EDC/HRE FOR PRINCIPALS

Awareness
Democracy is more than a trick!

Preparation
Democracy in my school

Action
Democracy: Start now!

PARTICIPATION

www.living-democracy.com
Participation and democracy

Principals and their staff know that the institutions and principles of democracy are defined by their national constitution and included in their curricula. Therefore, they are not negotiable. Children and adolescents should have the right to participate in decision making that affects their health, well-being and development. This right is enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which requires the views of children and young people to be heard "in all matters affecting the child".

The fundamental tenets of democracy include human rights and children’s rights. In order to protect minorities and the weak and vulnerable, for example, children and young people, there are limits as to what the majority can decide. In a democratic system, all laws and decisions must comply with human and children’s rights. This is one of the most important principles that children and young people must learn in school, both in theory and in practice. Therefore, in addition to meeting the curricular requirements in education for democracy and human rights, schools need to provide relevant real-life experiences for their students in the school community.

But HOW can this be done?

The objectives of this sequence for principals on Democracy and Participation in Schools are to provide ideas to promote the participation of students, parents, teachers and the community in the planning and decision making process of their schools with suggestions, practical steps and best practice models for democratic leadership.
Participation

Why should we strive for democracy?

Democracy

“Democracy is government by the people in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them (direct democracy) or by their elected agents under a free electoral system (representative democracy).

Pillars of democracy:

• Sovereignty of the people
• Government based upon consent of the governed
• Majority rule
• Minority rights
• Guarantee of basic human rights
• Free and fair elections
• Due process of law
• Constitutional limits on government
• Social, economic, and political pluralism, including recognition of independent civil society organizations
• Values of cooperation, fair competition, and compromise.”


Participation

“Current democratic standards go beyond classical representative democracy, where the key role of citizens is to delegate by vote to their representatives the responsibility for elaborating and implementing public policies, to participatory democracy, where public institutions comply with the principles of good governance and citizens have the legitimacy to engage in all phases of the public policy cycle.”

Council of Europe (ibid.)

This ideal model shows how the intensity of participation can vary from 0 (non-existent) to level 5 (full autonomy).

1. People are not informed about a decision concerning them. They are expected to obey rules and carry out orders.
2. People are informed about a decision concerning them. But they have no chance to influence it.
3. People are consulted. But their stance isn’t necessarily considered in the decisions concerning them.
4. People are empowered. Their stance is fully considered in the final decisions concerning them.
5. People are autonomous. They make decisions concerning them on their own.

In this participation model, information is the key variable on level 1 and 2, and liberty and equality on levels 3 to 5. In other words, authoritarian school leadership would result in participation on level 1 or 2. In a democratic school community, students would have the opportunity to participate on levels 3, 4 and wherever feasible, on level 5. What this model does not show, however, is that participation needs to be learned, and students need to develop competences to understand the information about issues and decisions involving them.

In school, as in society as a whole, democracy is faced with challenges of inclusion. Citizens have equal rights, but they are unequal in terms of their levels of competence and empowerment. School principals and teachers must make efforts to encourage younger or shyer students to participate in decision-making, as well as making older and more dominant students aware of their responsibility.

Deliberation and discussion

Ideally, we want decisions not only to be fair and equal, but also well-grounded and sound. This requires deliberation by the people involved in a decision-making process. It develops thorough reasoning and the
exchange of differing or controversial views and arguments. The participants need to keep well informed and observe procedural rules in deliberating, so as to reach a mutually acceptable agreement in their decisions.

Deliberating stands for comprehensible and logical argumentation, disclosing and reflecting (personal) preferences, dialogically balancing individual interests with the interests of others, orientation towards the common good (solidarity), as well as honesty and authenticity.

This describes the ideal that a democratic community should strive for, both in school and in the community as a whole. On both levels, deliberation must be learned through practice, although competence levels among participants will vary considerably. Moreover, as time is a scarce resource in everyday practice, a balance must be found between deliberation (wherever possible) and more strictly regulated discussions (as far as necessary).

**Why strive for democracy?**

Why should we strive for democracy in school and in society as a whole? Democratically governed societies fare better in many important respects; however, they must also cope with certain weaknesses that pose challenges for a democratic school community.

