

Learning School 8

Research at Bobergsgymnasiet

INVESTIGATING STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY



PERCEPTION

DEVELOPMENT

ENCOURAGEMENT

IMPACT

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THE LEARNING SCHOOL



The Learning School is an international student research project that aims to explore different aspects of education in schools around the globe. The project has been established for eight years and all the researchers are current or recently graduated students from one of the eleven schools currently involved in the Global Classroom Partnership. The research is conducted by students for students and offers a unique perspective in to aspects of education.

The basic principle of the Learning School is to promote school self-evaluation, where students are the main participants and contributors. The project is seen as a 'critical friend', empowering schools and their students by undertaking an examination of the process of learning. Learning School research involves students and teachers in a positive way, taking into account their views whilst focusing on different aspects of learning within schools. In the past, Learning School projects have investigated areas that include participation, motivation, lifelong learning and assessment.

Over the academic year the Learning School groups will visit Sweden, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Germany, United States of America, Australia and South Africa, with a final presentation at the Global Classroom Conference in Diepholz, Germany in July 2007.

Full details of Learning School research and previous reports can be downloaded from:

www.schoolofambition.org/research

BOBERGSGYMNASIET

In 1958 Bobergsgymnasiet was founded in Ånge, which is situated in the centre of Sweden. It is an upper secondary school, which means that students generally are between 16 and 19 years old. Bobergsgymnasiet has 436 students and a staff of 96, of whom 37 are teachers.

Students at Bobergsgymnasiet are able to choose between nine different programmes. Some of these programmes are mainly theory-based, others are taught using more practical methods. This also includes a special programme called AWARE (Ånge Wilderness Advanced Rescue Education). It is a unique co-operation between Wildlandfire, an international company, and the school partly located in Torpshammar, about 40km away from Ånge. Every year they accept 40 students from all over Sweden. AWARE is based on the Social Science programme but also offers special practical courses such as Search & Rescue and Forest Fire Fighting.



RESEARCH TOPIC: RESPONSIBILITY



A key component of education is the development of responsibility. In the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child it is stated:

'States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

The topic of responsibility was taken from the Curriculum for Excellence, in use in Scottish schools. One of the four capacities of the document aims that students will become responsible citizens. The research has been adapted for an international perspective and focuses on how students take responsibility and the effect it has on their learning.

The research intends to investigate five main themes:

- The types of responsibility found in schools and the students' and teachers' perceptions of these.
- To what extent do students experience and value responsibility for their learning?
- Do students want to have more responsibility for their learning and what factors affect their responsibilities?
- How is responsibility encouraged and developed in schools and by whom?
- The impact of this on students, teachers and the school.

From this the investigation will be able to provide schools with informed research on the topic of student responsibility.

METHODOLOGY



Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to collect data.

Questionnaires

(See Appendices 1 & 2)

The questionnaires enabled us to gather large scale opinions and identify trends and themes from both students and teachers. The questionnaire comprised of twenty statements relating to responsibilities found in school, ranging from 'keeping the school tidy' to 'making decisions about how the school is run'.

Class mentor teachers distributed the questionnaires to students in the second year which were then returned to an allocated pigeonhole. Teacher questionnaires were also distributed before the start of the research in Ånge, these were collected in a similar manner. Analysis of the questionnaires was done using SPSS, a statistical analysis program; the results obtained were used to see the differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of student responsibility.

Sample size: 76 students
20 teachers

Interviews

(See Appendices 3 & 4)

Semi-structured interviews were used for both students and teachers. A semi-structured interview is based around a set

number of questions, however, follow up questions can be asked to develop points and add depth to the interview. The single student interviews were conducted by two researchers. Teacher interviews were conducted in a similar manner but their questions were related to their perceptions of students' responsibilities.

The interviews were recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed, this ensured the data was accurate. Before the interviews it was explained that they were voluntary and anonymous, only age and gender were noted.

Sample size: 4 students
6 teachers

Group Discussions

(See Appendix 5)

Two group discussions took place, each with four second year students. The discussions opened with an activity where students had to partner cards, matching up some basic human rights the students have with the responsibilities required for them. From this activity the researchers could lead the discussion to focus on responsibilities found in school. Group discussions allowed us to support and elaborate on data found in questionnaires. They also allowed a more in-depth investigation into students' views of school, how it functions and how they contribute to it in terms of responsibility.

