

EDC/HRE FOR PRINCIPALS



Awareness

Understanding
my role

Preparation

Everybody
on board

Action

Democratic
decisions

LEADERSHIP



School leadership

Developments in school education reflect the challenges in society today, such as inclusion, integration of migrants, educating for democracy and human rights, coping with global competition, and implementing educational reform projects.

The traditional paternalistic role model of a school director has become outdated. As a lone fighter and decision-maker, a school leader cannot keep up with such challenges and changes. The complexity and dynamics of social, economic and political developments demand collaboration and participation of all stakeholders and community members, both at the school and state level.

Therefore, your success as school principal depends on your school community – the willingness of your staff, students and parents to co-operate and accept responsibility. As principal, you operate within a network involving the local community, media, donors, school authorities and other schools, and your engagement, whether inside or outside of school, requires skilful communication and co-operation. No one questions your position and responsibility as a school leader. On the contrary, your role is more important than ever. Now you are also tasked to delegate responsibility, to co-ordinate school development projects, to explore limits and opportunities within the legal framework, and to act as a role model for your teachers and students.

Democratic school leadership as a whole school approach supports you in your extended role and responsibility. Democratic School Leadership affords all stakeholders the opportunity to share their expertise and to assume responsibility. Thus, burden-sharing supports you, the school leader. Extended responsibility, however, involves more participation, and vice versa. To a considerable extent, democratic school leadership is joint school governance and decision-making.

Democratic school leadership goes far beyond the rights and responsibilities defined in the formal framework of school laws. Its informal “soft” elements encourage a way of thinking, living and working together – a *democratic school culture*. A school is the first institution that students enter in their lifetime, and a democratic culture within this institution will educate them in democratic citizenship and human rights. A democratic school culture is the most valuable contribution a school can make to the sustainability of democracy and human rights in society and at state level. Therefore, democratic school leadership offers your students a unique learning opportunity – to practice elements of democratic citizenship at an early age, an experiential learning experience befitting their stage of development and level of understanding.

This sequence explores democratic school leadership, embedded in a democratic school culture and conceived as a whole-school approach, in four topics. Topic 1, *A democratic style of school leadership*, focuses on your role as a democratic school leader and team player. Topic 2 introduces the Council of Europe’s model of *Competences for democratic culture*. These competences include attitudes, values, skills, knowledge and understanding that contribute to such a culture of democracy. This raises the question how these competences can be acquired through practical experience. Topic 3 considers *Democratic school leadership as a whole-school approach* and shows how this works in practice. Topic 4, *Discipline through responsibility* focuses on the sensitive issue of student discipline in school. It is argued that encouraging students to take responsibility for their school is more promising than attempting to enforce discipline through force and fear.

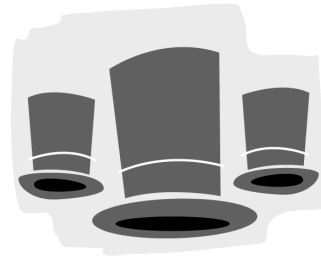
Democratic school leadership - Topic 1: A democratic style of school leadership

Key question: *How can a school principal sustain a democratic school culture?*

Awareness handout 1.1:

Reflect on your role as a school principal: developing a (more) democratic culture in school

Democratic school leadership is a challenge, and a school needs time to achieve that goal. You need to proceed with small steps, rather than a big one. This tool supports you in assessing your role as a school principal. Identify which objectives apply to you. The short-term objectives describe smaller steps that you can take immediately.



Short-term objectives	Medium-term objectives	Long-term objectives
The school principal refrains from extremely authoritarian expressions.	The school principal interacts with the school community in an open and friendly manner (principle of reversibility).	Mutual understanding between the school principal, the staff and other stakeholders.
The school principal provides reasons for his/her focus on specific issues.	The school principal presents issues and problems that need to be addressed to the staff.	The staff, students' and parents' representatives are involved in setting the agenda for decision-making.
The school principal explains his or her legal responsibilities and limitations.	The school principal listens to and considers the teachers' suggestions on how to organize the school.	The school principal, teachers and students plan and implement projects for school development.
The school principal explains to the teachers the objectives he or she has in mind.	The school principal discusses alternative options in decision-making with the teachers.	The staff, students' and parents' representatives are involved in decision-making.
The school principal explains his or her concerns when assessing teachers' performance and behavior.	The school principal delegates selected tasks to individual teachers.	The staff, students, and parents take responsibility for the development and performance of the school.
The school principal explains his or her methods of conflict resolution.	The school principal avoids making authoritative use of power to resolve conflicts.	Conflict resolution through cooperation and communication.

This tool is based on *How to develop a democratic atmosphere in the classroom*
<https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-2/unit-1/chapter-2/lesson-7/>

Democratic school leadership - Topic 1: A democratic style of school leadership

Key question: *How can a school principal sustain a democratic school culture?*

Awareness handout 1.2:

Styles of school leadership

Is democracy the best way to respond to the challenges facing our society? Or are there better alternatives? The controversy about this issue has been with us from ancient times to the present. What applies to society, also applies to schools. If we advocate democratic school leadership, it is necessary to consider the alternatives. Let us look at four main types of leadership.

Autocratic leaders tend to make all decisions by themselves. They will argue that this is the most effective style to complete a lot of tasks in a short period of time. That is indeed the strength of autocratic leadership, but its weakness is that the decisions may be opposed or questioned, which in turn increases the likeliness of conflict and the refusal to cooperate. Autocratic leaders underestimate to what extent they depend on others. School rules that are imposed without discussion are disobeyed more frequently, which is counterproductive in dealing with misconduct and bullying. Autocratic leadership often follows the status quo and given conventions, offering little in terms of innovation and development. Academic results are poor in autocratically led schools, as the students' specific needs for support and encouragement receive little attention.

Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by the lack of clearly defined procedures for decision-making and little involvement by the leader in decision-making processes. Time for discussions is not clearly limited, so the efficiency of decision-making and school management is poor. On the other hand, the strength of this type of leadership is a low level of aggression and conflicts in the school community.

Paternalistic leaders act as parental figures by taking care of their subordinates as a parent would, without giving them any responsibility or freedom of choice. In this type of leadership, the leader shows concern and cares for his staff. In return, he expects trust, loyalty, and obedience. Teachers are expected to be totally committed to what the leader believes in and to refrain from making their own choices or working independently. The teachers are expected to remain employed in the same school for a longer time to strengthen loyalty and trust. Paternalistic leadership tends to divide the staff, as the school leader will reward his favorite teachers for their loyalty with special treatment and opportunities like projects, trips, training, etc.

A democratic style of leadership offers the potential to overcome the weaknesses that the other types of leadership tend to develop. A democratic school leader ensures that all members of the school community are involved the decision-making process – but participation will vary, depending on the context. Students will not participate in every decision and the leader may not always have the last word. In some cases, he may confine himself to facilitating an agreement among the staff or the whole school community, or accept a decision he does not support himself.

Leadership and responsibility are shared, and frequently there are leaders of subgroups. The more members of the school community participate in the process – the school leader, the staff, students, housekeepers, office staff, perhaps also parents and external stakeholders, the clearer the picture of different interests, views and values will be. The strength of democratic school leadership lies in its potential to produce decisions and solutions that are widely accepted and supported, provided all interests and queries have been taken into account. The learning effort required for the different groups in the school community to develop their full participation potential may be quite daunting, but it is rewarding. The school community can develop a democratic school culture with an open and friendly atmosphere. Its members will be more motivated and committed, formal and informal communication will thrive, both involving the school leader and the school community. Discipline will improve if the students feel responsible for their school as well. The school will achieve higher academic results by accommodating the diversified abilities and talents of its students.

