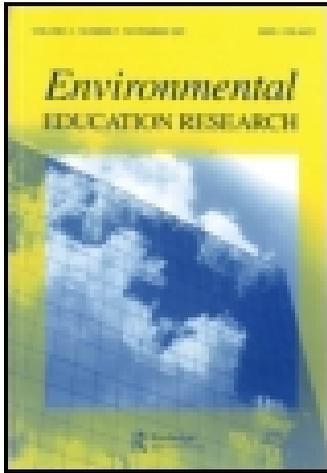


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The significance of ‘participation’ as an educational ideal in education for sustainable development and health education in schools

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This article examines the significance of the concept of participation for teacher meaning-making processes in education for sustainable development and health education. In Scandinavian public schools, education for sustainable development and health education focus on a wide palette of societal problems rather than on narrow curricula. Drawing on selected reviews of research literature on education for sustainable development and health education, Lacanian psychoanalysis provides inspiration for our analysis of the concept of participation, and how it is positioned and enacted in these fields of practice. Essentially, we argue that the concept of participation has a dual nature: it serves both as an educational ideal and as a teaching strategy. We also explore how the failure to achieve the ideal of ‘true’ participation may serve a positive purpose for the teacher; the acknowledgement that participation is not always as genuine as desired establishes a pedagogical situation where ideals of engaging pupils through true participation can continue to exist side by side with clear signs of a less consequential participation.

Keywords: education for sustainable development; health education; health promotion; participation; schools; Lacan

Introduction

Education is expected to play an important part in preparing present and future generations for the task of addressing environmental and health issues. Much effort has been put into educational practices related to sustaining democratic development; battling illness, climate change and global warming; and emphasising the importance of building inclusive, just and sustainable societies (Klafki 1997; Firth and Smith 2013; UNESCO 2013). This article discusses the notion of participation and its significance for teachers working with education for sustainable development (ESD) and health education (HE) in public primary and lower secondary schools (pupils aged 6–16).

A reoccurring theme within both fields concerns an educational deficit: something is lacking that requires education to help contribute to the making of a better world. Whether there is a need for more democracy, pupils with greater action competence, a larger dose of transformative learning, or more emphasis on participation, debates within education and educational research regularly highlight the

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absence of what are considered key dimensions (Jensen and Schnack 2006; Læssøe and Öhman 2010; Pavlova 2013). While we support the idea of developing a better understanding of what is *needed*, in this article we focus on the potential *excess* that a concept such as participation is imbued with.

Our aim is to add a new perspective to an already much debated concept by applying a different theoretical framework. When we talk of the concept of participation, we understand it both as a pedagogical practice and as an educational ideal. For the purposes of this paper, our analysis focuses on the concept of participation as found in the research literature linked to ESD and HE in schools, and on exploring the *significance* of these research perspectives and insights. By drawing, on the one hand, on selected literature reviews within ESD and HE, and, on the other, on Lacanian psychoanalytical theories, we suggest a particular perspective on the concept of participation, raising the questions: What is the significance of the ideal of participation within school-based ESD and HE? What role does the ideal of participation play in meaning-making processes for the individual teacher? Is it possible to understand the excess of the concept of participation?

Our argument is primarily a theoretical venture, intended to revisit and add nuance to the understanding of participation as one of the core concepts of ESD and HE in schools. Our point of departure, with reference to continental, critical educational theory (e.g. Klafki 1997; Jensen, Schnack, and Simovska 2000; Schnack 2008), is the understanding that sustainability and health are among the key topics that schools need to address if they are to respond to societal challenges and foster children's competences to deal with these challenges. Further, our assumption is that pedagogical practices related to ESD and HE often share common concerns and values related to social justice, health of the individual, the society and the planet, as well as a focus on participatory and democratic pedagogical approaches. What is crucial then, is understanding and acknowledging the importance of the conditions under which participation is possible in schools and in society, and what these conditions mean for learning.

Although participation is a concept in education that extends beyond the fields of ESD and HE to also include citizenship education, value studies, conflict resolution and so forth, in this article we specifically put the spotlight on ESD and HE. Sustainability and health are understood as concepts that relate to both individual behaviour and the conditions for life involving individual, socio-cultural and societal factors (Reid et al. 2008; Green and Tones 2010; Bonnett 2013; Levy and Zint 2013; Scott 2013; Simovska 2013; Simovska and McNamara 2015). Both concepts belong to discourses characterised by insecure and ever-changing knowledge about the individual, society and the environment, which, from an educational perspective, requires exploration of specific teaching and learning approaches and meaning-making processes.

In fact, from a critical education perspective, the content and the action-oriented understanding of the challenges associated with the promotion of sustainability and health are intimately linked to questions of relevant teaching strategies. In other words, sustainability, health and social justice are regarded as not only concepts which pupils must learn about, but also something that pupils need to experience through the process of education (Klafki 1997; Schnack 2000, 2008). The nature of this experience can be considered as the shared foundation of both practice fields, ESD and HE. They connect in their efforts to develop curriculum approaches that not only emphasise the importance of the complexity of the topic to hand, but also through participatory forms of pedagogic practice.

