

# THE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE *IN BRIEF*



**THE REFERENCE  
FRAMEWORK OF  
COMPETENCES  
FOR DEMOCRATIC  
CULTURE  
*IN BRIEF***

*The opinions expressed in this work are  
the responsibility of the authors and  
do not necessarily reflect the official  
policy of the Council of Europe.*

All requests concerning the reproduction  
or translation of all or part of this  
document should be addressed to the  
Directorate of Communications (F-67075  
Strasbourg Cedex or publishing@coe.  
int). All other correspondence concerning  
this document should be addressed  
to the Directorate of Democracy.

Cover and layout: Documents and  
Publications Production Department  
(SPDP), Council of Europe

Photo: shutterstock

© Council of Europe, February 2021

# Contents

---

<b>THE REFERENCE FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR DEMOCRATIC CULTURE IN BRIEF</b>	<b>5</b>
Background to the Framework	5
The conceptual foundations of the Framework	6
The model of competences for democratic culture	7
Clusters of competences	12
Competence descriptors	12
CDC in the curriculum	13
CDC and teacher education	14
CDC and pedagogy	14
CDC and assessment	18
CDC and the whole-school approach	21
A whole-school approach to develop CDC in learners in practice	23
CDC and building resilience to radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism	23
Conclusion	24



# The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in brief

---

**T**he Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (the Framework) is intended for use in all sectors of education systems from pre-school through primary and secondary schooling to higher education, including adult and vocational education. The heart of the Framework is its model of 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. The Framework also contains descriptors for all the competences in the model and offers guidance on how the Framework can be implemented in education systems.

This document is a summary but readers are encouraged to consult the full Framework (three volumes). Its primary aim is to help teachers and other education professionals get acquainted with the Framework. It emphasises three key aspects related to its use by teachers: pedagogy, assessment and a whole-school approach to promote the development of competences for democratic culture.

## Background to the Framework

The Council of Europe views education as fulfilling four major purposes:<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ preparation for the labour market;
- ▶ preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies;
- ▶ personal development;
- ▶ the development and maintenance of a broad, advanced knowledge base.

The four purposes are complementary and of equal value. The Council of Europe sees education as a process enabling individuals to make independent choices for their own lives, to recognise others as equals and to interact with them in meaningful ways. This view of education is linked to the ideals of democracy and human rights. Learning requires processes which engage the whole person: intellect, emotions and experiences. Experience-based and active learning complement learning based on theory for the competences that are needed for active democratic participation.

---

1. Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)13 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on ensuring quality education.

## The conceptual foundations of the Framework

A culture of democracy implies that, besides appropriate institutions, laws and procedures (such as elections), genuine democracy relies on a set of attitudes and behaviours that are needed for these institutions, laws and procedures to function democratically in practice. These include:

- ▶ a commitment to public deliberation;
- ▶ a commitment to basing deliberations on facts and avoiding irrelevant information, as far as possible;
- ▶ a willingness to express one's own opinions and to listen to the opinions of others;
- ▶ a conviction that differences of opinion and conflicts must be resolved peacefully;
- ▶ a commitment to decisions being made by those who have received the greatest share of the votes or seats in an election, with due regard to the protection of minorities and their rights;
- ▶ a commitment to the rule of law.

A culture of democracy requires the will and ability to conduct intercultural dialogue, understood as an open exchange of views, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, between individuals or groups who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations. It fosters constructive engagement across these perceived cultural differences with a view to reducing intolerance, prejudice and stereotyping, enhancing the cohesion of democratic societies and helping to resolve conflicts. In culturally diverse societies, intercultural dialogue is crucial for ensuring that all citizens are equally able to participate in public discussion and decision making.

In the context of intercultural dialogue, the concepts of identity and cultural group are understood as follows.

