

The school: a democratic learning community



**The school:
A democratic learning community**

**The All-European Study on
Pupils' Participation in School**

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Introduction

The All-European Study on Pupil Participation in Schools was commissioned by the Council of Europe as one of the two All-European studies carried out within the framework of the Second Phase of the Council's large-scale project Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC).¹

One All-European study is dedicated to an analysis of EDC policies in Europe.² The other study, presented here, deals with the issue of pupil/student participation in the democratic school. It is thought to be one of the very few attempts to collect information on the issue from a representative number of European education systems. However, the paper is a preliminary study; it does not aspire to meet the academic and theoretical standards of social sciences, nor the empirical standards of statistics. Indeed, for an in-depth study, there were not the resources or the time, and neither the extent nor the quality of the feedback from the various countries would have sufficed.

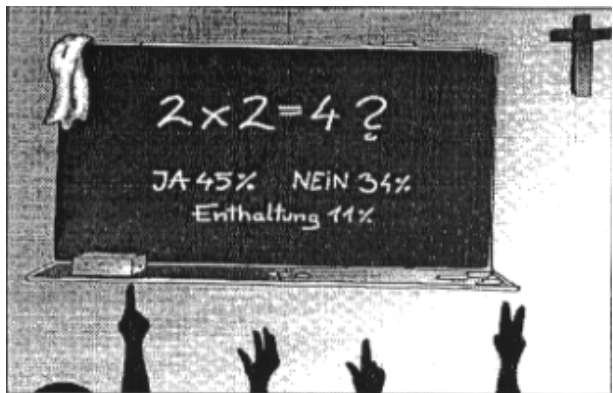
Therefore, it needs to be emphasised here quite clearly that the author's objective in this book is to bring together comments, descriptions, good practices and data in order to create an overall impression of the debate and situation of pupil participation in Europe. The main focus is to provide preliminary answers to the following questions:

- what is the general background and environment for learning about democracy in school?
- are there model projects or innovative approaches to pupil participation in Europe that could be highlighted as “good practice” in pupil participation?
- are there theoretical and practical elements of learning about democracy that could contribute to formulating “basic guidelines” for pupil participation in Europe?
- what is the legal basis for pupil participation in European countries?
- what are the democratic and participation rights of pupils and their parents in the school?
- is there a supportive framework for pupil participation in the education environment (in teacher training or special provisions)?

1. For more information on the EDC Project see: <http://www.coe.int/edc>.

2. See David Kerr et al., “All-European Study on Policies for Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC), Regional Study: Western Europe Region”, DGIV/EDU/CIT (2003) 21, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2003, and regional studies for the central Europe, northern Europe, southern Europe and eastern Europe regions.

Part 1: Elements of learning about democracy in the school



$2 \times 2 = 4?$ Yes 45%, No 34%, Abstentions 11%.

Cartoon: Stefan Rasch¹

1. Cartoon by Stefan Rasch, in Bundesministerium für Unterricht und kulturelle Angelegenheiten (ed.), *Betrifft: Demokratie lernen*, Heft 1, Vienna, 1998, p. 8.

1. General environment

Most people will agree that educational innovation and reform are an ongoing process – a project without a final report – and never actually to be completed.

The results of the PISA Study – which for many European states turned out to be anything from disappointing to alarming – led to intensified discussions, not only about the effectiveness of present-day school systems but also about reforms of virtually all elements of schooling and about the “literacy” of students.

In particular, methods of teaching and learning were – and still are being – questioned, and demands were articulated for the creation of a different school climate and learning environment. The term “literacy” was considerably expanded to include aspects like “political literacy” or “democratic literacy”, meaning the qualification of pupils for their future role as citizens. In this context, the role of the school in the qualification of responsible and participative future citizens in a democratic society has become more pronounced. It is generally recognised that “critical and independent thinking (...) is a precondition for participating in society, in democratic processes and educational institutions alike”.¹

Similarly, an Italian paper states that “it is possible to see growing recognition, on the part of political and social forces, and of public opinion in general, of the importance of the school system in creating responsible and aware citizens, and in building a democratic society open to change”.²

Similar statements can be found in many books, articles and experts’ statements, not only in Europe, but around the world. School offers a rich potential for fulfilling this task – though that, incidentally, is by no means a new or recent idea. In fact, to educate young people in a democratic spirit and to prepare them for their future role as active citizens has been the mandate of the school system for a long time.³

1. Mitja Sardoc, “Pupil participation in the Slovenian public education system”, unpublished paper delivered at the 2nd German-Croatian Seminar on Education for Democratic Citizenship, Opatija, Croatia, June 2003, p. 1.

2. Bruno Losito, “Educating for democracy in a changing democratic society: the possible role of schools in the civic education of students”, unpublished national case study, Rome, Italy, 2003, p. 3.

3. Cf. Gerd Hepp and Herbert Schneider, Vorwort [Foreword] in *Schule in der Buergergesellschaft*, Schwalbach, Germany, 1999, p. 5.

School reform

Thus, it can be said that the role of the school in the democratic socialising of its students is not in question. Rather, the question is whether the school in its present form is able, empowered and willing to fulfil this role.

For many decades, a debate has raged in pedagogical science, as well as in the field of civic education, about the problems and chances of democratic education. The demands for more autonomy and for an extension of schools' self-directed shaping of their environment correspond with demands for reduced state influence over and regulation of the education sector.

On the basis of long-standing pedagogical reform concepts, demands have been articulated again and again that the school itself needs to become a space of democratic living, learning and experience. In this context, it is quite obvious that many fields and areas of democratic socialisation have not been sufficiently explored with regard to their contribution to the process of democratic socialisation.

In the field of Social Studies and Civic Education in particular, it can be argued that the definition of democracy and the "democratic process" in the curricular context has been too narrow, focusing almost entirely on the macro-political process. This led, for example, Tilman Grammes, the German expert in Political Education, to demand a new debate on the "didactics of political education".¹ Even though the subject often includes social, economic and legal elements, setting up an interdisciplinary approach, the micro-social elements represented by the school as a field and laboratory for democratic living, learning, and experience are largely or even totally neglected.

Yet it is a fact that from the classroom to the wider school environment, many opportunities exist for experiment, trial and error, activity and engagement in democratic processes and even decision making, which could be given much more emphasis and put to pedagogical use. Thus, the school as a learning environment should and could be developed into an environment for democratic learning and experience.

Democracy as a form of living, society and governance

In today's increasingly complex and diverse world, it has become necessary to redefine the meaning of participatory democracy and to reassess the status of the citizen. Extremist movements, violence, racism, xenophobia and social exclusion

1. Grammes argues that more "courage for a discussion of the canon" (of curriculum content) is needed to find out which subjects are elementary and indispensable: Tilman Grammes, "Bilanz und Perspektiven der schulbezogenen Politikdidaktik: eine Wissenschaft ohne Gegenstand", unpublished manuscript, quoted in P. Henkenborg, "Schul- und Unterrichtsentwicklung als Herausforderung der Politikdidaktik: Thesen, Fragen und Aufgabenfelder" in http://www.dvpb.de/polis/jahrgang/3_00/henkenborg.htm.

threaten democracies. Globalisation and far-reaching technological developments challenge them. Each individual has a vital role to play in achieving democratic stability and peace in society.¹

These challenges are just as virulent in the classroom. They require a new understanding of the rights and responsibilities of future citizens. Intercultural learning is just one of the subjects which must be given more weight. In particular, these destabilising attitudes require a pragmatic approach that avoids overburdening lesson plans with theoretical knowledge about democracy and the civil society.

Thus, any analysis of a modern approach to teaching and learning about democratic civil society will probably agree with the definition of the three forms of democracy developed in the field of the Science of Democracy (an attempt to combine approaches developed in Political Science, Political Pedagogy and the Didactics of Political Education):

Democracy is

- a form of living;
- a form of society; and
- a form of government or governance.

Active citizenship

Behind such approaches stands the ideal of active citizenship, which is also highlighted by Article A of the Amsterdam Treaty of the European Union. One of the main objectives of the Directorate General for Education and Culture of the European Commission is to develop citizenship, not just in the legal sense of the word, but also by encouraging people's practical involvement in the democratic process at all levels: "Action in the field of education, training and youth offers a privileged vehicle for the promotion of active participation in Europe's rich diversity of cultures".²

New pragmatism

In learning and teaching about democracy, none of the three aspects mentioned above should or can be excluded. In earlier times, for instance, the focus was put almost exclusively on democracy as a form of governance and, therefore, learning about democracy usually offered little more than a description of institutions and procedures. Today, it can be said that the new pragmatism in civic education

1. Cf. K. Dürr, V. Spajic-Vrkas and I. Ferreira Martins, "Strategies for learning democratic citizenship", DECS/EDU/CIT (2000) 16, Strasbourg, 2000, p. 10.

2. European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture, Home page, <http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education-culture/index-en.htm>.

and in learning about democracy is emphasised in practically every publication in this context. Chapter 2 presents an outline of the learning process developed by G. Himmelmann, which represents a suitable way of structuring the basic curriculum of learning about democracy.

Overburdening of the school

In the school context, however, this poses a problem. Some experts are convinced that schools have been continually burdened with extra tasks, some of which were the result of the social changes experienced in all modern societies (the declining importance of certain socialisation agents such as churches), but some of which were hived off by parents onto the school.

In other words, schools are increasingly burdened with therapeutic functions and psycho-social repair tasks caused by parents who have reduced their contribution to the emotional, social and psychological development of their children, laying the responsibility squarely on the school. If these claims are true, the question arises of what should be done under such circumstances to enable schools to provide an adequate contribution to practical democratic learning.

Democratisation of the broader society

Seen in the wider context of democratisation, two crucial factors influencing the participation rights of pupils in school are a society's historical experience and its political macro-environment. This is especially true for the so-called reform societies, the former communist societies in central, eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

“The passage from authoritarianism to democracy is therefore a crucial time of growth for nations and their young people alike. And, in many ways, the ups and downs, the gains and losses and the missed opportunities of the transition nations are amplified and played out in the lives of the young people.”¹

The school as a democratic institution

Against the background of increasing democratisation in all areas and on all levels of society and, in particular, increasing demands for the transformation of the school into a truly democratic institution, the stage is set for the increased participation of pupils in the everyday life of the school – stimulating a comprehensive debate about how this is to be done.

1. “MONEE Report – Young People in Changing Societies”, quoted in Aleksandra Vidanovic et al., “Priorities, tools and proposals for constructing national youth strategy and policy, Ministry of Education and Sports, Republic of Serbia”, statement to the All-European Study on Pupil Participation, 2002.

How can educational achievement be improved through democratisation? In this context, we hear the call for more involvement of important groups (“stakeholders”) in the education processes and in the implementation of curricular reforms, in innovative approaches and new programmes – in other words, stimulating and intensifying the involvement of parents, teachers, NGOs, communities, congregations and voluntary groups.

But modern pedagogical concepts also call for more involvement of the prime group in the education process: the pupils or students themselves. However, there still seem to be strong reservations about the actual involvement and co-responsibility of pupils in decision-making processes. On a very fundamental level, there are widespread concerns that the school – with its comprehensive mandate for educating and even “creating” the competent, informed and responsible citizen – cannot possibly allow far-reaching co-responsibility or co-determination by its pupils.

And on a more practical level, some people – while in principle supportive of the idea and convinced of the rightfulness of pupil participation – cannot see any way actually to create and incorporate these opportunities in the everyday life of the school.