Framing

In what follows, we discuss a distinct perspective on the concept of participation within ESD and HE in schools, and the significance which the use of this concept can have on two levels: as an educational ideal permeating the fields of ESD and HE, and as a pedagogical strategy offering specific teaching and learning methodologies. We theorise the importance of continuing to apply the concept of participation, and the significance of the concept for teachers by drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis; a theoretical approach usually seen as an ‘outsider’ to established ESD and HE research. We start by asking the question: How can the concept of participation be understood as part of the meaning-making processes of the individual teacher involved in ESD and HE? As a first step towards its answering, we consider current perspectives on the concept of participation as found in select literature reviews. The particular reviews were selected as they represent recent systematic attempts to map the different ways in which the concept of participation has been employed within ESD and HE in schools. (It should be noted that the reviews are not employed as an exhaustive representation of research on participation, but rather as highlights of conceptual understandings and empirically grounded discussions of participation in ESD and HE in schools.)

Based on the reviews, we then explore the significance of the concept for the individual teacher from a Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective (Lacan 2004), including the emerging body of neo-Lacanian theories drawing on his work, primarily from Slavoj Žižek and Renata Salecl (Porsgaard 2013). As will be shown, this particular theoretical perspective represents a deviation from those typically employed within ESD and HE and which generally dominate discussions of participation within these fields. Moreover, the Lacanian perspective offers an alternative approach to participation, with the goal of understanding what the individual teacher has to gain from utilising an arguably contested concept such as participation. Strands of psychoanalysis are not the most obvious, convenient, or even ‘correct’ body of social theory to draw upon, but we do so in an attempt to be inspired by a perspective which, in recent years, has provided a surge of promising and interesting work, but which is usually excluded from ESD and HE (Cooley 2009; Bjerre 2011). Our particular focus in this regard is on how individuals create meaning through the social, rather than a clinical-psychoanalytical approach that seeks to understand the individual unconsciousness and provide a psychodynamic profile of any given teacher. Thus, by applying concepts linked to a distinct strand of psychoanalysis, we attempt to theorise how teachers, as individuals, make sense of the social aspects of participation within ESD and HE.

We continue the paper with a discussion of current perspectives on the concept of participation within ESD and HE, as well as the educational values and ideals related to these conceptualisations. We then outline the key features and arguments of selected recent literature focusing on the use and effectiveness of participation within ESD and HE in schools. Inspired by a Lacanian perspective, we specifically emphasise notions of interpassivity, false activity and pseudo activity as analytical categories. We conclude by arguing that participation as an educational ideal, as well as a pedagogical approach, also needs to be considered and understood from the perspective of the individual teacher’s meaning-making, particularly if it is to continue to play a vibrant role in the development of ESD and HE in schools.

The notion of participation as an ideal in ESD and HE

From a Lacanian perspective, an ideal can be understood as a social mechanism which individuals apply in order to install some kind of order and structure into a potentially chaotic situation. The notion of participation, when linked to educational practices, can then be seen as something that adds positive value to processes of learning, and might also offer a structure for educational activities.

In brief, the concept of participation within research and practice of ESD and HE in schools has its roots in the late 1970s when it emerged and quickly became a much discussed and applied principle. This was only strengthened by the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, and the entailing focus on the issue of children's participation in society and education, including environmental and health education (Rahnema 1992; Hart 1997; Reid et al. 2008; Læssøe 2010; Levy and Zint 2013). As a result, a broad palette of research, educational development initiatives, and publications exploring the concept of participation and its potential to affect the lives of children, as well as their families and wider communities (Simovska 2008).

The term 'participation' has been associated with a number of related words, such as 'taking part', 'involvement', 'consultation' and 'empowerment' (e.g. Simovska 2000, 2007). Taking the dictionary definition (e.g. Merriam-Webster 2014) as a starting point, it is possible to differentiate between two primary modes of meaning-making for the term:

- Participation in the sense of 'taking part in', i.e. 'being present'.
- Participation in the sense of 'having a part or share in something', which can be related to concepts such as 'empowerment' and 'ownership' and refers to one's sense of being taken seriously and being able to make an impact.

Within schools, the term is often directly linked to different understandings of interactivity as an important strategy to improve pupils' motivation for engagement in school and/or community actions in different areas (Simovska 2007, 2012). This is not to be confused with participation rates, i.e. enrolments and attendance, as promoted by the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, or the discourse of the Millennium Development Goals. Participation can also be understood more in terms of the 'voice of youth', grounded in discussions concerning the importance of *listening* to young people. However, both interactivity- and voice-type meanings have been critiqued as positioning participation as *symbolic*, such as when involving children in pre-designed activities without necessarily emphasising their influence on these activities. Others have stressed the fundamental importance of participation to notions of citizenship, suggesting *sharing power* in making decisions relating to children's lives (e.g. Hart 2008), but also learning and gaining important competences while participating (e.g. Reid et al. 2008).