**Strengths**

- **Fairness:** As all citizens enjoy equal rights of participation, decisions made by the majority are more likely to be accepted by the minority (“loser’s consent”).
- **Quality of decision-making:** As all citizens, experts and interest groups can participate in public discussion and decision-making, and free media keep the public informed, different views and conflicting interests are considered. Decisions are more likely to deliver effective and widely accepted solutions for problems and issues.
- **Peace within and without:** Democratically governed communities rarely begin a war, as citizens will not support such a policy. They are also more peaceful and less prone to violence as a means of achieving a political outcome.
- **Commitment and responsibility:** Democratic governments encourage citizens to identify with the community and take responsibility.

**Weaknesses (challenges)**

- **Complexity:** In modern societies, many issues have become so complex that a high level of expertise is required to understand them and discuss measures to deal with them. Participation tends to be the domain of the better-informed citizens and experts.
- **Unequal opportunities:** It follows that citizens may enjoy equal rights of participation, but in reality the opportunities to participate are unequally distributed. If left unattended, this issue may lead to frustration and disappointment with democracy among those citizens who find themselves excluded.

These weaknesses pose challenges for schools and the education system, as they hold the key to address these problems. Empowering young citizens to keep abreast with the issues and problems of their communities is the best strategy to prepare the young generation for their future, as well as to strengthen democracy.

**Competences**

Empowerment for democracy relies on acquired competences. We develop our competences through practice, by dealing with new situations or problems. This explains why the learning opportunities which participation in a democratic school community offers to students are so important. The Council of Europe’s competence model distinguishes between four dimensions of competence – values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding.

- **Values** include the “recognition of active citizenship” and “support for democratic processes and procedures”, both of which students can acquire through active participation in school life.
- **The attitudes of respect** – towards a person, a belief, or a principle – or civic-mindedness – “a feeling of belonging to and identifying with the community” – are taught not through preaching, but through personal experience and reflection. That is why it is so important that you and your staff (hopefully the parents as
well) serve as role models.

- Skills include the ability to “build consensus and compromise within a group”. As teachers know, skills need to be acquired through repeated practice.
- Knowledge and critical understanding “of the diverse ways in which citizens in public deliberations and decision-making” cooperate requires learning through practical experience and reflection in an EDC/HRE class, but cannot be acquired through learning from the book alone.

What does democracy have to do with schooling?

Basic approach, effects, competences, paradoxes, constraints

a) Learning and living democracy

Democracy can, and should, be learned at an early age. The learning approach that our website “Living Democracy” promotes can be summed up as follows:

• We need to learn about democracy in order to be able to live in democracy
• We need to live in democracy in order to be able to learn about democracy

These theses point to the fact that on the one hand, democracy depends on education to be put into practice, and on the other hand, that practising democracy is the key to learning about it. Therefore, education must ensure that young people learn about democracy if a society wants to remain or become, democratic. As schools are officially responsible for the education of the young generation, they need to practice democracy in order to foster the students’ learning about democracy.

b) Effects

Participation not only fosters learning about democracy but, as research has shown, also has a positive effect on student health, student learning and instruction in general: The regular assessment of student feedback on instruction and the involvement of students families and communities in schooling has led to improved student learning and achievement and overall higher quality of schools and instruction. Analyzing instruction from diverse perspectives (students, teachers) is a highly effective way to improve it. Furthermore, student participation has shown to have positive effects on self-esteem, student-adult and student-student relationships, as well as the school ethos. The involvement of teachers or students in school reforms has led to promising results.

c) Paradoxes

The institutional paradox

Schools are subject to the norms, values and laws of a specific state. They are responsible for the education of the young generation. Students cannot choose not to attend school, as school education is compulsory. Their parents must send them to school. Teachers are not free to teach what they like; they are employed to teach what the state has prescribed in the curricula. They are required to grade the students according to their achievements in prescribed subjects. Principals are employed to make sure that schools run according to official laws and regulations. Thus, schools are not a place where free and equal people interact to reach common ground. The relationship between the groups is determined by hierarchies and diverse means to exert power for the purpose of preparing the younger generation for modern life and allocating them to diverse, unequal positions within society.

The pedagogical paradox

The teacher-student relationship reflects the fact that more experienced and knowledgeable educators convey their knowledge and experience to unknowing and inexperienced learners. The inequality between teacher and student, as well as between parent and child, defines the need for education, but also represents an obstacle to democratic practice.

d) Watch out for constraints and pitfalls

• Start with yourself! Find out what measures and changes are within your personal reach. You represent a role-model for your school. Only if you demonstrate and practice democracy in action can you expect democratic practices on the part of your teachers.