Identity denotes a person's sense of who they are and the self-descriptions to which they attribute significance and value:

- ▶ Personal identities are based on personal attributes (for example caring, tolerant, extroverted), interpersonal relationships and roles (for example mother, friend, colleague) and autobiographical narratives (for example born to working-class parents, educated at a state school).
- ▶ Social identities are based on memberships of social groups (for example a nation, an ethnic group, a religious group, a gender group, an age or generational group, an occupational group, an educational institution, a hobby club, a sports team, a virtual social media group).
- ▶ Cultural identities (that is, the identities that people construct on the basis of their membership of cultural groups) are a particular type of social identity and are central to the concerns of the Framework.

Groups of any size can have their own distinctive cultures. For this reason, all people belong simultaneously to and identify with many different groups and their associated cultures.

Cultural groups have certain characteristics:

- ▶ They are always internally heterogeneous. This means that there is diversity within each cultural group, members of the group do not all share the exact same characteristics, norms and practices.
- ▶ They often have fuzzy boundaries. Sometimes it may not be clear and obvious who is part of the group and who is not.
- ▶ They are dynamic and change over time as a result of political, economic and historical events and developments, and as a result of interactions with and influences from the cultures of other groups. They also change over time because of their members' internal contestation of the meanings, norms, values and practices of the group. Cultural affiliations are also fluid and dynamic, with different affiliations – or different clusters of intersecting affiliations – being highlighted depending on the social context or in relation to the shifts in people's interests, needs, goals and expectations.

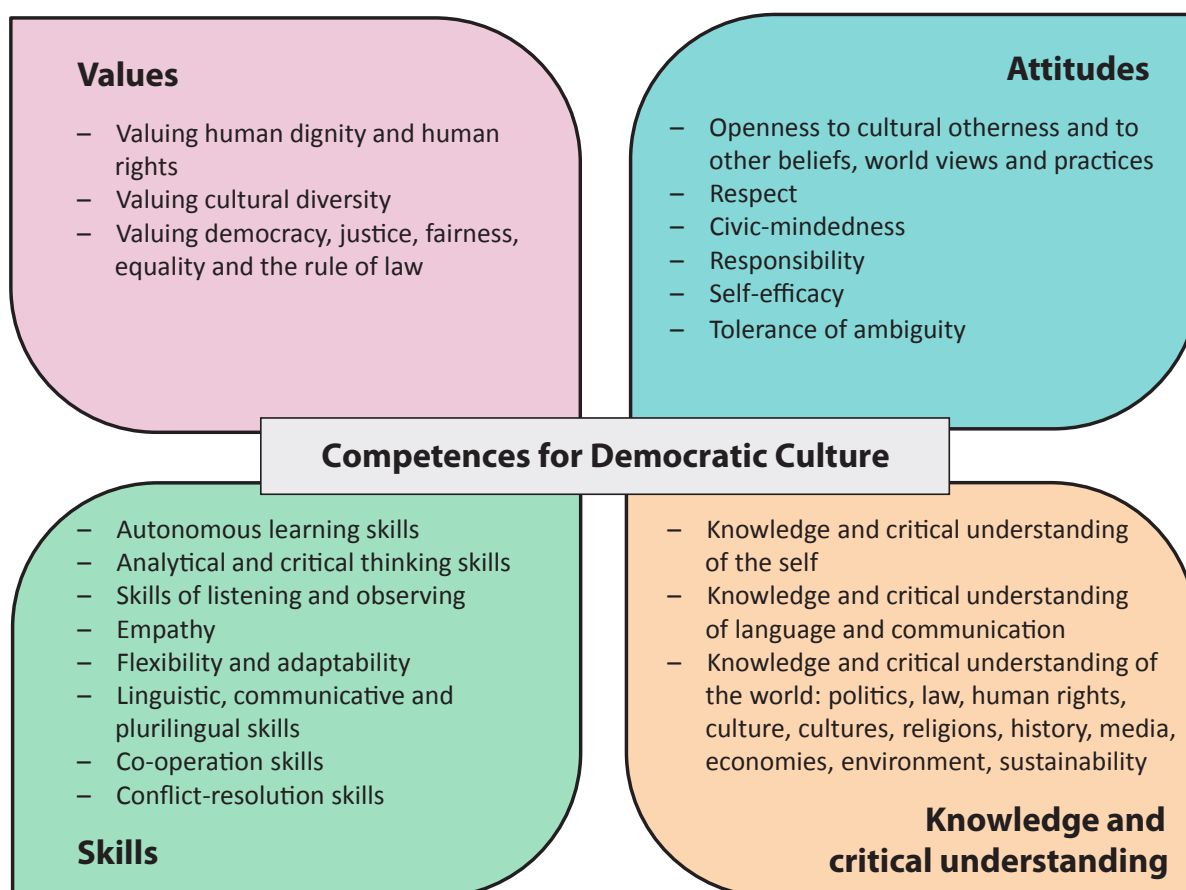
The term "competence" has two meanings in the Framework: a global meaning and a much more specific meaning. In its global meaning, competence is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and/or understanding in order to respond appropriately and effectively to the demands, challenges and opportunities that are presented by a given type of context.