As an educational ideal, the concept of participation has been primarily linked to three different understandings of the benefits of engaging with educational activities (Simovska and Jensen 2009):

- (1) Participation as a child's right to express their views, to be listened to and to be taken seriously. This argument hinges on the relationship between schools (and other formal and non-formal child settings) and communities creating

space for democratic learning processes which are inclusive in meaningful ways (Hart 1997, 2008).

- (2) Participation as beneficial to a child's social and psychological development and thus contributing to better educational outcomes. Among the important potential personal development outcomes of participation, children's empowerment and action competence have been discussed (Schnack 2000, 2008; Carlsson and Simovska 2012).
- (3) High hopes are also invested in participation as beneficial to society as a whole, as it potentially strengthens democratic processes and notions of sustainability and health (Simovska 2012). However, it has also been emphasised that while participatory activities do harbour the potential for furthering democratic development, there is an unavoidable tension between democratic processes and environmental/sustainable concerns (e.g. Van Poeck and Vandenabeele 2012).

As such, debates about ESD and HE are ripe with discussions of the importance and the potential of participation as an ideal. Equally, it could also be argued that the notion of participation has been under debate for so long, it risks being reduced to empty rhetoric or even counteracting the intentions behind the concept (Rahnema 1992; Van Poeck and Vandenabeele 2012). Nevertheless, this paper contends that consequential participation, which implies (the ideal of) school children influencing decision-making processes in matters that concern them, constitutes an important dimension of teaching and learning about sustainability and health in schools, and is still a relatively under-researched perspective (Reid et al. 2008; Simovska 2008).

Finally, from a psychoanalytical perspective, the value of participation can be linked with the assumption that the concept functions as a meaning-making tool for the individual subjects (e.g. teachers, pupils, researchers). Before elaborating on this point, in what follows we first look at the ways in which the four selected literature reviews engage with the notion of participation as an educational ideal, and how this ideal is translated into practice.

Researching participation in ESD and HE

In general, it can be argued that the researchers within both ESD and HE have focused either on indicators of participation or on the participatory process itself by analysing its purpose, level, scope, and children's capacity to participate (e.g. Chawla and Heft 2001; Cook, Blanchet-Cohen, and Hart 2004; Simovska 2007, 2012; Reid et al. 2008; Quick and Feldman 2011; de Róiste et al. 2012). We draw particular inspiration from four recent reviews of literature on the participation of children and young people, with a rare emphasis on ESD and/or HE. The reviews have been selected as these are the most recent reviews within the fields, and draw on a wide scope of research literature, with a strong emphasis on understanding and researching the value of participation. Our assumption is that these publications offer a vital window into contemporary perspectives on participation in ESD and HE. Moreover, systematic, high quality reviews in this field are scarce, especially those which value a broad concept of evidence and also include both qualitative studies and theoretically oriented papers.

The four reviews all deal with children's involvement in making decisions in school concerning matters that affect them, and their competences to do so. One of

the reviews deals explicitly with notions of participation linked to environmental education and ESD (Levy and Zint 2013), two deal with participation within HE (Griebler et al. 2012; Marent, Forster, and Nowak 2012), while the fourth focuses on children's competences to engage in participatory activities that relate to both ESD and HE (Ljungdahl 2012).

The review conducted by Levy and Zint (2013) focuses on the role of environmental political participation, and offers a fairly critical perspective on the potential of such processes. The authors argue that much of the literature related to environmental education and ESD has very little to offer in terms of furthering pupils' engagement and participation in political activities linked to environmental and sustainability issues. Their review discloses that actual participation in activities of a more political character, inside and outside school, has not been the focus of educational research concerning participation and ESD. Levy and Zint argue that great strides could be made by looking at neighbouring fields of research that draw upon sociology and political science in studying social and political participation. They also claim that the concept of participation could otherwise end up having very little actual impact on the competences of the pupils and even less on society at large.

A more positive perspective is offered by Griebler et al. (2012) and Marent, Forster and Nowak (2012). Both reviews interpret pupil participation as exercising some degree of influence. The two reviews draw similar conclusions: that involving pupils in decision-making processes has a positive impact on their personal and social development, and potentially also on their health and wellbeing. Positive effects are also identified in both reviews with regard to relationships between pupils and adults in the school, and on the school as an organisation, particularly in terms of its psychosocial environment and general atmosphere. Alongside these promising positive effects, negative effects are also identified; for example, pupils feeling disillusioned, not being taken seriously, or not having as real an influence as expected. Marent, Forster and Nowak (2012) conclude on the basis of the various perspectives on participation they identify, that the common denominator is the attempt to provide an in-depth understanding of the complexity of participation, significantly more profound than that offered by an approach centred solely on the use of models and methods. This understanding focuses on participation within the social contexts in which it takes place, and in relation to different connected dimensions such as identity, knowledge, and power, as well as internal differentiation of organisations and movements, including schools, ESD and HE. The application of social theory can, as claimed in different papers included in the review, be beneficial: making explicit or overcoming the normative and ideological framing of participation, deconstructing the reproduction of power relations within knowledge and practice of participatory processes, and generating spaces for joint actions and mutual accountability.