Indeed, the school is not a voluntary system and it is generally assumed that the degree of student participation cannot possibly match the extent of full democratic participation rights in the wider society. In the education process, there will always be areas and decisions which remain the prerogative of the institution, its representatives or the policy makers. So, the question of how far the democratic participation of pupils, parents and other “stakeholders” in the education system should be allowed to go – the scale and extent of democratisation within the context of the school – will remain a matter of dispute.

Uncontested, however, is the core statement which applies to all teaching and learning about democracy:

Teaching and learning about democracy will fail unless it takes place within a democratic educational framework and environment.

In other words, all democratic systems depend on the political engagement and readiness of their citizens to participate actively in political life, the public debate and the decision-making processes. The active citizen is, therefore, a precondition for and the very basis of a living and functioning democracy, and their participation is indeed the legitimisation of the system. The school is the preparatory system for such citizenship and needs to be strengthened and empowered to exercise that role in a meaningful way.

Along with the family, the school is the most important factor for the creation, formation and education of the “informed, responsible, participative citizen”.

In this context, the school has four educational objectives:

- to empower pupils and students for their future role as citizens;
- to provide opportunities for democratic learning;
- to open up suitable areas or fields for active participation and co-responsibility in the school environment; and
- to encourage pupils to actively participate in social life in the larger community and to exercise their rights.

Pupil participation in the school – and in particular the extent of participation, “how far” it should go – does, in the first place, depend at a very elementary level on the willingness of the groups involved to bring it about: the teachers, head teachers, principals, school inspectors or supervisors, school administrators and educational decision-makers. Secondly, it depends on the more general capacity of the education system to accept, stimulate, promote and implement the necessary changes, painful as they may be for many of the actors involved. And thirdly, in a more abstract sense, it depends on historical experiences, cultural, social and political factors, traditions and influences prevalent in any particular society.

The preparation of students for their role as “informed, responsible and participative citizens” is the global aim of any educational process – regardless of the form of the school, the age level or the subject – and in particular it is the core task of the subject called Civic Education or Political Education or Social Studies. But the task is not restricted to the school alone; rather, it is a process of life-long learning involving many different actors, groups and organisations.

In democratic states, education is a basic right which, as a rule, is guaranteed by the constitution. Therefore, we all passed through some form of schooling – and we acquired knowledge, skills and competences. We experienced success and faced failure; we formed friendships and relationships. During the school year, the school and the classroom were the focal point of our lives outside the home. Here we spent a large part of our days and finally acquired certificates qualifying us for future opportunities in our lives.

The school is an institution with its own structure and rules; yet it is also a place where educational and formative processes take place. In other words, it is simultaneously an institution for learning, a social institution, an organisation, an authority or legal entity, and a work-place.

The school is an institution which carries out critical functions for society: the school’s central tasks for and in society are to ensure the transmission of the knowledge, skills and competences on which the society’s cultural system is based.

As an institution, the school is also a bureaucratic organisation characterised by a functional hierarchy and a division of labour between the groups involved (pupils, teachers, principals and so on) and a set of rules which govern processes and its daily functioning.

This ambivalent character of school is perhaps the single most important influence in stimulating or increasing pupil participation. This study can be no more than a first overview of the situation of pupil participation in Europe. The continuation of this work would be advisable in order to collect more detailed information and experience, and to provide solutions from a representative variety of European countries.

2. A historical perspective

Historically, education systems and schools have been characterised (at least since the early eighteenth century) by extensive bureaucratisation and government control. With the rise of the industrial society – accompanied by the development of welfare-state institutions and party democracy – more and more forces came to influence education, and the role of the state and its administration interposing between the school system and society at large became somewhat reduced. For instance, curriculum development had to take into consideration qualifications required by the economy. Thus, education became a policy field in its own right.

In spite of this politicisation of education and the school, the state laid down the core regulations concerning practically all aspects of school life and its environment. This went a very long way indeed. Let us look back at a directive issued by a German school inspector in 1903, by no means an exception in Europe. The example makes clear that the pupils' school life was dominated by law and order, absolute discipline and unquestioned subordination:

In order to prevent any disturbance of the lesson, the teacher must take care

- that all pupils sit straight and upright and in exact lines behind one another
- that all children place their hands folded in front of them on their slates
- that their feet are in parallel position on the floor ...

All broad discussions and talking must be prevented, and in any case, a wink of the eye ... or the single call: "Class – attention" must suffice to restore order in the class room.¹

In the course of the hundred years since then, completely different perspectives have been formulated for everyday life in the classroom and, more generally, the school environment. A very important step in the modernisation of thinking about the school was taken in 1921, when A. S. Neill founded Summerhill School in Great Britain, a progressive, co-educational, residential school: "Summerhill is first and foremost a place where children can discover who they are and where their place is in the safety of a self-governing, democratic community."²

For the first time, a concept was developed by which children could have a say in the organisation of their timetable on a non-compulsory basis. A. S. Neill was convinced that traditional schooling was going in the wrong way:

1. C. Kehr, "Wegweiser zur Fuehrung einer geregelten Schuldisziplin", in *Praxis der Volksschule*, Gotha, 1903, p. 65 ff, quoted in *Zeitslupe* 30, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn, p. 8.
2. <http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/pages/index.html>.

“Most of the school work adolescents do is simply a waste of time, of energy, of patience. It robs youth of its right to play and play and play, it puts old heads on young shoulders.”

Neill’s ideas have proved very influential in attempts to reform education systems; his principle of voluntary attendance was and still is revolutionary.

There has been criticism of the lack of rules, sub-standard educational achievement, disorder, drug problems, early pregnancies and so on, but these seem to be unjustified. The school claims that so far there have been neither pregnancies nor drug abuse, and that educational achievement has been above average. It is by no means a lawless organisation: the school has more than 200 rules, more than many other schools – but in contrast to normal school rules, all of them were determined by the joint school council in which children and adults have equal voting rights; so Summerhill could be called the “first children’s democracy”.

In 2004, some of these ideas were gaining in importance and a general consensus seemed to be taking shape, on a very fundamental level, about the following pedagogical objectives:

- children should be enabled to acquire basic democratic experience at a very early stage in their school career;¹
- starting from an early age, they should therefore be empowered to understand and respect democratic principles (such as “equality”) and human rights;
- at the same time, they should be empowered to practise democracy in their daily lives: “Democracy must be learnt in order to be experienced” (Kurt Gerhard Fischer) is only one side of the coin; the other side is “Democracy must be experienced in order to be learnt” (Gisela Behrmann).²

So the 1903 directive quoted above is a far cry from today’s concerns and reflections on increased participation of pupils in schools. It was quoted here to show how hard and difficult it must have been to bring about changes under such conditions. In the German state of Baden-Württemberg, for instance, moves towards democratisation of schools started in 1945 when the first attempts were made to include pupils in the regulation of school life. It took another eight years before the participation rights of pupils and parents were set down in law. Pupil and student unrest, strikes and demonstrations in the later 1960s led to students’ co-responsibility (*Schuelermitverantwortung*) being finally clarified.

1. There even exist interesting models for democratic learning in a wider sense in kindergarten and pre-school education.

2. Quoted by G. Himmelmann, “Demokratie-Lernen als Lebens-, Gesellschafts- und Herrschaftsform”, in G. Breit and S. Schiele, *Demokratie-Lernen als Aufgabe der politischen Bildung*, Bonn, 2002, p. 26.

Similar developments took place in other European countries. It can safely be argued that – even though the idea of participation by pupils and parents in the school is not a new one – the actual realisation of the idea has been going on for only three to four decades. Earlier attempts were half-hearted and, even where they were followed by legal provisions, they frequently ran out of steam or degenerated into mere token policies.



“Civic education...”

Cartoon: J. Hickel¹

1. Cartoon by J. Hickel, Quelle & Meyer. Bundesministerium für Unterricht und kulturelle Angelegenheiten (ed.), *Betrifft: Demokratie lernen*, Heft 2, Vienna, 1998, p. 11.

3. The rights of the child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international agreement. It was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in November 1989 and has been ratified by almost every state in the world. Only two countries, the United States of America and Somalia, have not yet ratified the treaty.

The convention envisages a changed relationship between adults and children. Parents, teachers, caregivers and others interacting with children are no longer seen as mere providers, protectors or advocates, but also as negotiators and facilitators. They are expected to create spaces and promote processes designed to enable and empower children to express views, to be consulted and to influence decisions.¹

In a speech to the Commission on Human Rights in 1999, UNICEF's Deputy Executive Director Stephen Lewis stated:

“The most powerful change wrought by the convention is the way in which children have become visible. Politicians, media, NGOs and broader civil society feel a clear obligation to include children in their respective public domains, interventions, dialogues, debates, mandates. You can't ignore children any longer and get away with it. The convention has raised consciousness in dramatic fashion.”

This general vision is pronounced in more specific language in the articles that deal with the educational and participation rights of the child.

Article 12 of the convention states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that may be relevant in their lives and to influence decisions taken in their regard – within the family, the school or the community. The practical meaning of children's rights to participation must be considered in each and every matter concerning children. The article also indicates that children need to be involved in the process of realising their rights. As a fundamental right of the child, the right to participation stands on its own; it requires a clear commitment and effective actions to become a living reality and therefore is much more than a simple strategy.

For this reason, the right to participation was identified as one of the guiding principles of the convention:

– it is seen as an underlying value which guides the way each individual right is ensured.

1. See the UNICEF website (<http://www.unicef.org>) on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The following discussion draws on the description of Article 12 to be found on the website.

- it is seen as a criterion for assessing progress in implementing children’s rights.
- it is seen as an extra dimension to the universally recognised freedom of expression and implies the right of the child to be heard and to have his or her views or opinions taken into account.

Respecting children’s views means that such views should not be ignored; it does not mean that children’s opinions should be automatically endorsed. Expressing an opinion is not the same as taking a decision, but it implies the ability to influence decisions.

A process of dialogue and exchange needs to be encouraged in which children assume increasing responsibilities and become active, tolerant and democratic. In such a process, adults must provide direction and guidance to children, while considering their views in a manner consistent with the child’s age and maturity. Through this process, a child will gain an understanding of why particular options are followed, or why decisions are taken that might differ from the one he or she favoured.

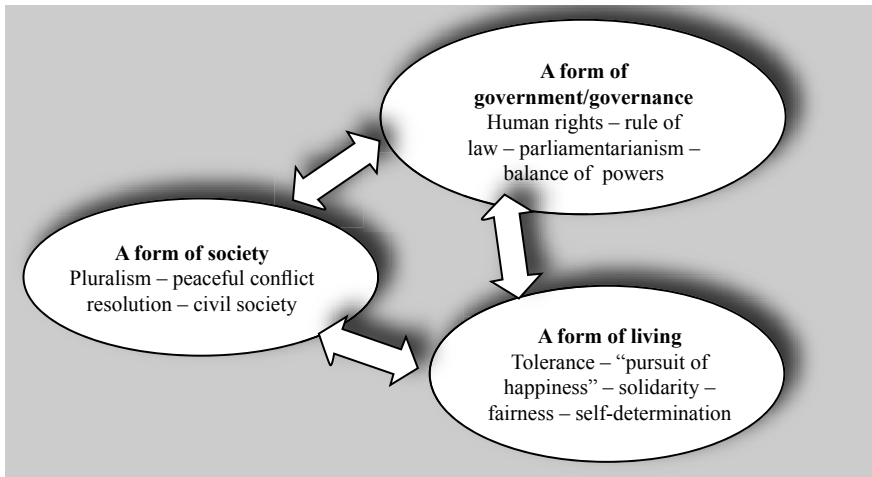
4. Approaches to teaching and learning about democracy

We have argued above that modern pedagogical approaches to learning about democracy define democracy as a form of living, a form of society and a form of government. Learning about democracy can thus be linked to pedagogical concepts. A comprehensive approach to such a discussion could start with a critique of “antiquated learning cultures”,¹ which however can probably still be observed today in most learning contexts in Europe.