• Are you really willing to grant a voice to the members of the school community? Nobody wants to find out that their engagement and involvement was for nothing. Instead of practising pseudo-democratic activism, it is preferable that you make well-informed decisions and communicate them transparently. Pseudo-democracy is counterproductive and tends to undermine trust in further democratic practice.

• Even if you do provide a real and honest opportunity for democratic practices, don’t expect people to follow it immediately. Indeed, some people may even resist it. Democratic practice is demanding and thus
requires patience from everyone involved. Do not be discouraged. Keep going! In the end it will be worth it.

- Be very clear about the possibilities within which decisions can be freely made and the limits that must not be exceeded (e.g. budgetary restrictions, the law, minority rights, your obligations and responsibility as school leader, conflicting roles).
Participation

Key areas of participatory democracy in school

The way you act as principal is essential to transforming your school into a (more) democratic community. If you intend to encourage participation in your school, include the following key areas in your planning and actions.

Communication

Listen actively (What does someone really want to say? How does he/she think? What are his/her needs? What is his/her perception like?) Convince others through logical and comprehensible arguments. Ask and answer questions openly. Disclose and explain your attitudes, assumptions, feelings towards the issue to be decided on honestly and authentically. Collect feedback. Provide a synthesis of all different viewpoints (Which common ground can be found considering all views raised concerning an issue?) Strive for a consensus.

Cooperation

Identify and discuss the values and visions that are to guide your school. If possible, try to reach an unanimous decision concerning them. Contribute to building an atmosphere of trust and create opportunities and a framework for the exchange of ideas and practices, as well as cooperative thinking, planning and implementation.

Transparency

Be transparent about preconditions, limits and scope when making decisions. For example, take legal, budgetary or local conditions into account. Articulate such issues clearly and explicitly. Make sure to constantly inform everyone involved about all important issues, and/or provide access to the relevant information.

Tolerance

We may feel opposed to a person or a group of people for various reasons. Those with a low level of tolerance simply behave indifferently towards others. A higher level of tolerance allows us to extend our limits of experience through thorough dialogue and honest attempts to understand others. Try to raise your level of tolerance when facing people or groups of people you feel opposed to.

School atmosphere

Ensure a positive, peaceful atmosphere where everybody feels safe, respected and belonging to an authentic community. Establish an atmosphere of respect and empathy for each other. Set up institutionalized modes of conflict resolution.

Power-sharing

Be prepared to share some of your powers and delegate responsibility to others. Ensure that stakeholders have a say in what they do and how they do it. Accept criticism and be prepared to move from control to trust. Ensure that potential risks of decisions are shared and that everyone involved is aware of them.

Decision-making

Analyze the legal preconditions (opportunities and limitations) for democratic practice in your school. Introduce a framework for rules for inclusive decision-making (establishment of democratic structures and processes). Include forms of deliberating and/or discussion, voting, representation.

Respect democratic decisions as binding and make sure to put the results of shared decision-making into practice. Make sure that decisions are legally and morally legitimate.

Everybody should have the same opportunity to take part in the process. Support and empower vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

When tasks and roles are to be assigned, take the preferences and competences of the people into account.
Initiative
Foster and support initiatives and provide some flexibility for taking action. As far as it is justifiable, allow opportunities to deviate from established rules and provide creative space for trial and error.

Resources
Provide and sustain resources for democratic practice (time, information, institutional support).
Participation

Consider the stakeholders

If you intend to put participatory democracy into practice, it is necessary to anticipate the involvement of potential groups of people and their specific roles. Moreover, if laws are in place in your country that grant stakeholders specific rights in decision-making in school, or institutions like a student council or a joint school conference (with teachers, parents and students) are legally defined, you must take these into account and make the best possible use of them.

**Students...**

...are the primary target group whose job is to learn and act democratically in school. They can be involved in the teaching and learning process during the lessons, in affairs concerning the whole class (rules, class trips, social life etc...), as well as in whole school issues, such as infrastructure, school events, or school rules. Moreover, students are a valuable resource for all attempts to reform and improve classroom instruction, or the school as a whole. Additionally, they can be taught democracy in various lessons based on the teaching materials from this website, Living and Learning Democracy.