Democratic school leadership therefore has strong potential as well as challenges. The more members participate, the more complex the processes of discussion, consensus-building and decision-making will be. Autocratic shortcuts to efficient decision-making may then seem to offer an attractive alternative. We argue that it is worth the effort to deal with this complexity, as your students should learn how to thrive in ambivalent and unclear situations (see [Competences for democratic culture](#), p. 43). Democratically led schools support their societies by educating their students to become citizens who are competent and confident to take part in controversial and dynamic decision-making processes.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 1: A democratic style of school leadership

Key question: *How can a school principal sustain a democratic school culture?*

Preparation handout 1.1:

The importance of reflection and feedback: Explore your team profile together
A tool to reflect team roles based on Meredith Belbin (<https://www.belbin.com/>)

In democratic school leadership, your staff members should ideally form a team. Each teacher will show his or her character and specific talents. However, it is possible to distinguish clusters of typical ways of behavior or roles, that people tend to develop in a team.

An ideal team model includes nine different roles. Each of the roles is essential for the success of a team. Each role has its strengths and weaknesses, and as you may not be able to change people, balancing their strengths and weakness through other team member's roles is the key to a team's success. This model of team players' roles may help your staff to reflect on their cooperation and identify the reasons for their success, their failures and problems as a team. This tool may help you and your staff to assess your perceptions of each other and to clarify your roles.

Role	Strengths	Weaknesses
Coordinator	Coordinators are person-oriented leaders. They are trustworthy, dominant and committed to team goals. These positive thinkers appreciate efforts of other team members, listen to others and have their own point of view.	Coordinators might over-delegate tasks to others, leaving themselves little work to do.
Shaper	Shapers are energetic task-focused leaders with a high motivation to achieve and win. They are committed to success and will 'shape' others into achieving the aims of the team.	Shapers may be aggressive in their attempt to get things done and achieve the goals. Two or three shapers in a group can lead to conflict and in-fighting.
Plant	Plants are idea makers characterized by a high IQ and introversion, while also being dominant and original. They tend to take radical approaches and are more concerned with major issues than with details.	Plants tend to disregard practical details and perspectives. They could be forgetful.
Resource investigator	Resource investigators explore opportunities and develop contacts. They are good negotiators who can find relevant information, support and develop ideas of others. They are sociable and enthusiastic, good at liaison work and exploring resources outside the group.	Resource investigators tend to lose interest after being initially fascinated by an idea. Their ideas are less innovative, and they may forget to see a task through.
Implementer	Implementers are disciplined, practical, trusting and tolerant. They are characterized by low anxiety and work for the team in a practical, realistic way. Implementers tend to do the tasks that others do not want to perform, and they do them well.	Implementers are conservative, inflexible and slow to respond to new possibilities.

Team worker	Team workers are sociable and have a positive influence on other team members. They keep up the team spirit and allow other members to contribute effectively. They often have diplomatic skills, a good sense of humor, and they are good listeners.	Team workers tend to be indecisive in moments of crisis and reluctant to do things that might hurt others.
Complete finisher	Complete finishers pay attention to details and thorough fulfilment of tasks. They are consistent, hardworking and responsible.	Complete finishers are perfectionists, who tend to be over-anxious and extreme. They prefer not to delegate tasks.
Monitor evaluator	Monitor evaluators are often judicious, prudent and intelligent. They contribute most when important decisions need to be made. They are competent in analysis and comparison, and they are not misguided by emotions.	Monitor evaluators may be boring or over-critical. They are not good at inspiring others and tend to be slow in decision-making.

It is interesting to note that every person has a predisposition for two, three, or sometimes even more of the roles described above. It depends on the team and the circumstances which role a member fulfills. If your staff finds that certain roles are missing, it should discuss how, and by whom, the gap may be filled.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 1: A democratic style of school leadership

Key question: *How can a school principal sustain a democratic school culture?*

Action handout 1.1:

Getting stakeholders involved in school governance

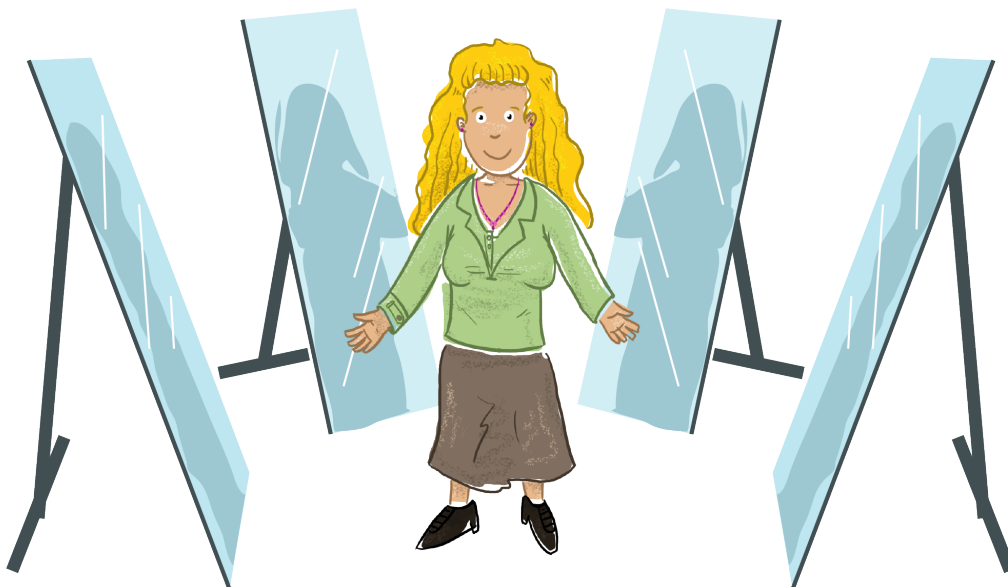
The following suggestions draw on the manual [Democratic governance of schools](#) (quoted here as *DGS*) by Elisabeth Bäckman and Bernard Trafford, Council of Europe Publishing 2007, pp. 51 – 59

In a democratic school community, it is important that all stakeholders have the opportunity to participate. They should be involved in communication, networking, communication and decision-making. By involving the local community, your school demonstrates that it does not wish to seclude itself, but rather play and active part in society. Members of the school community are actors, not spectators, whether on the school premises, or defending a democratic society, if necessary (see [DGS](#), p. 51).

As a school principal and stakeholder, you play a key in initiating, framing and encouraging all other groups of stakeholders to play their part. This role is challenging, as the number of staff members, students, and employees is often equal to the workforce in middle-sized companies. School principals interact closely with internal stakeholders, teachers, students and employees. On the other hand, there are external stakeholders, such as parents, school authorities, local policy makers, and donors. As school principal, you cannot control the behavior of any of these groups, but you can appeal to their shared interest in the school's success. Therefore, your personal and professional outlook is decisive when you attempt to get all stakeholders involved in school life.

Reflect on your outlook as school principal

You are the key stakeholder. To a large extent, it depends on you to what extent other members and groups actively assume responsibility in the school community. Therefore, you should assess your personal and professional outlook, as it has a decisive impact on your decisions and actions (see [Awareness Handout 1.1](#) and [DGS](#), pp. 52, 56).



In interacting with internal and external stakeholders, you act as a networker. You permanently communicate with teachers, students, parents and school employees, both in formal and informal contexts. You are regularly in touch with local policy makers, representatives of the school authorities, and donors who expect your attention. Try to identify their shared interests to which you can appeal.

Ask yourself: Why did I want to become a school leader? What kind of school, and what kind of society do I want? With questions like these, you can form a clearer idea of the visions that guide your actions as a school leader (see [DGS](#), p. 47).

Internal stakeholders

School life includes formal and informal contexts that require the principal, teachers and students to perform in specific roles, but also offer different opportunities. Staff conferences, parents' meetings and classes are formal contexts, talks during breaks in the corridor or the school yard are informal contexts.

If the following suggestions seem convincing to you, you may begin to implement them immediately.

First steps in getting teachers and students involved

- Supply teachers with relevant information before a staff meeting, giving them the chance to form their opinion (see [DGS](#), p. 36).
- Encourage teachers to express their views at staff meetings. Listen to their discussion, and appoint a deputy school principal or staff member as designated chair.
- Support staff members who wish to establish networks with society and external experts (see [DGS](#), p. 54).
- Leave your office during breaks and lunch hours to meet your teachers and students. Don't underestimate what is said to you in informal contexts, as teachers usually have a purpose in mind when they approach you (see [DGS](#), p. 57).
- Try to know as many students by name as possible. For example, a school director in Ukraine achieved this in small steps by inviting all students in groups to an afternoon tea in her office.