The aim of such a debate should be to develop reform concepts that will lead to the reinvention of the school as a sphere of living and experience and to recognition of the school as an important institution in the framework of the larger civil society. The well-known statement “*Demokratie beginnt in der Schule*” (“Democracy begins at school”) is very relevant to this argument.

The concept of “Democracy as a form of living, society and governance” brings together three strands of thinking on learning about democracy, linking the transmission of knowledge about political democracy with social learning and learning through experience. It is especially in this latter context that the issue of the democratic classroom must be seen and understood.²

Figure 1: Forms of democracy as elements of the learning process



1. See Tilman Grammes, “Fallen für Demokratie-Lernen im alltaeglichen Politikunterricht”, unpublished presentation paper.

2. See G. Himmelmann, 2002, p. 28 ff., especially Figure 2 on p. 30. Himmelmann points to the original concepts behind these reflections. These concepts are found in the works of George H. Mead and John Dewey, especially Dewey’s main work on *Democracy and Education* (1916), which contains the famous argument that democracy is not only a form of government but primarily a form of shared experience.

Within the time span of children's school career, it appears obvious that the way pupils acquire knowledge, skills and competences in the three areas of learning about democracy must be related to their age. If we follow the standard pedagogical concept, whereby learning should take place in concentric circles from the general to the abstract, it becomes equally obvious that learning about democracy must start as early as possible and span the students' entire time at school. However, a small child cannot possibly cope with the highly complex and frequently abstract issues of democratic government. Thus, Gerhard Himmelmann states:

“Learning about democracy needs to start at primary school level. It must begin with the notion of democracy as a form of living, otherwise the notion of democracy as a form of governance will remain a vacant idea suspended somewhere ‘in thin air’. Thus, from our point of view, the ‘concrete’, the ‘general’ and the ‘elementary’ notion in a general didactical sense exist in the possibility that pupils should be enabled to acquire, in the first place, an experience with democracy as a form of living – an experience which then can be expanded step by step and further developed to an understanding of democracy as a form of society and finally to democracy as a form of governance.”¹

Himmelmann concludes that each of the three school levels should primarily – though not exclusively – focus on a different basic aim of learning about democracy, according to the pupils' abilities to learn about and comprehend increasingly complex issues:

- at **primary school level**, democracy should primarily be presented as a way of life. The focus, therefore, should be on the individual and the aim should be to enable self-learning (acquiring “self-competence”, self-development, self-experience, self-responsibility, self-control and moral dispositions). Democracy as a form of living enables young children to make a direct link between the learning process and their everyday experience.
- at **secondary I level**, the focus should shift to democracy as a form of society. The emphasis should now be on the community, with the aim of enabling social learning and the acquisition of social competence (learning about social cooperation, communication, respect towards others, rights and responsibilities, pluralism, conflict and conflict resolution, civil society).
- at **secondary II level**, the focus should shift further to democracy as a form of governance. The acquisition of a political-democratic competence requires an understanding of history, of the shaping of democracy, of the forms of participation, and of the meaning of rights and responsibilities in a political system. It involves teaching and learning about human rights, human dignity, power, control and decision-making processes.

1. G. Himmelmann, *Demokratie-Lernen als Lebens-, Gesellschafts- und Herrschaftsform*. Ein Lehr- und Studienbuch, Schwalbach, Germany, 2001, p. 267.

Himmelmann’s model for the acquiring of democratic competences in the educational context is thus based on the key educational question: which elements of democratic learning are appropriate at which school level? He arrives at the conclusion that – even though a clear separation will be neither possible nor desirable – the learning process should be related to age (or school level). Table 1 shows the weighting of the different elements of learning about democracy in the context of the school system.

Table 1: Democratic competences in the educational context¹

Democracy as...	... a form of living	... a form of society	... a form of governance
	Aims of learning about democracy		
↓ school level	self-learning: self-competence	social learning: social competence	political learning: democratic competence
primary level	X X X	X X	X
secondary I level	X X	X X X	X
secondary II level	X	X X	X X X

X = degree of focus

These aims of learning about democracy, at least with regard to “self-learning” and “social learning”, are fully in line with older demands, such as the “key qualifications for a civil society” formulated in the 1980s by the German pedagogue Wolfgang Klafki. His “Eleven theses for a new concept of general education” include core qualifications such as “ability and readiness to articulate critique”, “debating skills”, “empathy”, “co-operation skills and ability” and “creativity”. According to Klafki, these demands have certain consequences with regard to the organisation and the methodology of learning, such as greater autonomy for the school, the propagation of teamwork among the teaching staff and multi-dimensional learning, as well as intensified efforts for in-service teacher training.

¹ Himmelmann, 2001, p. 269.

5. Practising and experiencing democracy in education

5.1. Practising democracy in primary education

Many people will argue that practising democracy in primary education – with relatively young children – cannot succeed because of the complexity of political issues. The argument is not valid, not even if based on very traditional and conservative pedagogical approaches to civic learning. Modern primary education strives to meet demands to reinvent the school as a “space of living, experience and learning”. In such an environment, school-pedagogical concepts of open learning seem particularly suited to issues of learning about democracy because its very purpose is to help to form emancipated and responsible attitudes. In educational situations dominated by traditional, hierarchical and strictly instruction-focused approaches to teaching and learning, such learning would seem futile.

The following list of basic principles developed by a German teacher for her primary class should be seen in the larger context of the democratic principles and human rights found in constitutions and international conventions (which I have added in brackets):¹

- every child is a special person in his/her own right, and will be accepted and treated as such (human dignity; equality).
- every child has strengths and weaknesses. He/she should be enabled to show his/her strengths and need not hide his/her weaknesses (non-discrimination; respect of personal, cultural and religious diversity, solidarity).
- no child must be afraid (right to freedom from fear and persecution).
- no child must be hurt – neither through words nor deeds (human dignity is inviolable; right to life; right to respect for physical and mental integrity).
- every child must be allowed to speak his/her mind (freedom of thought, conscience, religion, freedom of expression and information).
- in joint decisions, every child has one vote (right to vote, civic rights).
- we help each other. We work together (principle of solidarity).
- we treat each other in a friendly and respectful way (respect for the other; tolerance).

1. Classroom principles from Ingrid Prote, “Möglichkeiten des Einuebens von Demokratie in der Grundschule”, in G. Hepp and H. Schneider (eds), *Schule in der Bürgergesellschaft*, Schwalbach, Germany, 1999, p. 210. I have added (in parentheses) democratic or human rights principles taken from the Basic Law (the German Constitution).

A classroom example from a German primary school

The same teacher reported the following incident. In an ecology lesson, the children went out to a nearby field to find out what plants and animals lived there. They were told to bring back samples of different insects into the classroom.

After the lesson, they went out again to take the insects back to the exact place where they had found them. In the meantime, the farmer who owned the field (and who had probably seen the children in the morning and remembered that he had sprayed it with insecticide) had put up a sign at the gate showing a skull and the warning: “Do not enter! Poisonous chemicals!”

The children were aghast and took the insects back to the classroom. A lively discussion followed. Most children were convinced that the farmer could not have known that so many different insects lived there or that he would kill them by spraying the field with chemicals. The children decided to start an information campaign: They painted signs and organised a small demonstration in their village.

One child phoned the farmer on behalf of the class, informed him about the damage he had caused to the insects and asked him to explain his action. The farmer replied: “It’s my field. I can do what I like to it.” The answer provoked a heated debate not only between the children, but also between the class and their parents and other teachers.

The teacher deliberately restricted her role to facilitation of the discussion and moderating the results. All actions were agreed by joint decisions. The case may sound trivial but is indeed a very good example of how an everyday lesson plan can take a surprising turn and offer a completely new space for democratic discussion and action in a much wider context: confrontation with actual political problems, social responsibility, freedom of expression, freedom to demonstrate one’s will, informing the public, active engagement and participation, and democratic decision making.

The example shows that everyday learning situations can suddenly and unexpectedly open up to provide opportunities for learning about democracy, which were not originally intended or planned. In order to make use of such opportunities,

- the teacher must be given certain discretionary powers to decide on the spot whether and in what way to make use of the situation;
- the curricular framework or syllabus must allow sufficient freedom and flexibility; and
- the school must be prepared to accept and welcome such open learning situations and to promote contact with, and the inclusion of, outside groups and organisations.

If we look beyond the classroom, we see many opportunities for practising democracy in schools. The following example comes from a primary school in Switzerland:

Project RENGS: Children co-decide, Schule Riedholz, Canton Solothurn, Switzerland¹

When the school building and the school playground had to be extended, a good opportunity arose to re-organise and institutionalise co-determination by children in their school environment. The guiding idea was to create a school which offered an “environment supportive of the best possible development of the individual”.

The task of rebuilding the school playground was used as a means of encouraging pupil participation: the children were involved in the reconstruction process from the beginning. They had to learn that much, but not everything, was possible. Many discussions took place and many desires had to be abandoned.

On the other hand, the basic fundament was laid which led to the institutionalisation of co-determination procedures: monthly school assemblies with delegates from each class, general assemblies of all pupils twice a year. The open exchange of ideas, critiques and suggestions provided teachers with a valuable tool to learn more about the needs, desires and visions of the children, the weaknesses and strengths of the school as a system, and ideas for future action.

The model not only led to higher commitment of pupils, increased self-confidence among the delegates and better communication throughout the school, but also offered a stimulus and contribution to further quality improvement of the school.

An extremely interesting whole-school project is the Zornitza Alternative Educational Model in Sofia, Bulgaria. The model is outstanding in that the school was primarily created in order to work on this alternative educational approach. It combines the creation of a formal democratic structure in the school organisation with a more playful approach, which contains elements of a simulation game.

Zornitza primary school, alternative educational model, Sofia, Bulgaria

The alternative educational model was created in 1997 by the teachers. The school works completely under this model. According to the project description, the school established its alternative pedagogical model while observing general government requirements such as the education priorities set by the

1. RENGS: Regionales Netzwerk gesunder Schulen der Kantone Aargau und Solothurn; see the report “Partizipation – Kinder bestimmen mit”, in *Schulblatt AG/SO*, 25, 2002, p. 22 ff.

administration, the curricular provisions and the class-lesson-system: “The programme is in line with contemporary concepts of children’s development ... The children take part in all activities which develop analytical thinking, self-esteem ...”.

A general council including all pupils and all teachers is called at the beginning of a school year (or on request by pupils or teachers during the year). The council distributes pupils’ and teachers’ responsibilities, decides on the school’s plans for the school year and elects the Mutual Aid Groups.

There is also a School Council of Ministers in which certain functions and responsibilities are delegated to pupils (for example a Minister of Culture organises celebrations and exhibitions; a Minister of Justice sees to the fulfilment of children’s rights in the school; a Minister of Internal Affairs is responsible for inter-pupil relations and conflict resolution; a Minister of Ecology ..., etc.).

The Zornitza Model was approved by the Ministry of Education in 1997 and its concept was published in 1998. The model depends on regular evaluation, which takes place every year. This enables the school to react to new developments and to remedy apparent weaknesses in concept and practice. Zornitza seems to be a good example for educational reform approaches in the new democracies in South-Eastern Europe.

