

What counts as young people's civic engagement in times of accountability?

On the importance of maintaining openness about young people's civic engagement in education

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One aspect of the ICCS study's measurement of young people's citizen competence is "civic engagement". In this article it is argued that even though the study's assessment captures important aspects of young people's civic engagement, too strong educational reliance on it may contribute to meagreness in the educational assignment to see to an engaged citizenry. By providing deeper insight into the ICCS study's assessment rationale, and by presenting qualitatively derived examples of young people's civic engagement, it is suggested that in order to see to fruitful ways of approaching the educational task of providing for young people's civic engagement, we need to maintain openness to different depictions of civic engagement. Among them those that matter as such for the young people themselves in and through the social and material practices they take part in.

Keywords: ICCS, young people, civic engagement, education.

Introduction

One aspect of the ICCS study's measurement of young people's citizen competence is "civic engagement". This aspect, sometimes referred to in the study as "civic participation", "civic activities", "civic commitment" or "citizen activities", is considered to be central in young

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people's citizen competence (Shultz, Ainley & van de gaer 2010, Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito 2010).¹ The study's measurement of young people's civic engagement is intended to provide information about young people's past, current and future civic engagement inside and outside of school, in order to offer support to Swedish and other nation-state's schools in their commissioned task to provide for an engaged democratic citizenry. This is indeed a welcomed offer, as the liberal educational mission to see to this task is far from easy, not least in times with signs of decreased levels of engagement among young people in Sweden and elsewhere (see Olson 2012a, *Article 2* 'To be ...'). Even though these indications are not coherent, we have reason to believe that the schools' assignment to encourage young people to take part in societal and collective concerns need support (cf. Amnå et al 2010, The National Swedish Agency for Education 2010b).

On the basis of the considerable space given to international comparative studies in education in present times, this article aims to contribute to deepened insight into both what counts as young people's civic engagement in the ICCS study and what counts as young people's civic engagement according to young people themselves when they are asked about it. These insights serve to provide a rough picture of different ways of acting upon the notion of young people's civic engagement that are possible to take. Taking such tension-filled differences into account in education, it is argued, is necessary if we are to take the task to see to an engaged citizenry seriously (Biesta & Säfström 2011). More specifically, two conclusions are drawn from the overview of the two empirical studies' pictures of young people's civic engagement; the ICCS study and the qualitative study. First, that it is important not to rely too much on quantitatively oriented assessments like the ICCS study when it comes to the depiction of young people's civic engagement in education. Second, that maintaining openness for different depictions of young people's civic engagement in education is necessary in order to see to the educational task of providing young people, and society at large, with both affirmative (already known, reproductive) and creative (not known, productive) aspects of civic engagement.

The disposition of the text is as follows: first comes an analysis of the ICCS study's measurement of young people's civic engagement together with a summary of what counts concerning young people's civic engagement; and second, two qualitatively derived empirical examples of young people's enactment of civic engagement are provided. Third, on the basis of these analyses a summarising outline is provided for what counts as young people's civic engagement in the two empirical studies. Fourth, a discussion follows in which conclu-

sions are drawn and a forecast is made. Before analysing the ICCS study, a brief conceptual framework of civic engagement is presented.

Civic Engagement – common theoretical angles of approach

Without claiming to give a full-blooded theoretical account of the phenomenon of civic engagement, some of its characteristic features will be presented here. These features are not derived from any specific theoretical framing, and do not serve as theoretical tools, but serve the aim of constituting a stipulate analytical framework for the following analyses of the ICCS study's and the qualitative study's depictions of young people's civic engagement in this article.

According to Thomas Ehrlich (2000), civic engagement can be described as “promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes” (p. vi). At a general level, this concept can thus be considered to be as wide and imprecise as the concept of citizenship (Amnå et al 2009, Bowman 2011). However, some differentiating features between the concept of ‘citizen’ and that of its reverberation, the concept of ‘civic’ (Weerd et al 2005) can be discerned. If the concepts of citizen and citizenship offer openings towards statutory and identity-orientated, normative and operative working dimensions, the concept of civic often involves quite distinct, formal and factual depictions of what it means to be and to act as a citizen in society. ‘Civic’ often, but not necessarily, also makes implicit reference to centeredness in the state-citizen relationship (Birzea 2005). This centredness is commonly followed by softer or more harsh distinctions between *public* and *private* spheres in society, which can be framed in manifold ways depending on the politico-theoretical and philosophical framing that is called into question (to mention but a few that offer such framings; Arendt 1958, Habermas 1996, Honig 1993, Mouffe 2005, Rancière 1995, Rawls 1993, Rorty 1989, Young 2000).

Another general feature of civic engagement is that it corresponds to a ‘doing’, that is, some kind of favoured action taken by individuals or groups of people that is considered to be civic. It also commonly involves a link between this action-taking and civil society. This link can, like the distinction between public and private spheres in society, be framed in manifold ways depending on the politico-theoretical and philosophical approach that is in question. In addition, the relationship between action-taking and civil society can be described in terms of individual or collective civic ‘doing’ or agency assumed to be voluntary, and often is expected to be *directed in certain ways* in order to be considered a civic agency. At a general level, the notion of civil society,

which is a vital point of reference for civic agency, is ample in that it relates to certain affability considered to be a civic one. The framing of this so called *civic sociability*, which can take on a multiplicity of modes of togetherness, also depends on the politico-theoretical and philosophical framing chosen. These modes are often, but far from always, denoted as collective togetherness within a given society, a society in which membership and activities are directed towards public and societal concerns (cf. Finkel 2003, Putnam 2000, Svedberg et al 2010), with more or less openness for the preservation or renewal of these societies.