**Parents...**

...are responsible for their children. As such, they have a major role in the education of their children. There is no successful education in school without parental support and cooperation. That is why the involvement of parents is essential. Parents can be involved in many different ways. Epstein suggests forms of parental involvement, such as showing parents what they can do at home to support their students' progress in school, or regularly informing the parents about their children and the school program. Parents may also volunteer in school, e.g. in school events or providing other assistance. Finally, parents can participate in decision-making processes in school.

**Teachers...**

...are the main educators for the students in school. Their teaching strongly influences how and what students (can) learn. Teachers know the strengths, problems and personal characteristics of their students very well. Teachers are the most important partners for principals. A sound and close cooperation between principal and teachers is essential in providing good teaching and learning-conditions. Regular meetings between principals and teachers (staff meetings) are standard at most schools. Here, you can discuss new regulations by public authorities openly and identify their implications for your school, understand the teachers' attitudes and experiences, foster initiatives, delegate responsibilities, as well as involve your teaching staff in nearly every decision to be made in school.

**Community...**

...is the social context in which your school is embedded. It is comprised of ordinary citizens, public and private associations, enterprises and companies, other public educational institutions, public health and safety institutions (hospitals, police etc.) as well as policy makers. Cooperating closely with these actors enables schools to offer extended services that serve the students' and parents' needs. By involving community stakeholders in school decision-making, it is also possible to adapt the school's programs to the needs of the community. For instance, if the police reports increased vandalism, or doctors are concerned about increasing video-game addiction in the community, the schools may integrate the discussion of such issues into their program or curriculum.
Public authorities...

...supervise the implementation of laws, rules and regulations that are binding for schools. They monitor the schools through inspections, evaluation and observation of the school's performance. In general, it is necessary to ensure that all decisions taken by a school comply with current laws and regulations. Keep representatives of public authorities informed about your plans and, if possible, try to involve them in your decision-making process at an early stage. Confidence-building will make them more likely to support your ideas, visions and projects.
The sociologist Roger Hart wrote a book called *Children’s Participation: The Theory And Practice Of Involving Young Citizens In Community Development And Environmental Care* for UNICEF in 1997. This approach put the work of young people and adult allies around the world in the context of a global movement for participation. It offers you, your teachers and the parents an amazing possibility: to be honest about how we integrate children and youth into decision making processes. Too often, children on a stage, during a meeting in an event, and even in a theatrical play are treated as mere decoration, or minorities are integrated as tokens to make us feel better. ([http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm](http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm))

### The Ladder of Participation: Trying to be honest!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Students are part of a political event. They might carry placards with paroles. They wear the colours of a party or a movement. <strong>Manipulation:</strong> Students are misused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Students are prepared to appear maybe in costumes carrying flowers or flags. They make an adult event (even a student’s rights day) look nice or student friendly. <strong>Decoration:</strong> Students are used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A selected group of students (maybe a minority) is given a possibility to represent ‘their cause’ without having a say, without preparation. They serve to show political correctness. <strong>Tokenism:</strong> Symbolic integration (of minorities).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A task (for instance community work) is given to students with no choice to agree or disagree. But they are informed and know the cause. <strong>Students are assigned but informed.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Before a decision is taken, adults consult with students. Their opinion and proposal are taken into consideration. <strong>Students are consulted and informed.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A new school yard is planned. Students are not only consulted but can also decide on some of the details. <strong>Adult-initiated. The decisions are shared with students.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Students have an idea and voice it. They take the initiative and bring their plans to a result. <strong>Student-initiated and directed.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Students come up with a need or a plan. They convince adults to support and or finance. Together they decide and realize. <strong>Student-initiated. The decisions are shared with adults.</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The section “Preparation” provides you with four buttons guiding you to different questionnaires for the reflection on important fields of action concerning democratic practices in schools.

1. Involvement of students, parents and the community
2. Teachers and principals (practice and cooperation)
3. Decision-making, communication and power
4. School atmosphere, transparency and initiative

These questionnaires can be used in various ways to get a clear overview about a potential starting point for action at your school.