Why do we discuss these issues in a study on pupil participation? The answer is obvious: these examples, as well as many others which could not be presented here, show that primary education offers not only a space of democratic experience but also a space for practical experiment – since “Democracy must be experienced in order to be learnt”.

Such approaches show quite clearly that much more emphasis should be placed on innovative models developed from practice-orientated projects which can function as models of good practice in primary education for many other schools. It is by no means necessary to reinvent the wheel in every school willing to introduce a democratic climate.

5.2. Experiencing democracy in secondary education

Democratic participation cannot be restricted to the election of a class speaker and the joint organisation of school festivities by pupils and teachers. It is an all-inclusive task of teaching and learning, which can indeed – as we tried to show in the preceding paragraph – begin at a very early stage. At the same time, they are examples for practising democracy in the working environment of the school.

So, in fact, these cases and reflections are very helpful insofar as they enable us to focus more clearly on the curriculum content of learning about democracy in the school context. They take us a step further in our attempt to find answers to the

specific question posed in this report: What actually is democratic learning in the school context and how can it best be achieved?

Let us look at some examples from secondary education, one a formal concept of a democratic school (Schumann-Schule) and a more playful approach to the School as a State (Heuss-Knapp-Gymnasium).

An example of good practice: Schumann-Schule, Babenhausen, Germany

An interesting concept for democratic education has been developed at the Joachim-Schumann-Schule in Babenhausen, Germany. In 1998, the school community presented a concept which aimed to:

- create a learning environment for democracy,
- strengthen the productive resources of the school,
- improve the school climate, and
- contribute to the present values debate.

While aims such as the ones quoted above can be found in many “guidelines” or “visions” formulated by schools all over Europe, the Babenhausen concept is interesting in bringing to the fore the central elements and benefits of learning about democracy in practice:

If empowered to contribute actively to the shaping of their school’s working day, pupils and students will not only be more responsible and more trusting towards each other, but will also feel more responsible for everything that happens in the school.

Facing the problems and conflicts that exist in the school community will contribute to the development of democratic competence by making all processes more transparent, enable the better argument to prevail and guarantee that decisions reached in a democratic manner will be accepted and carried out by the school community.

Learning about democracy has a positive effect on democratic behaviour, the values and opinions held, the development of cognitive skills and the school climate in general.

Simulation games or project approaches to learning about democracy should not be under-rated in importance. A teacher-orientated approach will never achieve the same learning results as an approach that aims at stimulating self-determined learning by doing – creativity, independence, motivation and factual knowledge acquisition. One model for a simulation game is the following school project.

School project: The school as a state, Heuss-Knapp-Gymnasium, Heilbronn, Germany

This project was organised as a four-day event in July 2000 at the Heuss-Knapp-Gymnasium in Heilbronn. The project was an attempt to organise the whole school as a republic called Elevelia. For the four days of the project, all the pupils and teachers of the school constituted the “People of Elevelia” and all the elements typical of a democratic community had to be created:

- a national anthem and a national flag;
- a democratic constitution, including human and civic rights for all citizens;
- free and independent political parties;
- a president (elected directly by all citizens);
- a parliament (elected directly by all citizens);
- a prime minister (elected by the parliament) and government;
- civil servants (responsible for the central bank, the police forces and so on);
- a daily newspaper;
- a currency controlled by a central bank and valid throughout the school;
- free enterprise and firms providing jobs;
- legal institutions and courts with judges;
- cultural institutions.

The project was devised and organised by the pupils’ council in co-operation with teachers. For four days, the whole school became the state of Elevelia. Political parties were founded; firms and enterprises were set up and began to sell their products, a national currency with a fixed exchange rate was established, parliament and president were elected and, in a public ceremony, the school’s principal welcomed the new president and handed over the school keys to the new rulers.

After the project, an evaluation was carried out and confirmed that the project – in spite of the risks – was deemed a success by all the people and groups involved. Indeed, 80% of the pupils said that the project had been great fun and 70% wanted to repeat it. The pupils said they had learnt a lot about the functioning of a democratic state, that everybody had to collaborate and that political involvement is of great importance.¹

1. Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg (ed.), “Elevelia – man denkt fast an Utopia. Schule als Staat – handlungsorientiert Demokratie lernen? Ein Unterrichtsprojekt”, Heilbronn/Stuttgart, Sept. 2001.

Other interesting examples of learning about democracy through practising it can be found in many countries. They are primarily based on:

- the fundamental principle of an equal partnership between all people and groups concerned;
- a philosophy and practice of autonomous co-determination for living and learning in school;
- the principle of self-regulation;
- a new and completely different perspective of power and its usage;
- a living culture of conflict resolution within an agreeable school climate.¹

Democratic Contents – Democracy at Micro-Level

Schüler/innenschule des Vereins Gemeinsam Lernen, Vienna, Austria

Democracy is practised through self-administration:

All the people involved (young people, parents, teachers) are responsible for everything that happens in the school.

Everybody takes on tasks according to his/her abilities and skills.

Everybody has the chance to contribute to the shaping of the school.

Principles of School Democracy: The students determine their own as well as their group activities.

They respect the rights of others and the larger social context of the school.

Subordination and passivity are replaced by freedom of choice, responsibility, co-operation, creative initiatives and the right to say no.

Democracy is practised at micro-level:

The objective is to realise and experience the fundamental principle of a fair, partnership-based school community.

Learning must take place in a climate and in a spirit free of fear.

The holistic learning approach is practised through project-learning options.

The learning options are determined by the interests, needs and experience of the young people.

1. L. Kreissler and B. Wunsch-Grafton, "Demokratie in der Praxis ist eine lustige Sache"; see Kurt Tucholsky, Einleitung [Introduction] in Bundesministerium fuer Unterricht und kulturelle Angelegenheiten (ed.), *Betrifft: Demokratie lernen*, Heft 5, Vienna, 1998, p. 2.

There are many learning styles and forms; at the beginning of a year's course, the learning procedures are agreed on within the participating group. Self-initiative is stimulated.

The learning approach is characterised by the following principles:

Self-determined work, organisation and play are on a par with other activities and take place without supervision to create an atmosphere of self-responsibility and self-initiative.

Cross-subject projects are flexibly organised and enable students to adopt a multi-perspective view of problems. They are also frequently linked to other school networks.

Block-projects for certain learning areas draw on the expertise of external experts, frequently on very specialised topics.

Practical experience can be acquired through short-term internships in firms and organisations outside the school.

There are also learning projects for parents.

The selected models presented here should make it sufficiently clear that there is a wide range of opportunities and a wealth of creative ideas for the practical realisation of the democratic principle in school life. The re-creation or re-invention of the school as a functioning learning community is by no means an illusion and is far from being impossible – as long as there is the sincere will and the determination to make it come true. The idea of a learning community, however, will only function if some conditions are met:

In order to prepare students for their future role as informed, responsible, democratic and participative citizens, their school life and the learning process must be based on a spirit of equality, flexibility, responsibility and self-determination.

Learning about democracy through practice requires a fundamental re-thinking and reorientation of curricular approaches, school administration procedures, educational policies and, last but not least, the legal basis of the school. Unwillingness to reform, inflexibility, sluggishness and inability to innovate – which, alas, can be observed at all levels of education administration, everywhere in Europe, from the school's own staff to the ministries – are perhaps the most difficult barriers to the democratic reshaping of school life.

Learning about democracy through practice requires the full, unwavering and sustained involvement of principals, teachers and parents: principals and teachers must learn to understand and perceive the pedagogic opportunities of

giving pupils more independence and self-responsibility; parents must come to understand and perceive their extended role as caregivers in the school context.

Learning about democracy through practice requires special efforts directed at the inclusion of other stakeholders in the educational process, such as firms and enterprises, the local community, voluntary citizen groups and non-governmental organisations active within the environment of the school.



“Stop! Stand still! You’re needed as a candidate!”

Cartoon: Stefan Rasch¹

1. Cartoon by Stefan Rasch, in Bundesministerium für Unterricht und kulturelle Angelegenheiten (ed.), *Betrifft: Demokratie lernen*, Heft 5, Vienna, 1998, pp. 24-25.

6. Towards a typology of pupil participation in schools

The preceding chapters tried to show that schools should not only:

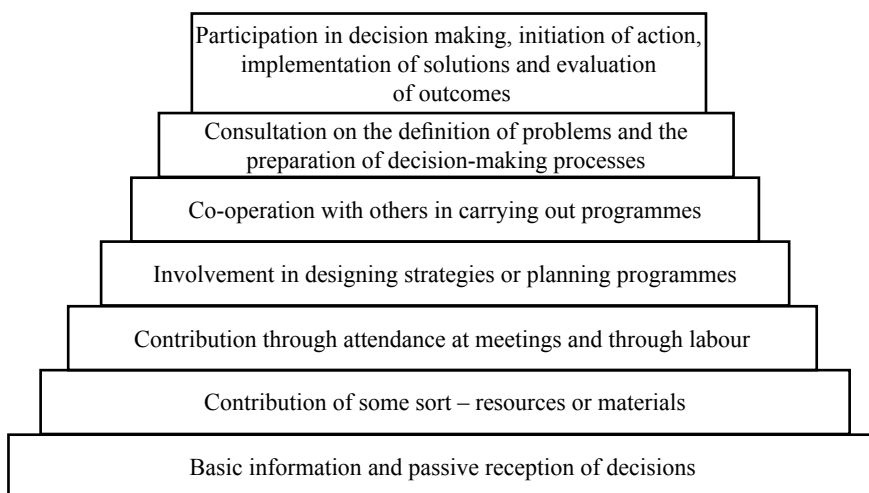
- aim at teaching and learning about democracy – they should also aim at being as democratic as possible;
- seek to qualify pupils for their future role as citizens – they should also aim to actively develop the democratic attitude of pupils;
- consider themselves as legal entities or institutions – they should also develop links to outside socialisation agents in order to create a learning environment characterised by a lively democratic climate which enables direct participation by pupils in their everyday affairs.

Furthermore, we have tried to show that learning about democracy can take place in quite different settings and forms. Even though its ultimate outcomes are of the greatest importance for the functioning of the democratic civil society, such learning can be organised in interesting, fascinating and even playful ways.

6.1. Content areas of pupil participation

Based on the assumption that the forms and degrees of participation in schools differ widely across Europe, a “ladder of participation” can be constructed – from quite simple levels of mere information to different degrees of active contribution to consultation processes and, finally, full involvement and participation in decision-making processes, the initiation of projects and ideas, the implementation of programmes and solutions, and evaluation of the outcomes:

Figure 2: Seven steps to pupil participation



To sum up: Learning about democracy in schools must begin with the individual pupils. They have certain rights which are most often defined within the legal provisions for minors. As shown in Section 3 of this paper, the Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly advocates a right to participation, a right to information and a right to freedom of expression. In the school context, these rights can be understood as both individual rights and collective rights.

On this basis, there are at least eight areas potentially open to meaningful pupil participation:

- **individual affairs** – individual issues and conflicts concerning the articulation of individual pupils’ interests and problems;
- **peer affairs** – issues and conflicts concerning relations between individual pupils and/or groups of pupils;
- **class affairs** – issues and conflicts concerning the class and the teacher, as well as activities, projects and peer conflict resolution;
- **school affairs** – issues and conflicts concerning the community of pupils and the school leadership and administration; school projects; communication with the local community; festivities; and the school environment;
- **organisational and staff affairs** – issues and conflicts concerning the regulation of school life, relations with staff, the school building, administration and transport problems;
- **content and methodological issues** – issues and conflicts about the selection of lesson content, teaching methods and topical projects;
- **curricular and education policy issues** – issues and conflicts over curricular regulations and their interpretation, the choice of topics and student assessment; and
- **links with extra-mural activities** – issues and conflicts in the school’s relations with the outside community, out-of-school activities, collaboration with out-of-school agencies and organisations.