Getting stakeholders involved: more advanced measures

- Identify routine tasks and delegate them to staff, perhaps initially for a limited period of time. Giving teachers more insight into school administration allows you to focus on important issues. By assuming more responsibility, your staff will identify more strongly with their school (see [DGS](#), p. 58). You put trust in your teachers, rather than controlling them.
- Increase or improve opportunities for your teachers and students to meet outside the classroom, such as shared cafeterias, lunch facilities, and areas for recreation (see [DGS](#), p. 48). For more ideas, see the sequences on nutrition and physical activity on this website for school principals.
- Form a team of teachers and students to create an attractive home page of your school. Your website can serve the democratic school community by providing information on current topics and issues. Invite all stakeholders to contribute to this website.
- Invite parents, school governors, local policy makers, donors, and/or media to your school. Arrange meetings with your staff and students. Discussion: What is the best school for this community? What kind of education prepares our students best for their future? Why is it important for a school to set an example of democratic culture?

For more ideas on how to get your school stakeholders involved, look at Topics 2 – 4.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 2: Competences for democratic culture

Key questions: *What competences does a democratic society rely on? How can they be acquired and practised in school?*

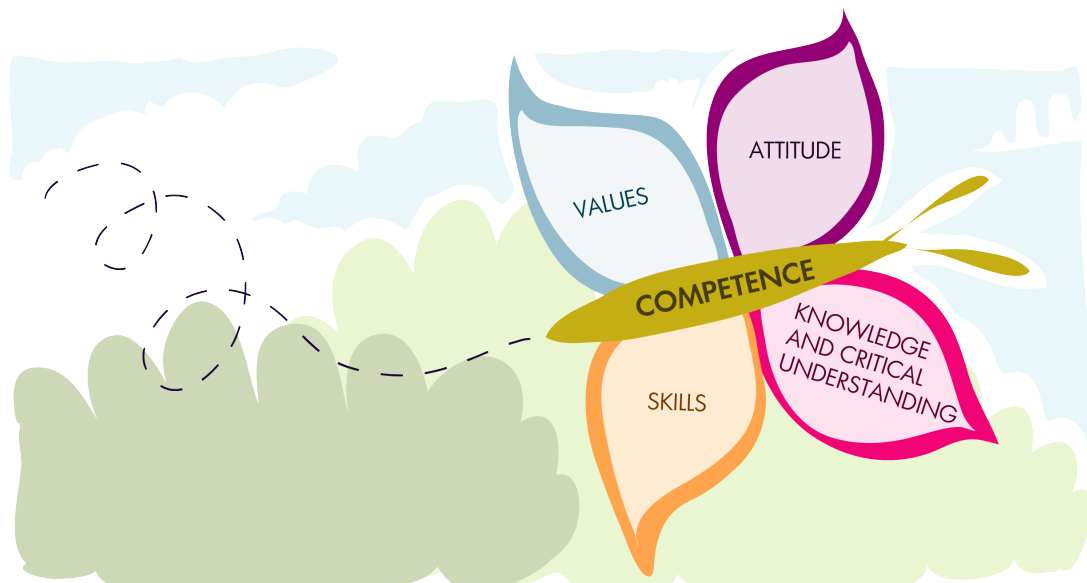
Awareness handout 2.1:

Competences for democratic culture (CDC) – a development perspective for school and society

Democratic institutions depend on the consent of, and the support by, the citizens. Institutional frameworks cannot survive if the people they are intended to serve reject or oppose them or are unable to participate within them. Therefore, a democratic culture is essential for democratic countries, and schools are the place where young citizens can learn, practise and understand what democratic culture is all about.

“Democratic culture” is a vague term and therefore difficult to handle for practitioners. A project initiated by the Council of Europe (2014 – 2017) has attempted to address this problem by developing a model of competences to describe the different dimensions of democratic culture and to pinpoint the competences that contribute to a person’s democratic cultural identity.

The Council of Europe’s competence model, *Competences for democratic culture*, includes four dimensions – values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and understanding. The term “competence” is defined as “the ability of a person to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities ... in a given context” ([Competences for democratic culture](#), p. 23).



The competence model for democratic culture was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in the Council of Europe, thereby authorizing it to be used in all educational institutions in Europe.

A democratic school community can provide a model of democratic culture. In this context, your students have the opportunity to acquire the competences of democratic culture through experience and practice. You as the school leader and your teachers are role models who demonstrate to your students the behavioral patterns and competences that promote, or counteract, democratic culture at your school. Therefore, it is important for you and your staff to reflect on the messages that you communicate through your behaviour. The above competence model for democratic culture can serve as a guideline.

The Council of Europe's model for democratic culture includes the following competences:

Values

- Valuing human dignity and human rights
- Valuing cultural diversity
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

Attitudes

- Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- Respect
- Civic-mindedness
- Responsibility
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance of ambiguity

Skills

- Autonomous learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking skill
- Skills of listening and observing
- Empathy
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
- Co-operation skills
- Conflict resolution skills

Knowledge and critical understanding

- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
- Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world

This set of competences for democratic culture serves as a frame of reference that we address in all sequences for school principals on this website.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 2: Competences for democratic culture

Key questions: *What competences does a democratic society rely on? How can they be acquired and practised in school?*

Preparation handout 2.1:

Support for students in acquiring competences for democratic culture (CDC)

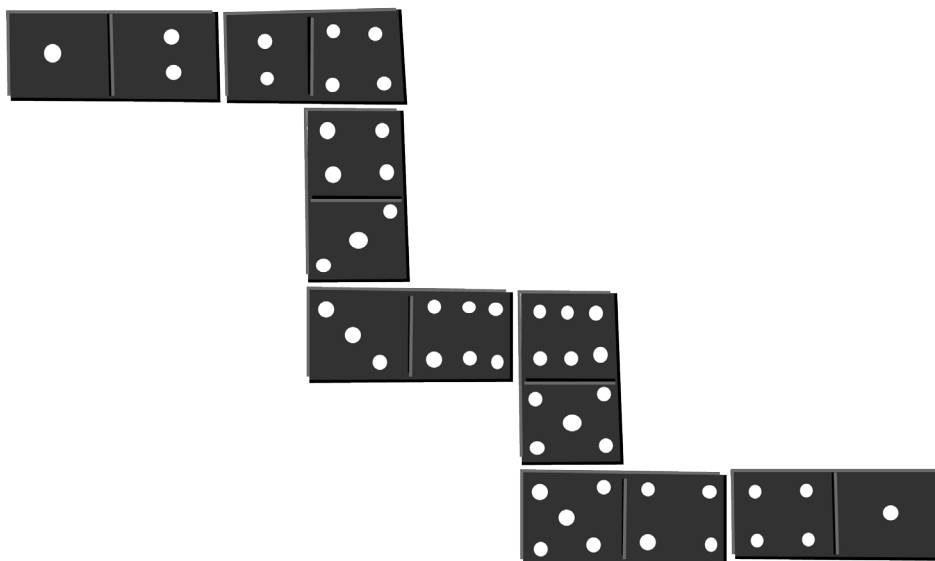
Students learn competences for democratic culture in clusters, or holistically, by linking values, skills, attitudes, and knowledge and understanding. They acquire the competences by deploying them in action and mainly by interacting and co-operating with each other. This raises the question what teachers and the school principal can do to meet their students' learning needs. This handout focuses on the decisive impact of a supportive methodology and learning environment for CDC. For a fuller account and the quotations, see *Reference Framework of [Competences for Democratic Culture, Vol. 3, Guidance for Implementation](#)*, p. 92 f.

At the class level

- Teachers can create an “open, participative and respectful classroom environment” that offers students a safe learning space. Here, they may feel free to express their views and emotions.
- Teachers can create opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning and to participate in lesson planning.