Case Studies

(See Appendix 6)

The case studies focused on students who appeared to take extra responsibility voluntarily within the school. We observed and interviewed a representative from the student council and a student from the AWARE programme who is a student mentor. These methods were used in order to gain a fuller understanding of what their role involves and how it affects their learning.

Class Observations

Four class observations were conducted with at least two researchers present at each. Class observations enabled us to gain an overall picture of the classroom environment. Most importantly, it provides the opportunity to identify examples of students taking responsibility for their learning in the classroom.

Ethics

All research adhered to a strict ethical code. The data collected was anonymous, unless otherwise stated and all participants were informed of this along with their right to withdraw from the research at any time. Consent was gained prior to any class observations, which were carried out from the back of the classroom so disruption was minimal. Video and photographs were used with the permission of the teacher and students.

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING



The methods of teaching applied in the classroom are some of the most critical factors in a student's education. During their school life students have to discover and understand how they learn and study most effectively. This type of responsibility is called Self-Directed Learning and is an important process:

"...in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes."

<http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-selfdr.htm>

Through the implementation of such practices teachers aim to help 'students acquire knowledge, skills, and understanding' and give them the opportunity to 'demonstrate, practise and apply these skills'.

The objective of the research is to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions of responsibilities associated with Self-Directed Learning, as well as the development and encouragement of these and the impact they have on the individual students.

Perceptions

When the students were asked about their responsibilities in school, completing their homework was the responsibility most frequently mentioned.

81% of the students believed that 'ensuring their homework is completed' is 'only' their responsibility, whereas just 25% of the teachers shared the view that students are currently 'only' responsible for it (shown in figure 1.1). However, almost 90% of teachers thought that they should be more responsible for this.

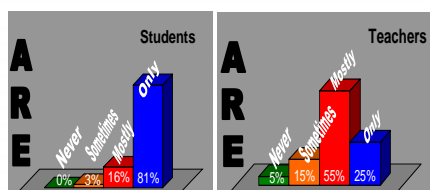


Figure 1.1 Ensuring My Homework Is Completed

Most students interviewed thought that 'ensuring my homework is completed' does not feel like a voluntary responsibility; it is rather enforced by society or the school system. Also due to the fact that there is a need to achieve good grades, as it is very difficult now to go into further education without a high level of qualifications.

"Everyone tells you that is your responsibility, since you are a small kid. They say you have to do your homework. It's not like you think, oh I really want to do my homework!"

-Student

Furthermore, a student mentioned that they do their homework because 'we are here at school because we want to be.' Homework is essential for their learning as it helps them to gain a better understanding of the subject and the work they are doing. Therefore, most teachers try to encourage their students to take this responsibility for themselves.

One teacher interviewed stated that in some cases they give up their free time to assist students who are struggling with the work:

"Just give them another chance sometimes put in your own spare time."

-Teacher

Differences

The majority of the students believed that currently 'catching up on missed lessons' is 'only' their responsibility but felt it 'should' be slightly less. Most teachers were of the opinion that the students are 'sometimes' responsible for catching up on lessons they have missed but they thought it should be 'only' their responsibility. This highlights a big difference between the students' and teachers' perception of this responsibility. With regard to students who do not catch up on missed lessons, one teacher said he would give them no option but to come to class and work, or leave the subject.



Teachers often think that 'it is not always the best thing to do but it's the only thing to do'.

However, another teacher said they prefer to be more approachable and ask the students what the problem is; whether it is the subject, the methods used in teaching or some other factor troubling them. These factors could be a problem as they may affect the students' individual learning and productivity.



Student Participation

80% of both students and teachers thought that 'setting deadlines' is between 'sometimes' and 'mostly' the students' responsibility. Teachers would like to give the students much more input so that it should be almost 'only' their responsibility to set deadlines.

In contrast, the majority of the students surveyed (53%) thought that they are 'sometimes' responsible for 'setting deadlines' but the students interviewed stated they have quite a large influence on it and that 'there's always a discussion at least'.

According to more than half of the students (55%) both 'deciding on teaching style' and 'evaluating teaching methods' are 'sometimes' their responsibility.