6.2. Forms of pupil participation

In a participative democratic school, different kinds of democratic learning – social, political, experience-based and activity-based – are closely related. The forms of such participation can and do differ across Europe to a great degree. A possible typology could include several very different forms:

- **parliamentary participation:** the widespread formal or hierarchical structure of class, school and regional or national representation based primarily on the election of speakers, delegates or representatives.

- **open participation:** more or less informal participative forms which are open to spontaneous or case-related action based on the definition and diagnosis of existing problems, the collection of information, the articulation of priorities and the development of solutions.
- **project-based participation:** one-issue approaches of participation directed at a single project, often in the context of a topical issue or learning process.
- **simulation games on participation:** participation and democratic procedures are exercised in a playful way, for example by simulating a “school state” with a president, a government, a parliament, media and so on.
- **problem-solving participative approaches:** for example, conflict resolution in the classroom or in the school organised by the students themselves and comprising mediation, “conflict pilots”, hearings, decisions and implementation procedures.

6.3. Fields for practising pupil participation

Participative structures	Class spokesperson Class council Pupil representation School parliament “A just community” Regional and/or national pupil representation
Participative learning	Responsibility for one’s own learning Responsibility for joint learning Participative learning in individual subjects Curricular options for participative learning Class projects
Participation in the social life of the school	Social learning Integration Conflict management Prevention of violence Festivities and celebrations School projects
Participation beyond the school	Relations with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – other schools – pre-school institutions – schools for the disadvantaged – enterprises and firms – the local government – other exterior partners Cross-border (international) school exchange programmes

7. Towards a European charter for democratic schools without violence

In November 2003, an interesting scheme was initiated by the Secretariat of the Council of Europe's Integrated Projects 1 and 2, a scheme of great relevance for the promotion of active learning about democracy in European schools. The project approach is fully in line with the concept of pupil participation: the charter consists entirely of contributions from young people and was formulated by them. As such, it is an innovative and even revolutionary idea.¹

In order to pull together the experiences and achievements of pilot initiatives across Europe in a document which could inspire many more schools to involve their students, along with educators, in decision making on matters concerning them, the Council of Europe launched a project to develop a European Charter for a Democratic School without Violence.

More than 120 schools across Europe expressed an interest in the project. A panel formed by the Council of Europe and educational experts selected the 26 best contributions from those sent in by schools from 19 European countries. The selected schools were invited to send delegates to a project conference held on 14 and 18 July 2004. More than 50 student delegates gathered at the European Youth Centre at Strasbourg to draft and adopt the charter.

The participants translated the charter into their native languages.

An electronic referendum was held between 11 and 22 October 2004 in cooperation with the Swiss Canton of Geneva.

European charter for democratic schools without violence

1. All members of the school community have the right to a safe and peaceful school. Everyone has the responsibility to contribute to creating a positive and inspiring environment for learning and personal development.
2. Everyone has the right to equal treatment and respect regardless of any personal difference. Everyone enjoys freedom of speech without risking discrimination or repression.
3. The school community ensures that everybody is aware of their rights and responsibilities.

1. Cf. www.coe.int/t/e/integrated-projects/democracy/02-Activities/15-European-School-Charter/default.asp.

4. Every democratic school has a democratically elected decision-making body composed of representatives of students, teachers and parents, and other members of the school community where appropriate. All members of this body have the right to vote.

5. In a democratic school, conflicts are resolved in a non-violent and constructive way in partnership with all members of the school community. Every school has staff and students trained to prevent and solve conflicts through counselling and mediation.

6. Every case of violence is investigated and dealt with promptly, and followed through irrespective whether students or any other members of the school community are involved.

7. School is part of the local community. Co-operation and exchange of information with local partners are essential for preventing and solving problems.

Part 2: Practising democratic participation in the school

Note, colon,
Democracy is a form of living and
of government, comma, based
on equality, comma, freedom
and human dignity, comma, and
prohibits inhuman treatment or
punishment, full stop. Blah blah
blah...



*AND NOW STOP CHATTING
AND WRITE THAT DOWN OR
ELSE I'LL GIVE YOU MARKS
YOU WON'T FORGET FOR
THE REST OF YOUR LIVES...!*



Cartoon: Stefan Rasch¹

1. Cartoon by Stefan Rasch, in op. cit.

8. Pupil participation in Europe

In October 2002, the Council of Europe's EDC project decided to collect data on pupil participation from member countries. Data collection was completed in May 2003 and comprised three elements:

- a questionnaire, sent out to all 48 national representatives of the Council of Europe's network of EDC co-ordinators in December 2002;
- country reports on pupil participation, presented upon request to the Council of Europe;
- feedback or further information from selected countries, requested by the editor of the study.

Figure 3: Countries supplying data to the EDC project



Altogether, 18 countries or regions returned full information (questionnaires and country reports); another 19 co-ordinators returned either the questionnaire or a country report. This meant there was feedback from 37 countries or regions – that is, 75% of the 48 EDC co-ordinators supplied information. Twelve countries or regions provided insufficient information or no data at all.¹

1. Please note: Whenever the phrase “in all countries” is used, it refers to the feedback in this study, i.e. to those countries whose EDC co-ordinators completed and returned the questionnaire, not to “all European countries”.

8.1. Legal basis for pupil participation

In all countries but one, pupil participation is based on legal statutes, laws, by-laws, rules or other provisions. In the Russian Federation, there seems to be no country-wide provision regarding pupil participation, but many regions of the Federation appear to have developed their own approaches.

Special mention in national constitutions of pupil participation or of democratic co-responsibility in the school or in educational matters seems to be the exception. Among the countries which completed the questionnaire, most have some wording in their constitution providing for recognition of the right of children to have a say in affairs that concern their daily lives. Such more or less general wording on the issue can be found in many constitutions, such as the Constitution of Spain.

Spain

Spanish Constitution, Article 27.7 (Education)

Teachers, parents, and in some cases, the students, shall participate in the control and management of all centres maintained by the Administration with public funds, under the terms established by law.

Many, if not most education laws in Europe refer to the right of pupils to be educated for their future roles as informed and responsible citizens. The Greek Law on Education 1566/85 specifies the objectives of primary and secondary education as being “to help pupils become free, responsible and democratic citizens, as well as citizens capable of fighting for national independence and democracy” (Article 1). More detailed provisions refer to pupil participation.

Greece

Education Law 1566/85, Articles 45-47

It is recognised that pupils have the right to establish collective bodies, which are considered to be important elements of the democratic organisation and functional structuring of education at the level of the school unit. These bodies are pupil partnerships, pupil communities, and pupil sports clubs. Their establishment aims at encouraging pupils to participate actively in school life, to enable them to:

- assume responsibilities and realise, through experience, the role that the democratic dialogue plays in shaping self-aware and creative citizens;
- contribute to the proper and fruitful development of the educational process;
- form their own view about life by linking school and society, which will in turn lead to the acquisition of the necessary capacities and skills for further development.

The pupils of secondary education form pupil communities with which they participate in the organisation of school life and the organisation and realisation of any kind of school activity.

In all the countries that responded, pupil participation is provided for in different instruments:

- education laws;
- national curricula or frameworks;
- other official documents, guidelines or recommendations.

There are, of course, many different forms which determine pupil participation. The overall structure of a country's political (and education) system is a decisive factor. In other words, in countries with a highly centralised structure, pupil participation is sometimes laid down in laws, by-laws and regulations which are often binding nationwide. There are also instances where pupil participation is laid down in national compulsory curricula or frameworks.

In decentralised education systems, pupil participation is sometimes regulated through regional provisions. Their significance is frequently determined by the size, importance and relative autonomy of the regional entity (the *Bundesländer* in Austria or the Cantons in Switzerland stand in contrast to the comparative insignificance of the regional regulations in Romania, at least with regard to education policies and pupil participation). In many countries, if not in most, a mixture of forms can be observed, resulting in the formulation of more general objectives for pupil participation in national core curricula and/or in curricula with additional documents such as “frameworks on participation”.

However, it can be concluded that practically all countries that contributed to the study have rules or legal provisions for some form of pupil participation, though varying in intensity. The need to create active and participative learning opportunities in the school environment, therefore, seems to be widely recognised in Europe as an educational principle and appears to have a stable legal basis.

8.2. General democratic rights of pupils

Minimal rights of pupils comprise the right to education and schooling, that is, the right to participate in the transfer of knowledge according to the pupils' abilities and needs. Furthermore, the education laws regulate the organisation of learning processes (but not necessarily their contents or methods) and also, in many cases, the choice of learning means and resources.

Beyond the general framework provided by the right to education, there are more detailed provisions with regard to the creation of a participative school climate. An example of a more comprehensive approach to creating a democratic environment

in the school can be found in the Swedish Education Act, which stipulates that all school activity shall be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values. The general objectives and guidelines provided in the Education Act are formulated more precisely in the national curricula, as in the example below.

Sweden

National Curriculum for Compulsory and Upper Secondary Schools

Democracy forms the basis of the national school system. The School Act (1985) stipulates that all school activity shall be carried out in accordance with fundamental democratic values and that each and everyone working in the school shall encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person as well as for the environment we all share (Chapter 1, §2 and §9).

The school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school shall represent and impart ...

The task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby participate actively in social life by giving their best in responsible freedom ...

It is not in itself sufficient that education imparts knowledge of fundamental democratic values. It must also be carried out using democratic working methods and develop the pupils' ability and willingness to take personal responsibility and participate actively in civic life.

By participating in the planning and evaluation of their daily education, and exercising choices over courses, subjects, themes and activities, pupils will develop their ability to exercise influence and take responsibility¹

The Austrian School Law explicitly uses the term *Schulgemeinschaft* ("school community"), defined as the "co-operation between teachers, parents (or guardians) and pupils. To ensure such democratic co-operation, pupils as well as persons

1. Quoted in Fredrick Modigh, "Pupils' and students' participation in Sweden", Country Study supplied by the Swedish national EDC Co-ordinator.

with parental authority have the right to representation of their interests towards teachers, principals and school authorities”.¹

In Hungary, emphasis is placed on the establishment and functions of “students’ self-government”, for which provisions are laid down in the Education Act of 1985 and the 1993 Act on Public Education. According to the latter, student participation takes two forms: direct expression of opinion and expression of interests through the establishment of student parliaments and a school board.

Hungary

Act on Public Education (1993), Section 63

1. Students, student communities and student circles may establish a student parliament to represent the interests of students. The activities of a student parliament shall cover all the issues concerning students. (...)
3. The student parliament shall make decisions on its own operation, the use of the financial means provided for the operation of the student parliament, the exercise of its spheres of activity, the programme of a working day when there is no teaching.
7. A general meeting of students shall be organised in the school or dormitory at least once a year in order to review the operation of the student parliament and the enforcement of students’ rights.

It is worth noting that the Hungarian Education Law stipulates – as do the regulations in many other countries – that the activities of the students’ self-governing bodies shall cover all issues concerning students, but (as Section 3 shows) there are certain restrictions: student bodies can, for instance, influence the programme of the working day (the school day) only for the periods “when there is no teaching”. In other words, they cannot influence decisions on the selection of topics in the classroom, the methods of teaching, or curricular aspects in general.