At the school level

- Teachers can co-operate across the curriculum to facilitate forms of co-operative learning.
- Teachers can co-operate to include CDC in the curriculum and to ensure equity for all learners.
- Teachers can “create opportunities for students to acquire positive high-quality participation experiences through projects in which the experiences are focused on issues that are of importance for the students themselves” (see the case history in [Awareness handout 3.1](#)). Teachers can encourage students to participate in decision-making processes, both in school (see Topic 3) and the local community.
- Teachers can arrange extracurricular activities on aspects of EDC/HRE.
- Teachers can arrange EDC/HRE projects, e.g. debating societies (see <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-4/part-3/unit-8/>)



At the school level, the principal plays a key role in creating supportive learning environments and opportunities for students in CDC learning, through encouragement, support, and co-ordination. For example, CDC learning could be regularly included in the agenda of staff meetings.

A free exchange of opinions on controversial issues in a safe atmosphere of mutual respect may support the development of a cluster of competences for democratic culture including

- Linguistic skills, such as the ability to express oneself clearly and briefly;
- Self-efficacy and empathy;
- Tolerance of ambiguity;
- Valuing of democracy and fairness;
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the topic under discussion.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 2: Competences for democratic culture

Key questions: *What competences does a democratic society rely on? How can they be acquired and practised in school?*

Action handout 2.1:

The school mission statement – a whole school project

The school mission statement – Keep it Short and Simple (KISS)

Many educational institutions and schools, but also business enterprises and government institutions use mission statements. A school mission statement is something like a business card for external partners, and a point of reference for daily work in school, a reminder for the school community of its shared vision and guideline.

A school mission statement should follow the KISS principle – *Keep It Short and Simple*. In a nutshell, and in a language that appeals to non-experts, it pinpoints the development perspective or key principles that define a school's shared vision and profile. A mission statement neither explains the reasons for the choices made, nor provides any information on implementation. A mission statement should be ambitious, but the goal should not be out of reach. A mission statement is open for review, but it would lose credibility if it were changed frequently.

See

https://www.missionstatements.com/school_mission_statements.html

https://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin229.shtml

Focus on one simple question in brainstorming

A school community is heterogeneous, bringing together two or three generations, professional educators, children and adolescents. If parents are included as well, the school community resembles a microcosm of the diversity and pluralism in society as a whole. In such modern societies, the challenge for democracy is to ensure that all citizens, regardless of their background, are engaged and understand what is on the agenda, as decision making would otherwise become the privilege of an elite of specialists.

Thus, the process of creating a school mission statement should begin with a phase of brainstorming within each group – the team of school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. For this brainstorming effort, it is important to choose one meaningful question for all groups. For a mission statement that highlights one key objective, one simple, open question is sufficient, such as “What makes a good school?” The question must allow every member of the school community to respond, based on their level of understanding and drawing on their personal or professional experience. In other words, everyone should be able to act as an expert. The school principal and staff should discuss the choice and wording of the key question, and to consider its implications for the final mission statement.

Brainstorming begins with the ideas and interests of all individuals. Thus, a wide variety of input should be expected that reflects a pluralistic community. In order to arrive at one simple statement, a process of integration and prioritizing is necessary, just as in democratic decision and policy-making. In EDC/HRE, different models show how to organize such a brainstorming process. They are suitable for students of all age groups, teachers, school leaders, and parents. As suggested above, the whole brainstorming process focuses on the same question in each group.

- **Think – Pair – Share** <https://www.teachervision.com/group-work/think-pair-share-cooperative-learning-strategy>
- **Wall of silence** <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-6/chapter-7/exercise-1/>

Framework for discussion and decision-making

Use the institutional framework that is in place at your school (see [Preparation Handout 3.1](#)). Otherwise follow this design to form ad-hoc groups. An elected council of teachers, students and parents, chaired by the school principal, should ultimately adopt the draft mission statement. This form of representative democracy ensures that all groups of stakeholders, regardless of their size, are equally represented. To ensure wide support for, and identification with the mission statement, it is advisable to set a quorum of 75% oder 80% for approval

(see [Democratic governance of schools](#), CoE publishing 2007, p. 36 f)

Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) as a school mission statement

The school mission statement should be widely appreciated in the school community. It follows that no one should feel excluded by its content due to discrimination based on age, religious belief, ethnic origin, gender, personal or group interests. The mission statement should not identify with any particular standpoint or group identity but rather emphasize key principles and an evolving perspective that can be supported by all members of the school community. We believe that CDC (see [Awareness Handout 2.1](#)) meets these criteria.

“CDC and a whole-school approach provides a valuable development perspective for schools on how to become more democratic, taking into consideration key areas of school life such as teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and co-operation with the community. In this way, development of a democratic school culture and competences of democratic culture in learners becomes a school mission.” ([Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, Vol. 3](#), p. 96.)

Outline of the discussion and decision-making process

- Brainstorming in class, parents’ and staff meetings (see details above).
- Spokespersons present their brainstorming inputs to the working group whose task is to draft mission statement. This group should include volunteers who represent all groups of the school community.
- The draft mission statement is presented to each class, the staff and the parents. Members of the draft working group attend each meeting, explain their decisions and collect feedback.
- The draft working group then discusses the feedback received and finalizes its draft.
- The school council, whether already established or formed ad hoc, then adopts the school mission statement by majority vote.

Debriefing and implementation

- The mission statement is displayed prominently on the school website, in school flyers for visitors and new parents, and on posters in the staff room and each classroom.
- With their teachers, the students discuss their experience of democratic participation in this decision-making process, linking it to the concept of democratic school culture.
- Parent’s spokespeople give feedback on the parents’ participation at a staff meeting.

The school community discusses the next steps to implement the mission statement

Democratic school leadership - Topic 3: Democratic school leadership – a whole school approach to EDC/HRE

Key questions: *How does democratic school leadership work in practice?*

Awareness handout 3.1:

Key principles for democratic school leadership as a whole- school approach

Based on [Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, Vol. 3](#), p. 97.

1. Respect for the local context and local ways of working

Whether in society or in school, a culture imposed by a leader would be autocratic, and not democratic. A democratic culture develops through participation by citizens, and in a school setting by all stakeholders who need encouragement to contribute their expertise.

2. Empowering all stakeholders to develop their own solutions to challenges based on a situation assessment

There is no single master solution to the challenges faced by individuals across different institutions and countries. Through an assessment of the current situation at a school, including its needs and capacity, the key stakeholders obtain a better understanding of its specific challenges and are empowered to develop their own tailor-made actions. This in turn increases the participants' sense of ownership and motivation for change.

3. Encouraging learning by doing through the participation of all stakeholders

Democratic competences are best developed through daily practice, including participatory decision-making, respectful and equal interactions, and democratic teaching and learning methods. This requires a committed partnership of all stakeholders – ranging from students, teachers, school leaders and parents to local authorities and other community actors. Moreover, it illustrates the vital importance of educational institutions as a whole in the process of learning and promoting the culture of democracy.

Through participating in school, students acquire the requisite skills for democratic citizenship in adult life. This is both learning “for” and “through” democracy and human rights in EDC/HRE as a whole-school approach. See: <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-1/unit-3/chapter-1/>

4. Integrating capacity-building into the school planning process

Changes in school culture are more sustainable when they are built into a school's formal planning process, such as creating a school mission statement (see [Action Handout 2.1](#)).

5. Supporting local projects and initiatives over the long term

It takes both time and effort to overcome resistance to change and to transform modes of interaction and practices in schools. Systemic change cannot be achieved by a one-time effort. Long-term support is crucial for tangible outcomes and a sustainable impact. This is the principle of undertaking small steps rather than attempting one big leap. It also requires patience, giving people time to adjust to democratic change, beginning with the stakeholders who are committed and interested in democratic school leadership.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 3: Democratic school leadership – a whole school approach to EDC/HRE

Key question: *How does democratic school leadership work in practice?*

Awareness handout 3:2.