From a pragmatic point of view (van Gunsteren 1998), different notions of civic engagement not only testify to certain choices made among different prevailing politico-theoretical positions. If they are given broad attention, these notions also contribute to societal change in that they are acted on in, for example, education. Different actors act on them differently in every historical era, societal situation and geographical context, in Swedish education and elsewhere (Arnot & Dillabough 2000, Björk 1999, Englund 2006, Ljunggren 1996, Olson 2008, Osler & Starkey 2006).² Hence, notions of civic engagement that gain influence in education and elsewhere in society are not innocent, they ‘do’ something to the people that are subject to them; with Louis Althusser (1976) they call them into civic subjects in a special way. These processes of “interpellation” not only allocate to language use a performative function (Skinner 1969), a role of ‘doing’ something to the people that takes these depictions into account; they also point at the crucial impact that human and non-human, material co-producers have on the ways in which educational and social practices come to matter themselves with considerable performative power (Barard 2008, Lenz Taguchi 2012, Sörensen 2009).

To conclude, the concept of civic engagement allows for both strict, formal and noun senses of civic engagement and refers to the actual capacity of people to influence society. It can involve organised and non-organised, social or political action in various local and societal settings and situations. Being quite an open concept and phenomenon, which can be framed in manifold ways depending on what politico-theoretical approach is applied, civic engagement allows for assigning different settings, situations, activities, beings and practices with potentiality to affirm (what counts as) ‘the civic’ in and beyond the curricula. In accordance with the aim of this article, the phenomenon of civic engagement is framed in terms of three characteristic features that serve as an analytical framework in this article. These features of civic engagement are: a correspondence to some kind of notion of civic sociability, some kind of distinction

between the public and the private spheres in society, and some kind of direction for civic agency. Through these features the analyses of the two empirical studies are being carried out: the ICCS study and the qualitative study. I begin with the ICCS study.

What counts as young people's civic engagement in the ICCS study?

Far from offering an exhaustive picture of the ICCS study's assessment of young people's civic engagement, I will here provide a sketchy insight into what counts as young people's civic engagement according to this study. Initially, an account of its questionnaire and items is presented. Then follows an analysis and summary of what stands out as distinctive in the ICCS study's depiction of young people's civic engagement.

The ICCS questionnaire and the items

According to the ICCS study, the concept of civic engagement denotes the extent to which an individual or group is inclined to endorse beliefs, attitudes, skills and values through certain patterns of activities considered to be civic at a given time and in a given social situation (Schultz et al 2008). This generous description of what is involved in young people's civic engagement is put to work, operationalized, in a questionnaire with formulated items.

The ICCS questionnaire is characterised by a general division into two major domains: a cognitive domain, where the youngs' knowledge and reasoning about citizen and societal matters are measured, and a values and behavioural domain, where values, attitudes, intentions and behaviours are measured (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito 2010, p. 41ff, The National Swedish Agency for Education 2010a). Civic engagement is seen mainly as being part of the latter domain, which involves both intentions and behaviours in the assessment design. Within this domain there are two offshoots: young people's *dispositions* for civic participation and young people's civic participation. In addition, these offshoots are divided into "current" and "expected" dispositions for civic participation inside and outside of school; and "current" and "expected" civic participation inside and outside of school. Taken together, the ICCS study is informed by a broad interpretation of civic engagement but it particularly stresses *behavioural* aspects (Shultz, Ainley & van de gaer 2010), which entail

students' intentions to participate as citizens in civic life and students' current participation in civic activities in their eighth year of schooling. It describes the extent of past, current, and expected civic participation and the factors that influence students' intentions for future active participation as citizens (p. 2).

In the assessment rationale intentional, actual and expected civic engagements are taken into consideration. In the items chosen to capture these dimensions *inside* of school, the students were asked to report whether they had done any of the following activities 'within the last twelve months', 'more than a year ago' or 'never':

- Voluntary participation in school-based music or drama activities outside of regular lessons
- Active participation in a debate
- Voting for a class representative or school parliament
- Taking part in decision-making about how the school is run
- Taking part in discussions at a student assembly
- Being a candidate for class representative or school parliament

In the ICCS study's measurement of young people's civic engagement *outside* of school, the students were asked to rate whether they had participated 'within the last twelve months', 'more than a year ago' or 'never' in:

- Political youth organisations
- Environmental organisations
- Human rights organisations
- Voluntary groups to help the community
- Charitable organisations
- Cultural organisations based on ethnicity
- Groups campaigning for an issue

The same items are used to measure their expected civic engagement in the future, as adults. What, then, can be said about these items in relation to the question of what seems to 'count' as young people's civic engagement?

