

Institutionen för didaktik och pedagogisk profession

# Kritiskt tänkande i grundskolans samhällskunskap

En fenomenografisk studie om manifesterat kritiskt  
tänkande i samhällskunskap hos elever i årskurs 9

av

Kristoffer Larsson

AKADEMISK AVHANDLING

som med tillstånd av utbildningsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid  
Göteborgs universitet för vinnande av doktorsexamen i Ämnesdidaktik  
framläggs till offentlig granskning

Torsdagen den 12 december, klockan 13.00,  
Kjell Härnqvistsalen, Pedagogen Hus A

---

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Ola Halldén, Stockholms universitet



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET  
ACTA UNIVERSITATIS GOTHOBURGENSIS

# Abstract

Title: Critical thinking in compulsory school civics. A phenomenographic study of 9th grade students' critical thinking in civics.  
Author: Kristoffer Larsson  
Language: Swedish, summary in English.  
Keywords: critical thinking, higher-order thinking, problem solving, phenomenography, variation theory, civics, social studies, students, compulsory school  
ISBN 978-91-7346-771-1 (print)  
ISBN 978-91-7346-772-8 (pdf)  
ISSN 0436-1121

Cultivating students' critical thinking skills is recognized as a highly important educational goal in many societies in the western world, not least in Sweden. Despite this the research community has so far produced little substantial knowledge on critical thinking and calls for new research approaches have been made.

In this study the phenomenographic perspective is offered as such a new approach, addressing, as it does, critical thinking in civics among Swedish 9th grade compulsory school students. According to phenomenography, students' critical thinking is delimited by the way of experiencing a phenomenon that induces critical thinking. Thus differences in students' critical thinking are linked to differences in the way of experiencing the phenomena inducing a manifestation of critical thinking.

The empirical investigation in the study revolves around how 19 9th grade students experience four different tasks designed to induce critical thinking about philosophical and political views of justice. In broader terms the main aim of the study is to describe the students' different ways of experiencing each particular task and furthermore, to link each specific way of experiencing a particular task to a specific type of critical thinking in relation to that task. Another aim is to make suggestions on how the kind of empirical results emanating from the main aim can be used in education practice to enhance 9th grade students' critical thinking in civics.

The study's empirical results show how the way of experiencing a particular task plays a decisive role for the type of critical thinking made possible in relation to the task. A more powerful way of experiencing the task is delimited by a more powerful type of critical thinking in relation to the task. A less powerful way of experiencing the task is delimited by a less powerful type of critical thinking in relation to the task. With these results as a backbone, the study takes on an extensive discussion of how the results can be applied in education practice in order to enhance 9th grade students' critical thinking in civics. The discussion deals with different suggestions for how the teacher can make the students' ways of experiencing more powerful, in relation to tasks and content in civics that "call for" critical thinking, by using the phenomenographic theory of variation.