The potential of project-based student participation

A case history

At a gymnasium in a European city, 9th grade students initiated a project in a geography class. They were dissatisfied with the state of the school facilities and wished to make suggestions for improvements. The teacher agreed to give the students the time they required. The students worked alone or in small groups. They assessed the state of the school buildings and the external environment, then recorded their findings on posters with their analysis, photos, and architectural drawings. They worked out suggestions for improvement and produced posters and three-dimensional models to make their point.

At that time, the municipal administration was planning a major refurbishment of the school and the area around it. During a visit to the school, representatives of the urban planning office took notice of the students' posters and models that were on display. They invited a group of students to present their ideas to the planning office. The planners appreciated the students' efforts to create a school environment that met the needs of children and young people and the city adopted some of the students' suggestions. The school principal supported this approach, and staff members were informed during a meeting. The students had already passed their final exams by the time their ideas took shape.



The school premises are situated next to a small river, but the bank was an ugly sight due to shrubs and bushes that had grown wildly for many years. A group of students suggested to clear the riverbank and to provide a recreation area with seating facilities for students with a free view of the river (see model above). The urban planning office adopted this idea. The photo on the right shows the result some years later – the area has been cleared, and rough stone seats can accommodate small groups of students.

Analysis

The students initiated the project, they selected the topic because it was closely linked to their interests, and they were eager to see improvements made at their school. They set themselves tasks that were more complex and time consuming than what a teacher would usually require, but in student-controlled projects we often see a much higher level of commitment. Their project focused on real issues in school life, and their work resulted in actionable projects that could be displayed in public.

The students carried out their project in a geography class, which required a change in lesson planning. The teacher accepted his role. He showed responsiveness to the students' interests, gave them the time they needed, and he showed flexibility in his lesson planning. Thus, he provided the students with the time resources they needed. The teacher as well as the also the school principal allowed the students to go ahead with their project, offering them support, guidance, encouragement and feedback.

The students' project depended on the willingness of their teacher and the school principal to let it happen. This brings an element of contingency into focus. Imagine a teacher or a principal with a different mindset, and the project initiative would have been turned down. The positive response by the urban planning office is a further instance of contingency. To put it simply, it was sheer luck that the students caught the attention of urban planners who acknowledged the expertise of young people. The timing was right. A year earlier or later, the student project could not have had the same impact. However, under the prevailing circumstances, the students could influence the development of their school environment much more strongly than within the formalized framework of student participation (see [Preparation Handout 3.1](#), Diagram in [Action Handout 3.1.b](#)).

We may assume that the project and the positive participation experience gave the students the opportunity to acquire a cluster of competences for democratic culture ([CDC](#)):

- Attitude: civic mindedness, particularly attentiveness to the needs of the community (*CDC* p. 41)
- Self-efficacy: feeling of confidence about tackling new challenges (*CDC* p. 42)
- Autonomous learning skills (*CDC* p.44)
- Analytical and critical thinking skills (*CDC* p.44)
- Ability to communicate and negotiate (*CDC* p.48)

Conclusions

Student initiatives are contingent – spontaneous and unforeseeable. Teachers and principals should be ready to respond adequately to let their dynamics unfold.

Teachers should offer the opportunity for reflection and assessment, as they are essential for sustainable learning in project-based and active participation. Otherwise, the positive emotions and memories may fade, leaving little impact on competences for democratic culture.

School principals and teachers should be aware to what extent student participation depends on their support. In our daily choices and decisions, we are all agents of contingency.

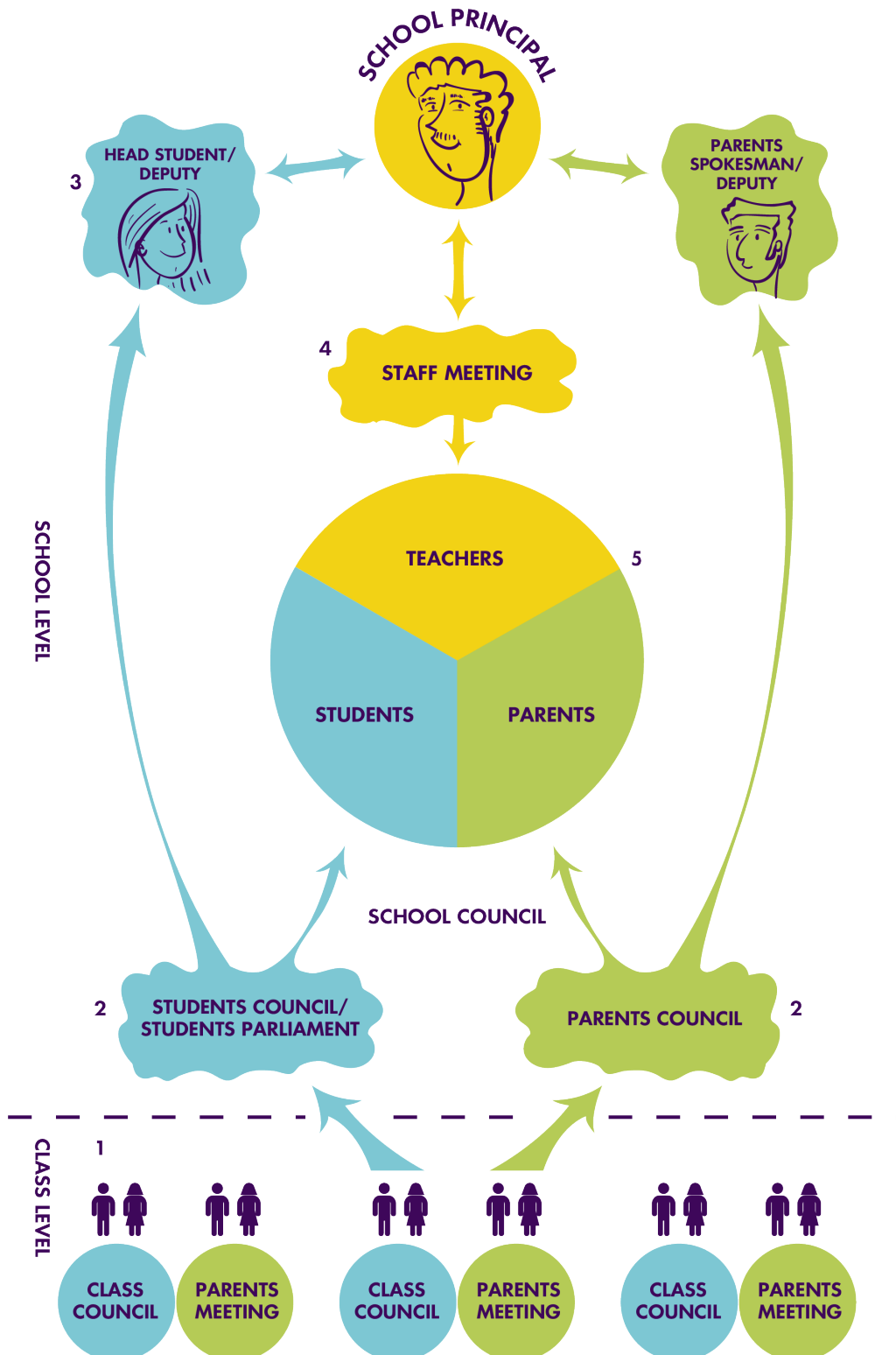
Democratic school leadership - Topic 3: Democratic school leadership – a whole school approach to EDC/HRE

Key question: How does democratic school leadership work in practice?

Preparation handout 3:1.

A framework for participation and decision-making in school

Numbers 1 – 5 refer to the notes below.



Notes

Before a discussion on issues and decisions begins, rules need to be in place to settle the question “Who decides what?”. Much like a community at the national level, a school community needs a formal institutional framework that grants students, parents and teachers their say and pays due respect to the legal responsibility of the school principal the teachers. (See [Reference Framework for CDC, Vol. 1](#), p. 27 f.). Across Europe, the rights of students, parents and teachers in co-decision-making differ from one country to another. In some countries, schools have a certain freedom in setting up their framework for participation and decision-making, while in other countries, this institutional framework is set by law. (See The EDC/HRE manual for teachers Vol. III, *Living in Democracy* that includes a lesson on how schools should be governed: <http://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-3/part-4/unit-9/lesson-4/>)

Whatever approach is adopted, how a school should be governed must be decided in a democratic way:

- How can all teachers, students and parents be given the opportunity to participate?
- How can decision-making be organized both democratically and efficiently?
- What are the responsibilities of the staff?
- What is the role and responsibility of the school principal?