However, students do not think that they should be much more involved as the difference between the results of how responsible they 'are' and the result of how responsible they 'should' be is quite small. In contrast to this the majority of the teachers perceived it to be 'mostly' the students' responsibility.

Almost half of the teachers would like the students to be 'only' responsible for 'deciding on teaching styles' and 80% would even appreciate the same for 'evaluating teaching methods'.

Restrictions

Nevertheless, according to the teachers it is difficult to give the students more responsibility than they already have in relation to the teaching methods in place because they have a tight schedule in which to complete the course. This means teachers are restricted in how much they can realistically change their teaching methods to suit the students. The majority of the teachers seemed to appreciate the students' opinions when deciding on their teaching style as it helps create a more effective learning environment.

By taking more responsibility to voice their views on this, students are more motivated and willing to learn and therefore more focused on the assignments:

"I think they would be more motivated for studying if they could feel that they could affect the study themselves."

- Teacher

Encouragement

That is why teachers try to encourage their students to express their opinions about teaching methods and styles. One teacher interviewed explained that the students could write an anonymous letter in the beginning of the year to express in what way they would like to be taught. Another teacher mentioned how they are trying to talk less in class and leave more time for the students to work on their own. This allows students to take responsibility for completing their work by themselves without so much guidance from the teacher.

Furthermore, one teacher said that they sometimes left the classroom in order to reduce the importance of the teacher's role in class 'to give the students time to reflect and work':

"I vanish from the classroom because they shouldn't have me as a focal point that they should use each other as helpers."

-Teacher



Referring to ‘voicing concerns about my learning’, the responses ‘sometimes’, ‘mostly’ and ‘only’ responsible all received 33% each. (shown in figure 1.2) Half the students thought it should be ‘mostly’ the students’ responsibility. Whilst a large percentage (80%) of the teachers felt that it is ‘mostly’ their responsibility and 90% thought the responsibility should be ‘only’ theirs.

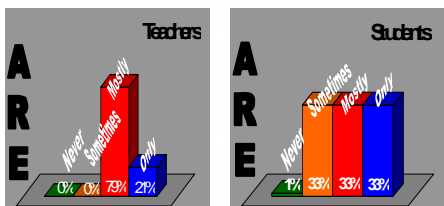


Figure 1.2 Voicing Concerns about their Learning

However, some of the teachers interviewed believed that not all the students do voice their concerns possibly because they do not feel confident about doing so. The result of this is that the views of the students who are struggling the most may be the ones who do not get heard.

“You always have people that don’t want to say what they think especially if they think differently than almost the rest of the class. So that can be difficult.”

-Teacher

Students always have the possibility to tell their problems to other people in the school for instance their student advisor, class teachers or the nurse. Most students, however, thought teachers at Bobergsgymnasiet are open-minded and that ‘it’s easy to talk to them’.

Most students felt that they are able to voice their concerns and that these concerns are heard. It has also been found through interviews that teachers will change or at least adapt their methods to help the students. This is important to them as they can work in the way that suits them best:

“So I can choose the way that fits me to learn.”

-Student

Overall students appeared to be very comfortable with the responsibilities they have with regard to their Self-Directed Learning. They feel especially responsible for showing up to classes and doing the homework but it is also important to them to have a certain input in the classroom.

Although the students presently have a say in how they are taught, teachers want them to have a lot more responsibility in class. Due to the fact that many jobs require high academic credentials, students feel that they are forced by the school system and society to take responsibility for their learning. Despite this, being responsible for their own learning affects the students and their education in a very positive way as they are able to discover the methods of learning which best suits their individual needs.



CO-OPERATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING



The term 'Co-operative and Supportive Learning' describes methods in which students interact and learn with each other in order to increase their ability to work together with fellow students and teachers, as well as developing communication and social skills.

From the questionnaires four key elements of Co-operative and Supportive Learning were focused on, to what extent students are responsible for: 'looking after younger students at school'; 'resolving issues between other students'; 'taking an active role in other students' learning' and 'helping others to learn when they have difficulties'.

