

*Learning***Value education encourages students' self-discipline**

You are walking along a hallway in a school. The noise from a classroom tells you that a lesson has run out of control and the teacher is unable to cope with the situation. During or soon after the lesson, the teacher knocks on your door, and asks you to intervene. The students whom the teacher has identified as troublemakers will plead innocent, putting you into the uncomfortable position of a "High Judge". In such incidents, the teacher will lose respect from the students.

This scenario points to the weakness of the authoritarian style of school leadership: Students must be forced to obey the rules that have been set, and if they don't, the teacher is expected to enforce them. This makes teachers feel uneasy, facing a vast majority of possible troublemakers and foes in class. Permanent control, praise and punishment are the means at the teachers' hands to enforce order and discipline.

Student discipline is indeed essential for a school to work well. Moreover, school is the first institution that children and youth enter in their lives, and here students must learn to obey the law, not because they are forced to, but because they should understand and appreciate the necessity of the rule of law. However, a system of permanent surveillance and sanctions is neither feasible nor desirable, as such a school teaches students an attitude of obedience, leaving them unable to take responsibility for the school community.

Values are invisible, but they appear in a person's behavior. To a large extent, discipline cannot be enforced, but must rather grow from within. Values cannot be preached, but are learned from good examples. As role models, your and your staff's attitude is decisive for the development of a democratic, value-based school community.

If you ask students what they expect from school, their answers show that they often expect more than a school can deliver. They wish to spend their time well, and want their school to function properly, although their behavior may sometimes be disruptive. Therefore, it is possible to convince the students that no community can function without rules, and that this also applies to democratic communities. 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/>.



If students share the values that school rules promote, they will be willing to accept and appreciate them. In *Competences for democratic culture*, published by the Council of Europe, these values include “support for the rule of law and equal and impartial treatment of all citizens under the law as a means of ensuring justice” (more: [Competences For Democratic Culture](#), p 38, no 7).

Value-based rules need to be discussed and communicated in class, and here, EDC/HRE plays an important part. *Growing up in democracy*, Volume II in the series of EDC/HRE manuals for teachers, describes a small project in which students assess the school rules in place, identify the underlying values and principles, and discuss suggestions to revise and improve the rules. The Cover picture of this volume, showing students signing the school rules they have adopted by majority vote, highlights the learning potential of this project as it allows students to participate in decision-making in school. The issue is meaningful and a true part of real school life. Educating for democratic citizenship and the values of democratic culture is possible with all age groups. *Growing up in democracy* addresses teachers at the primary level, so the project for participation in decision-making in school can be adapted for older students. See <https://www.living-democracy.com/text-books/volume-2/unit-5/>.

Students are perfectly aware that their behavior needs to be monitored, and that rules will be enforced if they are broken. This remains the principal’s and the staff’s responsibility, in accordance with school legislation. Those students who have developed an attitude of civic-mindedness, “a sense of accountability to other people within the community and accepting that one is answerable to others for one’s decisions and actions” (more: [Competences For Democratic Culture](#) p. 41), will create fewer disciplinary issues, as they have developed self-discipline and can take responsibility for their behavior.