The fourth review (Ljungdahl 2012) focuses on the contested relationships between children's participation and competence development in a range of practice fields, including, but not limited to, ESD, HE, and schools. The question asked in the review is how concepts of children's and young people's participation, competences and competence development are conceptualised, operationalised, and methodologically implemented and assessed in research papers documenting different institutional and non-institutional practices. The review identifies interesting tendencies in the conceptualisation of participation and its relation to competence development. One tendency is to approach participation through children's lack of ability to participate in social practices; that is, participation is viewed from a

perspective of deficit correction. Another tendency is reflected in research that regards participation as a method for developing skills. In this literature, participation is conceptualised as taking part, without implying influence or engagement; a one-way causal relationship is assumed between participation and competence development. The third tendency reported, and which comes closest to the understanding of participation in the previous three reviews, and that endorsed in this article, is a perspective including a reciprocal relationship between participation and competence development. This perspective takes a more nuanced approach to the notions of both competence and participation, including contextual, relational and socio-historical dimensions and their dialectic relationships.

Together, the four reviews emphasise that, despite its contested nature, the concept of participation occupies a strong position when discussing issues such as school-based ESD and HE. The reviews also indicate that the concept remains as slippery as ever. Evidently, considerable efforts have been made to qualify different approaches to participation in school practices related to sustainability and health. Alas, the tension between the lure of pseudo-participation and the hardships of consequential participation persists (Hart 1997, 2008; Simovska 2007, 2008). As pointed out by Levy and Zint (2013), it remains very difficult to pinpoint the actual impact of utilising participatory educational practices. Does participation lead to greater involvement in society and in efforts to improve the pupils' own and others' lives in the direction of the educational ideals invested in ESD and HE? Or does the concept of participation get caught up in a focus on methodological strategies that can be used to strengthen narrowly defined teaching practices, while losing sight of the wider purpose of education?

We argue that this tension characterises the role of participation as both an educational ideal and an educational method. In the following, a distinct Lacanian perspective is applied in order to try to understand why practitioners (and researchers) invest so much energy in the concept of participation, even though the ideal of genuine participation seems very hard to achieve and the real impact of using participatory methods in ESD and HE in schools is difficult, if not impossible, to measure. In other words, how can a Lacanian perspective help in unpacking the ways in which the notion of participation adds to the meaning-making processes of those engaging with participatory work within ESD and HE?

The importance of perceptions: a Lacanian take on the perceived

It can be argued that a theme common to the various approaches to participation dwells in the notion that participation is conducive to learning by linking the individual with the importance of acting through the social (Rahnema 1992; Simovska 2008; Læssøe 2010). We, however, adhere to the view that the line between the individual and the social is blurred and that the individual subject's learning is shaped through the social. It is within this social embeddedness that we propose a Lacanian perspective (Lacan 2004), emphasising the importance of the individual subject's (i.e. teacher's) perception of participation as an educational ideal. Discussing how teachers perceive their actions related to engaging pupils in ESD and HE within a framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis stresses the significance of how they create meaning where none might be, and strive to establish a perceived level of rationality as a basis for actions.

The choice of a Lacanian perspective points to the establishment of a link between the subject and language. Our argument is founded on Lacan's argument that: 'the unconscious is structured like a language' (Lacan 2004, 48). In Lacan and Freud's perspective this entails that the unconscious shows through speech. This counters the notion of the unconscious as the domain of irrational drives; something that opposes, and needs to be reeled in by, a rational self. This makes the unconsciousness a site where traumatic truth speaks out. The point is thus not to show an individual the way to accommodate demands of social reality; instead the approach tries to understand how something like 'reality' constitutes itself in the first place. The goal of using Lacanian theory to discuss the concept of participation in ESD and HE is therefore not to disclose some kind of underlying logic that regulates the pedagogical practices of the teachers, but to understand how the notion of participation can be understood as a way of creating meaning, and what the significance of such a meaning-making process might be in teaching.

Building on Lacan, we also contend that our most basic human desire is to be recognised by others. As Kojève argues:

Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other ... that is to say, if he wants to be 'desired' or 'loved', or, rather, 'recognized' in his human value ... in other words, all human, anthropogenetic Desire ... is, finally, a function of the desire for 'recognition'. (Kojève 1969, 6–7)

Put another way, one desires the desire of others, or, paraphrasing Elvis Costello, we all just want to be loved, but, tragically, we do not have access to this other. We can only be ourselves and therefore constantly try to guess what is expected of us and what we could do in order to attain the desire, or recognition, of the other.

