

Should the government be trusted? Qualifying students' civic narrative competence through social science education

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Schools in general and social studies education in particular, are assigned to prepare youths for life in democratic societies. In order to advance students' knowledge and prepare them for citizenship, teaching needs to include disciplinary knowledge, while taking into consideration, and incorporating, students' own experiences (Campbell, 2012; Reinhardt, 2016). In social science education, this dual task has been at the centre for empirical and theoretical studies focusing on specific disciplinary content or methods for inviting students' perspectives and interests. However, a less common approach has been to study the processes and interactions of life-world experiences and disciplinary approaches in order to understand students' construction of meaning. In this paper, we depart from a theory of narrative competence where the process of constructing meaningful narratives of society is understood through three interactional stages: experiencing, interpreting, and orienting to society (cf. Rösen, 2005).

An assumption of this paper is that the process of narrative competence can be qualified through teaching. In order to follow the process and to understand how students' arguments are qualified, this paper charts students' encounters with a central theme in democratic societies: social and political trust (Warren, 2018). The purpose of the paper is to explore the narrative process empirically through social and political trust as objects of learning. Through focus groups, elicitation tasks and students' log-books we explore how students reason before, during and after a teaching segment on social and political trust. The empirical data was collected in two upper secondary schools engaged in the research project, representing students of different socio-economic backgrounds. Tentative results suggest that students with an academically strong socio-economic background experienced a higher confidence in expertise and thought that "the system" works, although individuals make mistakes. The less homogeneous student group with a mixed socio-economic background, on the other hand, generally had less trust in expertise, and did not think that "the system" works so well as structural problems like racism. The study suggests that the teaching enabled students to use content knowledge as a tool in both life-world and disciplinary perspective and allow for new orientations.

References

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