From the questionnaire results it was found that the highest percentage of students (45%) believe that they are 'sometimes' responsible for 'looking after younger students', a similar percentage believe that this is the level it should be at. 56% and 28% of teachers think students are 'sometimes' or 'mostly' responsible for this respectively. This differs from the view of what the level should be where 50% of teachers believe students should be 'mostly' responsible and 39% of teachers feel that students should be the 'only' ones responsible for 'looking after younger students'. The majority of teachers interviewed think that students are not currently responsible for younger students. One reason for this was that they do not consider any of the students in Boberg to be young as the school only has three grades with students ranging in age from 16 to 19.

Therefore, they do not need to be looked after to the same extent as those in the first to ninth grades in the lower school, where one teacher explained that the older students do look after younger students.

More experience

Students who took part in group discussions also had the opinion that this was not their responsibility but, one student used the example that if someone was lost they would help them, as they would for anyone. Interestingly, students interviewed disputed this view on whose responsibility it is to look after younger students believing that they are responsible as they have more experience, one student stated:

"Mostly the other students know the younger students better and the teachers can't see everything."

- Student

Several teachers mentioned the idea of older students being mentors as a good way to help younger students integrate into high school. One teacher interviewed developed the idea further by describing how all students on the NV programme had an excursion together before Christmas to help them get to know each other. This teacher's view was that a similar activity at the beginning of the year would be a good idea to introduce younger students to older students so they already feel comfortable with each other when they come to school, which could benefit the school environment in general.

When referring to helping those of a similar age with any learning difficulties, the questionnaires illustrated that 56% of students and 53% of teachers have the same opinion of the level of responsibility apparent at the moment, that students are 'sometimes' responsible. However, student and teacher views differed concerning the level of responsibility students should take for 'helping others to learn when they have difficulties'. An increased percentage of students (60%) believe it should be maintained as 'sometimes' their responsibility, whereas 53% of teachers feel it should 'only' be the responsibility of students.

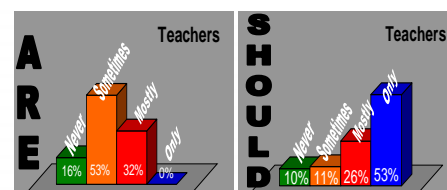


Figure 2.1 Helping Others with Difficulties

Figure 2.1 shows an interesting result, as absolutely no teachers believe that it is 'only' students that are responsible for this at the moment and also because teachers interviewed said that there is a thin line between how much responsibility the students should have for helping other students.



One possible explanation for these figures was mentioned:

"I think it's accepted among teachers that you learn more when you try to teach one of your fellow students."

- Teacher

Whilst no students contradicted this suggestion there were some strong points of view on whose role it should be:

"That's why we have teachers, so they can give you lessons. I mean that's why they're there because they know more about a subject, you should hope. They're there to support, not to just be paid for not being there."

- Student

Further opinions gathered from group discussions were similar to those mentioned for 'looking after younger students', in that they did not think they were responsible but that if they saw someone struggling they would help nevertheless. As one student stated:

"Maybe not your responsibility but you do it anyway. You can help others but it's absolutely not your responsibility to teach others... you shouldn't be like their extra teacher or something"

- Student

This idea of 'doing it anyway' is where students help without consciously thinking of their actions. Therefore, it becomes natural and is evident both through teacher interviews, where clear examples of students helping others were given, and also in the

class observations.

Active role

It was also observed that many students took an active role in other students' learning. This could vary from influencing their learning indirectly through class discussions, to more personally through group discussions and assignments. It could also happen through direct guidance where a student would make sure another has done their work. During two class observations the teacher used a short group discussion period, which was then followed by the teacher asking the class questions. This demonstrates that the responsibility of 'taking an active role in other students' learning' is already in place to some extent. This is reflected by the questionnaire results for students' and teachers' opinions on how responsible students are for this issue. 56% of students believe that they are 'sometimes' responsible and the teacher results were divided between 'sometimes' (45%) and 'mostly' (40%).



Mattis Karlsson, Case Study

One student who clearly 'takes an active role in other students' learning' is Mattis Karlsson who takes part in the AWARE programme.

This is based on the Social Science programme but also offers special practical courses such as Search & Rescue and Forest Fire Fighting; it therefore requires a heightened sense of responsibility. This was clear after observing both a theoretical and practical class where students encouraged others to stay focused at points within the theory class then during the practical exercise of ice survival. Students were paired and each had an equal amount of responsibility for helping their partner after the exercise. Students who took part also encouraged those students who had difficulties. When interviewed, Mattis described his responsibilities as:

"I take care of the other students in my class and see that everyone does the things that they are told to do."