The diagram shown on the previous page is based on a legal framework adopted. It is an example of how the questions mentioned above can be addressed. Alternati institutional designs also exist, but the questions they must answer are the same.

The following notes refer to the figures in the diagram.

Class level

(No 1) Democratic participation begins at the class level where all students may participate. Time for a class council or class assembly can be integrated into the timetable. At the lower and upper secondary levels, the students elect two spokespeople for their class or course. These spokespeople approach the teachers to represent the students’ interests, so they are not the teachers’ assistants. At the primary level, children do not elect spokespeople, but attend a weekly class council. Guided by their teacher, they learn to express their interests and views and to listen to each other.

School level

(No 2) In most countries, you will find provisions in the curriculum or legislation on the students’ right to participation. In the example shown here, both students and parents elect representatives to act on their behalf at the school level. This arrangement is both democratic and efficient, as participation in school governance requires time and expertise. As the school principal, you play an important part in encouraging and supporting the participation of students and parents at your school. (See [Democratic governance of schools](#), CoE publishing 2007, p. 37; <https://www.living-democracy.com/edchre-pack/>).

All classes and courses are represented by their spokespeople in the students’ parliament. This body meets regularly at least once per month. The agenda includes every issue in school life from the students’ point of view, such as the quality of teaching and learning, school meals, school facilities, rest and leisure, or safety. The school parliament can appoint a school cabinet with special representatives, or ministers, to develop activities with minimum support by teachers, such as staging discussions with party or NGO representatives, organizing a student café, school disco events, or movie shows. For an impressive example of what a student parliament can achieve, see the website of a comprehensive school in the UK, <https://pentrehafod.school>.

The same structure exists for parents. They elect spokespeople at the class level to communicate with the teachers in their class (no 1). The parents’ spokespersons attend the parents’ council at the school level (no 2). Here, the parents’ representatives share their experiences and views on the quality of teaching, assessment, their children’s well-being and safety and other issues.

(No 3) The students’ parliament elects two representatives, a head boy or girl and a deputy, as leaders of the student cabinet and as the students’ spokespersons at the school level. Likewise, the parents’ council elects two spokespeople. These top representatives for students and parents meet regularly with the school principal.

It is important that the school principal stay informed about moods and developments in the school community that may need his attention. The parents' and students' spokespeople will try to win the support of the principal and the teachers for their agenda.

(No 4) It is obvious that teachers need to meet regularly to deal with a wide range of issues in running a school, developing and improving teaching and learning, implementing the curriculum and new legislation, and many others. School legislation may be expected to specify the duties of staff and school principal and their rights of decision-making. The school principal chairs the staff meetings, also plays an important role in setting the agenda, providing information, or suggesting solutions. To a considerable extent, democratic school leadership depends on how the school principal and the staff share the responsibility and powers of decision-making (see [Democratic governance of schools](#), p. 36).

(No 5) In many countries, a school council or school board is required by law. In the example shown here, students, parents, and teachers elect representatives to sit on the school council. The head spokespersons for the students and parents belong to the council by virtue of their function. This school governing body varies from country to country. It may include representatives from the local community in addition to, or instead of, the students. The members may partly be co-opted rather than elected. The school council meets at least twice per school year. In our example, the school council, chaired by the school principal, decides on important issues, such as approving school rules, or the school curriculum. It may also evaluate applicants for the position of the school principal or deputy, and approve the school budget. Decisions by the school council are binding for the school staff and the principal. If the school principal disagrees with a decision, the matter must be turned over to the school authority. Meetings are not open to the public, and the agenda and minutes are partly confidential. Experience has shown that the representatives of the three groups do not tend to form blocks or outvote each other and that they are guided by responsibility and sound argument.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 3: Democratic school leadership – a whole school approach to EDC/HRE

Key question: How does democratic school leadership work in practice?

Action handout 3:1.

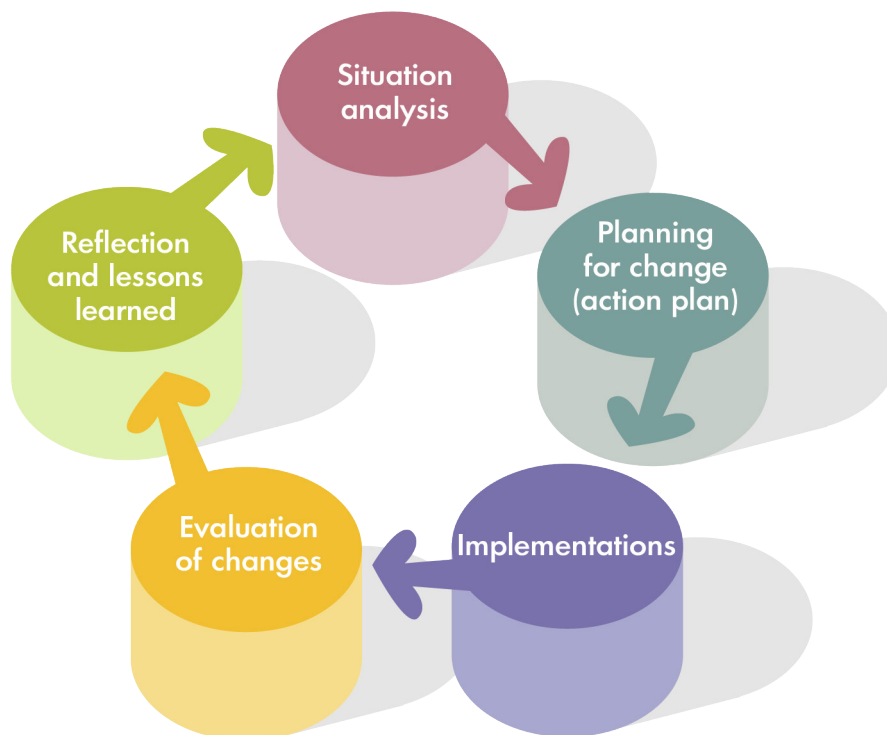
Decision-making in democratic school leadership



a) A five-stage model of school development and decision-making processes

Based on [Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, Vol. 3](#), p. 97 f.

This model outlines five steps that a school can take in a whole-school approach to developing a more democratic school culture and the development of the learners' competences for democratic culture. It can be adapted to decision-making processes dealing with any challenge and issue (see [Action Handout 4.1](#)).



1. Conduct a situation analysis to identify how principles of democracy and human rights are integrated into school life, including strengths and weaknesses, and with the participation of all stakeholders (e.g. whole-school assessments, SWOT analysis of *Strengths – Weaknesses – Opportunities – Threats*).
2. Identify potential areas of change and develop an action plan with the concrete activities you will undertake to achieve these changes (e.g. CDC as expected learning outcome).
3. Implement the action plan and ensure that it involves the whole school community.
4. Evaluate your progress and assess the impact of your work.
5. Share lessons learned with all stakeholders involved in your efforts as well as with other schools and plan further action accordingly.

b) A democratic school community is a learning community

There is no single master solution to the challenges faced by your school community, or society as a whole (see [Awareness Handout 3.1](#)). In attempting to address these challenges, we develop a cluster of *competences for democratic culture (CDC)*. We acquire and practise these competences (learning by doing), which applies to beginners and experienced players alike.