In addition to this global use of the term "competence" (in the singular), the term "competences" (in the plural) is used to refer to the specific values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding that are mobilised and deployed in the production of competent behaviour. Hence, according to the Framework, competence consists of the mobilisation and deployment of specific competences to meet the demands and challenges of concrete situations.

## The model of competences for democratic culture

The model, summarised in Figure 1, includes 20 competences, grouped into values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding:

**Figure 1: The model of competences for democratic culture**



### Values

Values are general beliefs that individuals hold about the desirable goals that should be striven for in life. They motivate action and they also serve as guiding principles for deciding how to act. Values transcend specific actions and contexts, and they have a normative prescriptive quality about what ought to be done or thought across many different situations. Without a specification of the values that are important for a democratic and intercultural society, the other competence elements within the model could be used in the service of many other kinds of political order, including anti-democratic orders. For example, one could be a responsible and politically well-informed citizen, possessing good communication skills, within a totalitarian dictatorship, if a different set of values were to be employed as the foundation for one's judgments, decisions and actions. Thus, the values which the Framework model contains lie at the very heart of democratic competence and are essential for the characterisation of that competence.

### Valuing human dignity and human rights

This first set of values is based on the general belief that every individual human being is of equal worth, has equal dignity, is entitled to equal respect, and is entitled to the same set of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and ought to be treated accordingly. This belief assumes that human rights are universal, inalienable and indivisible and apply to everyone without distinction. Human rights provide a minimum set of protections that are essential for human beings to live a life of dignity and provide an essential foundation for freedom, equality, justice and peace in the world.



## Valuing cultural diversity

This set of values is based on the general belief that other cultural affiliations, cultural variability and diversity and pluralism of perspectives, views and practices ought to be positively regarded, appreciated and cherished. This belief assumes that cultural diversity is an asset for society, that people can learn and benefit from other people's diverse perspectives and that cultural diversity should be promoted and protected. People should be encouraged to interact with one another, irrespective of their perceived cultural differences, and intercultural dialogue should be used to enable them to live together as equals in society. There is a potential tension between valuing human rights and valuing cultural diversity: in a society which has adopted human rights as its primary value foundation, valuing cultural diversity will have certain limits, set by the need to promote, respect and protect the human rights and freedoms of other people. Hence, the different cultural beliefs and practices should always be valued unless they undermine the human rights and freedoms of others.

## Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

The third set of values is based on a cluster of beliefs about how societies ought to operate and be governed. All citizens ought to be able to participate equally (either directly or indirectly through elected representatives) in the procedures through which the laws that are used to regulate society are formulated and established, and engage actively with the democratic procedures which operate within their society (this also includes not engaging on occasions for reasons of conscience or circumstance). Decisions ought to be made by majorities, while the just and fair treatment of minorities of all kinds ought to be ensured. Social justice, fairness and equality ought to operate at all levels of society. The rule of law implies that everyone in society is treated justly, fairly, impartially and equally in accordance with laws that are shared by all.