He also stated that he has a lot of help from teachers, which demonstrates that even those who are experienced in having this responsibility need help. Whilst this corresponds with student and teacher opinions of what level students currently 'are' responsible for 'taking an active role in others' learning', it contradicts the views of the teachers on what level students 'should' be responsible for 'taking an active role in other students' learning'.



58% of teachers had the opinion that it should 'only' be the students' responsibility and 37% think that students should be 'mostly' responsible for this.

From figure 2.2, it can be seen that teachers' views are almost the opposite of the students' results where 51% believe that their current level of responsibility, to be 'sometimes' responsible, is the way it should be. This shows that teachers seem to find it very important that students take a large interest in other students' learning and help as much as they can.

The results show that their opinion was divided between it ideally being 'mostly' (56%) and 'only' the students' responsibility (44%). These results are also disputed by responses from the interviews and group discussions where both students and teachers described a similar process where, if there were any problems, it would be a joint effort between teachers and students:

'They should resolve it amongst themselves first. If they cannot do that they should go to the class teacher. If that doesn't help they should go further.'

- Teacher

Primarily it would be the students' responsibility to sort out disputes, but if this did not work it would go up through the hierarchy from class teacher or mentor to head teacher then an outside counsellor. Through interviews it was found that the reasons this method is in place were that people such as counsellors are experienced in such matters and that some students are not as mature as others and therefore do not have the same capacity to deal with such important issues as adults:

'If it's just small arguments, another student can go between but if it's like big and really deep and with lots of emotions I don't think other students can handle that.'

- Student

Nevertheless, it was found that students feel that they get help both from the teachers and their friends in the school:

"It's mostly the teachers, but the friends too, actually."

- Student

Their classmates encourage them by being supportive, for example, with regards to homework since the friends can help when the teacher might not be able to. One teacher mentions the important fact that:

"Many times students are better teachers than we are actually 'cause they understand the problems more."

- Teacher

Students' potential

Several teachers mentioned the fact that many students get their 'paths swept in front of them by their parents' - the so-called 'curling parents'. According to one teacher this influences the students because they are not given much responsibility at home and this contributes in making the students take less responsibility for their learning. One student said that to encourage responsibility some parents could push their children more:

"Some they push their kids to do great at school and I think they feel more responsible, I think they feel more responsibility if they know their parents care how their grades are"

- Student

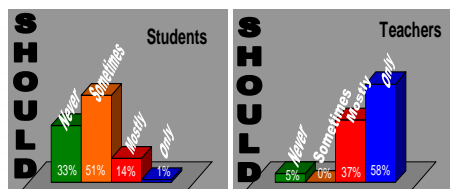


Figure 2.2 Taking an Active Role in Other Students' Learning

Resolving issues

A further issue that is related to Co-operative and Supportive Learning is 'resolving issues between other students'. Similar to the other issues highlighted in this section, the majority of students and teachers agreed that students are 'sometimes' responsible at the moment but, once again, the opinions on how responsible the students should be were extremely different. Most students (46%) maintained the view that they should 'sometimes' have this responsibility whereas no teachers gave this answer.



According to some teachers at Boberg there is a similar situation in school. The development of responsibility is therefore not always encouraged from either home or school. The students interviewed felt that the amount of responsibility they had was enough, which could explain why the teachers want to urge the students to take more. They see that they are not being pushed to their full potential. Nevertheless, some teachers feel they do not motivate the students as much as they could:

"We're always sweeping the path for them we are never really pushing them to the limit and that's a bad thing I think, you have to push someone to their limit to know where their limit is, and we don't, and if we don't do that they don't have to take the last bit of responsibility for their learning."

-Teacher

Teacher student relationship

Mattis Karlsson, our case study, said that he chooses to take his responsibility, and that the teachers encourage him to take responsibility for his class. He has said that he thinks it is important that someone takes this role and that more students should try to do it:

"It's fun, it's fun when the teachers like you and you talk to the teachers as a friend not as a teacher".

