals and that people should be able to decide for themselves. When I read this text, I'm amazed by how that person thinks. Can this really be a real person's opinion? I definitely don't agree with this person's ideas. He/she can't see society as it is, and it's really selfish with no solidarity. My first impression is this: Is this person even nice or caring? Because they're not really thinking of the best for the people. I liked the second text, however. It made my blood pump and my adrenaline rush, and it really made me start thinking. I liked the first text because it's close to my ideas, but the second text really got me going. (C11)

The student related the liberal stance to amorality and questioned whether someone who holds such a position could be a caring individual. However, it is noteworthy that the student found both texts interesting, although for different reasons. The second text sparked an emotional reaction, which the student appreciated, thus prompting the opinionated stance.

Many other students who took this stance did give a description of both texts but then directly abandoned the description and stated which view they preferred, giving few supporting arguments, such as 'I think this is really naïve' (A9). Their own political view was considered to be the most important, and the text that did not accord with it was dismissed:

The first text gave me hope and engagement. It had very good examples about why we need a welfare system for everyone. ... The other one was more right-wing and claimed that the market can find solutions and allow freedom for people to choose. This text gave a feeling of discomfort and hopelessness. It's based on right-wing propaganda and will only favour the wealthy and most privileged families. This way will only increase the problems we see today, and the 'solutions' the text proposes will actually make the situation we are in right now worse for those people who are in trouble and I think these ideas are founded on ideas rooted in ignorance and egoism. (A8)

Thus, what distinguished the responses by students taking this stance was the immediate outpouring of political rhetoric from the students, with little effort being made to try to comprehend the arguments. The intrinsic goals of social-science education, to think analytically using the procedures, models and tools of the discipline, appeared less important for the purposes of trying to make sense of the texts for these students.

5.4 The Non-Political Descriptive Stance: Descriptive and Non-Opinionated

The last stance had the fewest representations in the data, with ten answers in total. These answers demonstrated little by way of basis for their conclusions. All but one expressed a position; however, students taking this stance did not show motivated reasoning for their



choice. Description dominated the texts. The response of the only student who did not express a position (C8) can serve to exemplify the descriptive and unbiased understanding present in all of the answers:

Text one is arguing for defending the welfare system with high taxes in order not to make financial matters worse for some individuals. The arguments are about schools and hospitals and that high taxes can be used to create more resources. Text two promotes individual freedom through the privatisation of resources. Its arguments are about creating work so people can pay for themselves and make them free from state intervention. Both texts could be seen as a description of Sweden today. (C8)

The student read the texts, summarised them and drew the brief conclusion that the texts described a debate in contemporary Sweden without providing any support for this inference. The responses of other students who took this stance were dominated by long descriptions of the arguments in the text, ending with short reflections. The example below (B2) exemplifies these answers, with their short reflections:

Certainly, the second text had good arguments. If people didn't have to pay so much in taxes, they could keep their money instead of being on welfare. I liked the second text better ... it had arguments I agree with, like the importance of free education. Sweden is a very unique system ... it said so in the text as well. (B2)

Other students taking this stance imbued the texts with more of their own ideas but only to the extent that these were expressed in relation to the wording of the texts. These students did not really reflect upon the differences in the texts or their links to ideology but found them equally interesting, almost as if the conflicting arguments matched each other. Politics did not appear uninteresting to them; however, they did not appear to see a conflict. Again, students answering this way were far less common, and I would suggest that they did not necessarily display lack of political interest. Rather, they seemed to struggle with the texts and with making sense of the arguments. One student wrote as follows:

I don't get the arguments. Lowering taxes in order to let people be able to afford to pay them ... I don't know. Perhaps it's because people have their ideological standpoints already set. I did get some of the arguments that seemed more reasonable, like the one that said that our taxes wouldn't be sufficient for a growing population. I preferred text 1 because in text 2, there were some concepts I didn't get and the argument was clearer in the first text. (A17)

This particular student exhibited several difficulties that challenged student understanding of the texts. The first argument that the student referred to was an argument that advocated lower taxes to create jobs that would help people become self-reliant. Furthermore, both texts claimed that an ageing population would create future challenges for the welfare state. The reasons for this descriptive stance are probably varied. Some students may not have been interested in politics, and others might simply have been forced to struggle with the texts at a cognitive level.

6 Conclusion

Although the vast majority of students recognised ideological leanings in the texts and could place them within a left–right continuum, most students approached the topic from a political angle, expressing political values and beliefs about the kind of welfare state they would support. Some students demonstrated an understanding in which they approached the texts from a social-scientific stance, attempting to make sense of the text, interpret its arguments and display an awareness of bias, in accordance with intrinsic goals (Husbands et al., 2003; Strandler, 2017). However, it was more common for students' political beliefs and values to come to the fore and for them, in opposition to the social-scientific disciplinary approach, to become entangled in arguments over which societal goals they preferred and why certain arguments in the texts were wrong, bad or ignorant. Nevertheless, some students displayed a higher-level analytical approach, whereas others became entangled in ideological rhetoric and did not attempt to interpret the texts. Furthermore, many students' arguments were based on lived experience; they used these experiences to form a sense of the kind of welfare system they preferred. It should be noted that the two texts on the ideal welfare state probed the students, eliciting demonstrated political values and beliefs, which is consistent with the extrinsic goals of social-science education.