8.3. Structure and levels of pupil/student representation

In many countries, pupils’ rights to have a say in the regulation of their affairs are clearly formulated and laid down for the different levels of the education system. There are opportunities for pupils’ interests to be represented at class and school level in most countries.

1. Österreichisches Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, *Informationsblätter zum Schulrecht, Teil 2: Schuldemokratie und Schulgemeinschaft*, Vienna, 2000, p. 5.

Figure 4: On which level are students' interests represented?

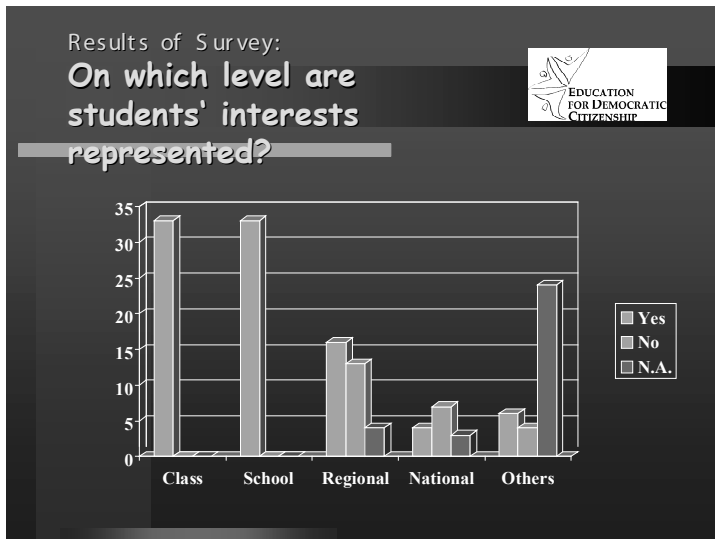


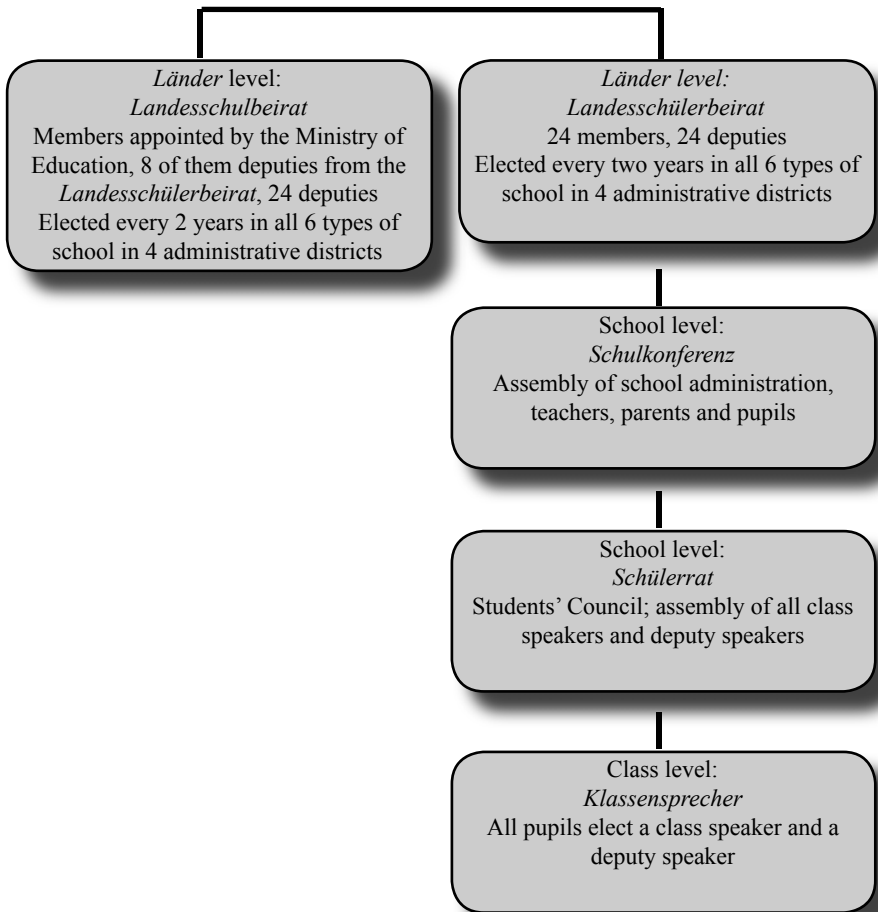
Figure 4 shows quite clearly that while the representation of students' interests at class and school level is well established, at national level a quite different picture emerges. However, as will be shown below, some countries have developed very sophisticated and far-reaching rights for students at national level.

In Germany, all groups involved in school life are given the right to participate in – and to some extent co-determine – school matters: pupils/students, parents, teachers, the community, education administrators and politicians. The term “pupil co-responsibility” (*Schuelermitverantwortung* or *SMV*) calls upon each student to:

- be actively involved in the life of the class and support his/her classmates;
- participate in the classroom lessons;
- be aware of and make use of his/her rights as granted by the school laws;
- participate in the decision-making bodies, such as school conferences;
- participate in the (intra- as well as extra-mural) dissemination of information about the school (via school newsletters, school radio etc.).

Figure 5 shows the formal structure of pupil participation in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, at every level from the *Land* to the classroom.

Figure 5: Structure of pupil participation in Baden-Württemberg, Germany



The main objectives of Germany's system of *SMV* are to:

- work on joint tasks which concern all pupils of a school;
- work on tasks connected with the participation of pupils in other democratic organs;
- participate in the school conference, which includes the right to provide suggestions about the classroom climate, school climate, general school culture and atmosphere;
- participate in certain administrative functions.

8.3.1. Class level

Class representatives or class speakers are usually elected by the pupils of a class. Their task is to represent the interests of the class with teachers, principals or the school administration. In some countries, all class spokespersons of a school elect a “school speaker” and deputy, and/or represent their constituents in the school conference or similar bodies.

8.3.2. School level

In many countries so-called school councils – or similar forms like school forums – exist to deal with issues concerning school life, school climate as well as participating in certain administrative or cultural functions. An example of far-reaching participation rights is provided by Luxembourg.

Luxembourg

Education councils in senior secondary schools

These are composed of four representatives of the teaching staff, two parents and two pupils. The representatives are elected by secret ballot for two years. Without impinging on the responsibilities of head teachers, education councils – in which pupils are full participants – have the following functions (Section 12 of the Regulation):

- they form part of the process for modifying and adapting disciplinary rules and internal school regulations;
- they submit annual reports to the Minister of Education on the general situation in their school;
- they make proposals concerning their school’s annual budget;
- they may issue opinions on the setting-up or dropping of optional courses and, possibly more important, catching-up courses, and on the school’s internal organisation;
- they draw up their school plan.

8.3.3. Regional level

In some countries, pupils’ interests are also represented at a regional or provincial level (Provincial Pupil Council or Committee). See Figure 5 for the German example. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the responsibility for school affairs lies exclusively with the *Länder* (states), so pupils’ representation is also placed on the level of the *Land* (state).

8.3.4. National level

Pupil participation at national level exists particularly in centralised systems. The members of national representative bodies are usually elected by regional or local school bodies. In more centralised education systems, there is usually no intermediate level of pupil participation between local or school level and the level of national decision making. Pupil representation in national councils or bodies can be seen in several countries. In a number of other cases, representation takes place in organisations or structures which are not primarily concerned with education issues, such as youth councils or forums.

Good examples of the articulation of students' interests at national level can be found in the education systems of Hungary and Luxembourg.

Hungary

The National Council for Students' Rights (Act on Public Education, Section 98 (2))

The National Council for Students' Rights shall take part in the preparation of decisions of the Minister of Education in connection with students' rights. The National Council ... may express its opinion, put forward proposals, and take a stand on any questions concerning students' rights.

The National Council ... has nine members, three members are delegated by the Minister of Education, three by the national students' organisations representing students aged between six and fourteen, and three by the national students' organisations representing students aged fifteen to eighteen.

Hungarian laws also provide for a Students' Parliament, convened every three years by the Minister of Education in co-operation with the National Council for Students' Rights. The Students' Parliament primarily monitors the implementation of students' rights; it can adopt recommendations and formulate proposals.

In Norway, there is provision for representation through pupil councils, which are consulted on educational matters.

Norway

Representation of pupil councils in government education bodies and educational committees¹

Pupil councils' representatives are appointed as members of education bodies and committees along with teachers' organisations, union representatives and others.

1. J. C. Christiansen, "Pupil democracy and participation in Norway", statement to the All-European Study on Pupil Participation, 2003.

At national level, pupils are represented in several education bodies, including the steering-group of the Norwegian Board of Education, the National Evaluation Committee on Education and the National Board on Vocational Education.

Pupils' organisations are consulted on proposed reforms, new laws and proposed curricula, either through representation in committees and/or proposals sent out as part of a hearing process to all organisations nationwide, including the national pupils' organisation. Pupil representatives are in some cases invited to take part in the development of new curricula and other educational projects, for example if these projects directly concern pupils' activities.

In Luxembourg, the Pupil Committee of every ordinary and technical senior secondary school elects one of its members as representative on the National Pupil Conference. The conference is convened by the Minister of Education at least twice every six months.

Luxembourg

Main functions of the National Pupils' Conference

- To represent pupils in dealings with the Minister of Education and all the other national school partners.
- To appoint from among its members pupil representatives to the national consultative commission, which submits opinions to the Minister on major educational issues.
- To appoint from among its members representatives for the working groups of the Ministry of Education, which are required to report back to the conference.
- To formulate proposals on all matters concerning pupils' views and their work.
- To receive information by the Minister of proposals and to articulate opinions on questions of interest to pupils.
- To form special consultative committees to address issues of interest to particular groups of pupils.¹

The extent of participation rights at national level in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, the frequency of the National Pupil Conference's meetings, and especially the closeness of the formal links between the National Conference and the Ministry of Education, combine to provide an excellent example of a functional structure at national level. It is also a very rare example of good practice in Europe.

1. J. P. Harpes, "Pupil participation and education for democratic citizenship in Luxembourg schools", statement to the All-European Study on Pupil Participation, 2003.

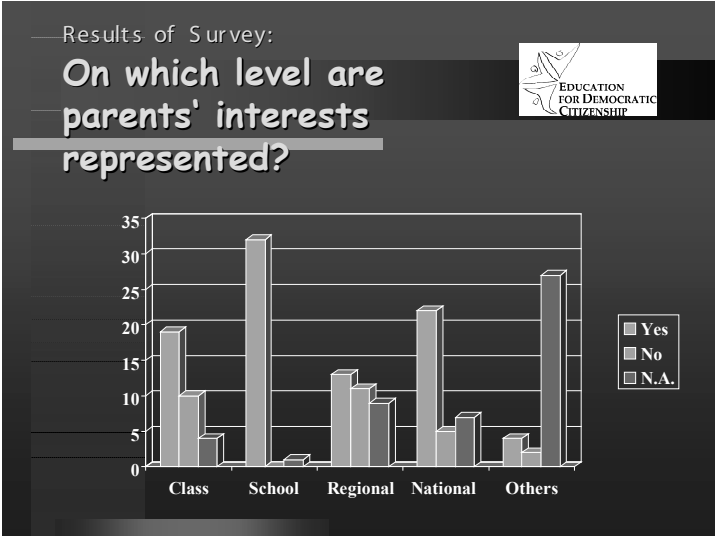
It is certainly true that, since Luxembourg is a small country with about 450 000 inhabitants, it is much easier than in a big country to assemble a representative of every senior secondary school. In a very small country, it is also possible for all students to be informed of proposals that concern them and to make a real contribution to the discussions. As such, of course, the National Pupils' Conference is a tool of instruction about democracy and, in certain respects, an instrument of quasi-direct democracy that may be unique to Luxembourg. Nevertheless, it remains a model worthy of consideration and possibly even of adaptation to the national participation situation in many other countries in Europe.