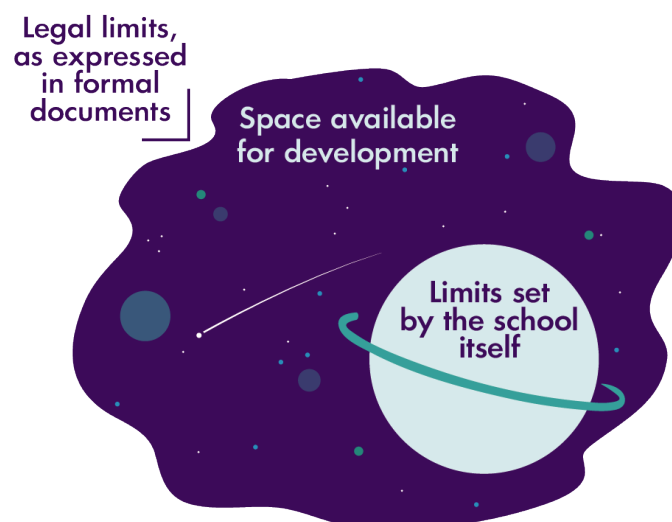
If no one knows the master solution to a given problem, the members of the school community have to find one together. By adopting a whole-school approach, all members of the school community can contribute their expertise and advocate for their points of view and their interests. The solution may then find wider support. This solution will often work, but may sometimes fail to deliver the expected outcome. In this case, a new cycle of decision-making begins. The diagram shown above reflects this necessity to deal with an issue again by linking evaluation (stage 4) and reflection (stage 5) with a new situation analysis (stage 1). An authoritarian leader would try to conceal his failure, as his prestige as strongman would be severely damaged. A democratic learning community, on the other hand, can draw new strength by learning through failure (see part c below).

The cluster of competences for democratic culture that are particularly important for problem-solving and decision-making include the following (see [Competences for Democratic Culture](#)):

Autonomous learning skills enable a person to acquire new information and critically assess its sources (CDC, p. 44). This is important in dealing with incomplete information by assessing which information is sound and credible, and by discovering and correcting errors.

A tolerant attitude towards ambiguity, includes the “acceptance of complexity, contradictions and lack of clarity” and irrational behavior on all sides, including oneself (CDC p. 43). This enables a person to be patient when wrestling with a problem proves to be difficult and time consuming.

Analytical and critical thinking skills and knowledge and critical understanding of the world (CDC, pp. 44 ff., 52 ff.) in dealing with complexity and contingency. These may not only be rooted in a given problem, but paradoxically also in a pluralist community with a high level of democratic participation. People who lack this skill may lean to “the authoritarian temptation”.



Knowledge and critical understanding of how democratic institutions work ([CDC](#), p. 52) enables members of the school community to understand the institutional framework and their rights of participation at their school (see [Preparation Handout 3.1](#)). In particular, they need to understand the limits and opportunities that their school's institutional framework provides (see [Democratic governance of schools](#), CoE publishing 2007, p. 33 f.; <https://www.living-democracy.com/edchre-pack/>)

c) Evaluation and reflection – the key to sustainable school development

In the five-stage model of decision-making, stages 4 (evaluation) and 5 (reflection) are essential for school development and success in several respects.

Learning by thinking about what we are doing: All competences, including those for democratic culture are acquired through practice, which is learning by doing. Learning by doing, however, does not necessarily include a clear understanding of the learning experience. It is through reflection that learners – not only students, but all members of the school community – become aware of the competences that they have newly acquired or practised, and integrate them in their mental toolbox, as it were, ready to be deployed in the future.

The assessment of outcomes renders future decision-making processes more efficient. Outcome assessments enable stakeholders to identify weaknesses and errors and to understand the reasons for success. We need to focus on questions such as the following:

- Was the situation analysis (stage 1) correct? Did we have the information we needed?
- Has our action plan (stage 2) and its implementation (stage 3) solved our problem?
- Are the outcomes fair, or at least acceptable for all groups in our school community?
- Do we agree in our assessment?
- ...

Feedback on participation and learning experiences focuses on the decision-making process, the opportunities to participate, and reflects on what has been learned by doing. This is important for all stakeholders in the school community – the teachers, parents and students.

- Who brought the issue to our attention? – Who was the agenda-setter?
- Are you personally satisfied with your opportunities to participate?
- Do you believe that everyone had a fair chance to participate and express their views?
- What have you learned?
- What would you like to learn?
- How was your experience with democratic school culture?
- ...



Democratic school leadership - Topic 4: Discipline through responsibility

Key Question: *How can schools encourage students to maintain discipline through responsibility rather than force and punishment?*

Awareness handout 4:1.

Control or trust? How to ensure student discipline

“Ask yourself: do students behave differently when there is no adult around? If so, why is that?”

(Bäckman/Trafford, *Democratic governance of schools*, p. 66)

If you answer this question with “yes”, you may be facing the problem of how to maintain discipline in school. Students must observe the school rules and treat each other with respect; otherwise a school cannot function, and life in the school community may suffer seriously. But what is the adequate solution? Putting students under permanent control and supervision is hardly feasible nor desirable, as your school would teach students only to obey the rules if they are under surveillance. A certain measure of control will be necessary to make the students take school rules seriously, but permanent supervision will not solve any problems of student discipline. (See *Rethinking discipline and order from a democratic point of view*, in *Educating for democracy*; <http://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-2/unit-1/chapter-2/lesson-5/>)

If you have answered the question above with “no”, you may agree with us that in your position as a school principal, you need to rely on your students’ attitudes, as the school community, like any other, cannot function without the students’ consent and commitment. The different heterogeneous groups in this community – students, teachers, housekeepers and employees, parents – are all interested in the school’s success, just as you are, and they contribute to the school’s performance in their specific ways, just as you do. At the same time, each player has his or her personal interests and needs in mind. You cannot control the different groups in the school community, but you can influence their behavior.



One might say that the students are responsible for the success of their teachers and their school principals, and that they strongly depend on you and your staff in their personal development and academic achievement. Therefore, all members in the school community rely on each other. It is important to make the students aware of this, and to put trust in them rather than to intimidate and control them. Students need to develop an attitude of civic mindedness and responsibility – not only to play their part in a democratic school community, but also in a democratic society as a whole. Civic mindedness includes the sense of belonging to a community, as well as a sense of civic duty. Responsibility stands for reflecting on one's actions and considering the effects of these actions on others. (See [Competences for democratic culture](#), pp. 12 f., 41 f.).

If your school succeeds in strengthening these attitudes in your students, you can be much more confident that your students will know how to behave “when there is no adult around”.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 4: Discipline through responsibility

Key Question: *How can schools encourage students to maintain discipline through responsibility rather than force and punishment?*

Preparation handout 4:1.

Joint decision-making encourages responsibility and ownership

No group or institution can function without order and shared respect for its rules, nor can it be democratic (see *Rethinking discipline and order from a democratic point of view*, <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-2/unit-1/chapter-2/lesson-5/>). Maintaining discipline, or respect for rules and order is therefore a key issue in every school. If discipline is maintained through democratic school leadership, the students can learn a lot about democratic citizenship.

Democratic school leadership shifts its focus from control to trust (see [Awareness handout 4.1](#)). By involving the students in adopting rules for the school, democratic school leadership can encourage the learners to identify with, rather than to reluctantly obey the school's rules. (See [Democratic governance of schools](#), CoE publishing 2007, pp. 60 ff.)

Involving students in making school rules

Quite frequently, students discuss and adopt rules in their class communities. The students learn through experience that rules are necessary to address problems that are caused by their classroom behavior. They also learn to obey the laws and written rules, regardless of whether they agree with them or not, because they have been adopted by majority vote. By participating in the creation of rules for their class or the school, the students understand their purpose and intent and thus identify with the results. "Students are the real experts on what school rules should look like to be realistic and easy to follow." ([Democratic governance of schools](#), p. 64).



Vol. 2 in the EDC/HRE teacher's manual edition offers a unit on rule-making in class (see <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-2/unit-5/> lessons 3 and 4), and the cover picture of the manual highlights the idea of school as a democratic micro community that makes its own rules. It is interesting to note that when students take ownership of rule-making at school, they tend to suggest stricter sanctions than adults do, for example in dealing with frequent late-comers or classroom disruptions. They can learn a lot about fairness as an elementary principle of justice, which means that punishment must not be too mild or too strict, depending on the offense and the lesson we wish to teach both the student in question and the community as a whole.