- Mattis Karlsson

The impact this has on Mattis Karlsson is that he has developed good leadership skills and these can give him good job opportunities in the future. He said that it has had a positive effect on his studies, he devotes a lot of time to schoolwork and that increases his chances for gaining good grades. Thus it makes him study harder:

"If I've told another person to do the work then I have to do my work, I think I have to do it better."

- Mattis Karlsson



Most students at Boberg are happy with all the Co-operative and Supportive Learning opportunities. Teachers and students both agree that solving issues should be a divided responsibility as it is a part of growing up but, if needed, support should exist from teachers and staff. However, teachers feel that responsibility levels should be a lot higher. The teachers feel that they take a large amount of the responsibility that the students could take, so if this were to be reduced the students would be forced to take more responsibility. The level of responsibility actually taken by students is not seen to its full extent due to these responsibilities being taken subconsciously and not thought to be 'responsibilities'. The teachers' desire for students to take more responsibility could be explained by this and also by the close relationship between students and teachers that exists in the school. The students do not feel forced to take responsibility by the teachers, more encouraged.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT



Student Involvement is the opportunity for students to participate in and contribute to issues affecting the whole school, particularly student democracy and extra-curricular activities. This can range from participation in the Student Council to promoting the image of the school and organising and taking part in out of school activities. It can also be a chance for students to help set new school rules, or even make decisions about how the school is run. The concept of 'Student Involvement' is to give young people a voice within school, to teach them to voice their opinions, hopefully culminating in an inclusive atmosphere.

From the questionnaires it was found that 60% of the teachers think students are 'sometimes' responsible for 'promoting the school's image', but 75% thought it should be 'mostly' their responsibility. The students think that they already take as much responsibility for this as they should; 47% believed it was 'sometimes' their responsibility and seemed quite content as 53% believed it should be.

The majority of students who participated in the questionnaire believed that it was 'sometimes' their responsibility to help to set new school rules. They seem relatively satisfied with the situation as the same percentage (56%) agreed it should be, but a slightly higher level would be

preferable, as a third (33%) think it should be 'mostly' their responsibility. The teachers believed that the students' responsibility for 'setting new school rules' was a little higher as 55% thought that students are 'mostly' responsible, and a large majority (75%) thought it should 'only' be their responsibility.

Unaware of council

From the questionnaires it was found that teachers wanted the students to be more responsible for 'making decisions about how the school is run'; 70% of them believed that students are 'sometimes' responsible, but 30% stated they should be 'mostly' responsible for this (see figure 3.1). Both students and teachers believe that students have a low level of responsibility in this area. 36% of the students said in the questionnaire that they are 'sometimes' responsible for 'making decisions about how the school is run, 25% think it is 'never' their responsibility.

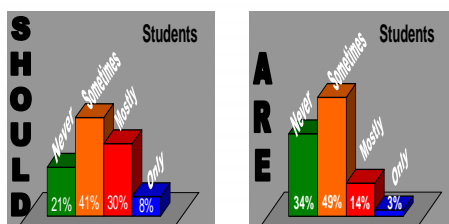


Figure 3.1 Making Decisions About How the School is Run

However, the results suggest that they would like more responsibility for it, as 30% of the students thought it should be 'mostly' their responsibility. Nevertheless, when asked in group discussions, students thought that they had some influence over this through the use of the Student Council. Teachers showed a similar point of view, they think the council, to a small extent, can influence the decisions made by school management, although only in minor issues. Despite this, many students and teachers feel that the students are not fully aware of what the Student Council is and what it does.

"I think mostly it is the ones that are attending, they know about it and all the meetings that are supposed to be and other things but the big majority are not aware of all of it."

- Teacher

Vicious circle

Many students claimed in the interviews that, although they were quite sure there is a Student Council at Bobergsgymnasiet, they have never heard about anything it has actually accomplished. They think that the exchange of information between students and the council does not work as well as it could, resulting in students being unaware of the work of the council.



Since they fail to see any results they grow sceptical and believe it cannot influence change, which leads to fewer students wanting to make use of it. This creates a vicious circle, as the council has no power when the students of the school do not support it (see figure 3.2).