8.4. Level of parental representation and participation

There is some form of parental involvement in educational affairs in all the countries that took part in this study. Generally, however, school education is largely considered to be the prerogative of the state. Parents can exercise their rights individually, on the basis of laws regulating the rights of the family in a given society, and collectively through parents' representation bodies. Parent participation can take place at class level, at school level, and at higher levels.

The results of the data collection for this study show that while pupil representation focuses more on class and school levels, parents' involvement seems somewhat more focused on the general school level. Surprisingly, the results show that roughly one third of the respondents claim that parents are not involved at class level, but all countries report some form of parental involvement at school level, primarily in the form of parents' councils and, in some cases, parent-teacher meetings.

Figure 6: On which level are parents' interests represented?



Parents' involvement at regional level is, however, relatively low (in many cases not applicable), whereas the data seem to show a relatively high involvement at national level. This implies that parents do have opportunities to articulate their interests at the policy-making level, be it in the form of parent–teacher associations or parents' councils.

The rights of parents are more pronounced than many parents even realise. Even so, there is a general complaint across Europe that parents do not participate sufficiently to safeguard the interests of their own children.

Section 32 of the Hamburg School Act sets out the rights of parents in Hamburg, Germany, to receive information and advice.

Regular exchange of information is indispensable if schools and parents are to work together as partners. Parents have the right to be informed of all important matters about the school. These include:

- the structure and organisation of the school and the educational courses;
- the lesson schedules, education plans, their goals, content and requirements;
- the essential features of the teaching plans and structure;
- the criteria for performance assessment ...;
- the transitions between the various educational courses;
- the final exams and qualifications, including access to occupations and professions;
- the opportunities for pupils and their parents to get involved in school processes;
- the right to inspect all files that contain data concerning their children (school files, education advisory bureau files and school doctor's files).

Furthermore, parents have the right to participate and make decisions:

- in the classroom through two parents' representatives, elected by all parents of a class,
- on the Class Committee;
- on the Parents' Council;
- on the School Committee.¹

One important issue concerns the frequently articulated complaint about low attendance rates by parents at class or school meetings. More detailed research would be required to verify the true extent of that problem in Europe. However,

1. *Schulinformations Zentrum*, Behörde für Bildung und Sport, Hamburg, January 2004. The paper contains a detailed list of the parents' rights in the school context.

any teacher or education practitioner will probably be able to confirm that claim by experience, perhaps even adding their impression of a strong gender imbalance in the attendance, with a far higher percentage of mothers than fathers participating in meetings.

A Spanish inquiry into parental involvement showed:

When asked: “To what extent do you participate in the following aspects of life at your child’s school?”, the answers by the respondents are mainly grouped in the options for little or no participation by the parents in school activities, except for meetings or talks in which 51% of the parents affirm that they participate “a little” or “a lot” ...

There are parents’ associations at 82% of the schools in the survey. This high percentage reveals the consolidation of the parent association movement. (...) However, the real participation by the parents through the parents’ associations is quite low: 35% declare they do not participate in them and 51% just pay the fees. Only 14% of the parents declare that they participate actively ... Participation in parents’ associations is greater in the case of parents with higher education: 42% of them participate¹

The situation in Malta does not differ much from other, larger states:

It is a fact that there are parents who are more than pleased to leave their children’s education in the hands of the school, and who find it an effort to drag their feet there once a year for Parents’ Day. Some of them, when they get there, have only a vague idea of the class their child is in and no idea who the teacher is or what their name might be. Yet others do not turn up at all ... Schooling is not just about learning a set of subjects; it is also about the principles by which our children will eventually conduct their lives.²

A Scottish research project on parental participation in schools shows equally clearly that parental involvement varies widely across the school system. Despite all efforts, the relationship between parents and schools remains difficult and the commitment of parents in collective representation bodies remains weak. In most regions studied in the Scottish research project, it was found that:

- the participation of parents in elections for the different councils is relatively low;

1. Instituto Nacional de Calidad y Evaluación (INCE), “Elements for a diagnosis of the Spanish educational system, Part 6: Family and school”, Madrid: <http://www.ince.mec.es/elem-e/cap6-5.htm>.

2. Malta Today archives, 22 December 2002: <http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/2002/12/22/issues.html>.

- their participation decreases as the age-level of pupils increases: the proportion of parents involved was 47% for primary schools and 32% for secondary schools (which included 17% in vocational upper secondary schools);
- the social breakdown of parents’ involvement shows that middle-class parents tend to be most represented in parents’ associations. The clear problem in a number of schools is promoting the collective representation and participation of parents from working-class backgrounds.

Table 2: Social breakdown of parents and members of parents’ associations¹

Occupation	Percentage of all parents	Percentage of members in parents’ associations
Executives; intellectuals; professional people	15	20
Intermediary professions	19	48
Self-employed and shopkeepers	10	2
Employees	13	22
Factory workers	36	6
Unemployed	3	1

Against this background, educational policy makers and schools are faced with three basic questions:

- is the level of parents’ participation in affairs concerning their children’s education sufficient?
- in what ways can parental participation be improved, extended and strengthened?
- how can a sustainable liaison of parental participation procedures with the school community, the school environment and the education authorities be achieved?

To provide preliminary answers to these issues, the Scottish project collected rich material from several European countries. The project identified methods for effective parental participation and analysed practices and approaches. Table 3 shows some of the key features which emerged from the international analyses and comparison.

1. The Scottish Office, “Parental participation in schools”. Part 1. <http://www.Scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w9/pps-00.htm>.

Table 3: Key features of parental participation in selected education systems¹

Key features of parental participation...	highlighted in case studies of
Benefits to be gained from an independent person liaising with parents, pupils and teachers to promote effective communication between home and school; especially in areas of social deprivation	France
Well-judged methods of contacting parents informally and encouraging their involvement	Portugal Spain
Carefully-prepared information which helps parents understand their role in supporting their children or working on school groups	Scotland Netherlands
Availability of information about important aspects of information such as curriculum, attainment and attendance	Belgium (Flemish Community) Scotland
Promoting exchange of information by parents, pupils, teachers	Belgium (Flemish Community)
Meetings of all groups involved in improving standards – teachers, pupils, parents' associations, education authorities	Portugal
Role of school-(class-)home contacts	Italy Austria
Value of seeking the views of parents and pupils or students in evaluating the quality of a school's work	Italy Scotland Austria
Need to establish and promote a common sense of purpose among all partners in improving key aspects of the school's work	Found in most case studies
The important and influential role of parent bodies such as School Boards and Parent-Teacher Associations	Found in most case studies

The main focus of parental involvement seems to be directed less at rights to actual and concrete participation and more at information rights. More transparency towards parents with regard to school activities and decisions concerning the education of their children is, of course, a crucial element; it is, however, only part of a true and meaningful “participation” in the proper meaning of the word.

8.5. Participative teaching and learning: recommendations, curricular guidelines, forms

As mentioned above, most countries seem to have some recommendations or guidelines with regard to participative teaching and learning. These are often contained in national and/or regional frameworks or curricula, plans or directives and can be either legally binding or non-binding.

1. The Scottish Office, “Parental participation in schools”, Part 1. <http://www.Scotland.gov.uk/library/documents-w9/pps-00.htm> (emphasis by the author).

At a most general level, it can be argued that participative forms of teaching and learning exist to varying degrees throughout the compulsory education system, even though the focus in many cases (if not most) is on secondary education. However, the question of what exactly is included in those forms of participation would require more detailed examination.

Generally, however, several conclusions can safely be drawn from the answers supplied:

- most recommendations and guidelines are sufficiently open to enable or allow active and activating methods and to stimulate student-centred approaches;
- in many countries, good practice with regard to student self-government, the stimulation of active involvement of pupils in the learning process, interactive teaching, the use of varying working methods, of self-directed working-groups, of methods of networking and the integration of extra-mural and extra-curricular activities in the learning process are encouraged;
- in some countries, ambitious approaches or pilot programmes for the self-evaluation of pupils are stimulated, based on participative teaching and learning, including the strengthening of pupils' involvement in decision-making processes at class level and/or school level. The extension of participative experiences of pupils goes beyond the immediate class and school environments to comprise a wider field of learning opportunities, such as the community;
- the empowerment of pupils is seen in some countries as the crucial point of participation: to encourage teachers to permit pupils to influence the working methods applied, at least with regard to specific issues or curricular targets, and to enable them to take on responsibility for their own learning.

Apparently, among the countries surveyed there is only one (Russian Federation) which does not yet provide any specific recommendations, curricular guidelines or stipulated forms for pupil participation – at least, as it seems, on a national or federal level. However, it seems a number of pilot projects or experiments with the provision of curricular elements for pupil participation, and some activities in the field of Civic Education, are in progress.

9. The relevance of pupil participation in teacher-training curricula

On a theoretical level and as a basic modern pedagogical concept, the need for student-orientated teaching is widely acknowledged and practised in Europe. Insofar as student orientation also involves empowerment and the training of skills and competences for active participation in school life, there seems to be a widespread consensus on the need for the involvement and/or extended participation of pupils in certain everyday affairs within the school framework and even with regard to content issues of teaching and learning.

As the answers to the questions about “Recommendations, guidelines and forms” of pupil participation show (see above, Para. 8.5), it can be argued that almost all education systems represented in this survey give priority to certain forms of pupil involvement.

This positive finding, however, is not supported to the same degree by the answers supplied to the question of whether specific training on participation issues is provided within the framework of teacher training. In most countries these issues are more or less implicit in general elements of teacher training; sometimes they seem to cover no more than a general introduction to students’ rights, responsibilities and self-governance.

In some cases, special training and seminars are organised by the education authorities which are directed at the qualification of teachers for issues relating to democracy in the school and for the support of diverse forms of participation by pupils in school and extra-mural activities. In particular, in the countries of central Europe (CCE), a large share of teacher-training activities is implemented by NGOs commissioned by state authorities. In such situations, priority seems to be given to knowledge- or content-focused training programmes, rather than matters aiming to qualify teachers for issues like value orientation, practised democracy and pupils’ co-responsibility.

Some countries, however, have recognised the need for special in-service teacher training focusing on the practice of pupil participation in the school. One such country is Sweden.

Sweden

The National Agency for Education organises and finances in-service teacher training in certain high-priority areas. In recent years, the government has put special emphasis on developing head teachers’ competency in the field of democracy and democratic values. Special in-service training is therefore arranged for head teachers and staff in this area.

The National Agency has also set up a website in order to better serve the public in general, and schools specifically, with information and knowledge within the field of democracy.¹

In the United Kingdom, this deficit seems to have been recognised by many institutions. Thus, School Councils UK is assisting many education authorities in providing training for teachers and pupils.

United Kingdom

Training for teachers and pupils enables trainees to assess the level of pupil participation in their school while looking at how to build on existing structures and bring in new initiatives.

The training of teachers aims to:

- provide a whole-school vision for student participation;
- show how active participation can support teachers;
- identify the necessary foundation stones for student participation;
- clarify what a school council could be and how it is integrated into school decision-making systems.