As the school principal, you should stay informed about such initiatives without intervening as long as the adopted rules at the class level comply with school legislation and school rules.

Democratic school leadership - Topic 4: Discipline through responsibility

Key Question: *How can schools encourage students to maintain discipline through responsibility rather than force and punishment?*

Action handout 4:1.

Democratic school leadership in practice: decision-making on school rules

Who decides what?

Before a discussion on school rules takes place and decisions are made, it is essential that all stakeholders know their rights of participation. Either by law or through an agreement by your school community, you need to have school rules in place for participation – preferably in form of a permanent framework. For more details, see [Preparation Handout 3.1](#).

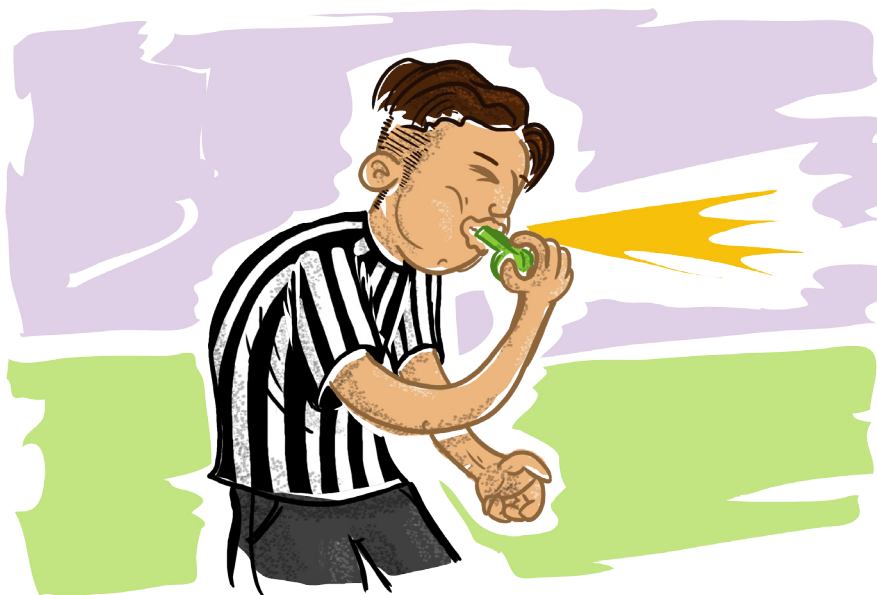
A model procedure in democratic school leadership: decision-making on school rules (adapted from the model in [Action Handout 3.1](#)).

1. Situation analysis: Why do we need new school rules?

- What kinds of problems are we dealing with (e.g. student behavior, implementation of school rules, effect of sanctions)?
- Why is this problem so urgent that we must deal with it now?
- Which rules worked well? What can be kept?
- Which rules need to be changed or newly introduced?
- ...

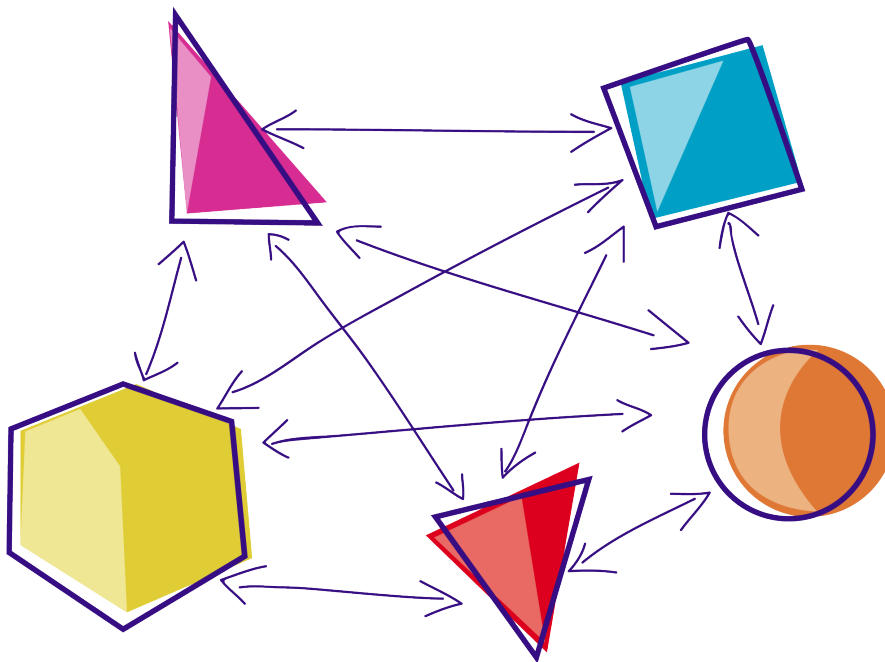
2. Discussion: What solutions are possible?

- How do we expect or wish that the members of our school community behave?
- What makes a good school rule?
- What choices do we have to improve or change our school rules? (Written, formalized school rules – or unwritten rules, informal agreements, appeals to shared interests and values)
- To what kinds of values do we adhere to in our rules?
- What kinds of sanctions should be in place?
- Do our new school rules comply with school legislation? (E.g. did we take the responsibilities of the teachers and the school principal into account?)



3. Joint decision and implementation

- Which option do we choose? Discussion among students, staff and parents.
- Majority vote by students and teachers.
- Final approval by the school council (see [Preparation Handout 3.1](#)).
- Master document signed by the school principal, head spokesperson for students and parents.
- The newly -adopted version of the school rules is shown on the school's website.
- Copies or posters of the school rules are displayed in every classroom.
- ...



4. Evaluation of the results

- The first review of the results takes place after a mutually agreed period of time.
- Has the problem been solved?
- Are there any unexpected effects?
- Can we accept them?
- Can we leave the rules in place as they are? Or should we begin a new cycle of decision-making to adapt or improve the rules?
- ...

5. Evaluation of the decision-making process; reflection and lessons learned

- Do the students, teachers and parents feel that they were adequately involved?
- Did they have an opportunity to express their views and ideas?
- Did their input have an impact on the result?
- Do we consider the way this decision was made an example of democratic school leadership?
- Conclusions for future decision-making: what worked well, and what should be improved? Can, or should we find ways to get students more heavily involved?
- What did the students learn? (E.g. Democratic communities are learning communities. – The enforcement of rules should be the exception rather than the norm. – All members of the community should share an attitude of mutual respect, responsibility and civic-mindedness so that we need not permanently control and observe each other).
- ...

The balance between participation and efficiency

It is obvious that a whole-school decision-making process, involving all stakeholders, particularly the students, is a major project that requires time (see [Action Handout 2.1](#)). The model outlined here focuses on the participation by all stakeholders and the learning opportunities for students.

It is unrealistic to believe that all decisions in school life can be made in such a manner, as neither the school leaders and teachers, nor the parents could meet their professional obligations. Moreover, the majority of students would probably lose interest. Therefore, a balance must be found between the participation of stakeholders in the school and its efficiency as an educational institution.

This balance can be achieved by the following means:

- Not all stakeholders in school will be actively involved in many, if not most decision-making processes. A major part of the school administration and teaching activities will remain the responsibility of the school principal and teachers. The quality of democratic school leadership is evident in its sharing of information and listening to feedback.
- An institutionalized framework of representative democracy (see [Preparation Handout 3.1](#)) reduces the time strain for the vast majority of school community, while decisions by the school principal and staff are open to critical observation and discussion.
- Large-scale participation projects that involve all stakeholders are appropriate whenever an issue directly affects student interests and needs, and the students assume the role of experts.
- Therefore, one or more major participation projects should be conducted every school year. This could involve a “top down” version, such as a discussion between the school principal, the staff, and the head spokespersons of students and parents. It could also be a “bottom up” version, such as an agenda-setting initiative of the students (see [Awareness Handout 3.2](#)). In this case, the school principals and teachers should welcome and support the students’ initiative for its contribution to a democratic school culture, regardless of whether they agree with the students’ ideas or not.