

*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.