What counts as young people's civic engagement in the ICCS study? On civic sociability, the public and the private, and direction for civic agency

Recapitulating the introductory presentation of three characteristic features of civic engagement, the items in the ICCS study offer some indications of what counts as young people's civic engagement. By considering the way in which the items testify to certain notions of *civic sociability*, of the delineation between *public and private spheres in society*, and of the *direction for civic agency* in the ICCS study, a rough depiction of young people's civic engagement is offered.

Civic sociability

Regarding the notion of the first characteristic feature of civic engagement in the ICCS study, civic sociability, it can be described in terms of a firm connection between an individual and (her/his joining-in for) particular specific modes of togetherness considered to be civic ones. To provide some examples, the focus on involvement with music or drama activities in school, on environmental and/or human rights issues and on the degree of charity in the 'wider society' in the items all centre on a relationship between an individual and collectively pictured togetherness. More precisely, civic sociability comes to denote young individuals taking up some kind of deliberated action towards, and within, a cooperatively depicted gathering; a joining-in for collective modes of togetherness-in-activity towards (pre)defined targets. This joining-in is framed in terms of human interaction in that it is exemplified as physical, face-to-face encounters with other people as a means for mobilisation of power for civic action taking. To summarise, the notion of civic sociability in the ICCS study stands out as a more or less individual business of 'plugging in' to deliberate, shared action taking in human groupings.

The public and the private spheres in society

Regarding the second characteristic of the phenomenon of civic engagement, the delineation of the public and the private spheres in society, the ICCS study's notion comes to the fore in its stress on particular arenas for young people's civic engagement; that is, in the way in which the items indicate *where* the young's communal participation is assumed to take place in order to be accounted for as a public (and civic) one. Hence, even though there is no explicit formulation of what constitutes the private sphere in society in the items, the arenas presented as ad-

equate spaces for civic action-taking – for example, taking part in or being a member of organised activities outside regular lessons, in student assemblies or other formalised school activities, or in political societal organisations – testify to a notion of the public sphere that centres on the envisioning of a physical meeting place, a plaza. This suggests that the public sphere is an open, concrete space that exceeds institutional levels and that embodies civic action-taking in civil society: as a place where people gather in order to struggle for specific societal issues.

Irrespective of whether this place is for formal party-political debates or for social, non-governmental organisation [NGO] manifestations, it tends to be separated from other spaces, such as, for example, the private sphere in the ICCS study. Hence, the ICCS study's notion of the public sphere stands out as an agential space for young people's civic engagement in societal concerns that is not to be confused with other spaces. Although implicit, this might indicate that arenas that are not involved in the items' exemplified arrangements feasibly denote something else, something non-public or non-civic (cf. Andersson 2012). In sum, the notion of the public and the private in the ICCS study stands out, implicitly, as a matter of young people's participation in distinct arenas, assumed to be public in that they constitute space for shared action-taking that is considered to be civic. This action-taking is intimately related to formal political initiatives and to NGO-related activities associated with civil society.

Direction for civic agency

When it comes to the third common characteristic feature of the phenomenon of civic engagement, the direction for civic agency, the ICCS study's notion can be described as moving from the outside in. This means that the assumed direction for the young individual to take, in order to come into question as an engaged civic, is presented as a matter of coming-in from a presumptive outside to a centre where her engagement is accounted for as a civic one. What is of interest here is not what this outside and this centre might consist of, but the very direction implicitly indicated in the study's items concerning (what counts as) young individuals' civic agency. Put differently, civic involvement seems to require their movement *from* somewhere *to* somewhere. Some examples of this are: the items asking for the young people's school-related active participation in a debate, their voting for a class representative or school parliament, their participation in decision-making about how the school is run and in discussions at a student assembly or in the school parliament, and their involvement

outside of school in various kinds of civil organisations, all of which require movement. These items all call for the young to move towards a determined activity that is assumed to be at the heart of 'the civic', and this movement seems to imply a step from a presumed periphery to this specific civic activity.

Taken together, the framing of the three characteristic features of civic engagement in the ICCS study – civic sociability, the public and the private spheres in society, and the direction for civic agency – testifies to a distinctive depiction of young people's civic engagement. Regarding civic sociability, it is denoted as deliberate joining-in for special modes of togetherness directed at societal concerns. This joining-in involves an individual who approaches a pre-defined collective. The second feature, the public and the private spheres, is denoted as an envisioning of an open place, a plaza, where civic action-taking is assumed to take place in physical encounters with other people through cooperation for communal concerns. The delineation to the private sphere stands out as indirect, whereby the private seems to indicate what non-public space is. The third feature, direction of civic agency, stands out as a matter of individually considered motion and action-taking from a presumptive outside or margin towards a centre of what is assumed to be part of 'the civic'.

Taking on the 'fact' that international comparative studies like the ICCS study have come to gain increased influence in the field of education in the past 20 years – and tend to be received as model dimensions of young people's civic engagement and its educational extensions (cf. Edling 2012) – this depiction is an important one to consider in relation to the educational task of providing for an engaged citizenry. To the aim of this consideration, I wish to introduce a qualitative study of young people's enactment of civic engagement.