Such a Lacanian perspective can have far-reaching implications, but, in our view, the most important aspect is that desire is a social phenomenon. Social processes shape and affect the subject and the desire of the subject. The social is the centre that everything revolves around. Focusing on language and desire is thus focusing on these concepts as something that is created in the social and forms the platform from which the subject is able to partake in the world. This requires a theory that analyses and reflects the processes of subjectification (Laustsen 1999; Biesta 2006), and which emphasises the importance of the social and how the unconscious is structured via the social. It also entails that it remains impossible to gain full knowledge of what goes on in the unconscious and even in the conscious. There is always something which cannot be articulated, which escapes the construction of meaning and returns to the idea of the irreducibility of the unconscious, i.e. the idea that the unconscious is not that which is not known, but that which cannot be known. There is, in other words, always 'a lack' which cannot be fulfilled. This lack is what forces the subject into new, ultimately unsuccessful efforts to identify itself through new paths of consumption, action or opinion. The notion of an ever-present unconscious lack can be understood as a strong motivator for the individual to engage in new activities, and a backdrop for making sense of activities. The perception of one's own opinions, work and desires is thus not a complete mapping of one's innermost beliefs, but a mirroring of what we perceive as the desires of others and what we think they desire of us. In short, our perceptions are driven by an aim to be recognised, seen and, ultimately, loved.

Following this line of thought in discussing the concept of participation in ESD and HE in schools, it can be argued that the teacher is trying to navigate the social

based on perceptions of the other's desire, to which the individual subject has no access. The teacher's perceptions are created through and grounded in the social. The emphasis is on how the individual teachers relate to the social and how they construct meaning in the midst of the incoherent, messy field that the social (i.e. ESD and HE in schools) represents. 'Truths' are only perceptions of what the subject believes the other sees as a truth. Messy indeed!

However, this does not mean that anything goes, which leads us to the next claim by Lacan and the next step in our argument.

The lack of an objective underlying truth led Lacan to state that 'les non-dupes errent' (Lacan 1974), which translates as 'those not fooled are mistaken'. Those who are not fooled are indeed the greatest fools. If one takes a step back in order to view 'reality' then one is in very much still stuck in the social with little hope of achieving knowledge transcending the social. Precisely because of the irreducibility of the unconscious and the persistent lack, it is necessary to accept that there is no way of presenting the 'bare facts', but that we will always remain in some sense or other, 'fooled' by social structures, others and ourselves, always carrying a set of pre-existing values and ideas, and having no chance of escaping the social, cultural and historical planes of meaning-making.

Thus the teachers' use of the notion of participation can be understood as part of the effort to structure their social reality in order to install a level of meaning into highly differentiated and elusive educational practices, expected outcomes and ideals about, for example, good health and sustainable development. Through utilising a concept such as pupil participation, the teacher seeks recognition for doing the right thing.

The following discussion, inspired by the research reviews and other literature outlined above, focuses on the possible understanding of the perceptions on participation as indicators of ideals and practices that attempt to cover up an existential lack: a lack that teachers, as individuals, carry in order to create meaning in a tumultuous world of education that aims to address complex societal challenges.

The importance of participation as an ideal

The reviews voice a range of important perspectives on the significance of participation and the reasons for employing the concept within ESD and HE. Two of the reviews emphasise that participation, as dealt with in the research literature, does not only offer distinct advantages when it comes to the effectiveness of educational processes (e.g. Griebler et al. 2012), but reaffirms itself as an educational ideal (e.g. Marent, Forster, and Nowak 2012). In this instance, inspired by critical educational theory, the notion of participation is argued to transcend its positioning primarily as a teaching method and can be viewed as a pervading value in society when promoting notions of a healthy, just and sustainable society (Baillie, Bassett-Smith, and Broughton 2000; Simovska and Jensen 2009). However, while the understanding of participation as an educational ideal is expressed in different ways in the reviews and in the related research literature outlined above, they all include a societal perspective on the *Good* that is inherent to ESD and HE. Returning to the critical potential of applying a Lacanian perspective, one finds that, through Lacan, Žižek can be seen as a stalwart critic of the idealism that the concept of participation seems to be associated with.

Žižek focuses his critique on two different understandings of idealism. Firstly, he criticises the focus on thought and reflexivity as *ideas*, following his interpretation of Marx's critique of the German philosophical idealism of the eighteenth century, as prioritising contemplation ahead of the material struggle against oppression. Secondly, Žižek criticises an idealism harbouring a potential for an *idealising* movement, as an expression of something complete, perfect and good. Both these critiques are centred on the risk that ideals function as pacifiers that instead of seeding emancipatory action, lead to maintenance of the status quo or worse (Žižek 2008, 104).

While the notions of ESD and HE that we draw upon here largely escape Žižek's first level of critique, through their insistence on outreach activities and attention to social injustice and action for change, the second level of critique would appear to hit home in several ways. Two of the selected reviews (Levy and Zint 2013; Marent, Forster, and Nowak 2012) describe how applying the notion of participation to schools can be understood as expressing a desire to move society towards a more idealised position. Similarly, with both ESD and HE, certain perspectives that link participation to pupils' action competence or ability for critical reflection and to initiate change to improve the conditions for sustainability or health (Jensen 1997; Schnack 2008; Carlsson and Simovska 2012) can be seen as representing a move towards the ideals of sustainable development and health equity, respectively. Within ESD in particular, the core concept of sustainability can be seen as describing an ideal (or utopian?) position where the needs of the human race are met, on a local and global scale, without unduly compromising nature and the environment.

