

*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).