Possibilities for working with the following materials

a) Fill in all questionnaires yourself as principal and find out which fields of action are well-established and which require additional support and development at your school.

b) Let the school staff fill in the questionnaires and analyze them together. Then, you initiate a discussion on the basis of the results. Try to understand better what surprises or strikes you. In so doing, prioritize the fields of action for the practice of democracy at your school.

c) Note: In the section «checklists, action plans and methods» there is a description of a free online survey tool (Google driven). You can copy the questions into this tool and start an online survey with your teachers. The system immediately shows the results, which can be further discussed with your teachers.

d) Use the questionnaire or some questions thereof as a basis for observations. Familiarize yourself in detail with the current practices in your school and in the classrooms. You can make regular observations over a period of time to collect more information. Crosscheck with your staff if necessary.

e) You can select specific fields of action or questions from the questionnaires. Use them as a starting point for discussions with the teaching staff and to raise awareness about a specific issue.

Note 1: Instead of choosing just one variant, you can also combine several variants. For example, you can fill in the questionnaires yourself, then conduct a survey with the teachers, followed by a discussion of the results. Finally, you observe and gather information about specific aspects in your school.

Note 2: For help with work in the fields of action you have identified for your school, consult the “action” section.
## Particpation

### Reflection on participation opportunities

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**STUDENTS: At our school...**

- ...students are involved in school decision making processes, e.g. rules, program, events, infra-structure, reforms etc.
- ...there are institutionalized representative student bodies, e.g. student parliament, school council, class council etc.

**STUDENTS: In the lessons... (Note: If you are a teacher please refer to your own teaching experience!)**

- ...students explicitly learn about democracy, e.g. in EDC/HRE.
- ...students explicitly practice democracy.
- ...students are able to give feedback.
- ...students are able to choose when they perform which kinds of tasks.
- ...students are able to choose where they work (rooms or a place in class).
- ...students are able to choose with whom they work.
- ...teachers assign tasks to the students that can be solved in different ways.
- ...teachers assign tasks to the students that allow for different results, e.g. solutions.
- ...the students are involved in defining rules.
- ...students are constantly informed about their strengths and weaknesses.
- ...teachers provide the opportunity for students to assess themselves.
- ...students are well informed about why they receive a specific grade.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents are regularly informed about their children's progress.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents are regularly informed about our school programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents are asked to volunteer and assist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents are shown what they can do at home to support their students' progress at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our school involves parents in school decision making, e.g. on rules, programs, events, reforms etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>At my school, there are institutionalized representation bodies for parents, e.g. parents’ council.</td>
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## Participation

### Reflection on the involvement of teachers and the community

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**PRINCIPAL and TEACHERS**

- At our school there are institutionalized time slots for teachers to regularly work together, e.g. teacher working groups.
- We follow common values and visions in our work at school.
- There is a high level of trust among the staff members.

*Note: If you are a teacher please refer to your own practice or experience!*

- Teachers use the teaching material on EDC/HRE from the Council of Europe provided on this website.
- Teachers have a lot of freedom to decide for themselves what to do.
- Teachers share their knowledge, experience and best practice with each other.
- Teachers make significant efforts to adequately teach (culturally, cognitively, physically etc.) disadvantaged students.
- Teachers are eager to adapt their teaching to the needs of their students.
- Teachers are in constant dialogue with each other.
- Teachers share information, ideas, experiences, knowledge, teaching materials or best practices with each other.
- Teachers observe each others’ lessons and give feedback to each other.
- Teachers work together with their colleagues to prepare lessons or try new ideas.
- Teachers agree on teaching content, tests or evaluation criteria.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our school cooperates with the wider community to offer additional services.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our school cooperates with the wider community to adapt its programs specifically to the needs of the community.</td>
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## Participation

### Reflection on the school atmosphere, transparency and initiative

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<th>partly</th>
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### SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE

- In our school students feel comfortable.
- In our school students feel safe.
- In our school students feel respected.
- In our school teachers feel comfortable.
- In our school teachers feel safe.
- In our school teachers feel respected.
- In our school there is an appreciative atmosphere.
- In our school there are institutionalized strategies for peaceful conflict resolution.

### TRANSPARENCY

- The principal openly shares information with the staff and provides access to it.
- The principal clearly communicates laws, regulations, expectations and possibilities for the teachers.
- The principal openly shares his point of view with the teachers.
- The principal regularly gives information on circumstances, facts, processes or decisions concerning the school.