What counts as young people's civic engagement in Linn's and Oskar's stories

Here I will present two empirical cases derived from a qualitative study carried out recently. The aim of presenting them is to provide for a deeper and more initiated insight into what counts as civic engagement for (some) young people (18–19 years) when they are asked about it. Important to say is that the aim is not to take on any fully-fledged comparison between the ICCS study and the qualitative cases. There are two obvious reasons for this: first, that the ICCS study's assessment rationale is directed toward 14-year-old individuals, while the qualitative study's collected material derives from 18–19-year-old

individuals. Secondly, the ICCS study's methodological body is quantitative, while Linn's and Oskar's stories are qualitative.³ Nonetheless, it is far from easy to answer questions whether – and if so to what extent – the similarities and the differences between the two different studies are related to age or to the methodological body 'at work' in the studies, or to any other significant variable involved. Initially, I present methodological aspects of the qualitative study from which the two cases are taken, followed by an introduction and outline of the two cases, called Linn's and Oskar's stories. This is followed by a summarising analysis of what seems to count as young people's civic engagement in these stories based on the three characteristic features of civic engagement: civic sociability, the public and the private spheres in society, and the direction for civic agency.

Methodological aspects

The two empirical cases are taken from a qualitative study conducted in late spring 2011 involving six young people aged 18–19, four women and two men. All of them were in education; they were students in their last year of upper secondary school. They were all recruited from the social science program except for one, who was in a mix-program of social sciences and media. All of them were recruited from a city-based, urban environment in the mid-east of Sweden, and the school is located in a mixture of class-related settings with the working class and lower- and upper-middle classes represented. They all participated in the study on a voluntary basis and were approached in school: in the classroom (a brief presentation of the study approved by the teacher and headmaster) and in the dining hall while eating.

Two forms of collecting records were used: the participants' own documentation of (enactments of) civic engagement inside and outside of school using a pen camera: and a follow-up individual conversation. The pen camera was able to film, record and take photos, and the participants were encouraged to use it freely during one week, documenting whatever they considered had something to do with civic engagement, without any restrictions on content, form, event, place or shape.⁴ Before giving them the camera, the concept of civic engagement was introduced to them by stressing the manifold ways in which civic engagement and citizenship can be approached: its meaning, connotations, direction, aims and action-taking (without really spelling out any particular meaning or feasible orientations, although they sometimes asked for them in order to grasp 'what the point was for the researcher in her study').⁵

After the week of documentation, each participant was invited to an individual conversation lasting about 45–60 minutes that took place in a small café in the suburb centre near the school. In these conversations, which were recorded, they were encouraged to share their filming experiences about what happened in the week of the documentation processes. Thus the focus in the conversations was not on how they came to conceptualise, understand or explicitly connect with the concept of civic engagement (operationalized in the Swedish terms 'medborgarskap'; 'medborgarskapande'; 'medborgerligt engagemang'; 'att göra medborgarskap' – 'doing citizenship' at various levels, areas and situations). Instead, the focus was on questions, mainly chosen by the researcher, about what they felt was hard, embarrassing, difficult, dubious or easy in their documentation of civic engagement, and why this was the case.⁶ Direct, factual questions were used sparsely, and almost only asked when seeking factual information and always at the end of the conversation.

When the recording week had passed, the researcher collected all pen-camera material from the six participants. The material from the pen cameras was transcribed, as was the recorded conversations. In the analyses, the transcriptions were looked through repeatedly in search of possible key themes. In the analyses, the various kinds of material – films, photos and voice documentations (their recorded voices) – were coded for key themes, first separately, then together. The aim of this mode of analysis of the material was to see, initially, if there were any genre-related themes to be found before proceeding with a mixed-material (genre) analysis. After the coding of the material for key themes, a second phase of analysis was carried out: to look for regularities and frictions in the key themes detected in the material, that is, in the participants' enactments of civic engagement.

Two of the participants, Linn and Oskar, have been chosen for this article, the reason being that they stand out as distinctive of the young participants in the study regarding the enactments of civic engagement.⁷ This does not mean that they serve as representational for young people in general. It only means that their stories are illustrative of the themes that were brought up by the young people in the study concerning the enactment of civic engagement. Hence, Linn and Oskar reveal certain key themes, frictions and regularities regarding what counts as civic engagement that resonate in the material as a whole.

Linn's and Oskar's stories – the centrality of home, non-material practices and everyday 'doing' for civic engagement

An account of Linn's and Oskar's stories is given here in order to provide a broad picture of their enactments of civic engagement. Three vital themes in civic engagement stand out in their stories: home, non-material practices and the idea of civic engagement as an everyday 'doing'.

Linn's⁸ story

When Linn talks about her week of documentation of civic engagement with the pen camera, she draws on practices in which the environment, knowing and responsibility are central. The sorting of household waste is a vital civic 'doing' in these practices:

one thinks about sorting household waste.. we have just begun that at home, er, and it is quite tough, yes, but at the same time it feels so good when you do it, er., as the environment is a part of us

When she speaks about the sorting routines, she refers to civic engagement by stressing sorting as being part of a somewhat bigger business, as 'part of us' in global, environmental terms. This engagement can be quite costly:

as you have to go out with it (the rubbish) quite often, it takes time and it is a bit messy when you have to know what's what, but at the same time, when I do it, it feels so awfully much better and you understand that this.. it brings with it something good, in contrast to being lazy and putting it in the bin and not give a damn about what happens later on because you feel it doesn't affect you yourself

Linn goes on talking about environmental issues as a subject for civic engagement that she shares in discussions with friends inside and outside of school. This talk, she says, usually centres on whether they sort certain household waste at home or not, the use of energy-saving lamps in their families and on current themes like ash clouds and volcanic eruptions. The subject is also linked to school, as she explains that they are in tandem with the concept of 'sustainable development', which is the school's profile. 'We have been drummed, eh, into sustainable development, which we at first didn't think about, but as I now notice it, I think about it all the time.'