## Attitudes

---

Attitudes are overall mental orientation which an individual adopts towards someone or something (for example a person, a group, an institution, an issue, an event, a symbol). Attitudes usually consist of four components: a belief or opinion about the object of the attitude, an emotion or feeling towards the object, an evaluation (either positive or negative) of the object and a tendency to behave in a particular way towards that object.

## Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices

Openness is an attitude towards either people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself or towards world views, beliefs, values and practices that differ from one's own. Openness involves sensitivity towards cultural diversity, curiosity about, and interest in discovering and learning about other cultural orientations and affiliations and other world views, beliefs, values and practices, as well as willingness to suspend judgment and disbelief of what is different and analyse one's own beliefs, values and practices. Openness also involves emotional readiness to seek out or take up opportunities to relate to others who are perceived to be different from oneself.

## Respect

Respect is an attitude of consideration, positive regard and esteem towards someone or something (for example a person, a belief, a symbol, a principle, a practice). One type of respect that is especially important in the context of a culture of democracy is the respect that is accorded to other people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations or different beliefs, opinions or practices from one's own. This type of respect does not require minimising or ignoring the actual differences that might exist between the self and the other, which can sometimes be significant and profound, nor does it require agreement with, adoption of or conversion to that which is respected. It is instead an attitude that involves the positive appreciation of the dignity and the right of the other person to hold those affiliations, beliefs, opinions or practices, while nevertheless recognising and acknowledging the differences which exist between the self and the other. An attitude of respect is required to facilitate both democratic interaction and dialogue with other people. However, there are limits that need to be placed on respect: respect should not be accorded to the contents of beliefs and opinions, or to lifestyles and practices, which undermine or violate the dignity, human rights or freedoms of others.<sup>2</sup>

---

2. From a human rights perspective, another person's right to freedom of beliefs should always be respected, but respect cannot be accorded to the contents of beliefs that seek to undermine or violate the dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. In the case of beliefs where the content cannot be respected, restrictions are placed not on the right to hold the beliefs but on the freedom to manifest those beliefs (Article 9 of the [European Convention on Human Rights](#)).

The concept of respect reflects better than the concept of tolerance the attitude that is required for a culture of democracy. Tolerance may, in some contexts, convey the connotation of simply putting up with difference, and a patronising attitude of tolerating something that one would prefer not to endure. Respect is based on recognition of the dignity, rights and freedoms of the other and a relationship of equality between the self and the other.

## **Civic-mindedness**

Civic-mindedness is an attitude of solidarity and duty towards a community or social group, beyond one's immediate circle of family and friends. Such groups include, for example, the people who live within a particular geographical area (such as a neighbourhood, a town or city, a country, a group of countries such as Europe or Africa, or indeed the world in the case of the "global community"), a group based on different belonging criteria (such as an ethnic group, faith group, leisure group, sexual orientation group), or any other kind of social or cultural group to which an individual feels a sense of belonging. Every individual belongs to multiple groups and an attitude of civic-mindedness may be held towards any number of these.

## **Responsibility**

Responsibility is an attitude towards one's own actions. It arises when a person has an obligation to act in a particular way and deserves praise or blame for either performing that act or failing to act in that way. Responsible individuals are able to reflect on their own actions, are able to form intentions about how they will act, and are able to execute their chosen actions. Responsibility can require courage insofar as taking a principled stance may entail acting on one's own, taking action against the norms of a community or challenging a collective decision that is judged to be wrong. Thus, there can sometimes be a tension between civic-mindedness and moral responsibility.