### INITIATIVE

- At my school, teachers and students are encouraged to follow their ideas and put them into practice.
- At my school, creative thinking and innovation is encouraged.
### Reflection on decision-making, communication and power

Note: For advice how to use this questionnaire go to "preparation: important fields of action"

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<th>so so</th>
<th>no</th>
<th>comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When making decisions at my school...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>…the principal involves all people affected by the decision (teachers, parents, students)</td>
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<tr>
<td>…disadvantaged and marginalized people are encouraged and supported to get involved.</td>
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<td>…the staff actively listen to and try to understand each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>…the staff try to convince each other through logical and comprehensible argumentation.</td>
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<td>…the staff openly ask and answer questions.</td>
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<td>…the staff disclose and reflect individual attitudes, presuppositions and feelings honestly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>…the different viewpoints of the stakeholders involved are taken into account.</td>
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<tr>
<td>…we attempt to achieve a common ground and consensus.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>At my school...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>…collecting feedback is a common practice.</td>
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<td>…there are written regulations to binding principles of democratic structures and processes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>…time is allocated for deliberating and making common decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>…the principal is in constant dialogue with the staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>…all affected (groups of) people are involved in decision-making.</td>
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</table>
…people regularly have the opportunity to vote (raise hands, tick options etc.)

…there are elected representatives who act in the interest of (groups of) people.

…the principal clearly communicates the scope and limits of current laws and regulations set forth by public authorities.

**POWER**

The principal supports democratic decisions even if they do not reflect his/her personal preferences.

The principal accepts constructive criticism.

The principal shares responsibility with others.

At my school, we all feel equally accountable for both success and mistakes.
A 5 step process for participatory action

The following 5 step procedure illustrates an ideal process for participatory, democratic action that you can apply in your school (based on Fung 2004). In this procedure you can involve the staff but also the students, parents and others who are affected by the issue to be decided.

1. **Agenda setting (Identification of what to act upon):** The issue to be acted upon can
   a) concern the implications of laws and regulations set forth by school authorities,
   b) concern current queries, concerns or problems at school,
   c) or simply be openly defined together.

2. **Discussion and proposition:** Suggestion, justification and discussion of alternatives, proposals and strategies to address the issue; This phase results in an action plan which should contain:
   a) concrete tasks to be accomplished,
   b) the assignment of tasks,
   c) expectations about what the tasks will accomplish according to the issue in question and
   d) the evaluation methods to assess if the tasks have been accomplished and whether the desired effects have been achieved.

3. **Action:** People try to follow the action plan and carry out the tasks.

4. **Evaluation:** After the action has been completed, people discuss how things worked out. Neither the result of step 1 nor the results of step 2 and 3 can ensure the best way of dealing with regulations, the solution of a problem, the effective treatment of a concern or the perfect answer to a question. The commonly developed tasks in step 2 express expectations and the actions carried out in step 3 are experimental. Evaluation provides information about the results of those experiments.

5. **Restart:** According to the results of the evaluation, the procedure can end or start again from the beginning. If necessary, rethink all concerns and strategies to increase the likelihood of better results.
Class Councils usually take place once a week per lesson in every class of a school.

The class council is an institutionalized structure that enables students to articulate their concerns and to discuss them with their teachers and classmates. Usually, there is a written class council constitution to determine the main features and basic conditions. You can establish such a constitution together with the staff and use the action plan in this section to facilitate the implementation of the class council step by step. As a democratically-minded principal, you are interested in having these councils in every class. Make sure that the teachers are well prepared for them. Prepare a teacher training event in your school with a group of committed teachers to support your effort. The following information needs to be shared by all:

**Main components of class councils:**

- Finding and collecting issues to discuss (conflicts, infrastructure, school trips, rules, instruction etc.); the students can list their concerns in a class council file or post them in a letter box that are permanently accessible.
- Adopting roles and functions, e.g. president, vice-president, chair, recorder, time-manager. All roles are practised in the beginning with the help of the teacher/mentor.
- **Goal:** The mentor/teacher gradually withdraws, and the students manage themselves.

**A class council session: a step by step guide:**

**Preparation of the class council sessions:**

- Before the sessions: the topics/issues to be discussed are registered (collection of topics).
- The minutes of the last session and a minute template for the next session are prepared.
- Chairs are arranged in a circle and material is provided.
- The president of the day is elected (maybe already for the whole semester).

**Introduction:**

A class council can start with welcoming words by the president, an expression of mutual acknowledgement or desires.

**Check the decisions from last session:**

The council checks the decisions, collects the decisions and maybe integrates some issues into the list of topics.

**Clarify the minutes for the session:**

The council checks the current list of topics.