For Linn, the enactment of civic engagement is primarily practised at home, where most of her documentation is carried out. Besides sorting household waste Linn emphasises paying bills and reading the newspaper as parts of this home-related civic engagement. When it comes to reading the newspaper, Linn considers it to be part of a wider responsibility of knowing:

knowing how the country is governed, how, what kind of society that is and.. mostly because.. I think it's important to know what's going on in order to keep a check on it and be able to affect it through voting when there is an election.. if you are a part of society, you want to feel that you have the opportunity to have an influence on it.. You might ignore it but it.. er.. I think it's important that you.. you feel a responsibility for that society

When asked to go further into how this everyday civic 'doing' stands in relation to how societal responsibility is enacted, Linn picks out an everyday event: face-to-face meetings with other people; 'being nice and treating people with respect because they're your fellow men and if you want a good society, I think one should be pleasant and show respect/.../ in order to feel that others have as good a society as you have'.

Overall, Linn's story of civic engagement involves social and material everyday practices that call certain notions of a good society into question. These notions entail both non-human and inter-, or intra-human activities, which are mainly related to home. These activities centre on the environment, knowing and responsibility, and come to matter as civic ones through a connectedness to earth, society, love, friendship, values and the wellbeing of other people.

Oskar's story

In Oskar's story, civic engagement is related to belonging, kinship and caring. He begins by localising civic engagement to abstract entities on a societal level, like the nation state, and approaches it as a formal kinship that entails both freedom and adaption. It involves freedom, he says, in the sense that he considers himself to have the opportunity to do almost whatever he wants as a citizen in Swedish society, which he links with various rights paradigms. For him, the flipside of the coin, adaption, has to do with

following norms and other things one has to do in order to be socially accepted.. and that becomes a kind of obligation even though one doesn't have to do it, it becomes a pressure, a social

pressure from society, to make a choice in a certain way. And that is in some way included in civic engagement

He goes on talking about a special occasion when civic engagement became actualised in his life. He was watching the ice hockey final between Sweden and Finland on TV with some friends, which was a somewhat odd event for him as he seldom watches sports at all (he finds it boring). While watching the game, he got involved in it and discovered that:

I focused on Sweden winning and that's only, like, because you are Swedish, it has nothing to do with.. I don't know the names of any of the players or those kinds of things. What happens is that one is reduced to a role, I don't know, I don't really need to be reduced to that role [laughs]/.../one appropriates some sort of culture.. through one's nationality and civic role

Oskar remains amazed by the enactment of civic engagement that he considers takes place in and through watching television. As he goes on talking, he ponders on the notions of kinship and belonging as integral to the enactment of civic engagement. Home and his family are the central parts involved, and home is also where most of his documentation is carried out:

It is at home that one is and lives and kind of has one's base and in that sense it's important [as a location for civic engagement].. then.. school, if that's the place where we kind of get fostered and where we are indoctrinated to be like we should be, then I suppose it's also an important place

Home in Oskar's story is portrayed as something more than being a place to rest your head and being a member of a certain country and society, or simply being at home. Home for him rather goes with being part of and one with home, which further suggests holistic parallels to being part of and one with the world. For Oskar, civic engagement can be seen as an ongoing relationship between what is seen as shared or common in society and the actual conditions in which Oskar finds himself part of every day. He hesitates about whether such envisioning is proper or adequate, as he struggles with deciding whether it is appropriate to document certain things as civic engagement or not:

I filmed from my balcony, kind of, but then I wondered, well, like this, it.. some sort of belonging one has the right to and when one lives and it is like this, how can we draw on civic engagement in this

When asked to go further into his doubts about the documentation – which among other things entails filming his feet standing on pieces of wood on his balcony, plants, the sky and piano music in his living room, keyboard tapping on a computer, food bought at Lidl on the kitchen table and his girlfriend eating cereals out of the box in the kitchen – he settles for belonging. Belonging for him ‘is that something more, some sort of spirit of community or some kind of, sort of, feeling of unity’. In Oskar’s story, belonging and kinship are repeatedly called upon in relation to his civic ‘doings’, which allude to being-part-of-home and running-a-home as being-in-life. This ‘doing’ takes on practices like cleaning, washing up and taking care of plants. Caring is given a special place here, which manifests itself in doing the dishes as a deliberate civic act; ‘doing something unexpected, something that one doesn’t have to do.. what isn’t required of one in a way’. Caring is imagined as a matter of doing something for somebody and doing what isn’t requested. When continuing to talk about civic engagement, Oskar stresses caring in utopian terms, at a level of social and collective rights; ‘if people need like help or need.. to have somebody there, I think it should be a right to have the opportunity to get help in that way’.

Overall, as is the case in Linn’s story, the enactment of civic engagement in Oskar’s story comes into being through home-related social and material practices in which societal, local and collective dimensions are involved in a delicate mixture. In his story belonging, kinship and caring stand out as central points of reference for these everyday ‘doings’.