In this respect, participation has rightly been criticised for serving many interests in school settings. Drawing inspiration from Hart (1997, 2008), Simovska's work on the continuum between token and genuine participation illustrates how participation can function as icing on an otherwise unappetising cake when trying to push specific agendas; for example behaviour modification and the promotion of 'healthy' lifestyles with little regard for the actual position and power of the pupils involved in such a process (Simovska 2000, 2007), and even less regard for the conditions or social determinants of such a lifestyle. Such work shows that the ideal of genuine participation co-exists with more superficial forms of participation. The notion of participation addresses many different interests and the research referenced in the reviews make a key point of their employment of participatory strategies, regardless of the interests they represent, be they moralistic, or democratic, for example (Levy and Zint 2013; Ljungdahl 2012; Marent, Forster, and Nowak 2012).

To move beyond Žižek's critique, it could be argued that from a Lacanian perspective, the focus on ideals in ESD and HE makes it possible to understand participation as having a core that is often imbued with values. This is not to link participation with hidden agendas, but to argue that the concept of participation within ESD and HE in schools offers the individual teacher more than pedagogical tools. The concept can be co-opted, to exhibit ideological excess; that is there is the distinct possibility of using participation to install an ideal in schools and thus allow the individual teacher to experience, or create, a sense of meaning where none might otherwise be found, intended or reasonably expected.

Participation and interactivity

Considering how the notion of participation offers both educational methodology and a surplus or excess in the form of construction of meaning for the individual

teacher, questions of the close link between participation and interactivity comes to the fore. This makes it possible to consider a Lacanian perspective on unconscious functions when it comes to the idealised notion of learning as participation. Lacan suggests what is often a counter-intuitive reading of such a reliance on the notion of interactivity. The Lacanian ‘Other’ is established through a group, or taking part in activities; this Other, in the form of a group, whether real, virtual or make-believe, can perform several important roles for the individual subject. It can be a vehicle for reaching common goals through interactivity, as discussed in some research within HE (Simovska 2007, 2008), but it can also act instead of the subject. In other words, it is possible for the subject to utilise the Other in such a way that the Other experiences the innermost, spontaneous feelings and attitudes of the subject, instead of the subject (Lacan 2004). To illustrate, Žižek uses the example of hired ‘weepers’ (women hired to cry at funerals, see La Pastina, Rego, and Straubhaar 2003) to illustrate this point: ‘they can perform the spectacle of mourning for the relatives of the deceased, who can devote their time to more profitable endeavours (like dividing the inheritance)’ (Žižek 2006, 23). The feelings attached to the activity are still upheld, but the subject is relieved of actually having to live it out. An example of this within ESD and HE would be when teachers, under the guise of participation, make all the important decisions for pupils, while engaging them in playful and ‘interactive’ activities to provide the ‘relevant’ knowledge and regulate their behaviour accordingly (Simovska 2007). Another example would be when schools compete and the ‘best’ ones are rewarded for collecting batteries in the name of recycling and sustainability. Here, the idea is that, through their participation, pupils will learn about important sustainability issues; however, the pupils might be motivated more by the possibility of a reward, for example rewards and resources that flow from when the project is successfully completed, e.g. a school trip, that reinscribes unsustainable practices (Schnack 2008). In both cases, the illusion of participation is upheld while the actual activities might be far from what is envisioned and desired by the teachers. This suggests that the notion of interactivity, and in turn also participation, could be supplemented with its uncanny double interpassivity (Pfaller 2003).

Interpassivity signifies the obverse of interacting with the object (instead of just passively following proceedings), as in the situation in which the object of the activity (e.g. the pupil) takes from the subject (e.g. the teacher) their own passivity, so that it is the object that ‘enjoys’ the activity instead of the subject, relieving the subject of the duty to ‘enjoy’ too (Žižek 2006). Of course, participatory and interactive activities should be enjoyable and enjoyed by pupils, the argument goes; but, as the teacher has no guarantee that this actually happens, the perception that the pupil’s enjoyment displaces that of the teacher could lead to a situation where no one truly participates in or enjoys the activities, educatively or otherwise.

That is not to say that participatory activities in ESD and HE in schools remove the power of schoolchildren (or teachers) to participate in activities that bring them enjoyment and learning. We want, instead, to draw attention to the double-sided, interactive/interpassive nature of the concepts of participation and interaction that, in effect, open the possibility that both children and teachers assume a position of interpassivity, and relieves both of the duty to be truly interactive. An example of this can be identified in the review by Levy and Zint (2013): they emphasise that research within ESD in schools suggests putting a stronger focus on those participatory methodologies that can be used to involve pupils in issues related to sustainable

development. At the same time, there is very little focus on documenting the extent to which children manage to turn these 'learning experiences' into actual engagement with society. Knowledge is presented and children participate in the educational activities, but evidence that this is translated into strategies for altering the conditions of the children's lives is harder to find. The urge to promote notions of sustainability and health in schools is no doubt great, but clinging to the hope that pupils might, sooner or later, take action themselves and bring about change, might lead to disappointment. In effect, through interpassivity, the teacher can remain passive, sitting in the background, while the Other does the work. Instead of pushing for participatory activities that will make it possible for the children to participate in society, the hope is that the children will take action themselves, and instead of being part of a radical shift in power, the 'conflict' or the 'revolution' will address any issues at a later stage. However, as Levy and Zint (2013) rue, a focus on environmental and sustainability issues in schools does not necessarily lead to political participation later on in life.

