

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?*

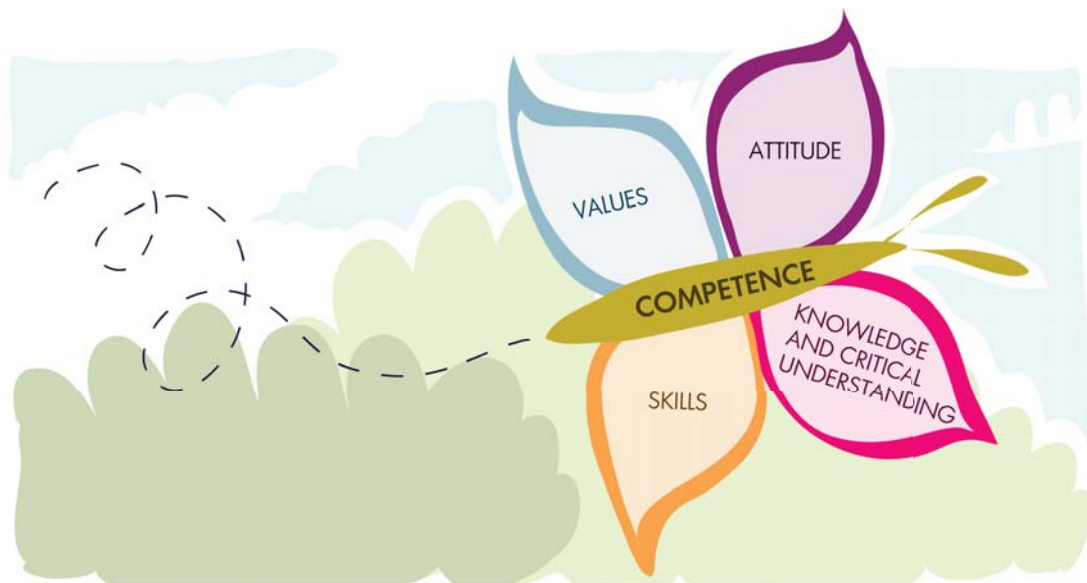
Awareness handout 2.1:

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.