What counts as young people’s civic engagement in Linn’s and Oskar’s stories? On civic sociability, the public and the private, and direction for agency

Regardless of whether Linn and Oskar can be seen to act on civic engagement or on something else, and irrespective of whether they can be considered to have a fair, ‘proper’ or in any sense emblematic picture of what is involved in the phenomenon of civic engagement or not, we can treat their stories as exemplifications of what counts as (some) young people’s civic engagement according to themselves when they are asked about it. More precisely, we can ask how the importance attributed to home, non-human practices and everyday ‘doing’ in their stories can offer insights into what counts as young people’s civic engagement for them. With these considerations in mind, Linn’s and Oskar’s stories are examined in relation to the question of what notions of the three

characterising features of civic engagement – *civic sociability*, the *public and the private spheres in society* and the *direction for civic agency* – that stand out in these stories.

Civic sociability

Linn's and Oskar's stories point to civic engagement as involving a particular notion of civic sociability. This notion has two faces: it appears as a matter of intra-human togetherness in terms of belonging, caring and respect; it also appears as something that to a significant degree involves non-intra-human practices, a mode of togetherness in which not only humans but also materials plays an important part. Concerning the former, intra-human face of civic sociability, this is actualised in Linn's and Oskar's concrete, everyday 'doings' like respectful meetings with other people, offering help to fellow-men and joining-in for discussions with other people such as peers and your family and school about global subject matters like the environment. Concerning the latter face of civic sociability, the non-intra-human one, it comes to the fore in their stress on everyday 'doings' like buying and eating food, piano-playing, sorting household waste, computer activities, doing the dishes, paying bills, watering the flowers, watching TV and reading the newspaper. Overall, these practices 'cut out' civic sociability as a matter of human-material participation in shared, societal concerns at a collective level. What makes this participation special is that it does not exclusively entail human relationality or togetherness, but also a material one.

The public and the private sphere in society

Concerning the second characterising feature of civic engagement, the notion of the public and the private spheres in society, Linn's and Oskar's stories indicate an approach that is deeply entwined with the centrality of home. Home denotes an agential arena that is involved in their notions of public life, since it to a considerable extent serves as a place for social, societal, collective and global action taking that is part of 'the civic' in their stories. To provide some examples, watering and cultivating plants, the desire and inclination to give birth to children (in the future), stressing the importance of taking care of people that are in need inside and outside of home and reading newspapers are home-related everyday 'doings' that serve to reinforce action-taking, awareness and knowability of political and societal concerns at different levels.

Regardless of whether home is acted upon in order to fulfil one's civic obligation to act politically in formal or structured registers, in terms of voting or discussing certain topics inside or outside of school (cf. Liljestrand 2012), or socially, in terms of helping people without the "social pressure" of feeling an "obligation" to do so as a "member" of civil society or a nation state, home comes to matter as a constituent for both visionary and here-and-now-oriented depictions of civic action-taking. This action taking is put in relation to the struggle to create a 'good' society in joint, which to some degree entails physically and geographically distant, participation. To this end home denotes a public space in their stories. Home is also stressed in terms of a private nest. Hence, the notion of home as an important referent to the distinction between the public and the private is two-faced: On the one hand, it constitutes a somewhat private shell that relates to certain values, senses of rest and safety through actualised everyday 'doings'; on the other hand, it is stressed as a place that is deeply entwined with shared action-taking for specific issues on an ideational, ethical, social and collective welfare-oriented level. Taken together, the emphasis of home as an agential place for a multiplicity of things, practices and dimensions linked to their enactment of civic engagement point out an indirect notion of the public and the private where private and public matters, action-taking and urges are not easy to separate from each other. Hence, their stories contribute to a certain blurring as concerns already settled notions of delineation between the public and the private as distinct spheres in society.

Direction for civic agency

The third characteristic feature of civic engagement, the outset of direction for civic agency, comes into question in Linn's and Oskar's imaginaries of centeredness. In these imaginaries civic agency comes to be directed *from* a presumptive centre outwards. To provide an example, community, kinship and belonging are stressed as vital, everyday feelings, values and 'doings'. They are emphasised in the confident belief that they (Linn and Oskar) are already *in* 'the civic' rather than being outside it, on the way to becoming part of it or approaching it from some abstract constitutive margin. These imaginaries make up the notion of direction for civic agency in that they accentuate civic existence as something that they consider themselves already to be part of, rather than something that they are to aim for by joining-in from a 'non-civic', 'non-legitimate' outside.⁹ To provide some examples: the freedom to 'do whatever one wants', the personal responsibility to see

to the environment in a global perspective and involvement in sports as agential participation in assumedly civic ‘events’ all point, I suggest, to an enactment from a centre of (what counts as) ‘the civic’. In sum, although they are far from being entirely, coherently or explicitly articulated, Linn’s and Oscar’s stories appear to indicate civic agency as a matter of action-taking from an experienced centre towards a presumed margin in becoming towards this centre for civic agency, in order to be properly positioned as ‘civic’.