From a Lacanian perspective, this position can be achieved by the subject (the individual teacher) through interposing another object, the ideal of participation, between him- or herself and the hope for change within ESD and HE. The possibility exists of course that the participatory activities connected to ESD and HE succeeds to some degree; in such circumstances the teacher has arguably remained active through others. Where this is possible, the work of the teacher bears fruit, but chances are that nothing much would happen and the activities that the individual teacher considers possible by engaging the pupils through participation never materialise. Even when such activities do emerge, they have little consequence and lack substantial impact on either sustainability or health. This constitutes a situation where the subject (the individual teacher) is passive through the other; such that the subject concedes the passive aspect (working on new teaching strategies, promoting curriculum, etc.) to the Other.

This leads us to other takes on the notion of interpassivity. The concept of *false activity* or *pseudo activity* stresses that not only is it possible to act in order to change something, it is also possible to act in order to prevent change. In clinical psychoanalysis, this is the typical strategy of the obsessive neurotic. In psychoanalytic treatment, obsessive neurotics talk constantly, flooding the analyst with anecdotes, dreams, insights: their incessant activity is sustained by the underlying fear that, if they stop talking for a moment, the analyst will ask them the question that truly matters – in other words, they talk in order to keep the analyst passive (Evans 2010). Such a conscious strategy to avoid genuine participation by actively pushing pseudo-participation could arguably also pose a threat to participation in ESD and HE, as evident in the reviews outlined above. Levy and Zint discuss how political efficacy is very hard to foster among children, especially when the challenges that they face are hard to grasp and of vast societal importance (Levy and Zint 2013). Yet pushing children to actively engage in society and take a political stance is not simply laudable; it is also extremely complex and potentially frustrating for the individual teacher. This introduces the risk that partaking becomes a more easily achievable goal than actually engaging. The lure of false activity then also becomes a companion to a wide range of efforts to encourage children to participate.

Activities for the sake of the activity itself, with little impact beyond a short episode of general entertainment and attention for the organisation or individual that hosted the activity, is as such a recurring criticism in all the reviews, particularly

Levy and Zint (2013) and Ljungdahl (2012). The review by Griebler et al. (2012) avoids discussing this issue by applying specific criteria for selecting the literature to be included, with one of the important criteria being that participation is interpreted as engagement and influence by pupils. However, even in this case, where the focus is on the desire for an ideal involvement of pupils, the review identifies ‘negative’ effects when pupils report that they were not listened to or taken seriously.

As such, participation can be seen to have many guises, and not all aspects of ideal notions of learning as participation are covered within a Lacanian understanding of ‘interactivity’, ‘interpassivity’, ‘false activity’ or ‘pseudo activity’. However, these concepts do enable an understanding of the unconscious function of these cross-cutting aspects of engaging the pupils via participatory activities. Such activities do not only act as direct realisations of learning potential as perceived by the individual teacher, but also as a way of relating to broader ideals of democracy, sustainability, health and social justice that underpin ESD and HE.

As discussed in all the reviews, participation is understood and applied in a host of different settings, often with the hope of further developing a promising practice. An understanding of how these ideals might lead to activities that, in isolation, have little other impact than preserving the status quo, and why this might be considered desirable, can be drawn from a Lacanian perspective. This does not necessarily entail unsuccessful practices, but it suggests a distinct perspective on parts of the psychoanalytic function of promoting concepts of participation in ESD and HE: taking interpassivity for interactivity can be a way of shielding oneself from dealing with the overall struggle for genuine participation while settling for the less demanding symbolic participation. By applying such a perspective to participatory pedagogies, one does, however, run the risk of only seeing failed attempts, where all efforts to bring out the potential of concepts like participation only manage to gloss over the always possible dark side.

This then, is our critique of a Lacanian perspective; if employed consistently in analysing participatory practices within ESD and HE, there is little to suggest the possibility of positive practices. Equally, we recognise a degree of caution is in order, as there is no reason to suggest that all participatory activities are necessarily embedded in notions of interpassivity, false or pseudo activities. More stridently, it can also be argued that the very notions of interpassivity, false or pseudo activities necessarily fail to explain the full nature of participation, as they remain temporary but nonetheless flawed attempts from psychoanalysis to describe the extremely complex processes of ESD and HE as participatory teaching and learning within the wider, including conscious and deliberate realities of messy and dynamic educational practices in schools.

