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**”Like the cement in a brick wall” - Health promotion in schools according to students, school staff and politicians**

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## **Introduction**

Health promoting schools (HPS) play according to the World Health Organization an important role as a means of influencing the health and education of future generations. Efforts to promote health has been initiated in schools across Europe for the past two decades. However, evaluations show that alongside positive outcomes from HPS several challenges exist which call for continued development of HPS and further research. There are a number of reasons for participatory approaches for example practicing the democratic spirit underpinning the core of health promotion. Giving the whole school community an opportunity to partake in participatory processes has been shown to enable empowerment and may contribute to sustainable change. Therefore, the aim was to give voice to students, school staff and politicians about their experiences of health and learning in school.

## **Methods, context and participants**

Data was collected in one municipality in northern Sweden part of a HPS research and development project funded by the Swedish National Agency for Education. A total of 75 open letters were written by students, school staff and politicians continuing the following open ended sentence, “Now I’ll tell you about my experiences of school when it was a place for health and learning ....” Data was processed using a phenomenological analysis.

## **Results and conclusions**

The results illuminate physical, mental, social and existential dimensions of school as a place for health and learning. The participants experiences highlight interpersonal relationships, appreciative attitudes, time for reflection, trust, respect and co-agency practiced alongside the educational aspects in school. The participants experiences can be understood as the foundation of health and learning in school using a brick wall as a metaphor. One can view each brick as a representation of a school subject and the cement holding together the brick wall representing health promotion. To inform the continued development of HPS these findings can be compared to the health and learning connection found in the Swedish National School Curriculum of 2011 and the *Guide for Student Health* published 2016 by the Swedish National Agency for Education and the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare.