



Guidance Document 5

CDC and the Whole-School Approach

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Who is this document for?

This document is first and foremost addressed to all stakeholders in schools – school leaders, teachers, other school employees, students, parents and local community actors such as local education authorities, NGOs, parents’ associations, school boards, etc.

Although specifically addressing a whole-school approach, much of this document is also relevant for higher education institutions through a whole-institutional approach.

Purpose and overview

The guidance document explores the added value of a whole-school approach in developing a democratic culture at school and the competences that need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies.

There is quite substantial evidence to suggest that whole-school approaches – which integrate democratic values and human rights principles into teaching and learning, governance and the overall atmosphere of the school – contribute significantly to young learners’ experience of, development of and practice of democratic competences.

This document explores the key concepts commonly contributed to a whole-school approach: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, co-operation with the community. It gives some examples of how clusters of competences from the CDC model can come into play in each of the three areas and looks at possible benefits of applying a whole-school approach to developing competences for a democratic culture in learners, for a democratic school culture and ultimately for a sustainable democratic and inclusive society for all.

The added value of a whole-school approach

What is the added value of adopting a whole-school approach in order to develop a democratic school culture and competences for democratic culture in learners? Competences for democratic culture are important for learners, but also for schools as an institution and for the community as a whole. If they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies, citizens need to be able to recognise and practise democratic principles. These principles are set out formally in the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education.



For democracy and human rights to become a reality in daily life in a society, they should become a reality in daily life in schools. Schools are where young people often get their first opportunity outside the family to develop and practise the democratic competences that they need for active engagement and living together in diverse societies.

Making democracy and human rights a reality in the daily life of schools is not only a question of classroom teaching. It is a function of all aspects of school life. Participation in shared decision making and school governance, for example, helps all school actors, and in particular young people, to gain practical knowledge of and develop trust in the democratic and participative processes. It encourages them to practise their own democratic competences with increased confidence.

A whole-school approach to CDC ensures that all aspects of school life – curricula, teaching methods and resources, leadership and decision-making structures and processes, policies and codes of behaviour, staff and staff–student relationships, extracurricular activities and links with the community – reflect democratic and human rights principles. In turn, this may create a safe learning environment where these principles can be explored, experienced and even challenged in a peaceful way.

Engaging the whole school in creating a positive and safe learning environment might also influence student achievement positively and even increase their life satisfaction. Students who feel part of a school community and enjoy good relations with their parents and teachers are more likely to perform better academically and be happier with their lives.

Key concepts

Teaching and learning

The school's formal programme, including curriculum and lesson planning, teaching and learning methodology and extracurricular activities, provides opportunities for learning about democracy and human rights at a formal level.

In the curriculum, competences for democratic culture might be incorporated into the school's academic programme:

- in the form of a new subject or course;
- into different curriculum subjects;
- as a cross-curricular theme incorporated into all or some curriculum subjects.

For further information, see Guidance Document 1 on curriculum.

Teaching and learning methodologies and learning environments potentially have a great impact on the development of competences for democratic culture in learners, in particular by giving learners opportunities to learn through experiencing democracy and human rights in action in the classroom. This can be done by:

- ensuring the classroom is a safe space where students feel able to discuss their views openly, even when their views may be controversial, by creating an open, participative and respectful classroom environment that allows all class members to share their experiences, to express their own opinions and emotions, and where the students participate in the setting and respecting of ground rules, such as listening to and respecting others;
- creating opportunities for students to participate in their own learning, e.g. through peer assessment, student-generated questions, or co-research;
- facilitating forms of co-operative learning across the curriculum through the use of different forms of group and team work, e.g. paired, small and large group work;
- finding ways for teachers to work collaboratively to include CDC across the curriculum, to reflect on how their practice may facilitate, or hinder, equity and equal access to learning, and

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engage in action research to develop ownership of approaches for the inclusion of CDC in their teaching and assessment practices;

- creating opportunities for students to acquire positive high-quality participation experiences through projects in which the experiences are focused on issues that are of importance to the students themselves;
- providing students with the opportunity to find out about and explore alternative ways of perceiving issues, enable them to consider and discuss alternative perspectives with others, to participate in group and institutional decision making and to take part in action that is aimed at producing change on the issues concerned.

For further information, see Guidance Document 2 on pedagogy.

Extracurricular activities are important arenas for developing and practising democratic competences, and for active engagement in school and societal issues. For instance:

- plan and run a whole-school or part-school activity on an aspect of education for democratic citizenship and human rights, e.g. an outreach programme or a study of economic conditions in the neighbourhood;
- organise out-of-lesson groups, activities or projects relating to education for democratic citizenship and human rights, e.g. a discussion group, debating society or young citizens' action group.

Through democratic teaching and learning practices clusters of competences might come into play. For instance, a conversation on a sensitive or controversial issue, held in a safe atmosphere, and by giving voice to all arguments and perspectives, while encouraging perspective-taking, might:

- support the development of self-efficacy and empathy;
- foster analytical and critical thinking skills;
- develop tolerance of ambiguity;
- contribute to valuing democracy and fairness;
- strengthen knowledge and critical understanding of the topic discussed.

School governance and culture

The organisational culture of a school can help people in the school community to play a role in the way the school is governed and managed – through its approach to leadership, vision, system of governance and decision-making processes, student participation and general working atmosphere. A democratic approach to school governance helps create a culture of openness and trust in the school and improve relations between its members.

An inclusive school ethos which is safe and welcoming, where relations between staff and between staff and students are positive, and where everyone feels they have a part to play and their human rights are respected, will better facilitate development of competences for democratic culture. To this end, school administration, teachers, parents, students and other stakeholders may join their efforts to make school governance and environment more democratic, including its approach to management and decision making, school policies, rules and procedures, student participation and general school environment. Such efforts may include concrete actions as suggested below.

Leadership and school management (including school planning, evaluation and development)



- Develop a leadership style nurtured by respect for human rights, democratic principles, equal treatment, participatory decision making and responsible accountability.
- Encourage participation of all stakeholders in the review of the whole-school environment and its capacity to promote democratic citizenship and respect for human rights – including programme coherence, extracurricular activities and school governance, for example through review meetings, observations, liaison with student representatives, school-wide surveys, and feedback from parents and community actors, etc.

Decision making

- Establish inclusive and participative decision-making structures and procedures, including powers for teachers, students and parents in setting agendas and participating in policy decisions, for example through representation on school boards and working parties, focus groups or consultations.

Policies, rules and procedures

- Draw up and revise school policies to reflect the values and principles of democratic citizenship and human rights, including general policies on issues such as equality and sexual orientation, and special interventions, for example anti-bullying programmes.
- Introduce functioning rules at school that guarantee equal treatment and equal access for all students, teachers and other members of staff regardless of their ethnicity, cultural identity, lifestyle or beliefs; establish procedures for peaceful and participatory resolution of conflicts and disputes.

Student participation

- Develop opportunities for students to express their views on matters of concern to them, both in relation to school and to wider issues, and participate in decision making at school and in the community, for example through class discussion, student councils, surveys and suggestion boxes, representation on working parties and policy groups, presentations in school assemblies and debating clubs.
- Make sure that participative approaches that the students are involved in are authentic, meaning participation as an exercise of power and a means of taking over responsibility, while clarifying conditions and limitations of participation to avoid pseudo-participation or the notion of “just pretending”.

Student participation and inclusive forms of decision making have a great impact on the development of CDC, as they allow for experience-based learning (learning through). This dimension of school life helps to develop several competence clusters including:

- Civic-mindedness, responsibility and self-efficacy
- Analytical and critical thinking skills and communicative skills
- Knowledge and critical understanding of politics (decision-making mechanisms)
- Valuing democracy and fairness.

Co-operation with the community

A school's relations with the wider community – including parents, authorities, NGOs, universities, businesses, media, health workers and other schools – can help to foster a culture of democracy in the school. Schools that partner with NGOs, for instance, can benefit from such actions as

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increased training opportunities, visiting experts and project support. Close links with the community can also help schools address relevant community issues. Schools can co-operate with the community in a number of ways.