Overall, Linn’s and Oskar’s both constitute and bear witness to the three characteristic features of civic engagement. More specifically, these stories denote special ways of joining-in for togetherness in human and non-human registers that make up the feature of civic sociability. They also denote particular approaches to everyday ‘doings’ at home, which is used as a space for shared, societal concerns that make up – and at the same time blur – any presumed distinction between a public and the private spheres in society. In addition, their stories denote special imaginaries of centeredness as concerns what constitutes the direction for civic agency. These imaginaries mark out the discreet positioning of their own embodiment of the heart of an assumedly civic centre, and hereby locating what they are *not* taking (civic) action within; the periphery. The notions of civic engagement elucidated in Linn and Oskar’s stories provide – although far from clearly, coherently or entirely – some feasible indications of what might count as such engagement when young people are asked to ‘cut it out’ themselves.

What counts as young people’s civic engagement in education?

After these two analyses of the empirical studies – the ICCS study and the qualitative study – I provide, initially, for an overview of the result from these analyses. After this a discussion follows on the question of what counts as young people’s civic engagement in education, accompanied by some concluding remarks.

A summarising account of young people’s civic engagement in the two empirical studies

If we consider the rough depictions of young people’s civic engagement that come into question through the analyses the following figure can be outlined.

Characteristic features of civic engagement	The ICCS study	Linn's and Oskar's stories (the qualitative study)
Civic sociability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining-in for human togetherness • Relationship individual-collective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joining-in for human and non-human togetherness • Relationship individual-individual + individual-collective/ assemblage
The Public and the Private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Envisioning of the plaza; open space as agential place • Participating in physically shared activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyday 'doings' as agential • Home: a public and a private place • Home as a blurring space
Direction for civic agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate action: imaginaries from the outside in • Movement from somewhere to somewhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberate action: imaginaries from the centre and outwards

Figure 1. Depictions of young people's civic engagement according to the ICCS study and to Linn's and Oskar's stories (the qualitative study) – in relation to three characteristic features of civic engagement.

On the basis of this figure we can confidently conclude – without going into extensive comparisons – that what is measured in the ICCS study is not completely in line with what comes into question in (these two) young people's stories. As aforementioned, there are two apparent reasons for the disconcertment. First, the ICCS study's assessment rationale is directed toward 14-year-old individuals, while the qualitative study's collected material derives from 18–19-year-old individuals. Secondly,

the ICCS study's methodological body is quantitative, while Linn's and Oskar's stories are qualitative. However, it is far from comfortable to offer any answer to questions whether, and if so to what extent, the resemblances and the dissimilarities between the two studies are related to age or to the methodological frame 'at work' in the conclusions, or to any other notable feature involved.

Important to say, though, is that it is not suggested that young people's civic engagement can be captured to their full by either quantitative or qualitative studies. Neither is it stressed that 'anything goes' as concerns what counts and should count as young people's civic engagement just because it stems from the young themselves, or from any other source for that matter. Hence, Linn's and Oskar's stories should not be seen as a full-blooded, *alternative* framework to (what counts as) civic engagement to the ICCS study that can or should replace it. According to Bruno Latour (2004), such an agenda of "explaining away" certain notions in favour of others is infertile as it only leads to digging trenches between different positions. The point I wish to make here, however, is not related to methodological, comparative or contrasting concerns as regards the very content in the two depictions of young people's civic engagement that stand out in the analyses, even though these are important ones and deserve attention. I will instead shift focus away from these depictions in order to approach the field of education.

What counts as young people's civic engagement in educational times of accountability?

The summarising overview of what counts as young people's civic engagement in the ICCS study and in Linn and Oskar's stories offers a wealth of ways of taking part in, constituting and (not) acting on the phenomenon of civic engagement. This richness, I suggest, can be seen as a useful offer to the field of education when it comes to the task of providing for the "readiness" for young people to take on their "roles as citizens". Restating the 'fact' that we experience in present times an overreliance on quantitatively oriented assessments like the ICCS study, and considering the range of ways of depicting civic engagement that have been highlighted in the analyses above, I wish to arrive at two conclusions; first, not to rely too hard on studies like the ICCS study in education when it comes to young people's engagement, and secondly; to see to the educational task to provide for young people's civic engagement in a way that takes both the affirmative and the creative aspects of civic engagement into account.

As concerns the first conclusion, it stands in relation to the purpose of liberal education itself. If we over-rely on quantitative international assessments like the ICCS study we run the risk that the multiplicity of different accounts for – and accountabilities of – young people's civic engagement fall out of the picture, and we end up with (only) one prevailing logics of accountability – the one offered by the ICCS. This would be hazardous, as it would imply an educational meagreness that could hardly be considered as appropriate in liberal societies with the alleged stress on individual autonomy and on plurality as concerns the educational offer of choice of life projects. As regards the second conclusion – maintaining educational openness for different depictions of young people's civic engagement, such as Linn and Oskar's – it is important if we see to the educational task of promoting an engaged citizenry seriously. In order to provide young people, and society at large, with both affirmative (already known, reproductive) and creative (not known, disruptive, disconcerting, productive) aspects of what it means to be an engaged citizen – which is a compelling part of any educational system that aims to promote young people's political and societal participation – we need to have a repertoire of different ways of (not) partaking in 'the civic' in order to see to both the preservation and renewal of the phenomenon of civic engagement. Taking on the performative and 'interpellational' power involved in young people's enactment of civic engagement, the importance of avoiding educational meagreness and of taking the twofaced educational mission of providing for an engaged citizenry seriously are worth taking into consideration. If not, we might contribute to reinforcing the liberal democratic 'failure', with its inherent lack of being internally compelling (see Olson 2012a, in *Article 2* 'To be ...').