The dual potential of participation

That said, the mechanisms embedded within the notion of interpassivity do cast light on how teachers ensure they can continue to promote participatory teaching. Even if genuine participation constituted the normal and easily attainable state of affairs in schools, the danger would persist, from a Lacanian perspective, that the individual teacher would have to face up to the miniscule impact of pupils’ actions and the continued slide towards unsustainability or ill health, both locally and globally. Believing in the potential of participation, and perhaps seeing interactivity where interpassivity might really be at play, can be seen as a way of establishing a strong

base for a persistent belief in the potential of promoting an educational ideal. As emphasised by several of the reviews, participation – and especially ‘genuine participation’ – is hard to identify in practice, operationalise and measure (Ljungdahl 2012; Marent, Forster, and Nowak 2012). Insisting that some participatory activities and strategies hold special potential for learning, change or emancipation thus helps to translate the actual ideal of participation into actionable approaches. On the one hand, this offers the possibility of working with abstract aims in more concrete and measurable terms and linking them to a familiar context of learning and competence development (Ljungdahl 2012). On the other hand, it also establishes a situation where the exact opposite can happen. The ideals can remain intact with little outcome outside of the context of a given activity, e.g. in project work, frequently of limited duration, focusing on ESD or HE.

This tension, between the effort to shield and protect cherished ideals and the urge to avoid accepting one’s failure to live up to them, creates a situation where such ideals are both linked to a context and disconnected from it in case of failure (e.g. Griebler et al. 2012). Meaning-making processes are thus not harmed by negative results of engaging in participatory activities. Arguably, frustrations and lack of success can in this light be understood in a positive manner, as they facilitate a situation where it is possible for the individual teacher to continue participatory efforts instead of withdrawing and questioning whether a chosen (and desired) approach makes any sense.

The reviews, as well as the other literature discussed so far, also indicate that despite the problems and barriers, engagement in ESD and HE participatory practices remain powerful educational tools. By applying a Lacanian perspective however, we emphasise that this educational tool runs the risk of outcomes diametrically opposed to those intended. No matter whether such a dark side of participation is dubbed interpassivity, false activity or pseudo activity, it is important to be aware that it functions as an inescapable shadow, always clinging to attempts at participatory teaching, and at times even obscuring the positive aspects.

Nevertheless, this should not lead to the simple conclusion that we must identify and eradicate interpassivity, false activity or pseudo activity from participatory educational practices within ESD and HE. While that might be a good practical exercise for teachers, we argue that it is important to focus on the significance of this troubling downside to complex concepts like participation. We concur with the Lacanian perspective that the significance lays in the fact that interpassivity or false activity also has a positive dynamic effect for the individual teacher. The acknowledgement that participation is not always consequential or that interactivity is often hard to achieve in teaching and learning processes establishes a situation for the individual teacher where ideals of engaging the pupils through genuine participation can continue to exist side by side with signs of symbolic participation. With actual, ‘Real’, imperfect educational environments and outcomes being the norm, the utopian potential for a perfect school is maintained. Arguably, without the practice of interpassivity and token participation, the ideal of interactivity and genuine participation could not be maintained.

Epilogue

Criticism and praise of the concept of participation are abundant, yet we hope this discussion has introduced new perspectives to revitalise the debate: Participation is a

worthwhile and powerful concept, both as an ideal and as an educational strategy. But we should also try and understand its dark side too, and the role this dark side can play for both teachers and pupils as individual subjects, as well as for the schools as settings, and for broader educational thinking. Participation cannot solve all educational woes, but rests, among other things, on the individual desire to create meaning among the uncertainties that surround education for sustainable development and health education. The individual teachers that take on challenges like ESD and HE and utilise participatory approaches are arguably working hard to create meaning in complex environments such as schools. Curricula, professional identities, institutional requirements and policy frameworks all exercise influence on the teachers' space for choosing pedagogical strategies and on the possibility of understanding these strategies as expressions of a normative ideal.

In other words, the concept of participation harbours significant potential, but as an ideal it rests on notions of the 'good' and 'worthwhile' that are often out of reach, and as an educational tool it clearly clashes with many of the other things actually and necessarily taking place within schools: structures, resources, hierarchies, priorities, assessments, the teacher/pupil relationship, the urge to learn *something* and not just *anything*. All educational ideals face this clash with reality; it does not make participation less important, but we need to be aware of the (in)significance of participation, real or less real, symbolic or genuine, for the individual subjects' meaning-making processes.

When working with research on participation in ESD and HE, a theoretical emphasis on the excess embedded within such an imperfect concept could be seen as a strategy to circumvent the seemingly never-ending race to come up with the 'perfect' concept, and in effect, get rid of the lack or deficit in a given educational field. Again, this should be done in the knowledge that there is no way to transcend the ideal of participation when trying to improve the methodologies surrounding it. There is no 'perfect' version of the concept to be had and, in the spirit of Samuel Beckett, we can only hope to try to push the envelope of participation in ESD and HE, while at the same time recognising that this can only lead us along the path to failure once again, but hopefully failing better.

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