## **Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is an attitude towards the self. It involves a positive belief in one's own ability to undertake the actions which are required to achieve particular goals. This belief commonly entails the further beliefs that one can understand what is required, can make appropriate judgments, can select appropriate methods for accomplishing tasks, can navigate obstacles successfully, can influence what happens, and can make a difference to the events that affect one's own and other people's lives.

## **Tolerance of ambiguity**

Tolerance of ambiguity is an attitude towards situations which are perceived to be uncertain and subject to multiple, sometimes even conflicting or incompatible, interpretations. Hence, the term "tolerance" should be understood here in its positive sense of accepting and embracing ambiguity (rather than in its negative sense of enduring or putting up with ambiguity). Thus, tolerance of ambiguity involves recognition and acknowledgement that there can be multiple perspectives on and interpretations of any given situation or issue and that one's own perspective on a situation may be no better than other people's perspectives. It also involves acceptance of complexity, contradictions and lack of clarity, as well as willingness to undertake tasks when only incomplete or partial information is available and deal with it constructively.

## **Skills**

---

A skill is the capacity for carrying out complex, well-organised patterns of either thinking or behaviour in an adaptive manner in order to achieve a particular end or goal.

## **Autonomous learning skills**

Autonomous learning skills are those skills that individuals require to pursue, organise and evaluate their own learning, in accordance with their own needs, in a self-directed and self-regulated manner, without being prompted by others. Autonomous learning skills are important for a culture of democracy because they enable individuals to learn for themselves about, and how to deal with, political, civic and cultural issues using multiple and diverse sources both far and near, rather than relying on agents in their immediate environment for the provision of information about these issues.

## **Analytical and critical thinking skills**

Analytical thinking skills are those skills that are required to analyse materials of any kind (for example texts, arguments, interpretations, issues, events, experiences) in a systematic and logical manner through actions such as: breaking down the materials that are under analysis into constituent elements; interpreting the meaning(s) of each element; examining the elements in relation to each other; identifying any discrepancies, inconsistencies or divergences between elements; and drawing the results of the analysis together in an organised and coherent manner to construct logical and defensible conclusions about the whole.

Critical thinking skills consist of those skills that are required to evaluate and make judgments about materials of any kind, through actions such as: making evaluations on the basis of internal consistency and on the basis of consistency with available evidence and experience; making judgments about whether or not materials under analysis are valid, accurate, acceptable, reliable, appropriate, useful and/or persuasive; evaluating the preconceptions and motivation of those who created the materials; elaborating different alternative options; weighing up the pros and cons of the available options; and drawing the results of the evaluative process together in an organised and coherent manner.

## **Skills of listening and observing**

Skills of listening and observing are the skills that are required to understand what other people are saying and to learn from other people's behaviour. Understanding what other people are saying requires active listening – paying close attention not only to what is being said but also to how it is being said through the use of tone, pitch, loudness, rate and fluency of voice, and paying close attention to the person's accompanying body language, especially their eye movements, facial expressions and gestures.

## **Empathy**

Empathy is the set of skills required to understand and relate to other people's thoughts, beliefs and feelings, and to see the world from other people's perspectives. Empathy involves the ability to step outside one's own psychological frame of reference and the ability to imaginatively apprehend and understand the psychological frame of reference and perspective of another person. This skill is fundamental to imagining the cultural affiliations, world views, beliefs, interests, emotions, wishes and needs of other people.

## **Flexibility and adaptability**

Flexibility and adaptability enable individuals to adjust positively to novelty and change and to other people's social or cultural expectations, communication styles and behaviours. They also enable individuals to adjust their patterns of thinking, feeling or behaviour in response to new situational contingencies, experiences, encounters and information. Flexibility and adaptability, defined in this way, need to be distinguished from the unprincipled or opportunistic adjustment of behaviour for personal benefit or gain. They also need to be distinguished from externally coerced adaptation.