"I heard about it, but I've never heard anything they've changed."
-Student

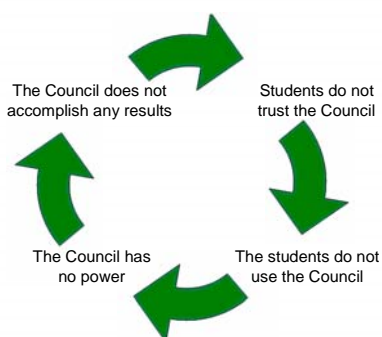


Figure 3.2

Voluntary responsibility

A Student Council has an important function, not only as the students' voice, but also to give them 'an opportunity to take more responsibility' for matters concerning the school and its students. They should represent their opinions and serve their interests. By voluntarily taking this extra responsibility the students think they 'learn to be more responsible', and when asked in interviews they also thought it could make them more

dedicated to their studies. Moreover they 'learn skills that can be good for future life', living in a democratic country.

"For me it's been really good because you learn how to have a meeting or how to do decisions and it's good because you know for the future how to have a meeting and it's important if you want to start a company or something."

- Linnea Andersson, secretary .

Linnea Andersson is the secretary of the Student Council, within this position it is her duty to take notes from all the council meetings and to be responsible for the council's incoming mail. She joined it because she wanted to do something important, to make a difference, but after a while she realised that 'you can't do everything on your own'. Therefore it is important that all the students in the school, even if they are not actively involved, take an interest in the Student Council and use it.

Multiple factors

The research found that both students and teachers are of the opinion that students should have more responsibility in 'making decisions about how the school is run'. One of the best ways to do this is to be involved with the school's Student Council. The lack of interest in the council could be due to many different factors,



some of which the council has no control over. One of these factors is the students having a lack of time. When asked in interviews about why they were not in the council most students said they did not have time to get involved in it, they maintained they have too much to do already.

"I don't think I have time for it. I have so much else to do."

-Student

There are many extra-curricular activities that the students can choose to get involved in, for example orchestras, choirs and sports teams. However, with a few exceptions, such as the Student Council, the sports council and the Christian group, they do not belong to the school and are mostly practised in students' spare time. Being involved in these groups is one of the factors contributing to the fact that students feel they do not have enough time to get involved in the Student Council.



Another possible reason that the students gave which could, to some extent, explain the low interest in the Student Council is that they have tried, but failed to make a difference. They were referring to an event a few years ago when the school day was moved forward one hour. The students did not like the idea and through the Student Council tried to prevent the change, but they felt they were ignored. This discouraged the students as they felt unable to make a difference.

“We couldn’t change and when such things happen, then people say ‘why should we have a school council when we once were this active and nothing came out of it’, why should we engage ourselves in small questions if no one is listening any more?”

- Student

Close relationship

One of the reasons mentioned by the students as to why they do not use the council is because they do not really see a need for it. Since Bobergsgymnasiet is such a small school, with only 436 students and 37 teachers, students and teachers feel they have a very close relationship. Students think that teachers are very approachable and that it is easier to go straight to them. As one student said, the teachers ‘are more like friends, but still teachers, so it’s easy to talk to them’. Teachers agreed and



added that it can be less trouble to go straight to the source instead of taking the diversion through the Student Council.

“I think they would bypass the Student Council and go directly to the adults. Because I think we are a small school and it’s better to deal directly with the person involved.”

-Teacher

It can be a good thing that the relations between students and teachers are this open, but it causes a problem as it prevents the students from using the council to its full potential. It should function as a democratic assembly working for the students’ best interests. Instead of bringing their issues to the council the students tend to go straight to teachers, headmaster or other party involved, this seems to work well for the individual students. However, some of the

students expressed in the interviews that they are concerned, if there was a conflict that would need a strong Student Council, they would not have one because no one has any experience of using it. They would have no one organising them, and there is only so much a student can do on their own.

Students content

Overall the students seem to be quite content with the school situation, and this might be one of the main reasons as to why the Student Council is not very effective. There does not seem to be much they think is in need of changing at the school. When asked in group discussions whether there were things they would like to change about the school students answered ‘there is always something’, but failed to give any concrete examples.



Although there are many positive aspects of having a well-functioning Student Council, there is a low interest among the students. Some of the reasons are not factors that the council can alter, there are still ways in which it can encourage the students' interest, such as improving the communication with students about the work of the council.