Parents and community participation

- Encourage parents or community members with expertise relating to aspects of education for democratic citizenship and human rights to contribute to teaching and learning on a voluntary basis, for example lawyers, health professionals, politicians or charity workers.
- Facilitate student projects designed to solve community problems or challenges, for example relating to personal safety, youth crime, or old or vulnerable citizens, etc.

School to school partnership

- Set up or join a network of schools for sharing resources and experiences.
- In the case of culturally or religiously homogeneous schools, establish co-operative and learning links with other schools to enable students to have meaningful interactions and contact with students from other ethnic backgrounds and religions.
- Facilitate online dialogue with students in schools in other countries to discuss social, cultural and global issues from a variety of national and cultural perspectives, and perhaps to take action together on those issues that are of mutual concern to the students.

Partnerships with community institutions

- Develop partnerships with, for example, NGOs, youth organisations, higher education institutions, etc., to enhance aspects of the school programme of education for democratic citizenship and human rights in and out of school.
- Develop partnerships with local authorities to encourage participation of students in formal governance structures representing young people, for example youth councils or local municipalities, and to encourage local authorities to seek out proactively the views of students on civic matters that have relevance to the lives of young people, in order to foster their active citizenship and political participation.
- Develop partnerships with religious and belief organisations in their local community, to facilitate student visits to religious institutions and places of worship, and visits by members of faith communities to the school.
- Develop partnerships for action with advocacy groups promoting human rights, e.g. LGBTQ, anti-racism, women's rights, children's rights and other issues that students express their interest in.

Activities and programmes related to the wider community are particularly well suited to developing competence clusters which combine the achievement of new knowledge and critical understanding but also experience-based development of skills and attitudes. The encounter with unfamiliar people and phenomena is also a chance for self-reflection and adjustments of attitudes. For instance, student projects designed to solve community problems or challenges might:

- contribute to civic-mindedness, responsibility and self-efficacy;
- strengthen empathy;
- develop flexibility and adaptability as well as co-operation skills;
- foster knowledge and critical understanding of the self as well as culture, society and environment.



Below are some examples of the possible benefits of applying a whole-school approach to developing competences for democratic culture in learners, in schools and communities.

Individuals

- Increase in empathy among students.
- Improved co-operation among students–students, students–teachers, etc.
- Students are listening more to each other.
- Stronger sense of responsibility (for own learning and school environment).
- Increase in civic-mindedness (students show a stronger interest in community issues).
- Students show more respect towards each other and their teachers.

Schools/classroom

- Teachers feel more confident about applying democratic citizenship and human rights education.
- Classes which include elements of democratic citizenship and human rights education components tend to use interactive methodology for teaching and learning more often.
- More positive learning environment at schools based on openness and trust.
- Improved collaboration, including between students and teachers, teachers and teachers, school management and staff, and between teachers and parents.

Community

- Partnership with NGOs and local authorities resulting in possibilities for students to experience how democracy works in practice.
- Partnerships with actors in the local communities result in more training possibilities for teachers and expert support when implementing democratic and human rights-based initiatives.

How to apply a whole-school approach to develop CDC in learners in practice

At operational level, applying a whole-school approach to CDC shifts the focus from developing purely individual competences towards building a democratic learning environment where clusters of democratic competences can be learned and practised.

From this point of view, CDC and a whole-school approach provides a valuable development perspective for schools on how to become more democratic, taking into consideration key areas of school life such as teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and co-operation with the community. In this way, development of a democratic school culture and competences of democratic culture in learners becomes a school mission.

There are many ways of applying a whole-school approach in school. Below are some key principles and five possible stages of application.

Key principles

- *Respect for the local context and local ways of working.* A democratic culture cannot be imposed on a society from the outside, but needs to be built by citizens themselves, just as a democratic school culture cannot be imposed from outside but needs to be built by involving all stakeholders.
- *Empowering all stakeholders to develop their own solutions to challenges based on situation assessment.* There is no one master solution to the challenges faced by individuals across



different institutions and countries. Through assessment of the current situation at school, including its needs and capacity, key stakeholders get a better understanding of specific challenges and are empowered to develop their own tailor-made actions. This in turn increases the sense of ownership and of motivation for change.