## **Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills**

Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills are those skills that are required to communicate effectively and appropriately with other people. They include, among others, the ability to express one's beliefs, opinions, interests and needs, explaining and clarifying ideas, advocating, promoting, arguing, reasoning, discussing, debating, persuading and negotiating; the ability to use more than one language or language variety; the ability to express oneself confidently and without aggression, in a manner that is respectful of the other persons' dignity and rights; the ability to recognise different communicative conventions (both verbal and non-verbal) and to adjust and modify one's communicative behaviour to the prevailing cultural setting; the ability to ask questions of clarification in an appropriate and sensitive manner and to manage breakdowns in communication, for example by requesting repetitions or reformulations from others, or providing restatements, revisions or simplifications of one's own misunderstood communications; as well as the ability to act as a linguistic mediator in intercultural exchanges.

## **Co-operation skills**

Co-operation skills are those skills that are required to participate successfully with others in shared activities, tasks and ventures and refer to expressing views and opinions in group settings and encouraging other group members to express their views and opinions in such settings; building consensus and compromise within a group; setting group goals and pursuing them; appreciating all group members' potential and contribution;

encouraging and motivating other group members; and sharing relevant and useful knowledge, experience or expertise with the group.

## **Conflict-resolution skills**

Conflict-resolution skills are those skills required to address, manage and resolve conflicts in a peaceful way. They refer to skills for reducing or preventing aggression and negativity and creating an environment in which people feel free to express their differing opinions and concerns without fear of reprisal, while at the same time recognising differences in power and/or status of the conflicting parties and taking steps to reduce the possible impact of such differences on communication between them. They entail managing and regulating emotions effectively; listening to and understanding the different perspectives of the parties involved in conflicts; countering or reducing misperceptions held by the conflicting parties; identifying common ground on which agreement can be built; identifying options for resolving conflicts; and refining possible compromises or solutions.

## **Knowledge and critical understanding**

---

Knowledge is the body of information that is possessed by a person on a certain topic. The term “critical understanding” is used to emphasise the need for the comprehension and appreciation of meanings in the context of democratic processes and intercultural dialogue to involve active reflection on and critical evaluation of what is being understood and interpreted.

### **Knowledge and critical understanding of the self**

Knowledge and critical understanding of the self implies knowledge and understanding of one’s own cultural affiliations, of one’s perspective on the world and the way in which these influence one’s perceptions, judgments and reactions to other people. It includes knowledge and understanding of the assumptions and preconceptions which underlie one’s perspective on the world; awareness of one’s own emotions, feelings and motivations, especially in contexts involving communication and co-operation with other people; as well as knowledge and understanding of the limits of one’s own competence and expertise.

### **Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication**

Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication refers to knowledge of the socially appropriate verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions of any given language, with an understanding that people of other cultural affiliations may follow different verbal and non-verbal communicative conventions from oneself, which are meaningful from their perspective. This is true even when they are using the same language as oneself, and requires an understanding that:

- ▶ people who have different cultural affiliations can perceive the meanings of communications in different ways;
- ▶ different communication styles will have a different social impact and effect on others, and different communication styles may clash or result in a breakdown of communication;
- ▶ one’s own assumptions, preconceptions, perceptions, beliefs and judgments are related to the specific language(s) which one speaks.

### **Knowledge and critical understanding of the world**

Knowledge and critical understanding of the world refers, within the model of competences for democratic culture, mainly to the following aspects:

- ▶ politics and law;
- ▶ human rights;
- ▶ culture and specific cultures;
- ▶ religions;
- ▶ history;
- ▶ the media;
- ▶ economies, the environment and sustainability.

## Clusters of competences

In real-life situations, competences are rarely mobilised and used individually. Instead, competent behaviour invariably involves the activation and application of an entire cluster of competences. Depending on the situation, and the specific demands, challenges and opportunities which that situation presents, and also the specific needs and goals of the individual within that situation, different subsets of competences will need to be activated and deployed.