The concept of Student Involvement is to give the students a voice within school and this is also the intention of the Student Council. However, students are already voicing their own opinions and solving problems themselves, therefore they question the need for a Student Council. However, if there would be a considerable issue concerning all the students of the school they would have nowhere to turn to and have no

experience in using a Student Council. For the moment the council is not working very effectively. This highlights an area that needs improvement as it is important for all students to be able to affect decisions concerning the school since they are a part of it and wanted more responsibility in this area. What they do now will greatly affect not only their learning now, but also their life in the future.

CONCLUSION



Bobergsgymnasiet has a very good teacher and student relationship that, according to the students, is due in part to the small student population. This influences greatly both the amount of responsibility taken by students and in what ways they take it. The students seem quite content with the level of responsibility given to them. It was found that, even though the students have a high level of responsibility, this is not always apparent to teachers, as they want them to take even more. However, the research revealed that many 'responsibilities' were not considered to be so, as the students do them subconsciously. It was also found that the students encourage their friends to take responsibility and that teachers encourage them to express their opinions. This provides a good support system that the students feel a need for. Both the students and the teachers seem to find it very important that the students take a large interest in others' learning and the students help as much as they can but they still require the support of the teachers.

Students feel that most of their responsibilities at school are enforced and that they must take responsibility for their learning to gain good grades, which is necessary for successful progression in life. It is felt that the enforcement of responsibility is by society and the school system, not the teachers. Students understand and appreciate that the teachers are actually helping them by trying to encourage them.

It was found that students were given a lot of input in decisions affecting their learning in the classroom. However, one area that students wanted to have more responsibility in is making decisions about how their school is run. Being involved with a schools' Student Council is often a way in which students can take an active responsibility for decisions affecting them at school. However, due to the close student-teacher relationship apparent at Boberg, many students tend to bypass their Student Council in favour of talking directly to the school staff concerned. Unfortunately, this then produces a cycle whereby the students do not use the council as they are not aware of what they can achieve; without the support of the students, the council loses its influence on decisions and therefore there are few accomplishments. As the students see no results from the council they fail to see a reason to use it. This cycle also leads to the Student Council having a lack of experience in dealing with larger issues leaving them unable to tackle these, should they occur. Students may find it difficult to influence management decisions as they do not have a strong student democracy to drive changes.

Students were quite happy to voice any concerns to their teachers and most interviewed valued both this and their other responsibilities. The taking of responsibility was more subtle in its exchange, perhaps due to the relaxed atmosphere. Students were both confident and comfortable to take responsibility for their learning and this is something that will benefit them, not just in the future but for their learning now.

SUGGESTIONS



1. School groups give students an opportunity to take more responsibility, which could help them to increase their sense of responsibility and give them experience that can have a positive affect on their future learning and work. Students might be more willing to join school groups if they were made more aware of what personal skills they could gain from this, and also if they received a special recognition for participating in extra-curricular activities, for example a certificate that could be an asset when applying to university or a job.
2. It was discovered that students do not know much about the Student Council and its work. Therefore, it is suggested that the Student Council's information board, which already exists, should be improved. It should contain all necessary information, such as issues discussed by the council, minutes of the last meeting, what they have done recently, how the system works and also the time and date of the next meeting, and the names or pictures of members of the council, so that students know who to go to.
3. It may also be useful to have a suggestion box for students, so that students can make anonymous suggestions if they do not want to go to a council member directly. Some teachers suggested giving the council more power and opportunities concerning school matters. Hopefully, by heightening the profile of the Student Council the students would see that it can influence change and therefore be more willing to make use of it.
4. For groups such as the Student Council it might also be a good idea to have some kind of training in the beginning so that they feel they learn something and understand how the system works, to enable them to work to the best of their abilities.
5. The Student Council meetings could also be better assembled, for example the members could be sitting around a table instead of being spread out in a big area. This would give the representatives an increased sense of being equals and maybe feel more like they are an important part of the council and therefore more active in the meetings. It is also easier to have a discussion if you are not spread across the room.
6. It would be helpful if new students coming to the school had the possibility to get to know other students better. This could be in the form of different team-building exercises where older students work with younger students in varying small groups. This would result in them knowing more people when they start at the school and older students will be more likely to help them if they have already met. This would enhance the friendly school atmosphere as well as the development of responsibility as they would feel more responsible for others.

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