- *Encouraging learning by doing with the participation of all stakeholders.* Democratic competences are best developed through daily practice, including through participatory decision making, respectful and equal relations, and democratic teaching and learning methods. This implies a committed partnership of all stakeholders – ranging from students, teachers, school leaders and parents to local authorities and other community actors – which explains the importance of approaching education institutions as a whole in learning and promoting the culture of democracy.
- *Integrating capacity-building into the school planning process.* Changes in school culture are more sustainable when they are built into a school's formal planning process.
- *Supporting local projects and initiatives over the long term.* It takes both time and effort to overcome resistance to change and transform relations and practices in schools. Systemic change cannot be achieved by a one-off effort. Long-term support is crucial for tangible outcomes and sustainable impact.

Five stages of application

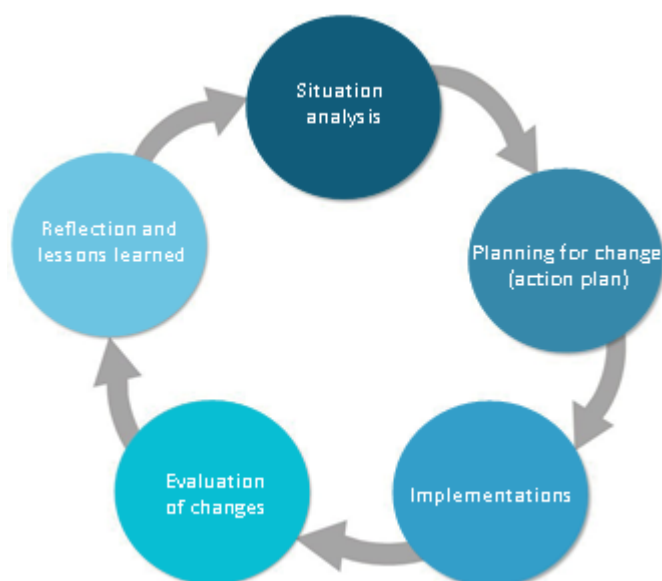
Below are five steps a school can take to become more democratic through applying a whole-school approach to the development of a democratic school culture and the development of competences for democratic culture in learners.

1. Conduct a situation analysis to identify how principles of democracy and human rights are integrated into school life, including strengths and weaknesses, and with the participation of all stakeholders (e.g. whole-school assessments, SWOT¹ analysis).
2. Identify potential areas of change and develop an action plan with concrete activities you will undertake to achieve these changes (e.g. CDC as the expected learning outcome).
3. Implement the action plan involving the school community.
4. Evaluate progress and assess the impact of your work.
5. Share lessons learned with all stakeholders involved in your efforts as well as with other schools and plan further actions accordingly.

¹ Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

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Forward-looking conclusions

It is recommended that all stakeholders in school consider the added value of a whole-school approach to develop a democratic school culture and competences for democratic culture in learners. Much research evidence shows that when learners experience a safe learning environment in which democratic and human rights values and principles can be explored, understood and experienced, they are more likely to:

- have higher levels of civic knowledge;
- support democratic values;
- develop an understanding of their own rights as well as their responsibilities towards other people;
- become supportive of the rights of others;
- develop higher-order critical thinking and reasoning skills;
- develop positive and socially responsible identities;
- develop positive and co-operative relationships with their peers based on listening, respect and empathy;
- accept responsibility for their own decisions;
- develop positive attitudes towards inclusivity and diversity in society;
- become engaged with political and social issues;
- feel empowered as citizens who can challenge injustice, inequality and poverty in the world;
- engage in democratic activities in the future.

In conclusion, taking a whole-school approach to develop a democratic school culture and competences for democratic culture in learners has significant potential for supporting young people to become knowledgeable, thoughtful, responsible, engaged and empowered citizens.



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