- Are the topics still urgent? Do they still need to be discussed?
- Are there new issues/urgent issues?
- Is there anything else to be informed about, discussed or decided on?

**Discuss concerns/resolve conflicts:**

The students express their concerns, search for solutions and consider suggestions. The student who comes up with a topic starts with explaining the concern. The other students obtain information and ask follow-up questions to fully understand the issue, express arguments and collect suggestions (in small groups or in the plenary sessions).

**Making decisions:**

After debating and discussing an issue, there needs to be a common decision (through voting or finding consensus) and a procedure for guiding the process.
Recording of decisions:
Decisions are recorded and stored as documents in a class council file. After a while, the class council must check if the decisions have been realized (why, why not).

Reflection and feedback on the session:
Students reflect on their experiences in the class council and ask themselves what worked well/not well, and what they could change individually and together.

Closing the session:
The president presents the decisions once again, clarifies organizational issues etc.

Reflection on the class council sessions:
The mentor reflects on the class council with the student(s) and their performance of tasks (chair, recorder etc.) and finds out if the students still need support in terms of chairing or leadership of the council, and other concerns and suggestions.
Collecting and clustering

In a democratic decision-making process, many points of view, suggestions and ideas may arise. Thus, the chair has to process these issues and cluster them. This can be achieved in plenary sessions by simultaneously taking notes on the board or flipchart when the participants raise their points. In groupwork, participants write down their points on the flipchart and present them. After having raised and discussed all points, it is necessary to cluster overlapping aspects and clearly distinguish them from each other.

Voting and prioritization

Voting is the typical procedure to make a democratic decision, whereby the majority usually determines the outcome. There are different procedures of majority vote.

We are most familiar with voting by raising one’s hands or marking one of several options on a ballot. A useful way of voting after collecting and clustering several views, ideas or suggestions from an audience is to distribute a number of colorful sticky dots per person. The participants then paste their dots to their preferred options on a form. They may use all dots for one option or distribute them for many options. You can also set a limit of three dots for one option if this makes sense. It is important to recognize that the participants may mutually influence each other when they can see what others vote for, e.g. when raising hands or openly assigning dots to certain options. To prevent mutual manipulation, it is possible to ask the participants to close their eyes before raising their hands or to hand out little stones to the participants and ask them to cast them into boxes next to the given options. The latter procedures have proven especially useful when working with young children who tend to look what others do before they think for themselves.

Consensus seeking

Majority votes always produce winners and losers. When voting for certain issues, it is necessary to keep in mind that the potential losers must also participate in implementing the decision. That is why one should attempt to include their interests if possible, e.g. through compromise. One way of seeking such a consensus is to provide four options that the participants can vote for. It has proven to be motivating when the corners in the room represent different options (you may mark the corners with small posters) and the participants move to the corners of their choice.

Options:

1. I totally agree
2. I have some doubt about it, but I actively take part in putting it into practice.
3. I can’t agree with it in this form. This. We have to change something (e.g. in the wording).
4. I totally disagree (veto)

If one person votes for option 3, the group has to amend and improve the current proposal. If a person votes for option 4, the proposal has been turned down. The advantage of this procedure is that nobody can withdraw from decision-making or be ignored. Everybody has to come up with a statement and openly take a position. When applying this method with (small) children only two options should be offered „agree and disagree (veto)“ in the beginning. If only one child disagrees, the children need to look for a new solution.
Methods - Conflict resolution, world café, deliberation forum

**Conflict resolution:**
Conflicts between persons or groups of persons should be dealt with in a systematic way. They offer important learning opportunities in democratic citizenship, as students can learn that conflicts belong to social life but can be resolved by taking the interests of both parties into account.

A standard conflict resolution procedure (usually applied with students):

1. The whole group obtains approval from opposing parties to resolve their conflict.
2. The conflict is described by every person involved in the conflict.
3. The conflict is analyzed and interests and needs are clarified.
4. The group tries to switch perspectives and shows empathy with all parties to the conflict.
5. The group searches for solutions (e.g. through brainstorming).
6. The persons involved in the conflict consider the solutions (helpful, realizable) and choose some.
7. The persons involved in the conflict reach an agreement.
8. The persons involved in the conflict (together with the help of the group) plan how to implement the agreement (who, what, when, how).

**World Cafe:**
The world cafe is a method for hosting a large group dialogue and can be useful for a variety of needs. This method is well-suited for solving difficult problems or answering complex questions together with many people. It fosters the usage of collective intelligence and supports the expression of different opinions, ideas or solutions. The website ([www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)) provides you with all the necessary information about the method.