The training of pupils aims to:

- show that effective school councils can make a difference;
- provide opportunities for pupils to develop skills of participation for active citizenship
- develop an understanding of peer leadership.²

The model concept developed by School Councils UK shows that effective training must be offered to teachers and pupils alike. They need to be qualified for their task. So, if one conclusion with regard to teacher training could be drawn from the results of the data collection, it would be that more efforts of a similar nature are needed to qualify teachers and pupils for the particular questions, problems and tasks brought about by the extension of the participation rights of pupils. In fact, the topic should indeed become a core element of teacher training curricula – for pre-service training as well as for in-service training.

1. Fredrick Mødigh, “Pupils’ and students’ participation in Sweden”, statement for the All-European Study on Pupil Participation in School, 2003.

2. School Councils UK, “Training for local education authorities”, 2003. <http://www.schoolcouncils.org/training/leas/php>.

10. Obstacles, deficits and desiderata

The results show that a number of setbacks to participative teaching and learning appear to be common throughout Europe:

Traditional methods of teaching and learning

These are still widespread and there is a certain resistance to democratisation and change in the school – an inertia not only on the part of the transmitters (teachers, teacher trainers) but also on the part of policy development, curricular development and educational decision making.

Teachers' attitudes

The views of teachers on the extension of pupils' participation rights and on participative teaching and learning vary, and a certain cleavage seems to exist in Europe. In fact, the attitudes of teachers towards pupil participation seem to mirror – at least to some degree – their own life experience and socialisation.

The national historical experience is an important element and, in many cases, the main reason for the lack of a democratic culture in the education system, particularly in formerly authoritarian systems which have little experience with open, liberal forms and methods. Also, in some countries, support by the education system and administration for more modern approaches seems to be lacking.

Lack of a suitable environment

Some of the country reports provided interesting information about practical approaches to the task of creating an environment suitable for pupil participation in school. These are directed at empowering the pupils for democratic and social learning and behaviour. Critical elements for such learning are the establishment of suitable social structures in the school, the creation of value-orientated learning communities (rather than knowledge-orientated instruction systems) and the introduction and establishment of fields and areas for self-directed action and co-operation.

The ideas of partnership and the learning community

The basic climate required for a functioning democratic participation in the school is characterised by an awareness of the importance of partnership. It is the most essential concept for the re-invention of the school as a learning community (as stipulated, for example, in the Austrian school laws). True partnership, however, requires the recognition of elements like the duty of information and a readiness to open areas for joint decision making, to share responsibility and to develop new forms of communication.

Widespread reservations regarding pupil participation in all the groups involved

- young people are not accustomed to being consulted and do not use it to their advantage. Many pupils view consultation and democratic deliberation as mere token activities.
- there is a fear among adults in and out of school of giving young people too many rights and not enough responsibilities. Many adults are also uncomfortable with the changes required for such participative processes.
- the importance of pupil participation is affected by the insistence of many head teachers that such activities be restricted to after-school hours rather than making democratic participation part of the school working day and an integral part of the curriculum.
- enfranchisement of the confident and vocal members of the school community (those able to express themselves in public) may unintentionally reduce motivation and opportunities for others who are less fluent in speech and expression, especially those who most need their voices to be heard.¹



Your Vote for Sabine!
(I'm only here because of the female quota!)

Cartoon: Stefan Rasch²

1. See SSEN, Case Study 31, <http://www.ethosnet.co.uk>.

2. Cartoon by Stefan Rasch, in Bundesministerium für Unterricht und kulturelle Angelegenheiten, *Betrifft: Demokratie lernen*, Heft 5, Vienna, 1998, pp. 24-25.

11. Conclusion: a new culture of living and learning in the school

People are not by nature predestined to become good democrats, and children do not automatically become good citizens. Democracy needs to be learnt – and can be learnt. Participation is a crucial element in involving people in the democratic process. Such participation can take place not only in the political field but in everyday life and all kinds of social contexts. Early learning, training and conditioning for such processes are of critical importance. The school is a place where such learning can go on.

These objectives cannot be achieved in an environment characterised by distrust, regulation and control. The school of the future must provide suitable opportunities for participative learning, experiment and experience. Participation is not a one-way street: it requires a continual exchange with others. That is why activity-orientated approaches for social learning need to be developed in addition to participative learning. Social learning is directed at acquiring general social competence as well as the skills and methods needed for co-operating with others. These competences, however, are the backbones of citizenship in a democratic Europe.

All three dimensions – affective, cognitive and pragmatic – are to be found in the educational process in the school. However, pupils' participation rights and their practical realisation are frequently limited to relatively marginal and/or unattractive areas and fields. Under such circumstances, pupils will not be able to experience the above-mentioned affective and cognitive dimensions beyond the mere transfer of knowledge in formal learning processes about institutions or laws. They will not be able to experiment with their participation rights or gain experience in doing so; and, as a result, they will not recognise their participation rights as an important contribution to the creation of a school community. In the longer term, they will not feel responsible for the functioning of the community as a whole.

11.1. Checklist for democratic participation in schools

The following checklist of suggestions for democratic participation in the school context is meant to provide a stimulus for discussion and action and – above all – for a new culture of living and learning in the school context:

Aims

- The democratic school as a system of responsibilities and rights
- Participation and conflict resolution in the school
- Participation and the prevention of violence

- Participation and social learning
- Projects on practical participation
- Creation of an environment suitable for an open learning community

Participative structures

- Class speakers
- Class councils
- School councils or school parliaments
- Structures and bodies beyond the school (regional or national, such as youth parliaments)

Participation in learning

- Responsibility for one's own learning
- Responsibility for joint learning in the class
- Participative development of curricular elements (within certain subjects)
- Project-orientated learning approaches

Participation in the everyday life of the school

- Social learning
- Integration
- Conflict management
- Prevention of violence
- School community events
- School projects

Participation beyond the school

- Links to other schools, school networks
- Links to other institutions (kindergarten; enterprises; local authorities; libraries, etc.)
- Links to the local community (local administrators, youth clubs, etc.)
- Regular meetings with local politicians (mayors, town councillors, etc.)
- International links and exchanges, integration in European school link projects

Support systems for the acquisition of competences in participation

- Transmission of competences and training for conflict resolution
- Communication training for pupils' representatives

- Teacher training for issues connected with pupil participation
- Establishment of regional service points for class and school representatives

11.2. Trust – the precondition for change

Throughout this paper, we have been looking at various aspects suggested, approaches practised and demands articulated in and by the education community in Europe with regard to a new understanding of pupils and their rights in a democratic school. The creation of the school as a democratic community, however, is not to be achieved overnight. It is a long and arduous process faced with many obstacles, oppositional forces and an incredible degree of inertia on the side of all groups concerned.

The one element that perhaps is most desperately needed to reach the objective of the democratic school is trust. Our education systems were and still are characterised by distrust:

- distrust of pupils' ability to develop self-responsibility for their own learning;
- distrust of teachers' ability to achieve good results in open learning situations characterised by more curricular freedom and autonomy;
- distrust of schools' ability to create a democratic environment through greater autonomy; and
- distrust of all learning situations not regulated through curricular prescriptions and rules.

Reforming and reinventing the school for its function as a learning community can only be attempted successfully if trust is established as a principle in education systems and becomes a visible signal from education policy makers to schools and to education practitioners.

11.3. Towards a new culture of living and learning in the school and its environment

A new culture of living and learning in the school is not only possible; it is urgently needed and should be made a priority of education policies in Europe. There are several important pre-conditions for and elements of such a new culture:

- the new culture requires trust as the indispensable underlying basis of all education processes;
- it must enable students to articulate their own opinions rather than passively receiving and repeating the opinions of adults;

- it must empower students to combine their everyday experience with their learning processes, to influence decisions about their learning and to practise democracy in their immediate environment;
- it must develop methods and ways to ensure the quality of teaching and learning, not only with regard to “hard quality criteria” (such as resources, school structure, rules) but also to “soft criteria” (typically the school climate and atmosphere);
- it must encourage attitudes of self-initiative, responsibility and a common spirit replacing procedures, administrative and learning processes that lead to distrust and de-motivation;
- it must create learning situations in which pupils are able to work on “open issues” rather than merely following a given and thematically restricted syllabus;
- it must create incentives for innovative pedagogues and must contribute to the re-invention of the teaching profession – teachers should become moderators and facilitators of the learning process instead of mere presenters of given subject-matter;
- it must establish a new culture of collaboration in the school as part of the longer-term school development scheme;
- finally, it must create more “open spaces” in the whole school and learning context to enable more flexibility, stimulate motivation and instil pupils with a sense of belonging and self-responsibility.

11.4. Towards a wider understanding of learning about democracy and EDC

In theory and practice, all political learning in the school context must be seen and understood as democratic learning. Empowerment of pupils for their future role as informed, critical and participative citizens in a democratic society requires the creation of participative structures and procedures and the opening-up of spaces for experiencing a feeling of trust, belonging and responsibility. These are elements which must be taken into consideration whenever we talk and discuss the issues of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC).

Thus, following a definition developed in the context of the Council of Europe’s project Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC),¹ we should now add the element of democratic participation in the school context to our approach towards a Europe-wide consensus on learning about democracy formulated in the Council of Europe’s EDC project:

¹ I. K. Dürr, V. Spajic-Vrkas and I. Ferreira Martins, “Strategies for learning democratic citizenship”, DECS/EDU/CIT (2000) 16, Strasbourg, 2000, p. 74 (points 1-8).

Expanding the definition of learning about democracy

Learning about democracy:

- is deeply rooted in European educational ideas promoting democratic stability on an integrated and culturally varied continent;
- is a multifaceted and multi-dimensional innovative bottom-up approach to facilitating active participation in democracy;
- aims at helping pupils, young people and adults participate actively, creatively and responsibly in decision-making processes;
- provides life-long opportunities for acquiring, applying and transmitting information, values and skills in a broad range of formal and non-formal educational and training contexts;
- crosses over the borders between school and community and challenges the divisions between formal, non-formal and informal education, between curricular and extra-curricular activities as well as between schooling and socialisation;
- promotes the reciprocity of teaching and learning and incites permanent exchanges of teachers' and students' roles;
- strengthens a dynamic and sustainable democratic culture based on awareness and commitment to shared fundamental values: human rights and freedoms, equality and the rule of law;
- strengthens social cohesion and solidarity and promotes inclusive strategies for all groups and sectors in a multicultural society;
- recognises the importance of school democracy as an essential condition for learning and practising citizenship from an early age and as an important factor in creating a climate of trust and responsibility for preventing and combating violence at school.

In the school, children for the first time in their lives encounter a social institution and have to deal with adult persons outside their family contexts. This early experience must be understood as a decisive factor influencing their later attitudes towards the state, the society, politics in particular and democracy in general. A “good school” is the place where the necessary skills and competencies for a “good life” can be acquired; it must therefore provide a space in which many – and perhaps hitherto unused, unorthodox and unconventional – opportunities exist for social learning, political debate, democratic co-determination and responsibility, as well as for the acquisition of social and democratic competencies, qualifications and skills which young people need for their future role as informed, responsible and participative citizens.

People are not by nature predestined to become good democrats, and children do not automatically become good citizens. Democracy needs to be learnt and can be learnt. This publication, carried out within the framework of the second phase of the Council of Europe's large-scale project Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC), is an attempt to collect information from a representative number of European education systems on the participation of pupils/students in the democratic school.

Divided into two parts, the analysis provides answers to the following questions: what is the general background and environment for democracy learning in the school? Are there good practices for pupil participation in Europe? The second part of the study deals with the legal basis for pupil participation in the European countries, the democratic rights of pupils and their parents in the school, the relevance of pupil participation in teacher training curricula and the common obstacles to participative teaching and learning.