Notes

1. For an explanation of the ICCS study, placed in a Swedish context, see Article 1. For an explanation of how it is related to each article, 3–6, in this volume, see *Article 2* [‘To Be or Not to Be a (properly educated) Citizen’]. Here I will give a brief summary of the study. The IEA/ICCS-study 2009 (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement/ International Civic and Citizenship Education Study) is an international study on 140.000 14-year-old students in 38 different countries in Asia, Europe and Latin America based on several instruments of collecting data, viz. (IEA, <http://www.iea.nl/icces.html>): (I) an international knowledge test for students, together with international and national questionnaires concerning their background, attitudes and behaviours; (II) an international questionnaire and a national questionnaire for teachers; (III) an international questionnaire for schools/school principals. The study makes it possible to compare the data from students, teachers and school principals on issues related to democracy, society, justice and citizenship within and beyond schools. The original sample for the Swedish data included in total 169 schools, both public and private, 2 711 teachers and 3 464 students. The sampling process, and the analyses of data, was carried out in a way that enables generalisations over the total population of students in the 8th grade during the investigated period. The data was collected in the spring of 2009 and the school questionnaire, the knowledge test and the questionnaires for students were answered by over 90 per cent of the sampled Swedish schools and students, whereas the answer rate for teachers ended up a bit lower, but still within an acceptable margin of error – of the sampled teachers 74 per cent answered. In this article I use the concept of ‘the ICCS study’, which denotes the ICCS 2009 study. The report on the ICCS 2009 study referred to is the *ICCS International Report* (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito 2010).
2. For further reading about the Swedish educational context as concerns the ways of acting upon different depictions of civic engagement, see for example Joakim Ekman & Sladjana Todosijevec (2003), Jan Grannäs (2011), Maria Olson (2009, 2012b), Lars Svedberg et al (2010).
3. To name but some of the implications of the differing methodological circumstances; The ICCS study’s rationale is developed in order to face the difficulties of measuring, comparing and evaluating things that have emerged in different contextual and geographical settings over time. In order to see to these tasks the rationale needs certain degrees of standardisation, structure and formalisation as concerns both form and content in order not to fall short in relation to its methodological, theoretical and not least contextual, demographical, socio economical, gender- and ethnically oriented challenges. The qualitative study does not face these aims, targets and challenges, but faces other ones that come with the choices of collecting data, the selection of participants for the study and ways of analysing and presenting the material and result.
4. Because of the commonly referred distinction between the concept of civic and that of citizenship touched on earlier, and the aim of providing for a certain openness for the ways in which civic engagement matters for and is defined by young people themselves, the task of operationalizing the concept of civic engagement – both in relation to the pen camera and to

the following individual conversations – was not without its difficulties. In addition, the selection of participants was limited in a number of ways. Yet, for the purpose of this text – to gain general insights in what counts as civic engagement for young people when asked about it – their stories can provide a broad catching of what comes into question as civic engagement that can be further elaborated.

5. In regard to the delicate balancing act of opening up, and at the same time not shutting down any particular way of framing civic engagement not much was said about what civic engagement is, has been or can and cannot be in relation to other referents or conceptualisations, such as societal commitment (in Swedish: 'sambhällsengagemang'), membership of or partaking in a community ('medlemskap' or 'delaktighet i en gemenskap'), belonging ('tillhörighet') or any framework of rights and obligations. Instead the researcher stayed put to the notion of civic ('medborgarskap') as something that can involve manifold things, and that the point was that they bring their ways of actualising civic engagement into being in their own way. One complexity involved here though is that in the Swedish language there is no linguistic distinction made between civic and citizen. Both concepts merge into the concept of 'medborgarskap'. This denotes the important circumstance that there are always situated issues to consider in any study of young people's civic engagement, be it quantitative or qualitative ones. It was further underscored that the expectation from the researcher as concerns their documentation task had nothing to do with that of the teacher's. Stress was also put in that nothing that they would come up with in their recordings could be considered as wrong, misdirected or not-of-use for the researcher or for the study, as it was their own ways of acting upon civic engagement that was of interest.
6. Examples of the main questions asked; what did you find hardest/easiest with this task? Why was that? Did you erase any documentation (photo, film or sound recording)? Why/why not?
7. With young people's enactment of civic engagement I mean what these participants chose to 'cut out' – with words and deeds (see Barard 2008) – as civic engagement in their everyday lives in general, and in their documentation of civic engagement in the study in particular, when asked about it.
8. All names used are pseudonyms.
9. These imaginaries have certain bearing to the fact that the young people in the qualitative study have already reached legal age (they are 18–19 years). Nevertheless, there is a limit to the extent to which age serves as an explanatory feature in relation to the question about young people's civic engagement. This is so as the feature of age is far from the only one in play in their enactments of civic engagement. To mention but a few other ones, there are socio-economical, ethnical and gendered features that have proven to have a far from insignificant impact in this respect.

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