**Deliberation forum:**
This method has proven to be well suited for students but can also be applied with adults. It aims to develop a deep understanding of an issue and to illustrate a potential change in attitudes following deliberation: First, you hand out a short questionnaire (usually closed questions) to the participants asking for their attitudes about the issue in question, e.g. the integration of refugees. In the second step, the participants obtain well-balanced information about the issue. In a plenary session (third step), various experts and interest groups from the school community can be invited to present their arguments and attitudes to the participants. Fourth step: the participants are divided into various groups and develop questions to ask of politicians from different parties. Fifth step: in a second plenary session, the politicians may react to the questions within a set time limit. In the end, every participant fills in the questionnaire from the beginning again. The questionnaires are anonymous but labelled with a code. This way, it is possible to show changes in people’s attitude.

**Note:** If you do not manage to organize every step, e.g. inviting all the experts or politicians, you can also skip or change a step, for example by substituting participants for experts. These participants should be informed in detail about an issue, or they adopt the position of a specific interest group.

**Sources:** [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)
Do you want to collect feedback on a specific issue or conduct an evaluation? Do you want to collect opinions or more detailed information from people? Do you want to enable the participation of larger groups of people and figure out priorities?

Why not design a questionnaire and conduct a survey? Be clear about what information you want to obtain. You can find many hints and examples on the internet about what questions to include in a questionnaire for feedback, evaluation or collecting opinions, etc. such as from the official national education websites of your country, teachers’ websites etc. You can also create your own individual questions. Questionnaires are generally more favorably accepted if they are designed together with representatives of the people to be questioned.

You can use several types of questions, such as

1. open questions: people can answer in their own words or
2. closed questions: people select from given answers

Try to keep the questionnaire as short as possible (maximum 4 pages) and phrase the questions clearly and specifically. Have a clear idea what the results of the survey will be used for.

An online survey allows you to analyze the results in the most efficient way. You automatically get the results as soon as the people have filled in the questionnaires. Google forms (google drive) is a free online tool you can use (www.drive.google.com). For usage you only have to open a free google account if you still don’t have one (https://accounts.google.com). You can find several video tutorials on the internet (e.g. in youtube search for: google forms survey) which provide you with the necessary information to to use the tool. Watch them and try it out for yourself.

Here is some basic information on google forms which may interest you:

- You can choose how to invite potential participants to take part in the survey through:
  a) sending e-mails
  b) copying and pasting a link and hand-out or sending the link to the participants.

- Anonymity is ensured even if the people log into their google account. The organizer of a survey does not see who has answered. This can easily be demonstrated online with a digital projector.

- You can analyze the data by a quick click on a button on the screen and print the results (including charts).

- You have many options for questions (multiple choice, rating, open questions etc...).

- You can export the data into excel.
FOUR BASIC STEPS OF PARTICIPATION

WE DECIDE TOGETHER

WE PLAN AND IMPLEMENT THINGS TOGETHER

WE SHARE AND DISCUSS IDEAS

WE INFORM EACH OTHER
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

REACTIVE
I react to things that happen and say something when things go badly, or when they go well.

GENERATIVE
I generate new projects, organisations or initiatives, based on seeing something is missing.

RESPONSIVE
I respond when asked for my view or opinion.

ENGAGING
I engage, catalyze, connect or encourage others.

STRATEGIC
I generate new projects, organizations or initiatives, based on seeing something is missing.

HELPING
I help out by doing things.

SUPPORTIVE
I support projects and schemes that are already happening.
TO WHAT EXTENT ARE WE PART OF THE PROJECTS?

WE HAVE A PLAN

THE ADULTS DECIDE AND WORK TOGETHER WITH US

WE DECIDE AND DO IT OURSELVES

WE DECIDE TOGETHER WITH THEM

THEY LISTEN TO OUR IDEAS AND INFORM US

THEY INFORM US AND TELL US WHAT TO DO

SOME OF US ARE SELECTED TO DO, WHAT THEY DECIDE

WE PLAY THE ROLE OF A HAPPY DECORATION

THEY USE US TO MAKE IT LOOK GOOD

THE ADULTS HAVE A PLAN

THE ADULTS HAVE AN EVENT (ABOUT US)

THE ADULTS HAVE AN EVENT