

*Learning***Linking lessons to the real world**

Running a school is a demanding task for a principal, requiring that you have a clear idea of your institutional key objectives. There are good ways to link the different issues and small steps like pieces of a puzzle in one big picture. Having this big picture in mind will often help you to be prepared for surprises, mostly unwelcome, before they happen.

“Democratic participation for students should be limited to student councils and deal with activities in school, but not in the classroom. Lessons are too important for students to interfere with.”

This view is common in schools, and people who argue this way expect that students simply to toe the line, obeying school rules and orders from the staff. But on the other hand, we expect students to prepare for their role as adult citizens in a democratic community. Do we really believe that learners will somehow develop into democratic citizens by themselves, simply by attending school for a number of years?

“Will I ever need this in my life? – in the real world out there? Why do I need it?” Questions like these point to the gap between the time students spend in class and outside of class. Students will not be satisfied by the argument that a lesson is useful because it has been set in the curriculum by the ministry, or because the teacher says so, or because it prepares them for the exams. Rather, these questions remind teachers what didactics are all about: They must be able to explain their choices of topics and learning objectives, keeping in mind that something becomes interesting if it is connected to real life and to what learners already know.

If you wish to discuss this topic with your teachers, these materials will support you:

Teachers can take small steps if they wish to respond to the students' learning needs, but they should take them: <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-2/unit-1/chapter-2/lesson-7/>

Teachers who wish to reflect about their didactic choices will find support here: <https://www.living-democracy.com/textbooks/volume-1/part-2/unit-2/>

Democratic citizenship can be learned in school through experience and reflection. Education for democratic citizenship and human rights (EDC/HRE), both as a topic in class and a whole school approach, shows many ways how to link lesson topics to the real world, and particularly to life in school. EDC/HRE suggests different paths to suit different teaching styles. For teachers who prefer teacher-centred courses, EDC/HRE offers exercises on topics and examples related to the students' experience. Teachers interested in models of cooperative and task-based learning will find abundant material in the EDC/HRE manuals (<https://www.living-democracy.com/teachers/>).