I argue that the various approaches that students took in this project imply two important conclusions. First, students provide their own political and ideological understanding when confronted with discussions of contemporary issues. Their thinking and articulation are those of political animals (Aristotle, 2013; Yack, 1993); they use their voices to communicate moral concepts such as fair and unjust; and they are drawn to political ideas that are in keeping with those moral standpoints. When students encounter a characterisation of a political issue, such as the welfare state, they respond as political beings who have their own ideas about society. This is, however, consistent with the disciplinary idea that the welfare state involves more than instrumental arrangements, even revolving around moral conceptions and values (Kildal & Kuhnle, 2005). Students' lived experiences thus play an important part in guiding them in their political reflections on right and wrong. Even those students who approached the topic analytically and in a non-opinionated way demonstrated that their experience of the world was internalised with their understanding of how a welfare system could and should be organised.

Second, students experience difficulty in recognising the differences between politics and the study of politics. Even though the texts were presented in a social-science classroom in school, most students took political stands rather than trying to impress the teacher or researcher with an attempt to exhibit knowledge of politics. To practice social-scientific thinking that is informed by disciplinary ways of understanding evidence and arguments may seem unnatural for students (Wineburg, 2007) and as something to be taught. I suggest that the intrinsic goals of disciplinary knowledge, including learning about the political ideals of other political cultures through perspective taking, can broaden students' everyday understanding. We saw a few students making attempts to understand how values such as fairness and freedom can be interpreted differently and considered to be guiding principles for specific ideals regarding societal development. As Robert (2014, p. 198) and other scholars have shown, our knowledge of the world must always be from a certain standpoint; we see the world from where we are

used to regard ourselves as beings rather than from other perspectives. In addition, important second-order procedural and disciplinary concepts, such as evidence and inference, could play a role in helping students practice an enquiry mode wherein they can transcend their own experiences (Sandahl, 2015; Barton, 2017).

It appears clear that political beliefs, values and emotions, not disciplinary thinking, drive student engagement and interest in societal issues (Barton, 2009; Rickinson et al., 2009; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017a, 2017b). Political issues, such as the welfare state, evoke engagement and open up students' lived experiences. Thus, it is possible to think of the political as beginning in what Habermas (1987) called the life-world, with students interpreting and engaging political issues by making meaning of them within their own context. This leads us to a central issue with regard to combining intrinsic and extrinsic goals in social-science education. If the aim of social-science education is solely the qualification of students' thinking, a politicising approach is a challenge for teachers to overcome, although this is not necessarily true if the pedagogical goal is to allow students to become their own as is implied by Biesta's (2010) subjectification. However, this division into domains and goals risks a binary conception of the goals of social-science education. Following Biesta (2012), I would argue that the domains are integrated within the classroom, and in class, teachers must combine approaches. It is tempting to separate teaching into two spheres: in one, students are taught to think like social scientists, advancing in disciplinary ability and considering political issues as objects of study; in the other, students are invited to expound their own political ideas. I believe that this is not a suitable way forward (Englund, 2006).

Important and pressing societal issues can and should be discussed from a disciplinary perspective; however, it remains unclear whether students will make meaning from this if the life-world is not included. Certainly, disciplinary understanding can enable the making of sense; however, to ensure that meaning can be made out of it, it must incorporate students' preconceptions, emotions and understanding, allowing these to be tested in the classroom. I argue that resistance is a key concept here – the origin of resistance to one's ideas may not always be other people but instead can come from knowledge produced within the disciplines of the social sciences, e.g. perspective taking, where students learn to discuss and see political issues from different standpoints (Sandahl, 2015). Such knowledge, in the best of worlds, can at least give wings to students' inclinations to challenge and question opinions – both their own and others'. Previous study of citizens' disposition to retain beliefs even in the face of contradictory evidence (Taber, 2011), paired with the heated contemporary discourse, makes this a pressing issue for social-science education in its preparation of students' civic competence and their active participation in society.

I suggest that we require additional conceptual and empirical study to develop a social-science education that integrates disciplinary thinking and the life-world. It is perhaps that we need to understand social-science education as a dual, but integrated, world: on one hand, it features the cold discipline of a world that engages in issues founded on evidence, causality, structure/agency and perspective taking; on the other, it would consist of dynamic experiences, identities, myths and legends that make up the life-world. Furthermore, I suggest that the political must always begin and end in the life-world. However skilled we might be in our political analyses, we cannot escape the values and beliefs that we bring into our



understanding of the world. The welfare state is perhaps typical in this way – it does not only include knowledge of how different societies structure their systems alone but also embodies determinations of what is fair and just in relation to norms and values. Because we are all political animals, we all have ideas in such subjective dimensions. Still, a disciplinary approach and its epistemic rules can remind us that our perspective often indicates to us what we see as wrong, bad or ignorant; they can shed light on our biases, granting us an understanding of them. It is a somewhat undirected political driving force that lies embedded in the metaphor of the political animal. Perhaps the goal of social-science education is to take the student on a journey from a political animal to becoming a *homo civicus* (Dahl, 2005). I argue that this is what most educators wish for as the result of their work – responsible citizens with ideas on how to change and preserve society, albeit not necessarily interested in the details of policymaking and political processes.

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