An example of how an entire cluster of competences may be mobilised is provided when someone wants to take a principled stand against hate speech that is being directed at refugees or migrants on the internet. Such a stand is likely to be initiated through the activation of human dignity as a fundamental value and to be sustained through the activation of an attitude of civic-mindedness and a sense of responsibility. To challenge the contents of the hate speech, analytical and critical thinking skills will need to be applied. In addition, the formulation of an appropriate response requires knowledge of human rights as well as communicative skills in order to ensure that the stand that is taken is expressed appropriately and is targeted effectively at its intended audiences. In addition, the person will need to draw on knowledge and understanding of digital media in order to ensure that the response is posted in an appropriate manner and its impact maximised.

In other words, competent behaviour means responding appropriately and effectively to the various demands and challenges presented by democratic and intercultural situations. This is achieved through the use of varying subsets of psychological resources, drawn selectively from the individual's full repertoire of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and understanding.

## Competence descriptors

The Framework provides descriptors for each of the 20 competences in the competence model. These descriptors help to operationalise the competences and provide tools for curriculum planning, teaching and learning, and assessment. Competence descriptors are positively formulated statements that describe observable behaviours which indicate that the person concerned has achieved a certain level of proficiency with regard to a competence. In order for descriptors to be relevant for curriculum planning, teaching and learning, and assessment, the descriptors are formulated using the language of learning outcomes.

Volume 2 of the Framework<sup>3</sup> includes 447 validated descriptors, of which 135 are considered key descriptors and correspond to one of the three levels of proficiency (basic, intermediate and advanced). The statistical procedure used to scale the descriptors makes it highly probable that if a person displays the behaviour corresponding to a descriptor at the advanced level, this person will also be able to display the behaviours corresponding to the descriptors at the intermediate and basic levels for the same competence. Below are some examples of key descriptors (Table 1):

**Table 1: Key descriptors**

Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law	
Basic	Expresses the view that all citizens should be treated equally and impartially under the law
Intermediate	Argues that democratic elections should always be conducted freely and fairly, according to international standards and national legislation, and without any fraud
Advanced	Argues that there should be effective remedies against the actions of public authorities which infringe civil rights
Tolerance of ambiguity	
Basic	Engages well with other people who have a variety of different points of view
Intermediate	Deals with uncertainty in a positive and constructive manner
Advanced	Expresses a desire to have his/her own ideas and values challenged
Co-operation skills	
Basic	When working as a member of a group, does his/her share of the group's work
Intermediate	Works to build consensus to achieve group goals
Advanced	When working with others, supports other people despite differences in points of view

3. All validated descriptors are also available at: [www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/descriptors-of-competences](http://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/descriptors-of-competences).

Knowledge and critical understanding of the world	
Basic	Can describe basic cultural practices (e.g. eating habits, greeting practices, ways of addressing people, politeness) in one other culture
Intermediate	Can explain the dangers of generalising from individual behaviours to an entire culture
Advanced	Can explain why there are no cultural groups that have fixed inherent characteristics

Besides the list of scaled descriptors validated for learners above age 10, a separate list of descriptors validated for younger learners is also available.

The descriptors can be useful as reference points for curriculum development at different levels, from national to school-based curricula, as well as for the design, implementation and evaluation of learning activities.

Since competences are usually mobilised in clusters, educators can use the descriptors in designing learning activities to support the development of various competences. The bank of descriptors should be seen as a toolbox from which to identify and combine the most relevant elements considering the level of the learners and their specific context. When choosing the most relevant descriptors to set as expected learning outcomes, educators should consider that learning activities need to provide meaningful opportunities for all learners to move to higher levels of proficiency or to stabilise and consolidate proficiency for various competences. Descriptors refer to a general level of proficiency and not just to performance in a single specific situation or learning activity. The use of descriptors, because they are formulated in positive terms, allows for the recognition of what learners can do, and the absence of behaviours should guide future educational interventions.

The descriptors are relevant for assessment, including peer-assessment and self-assessment, and support critical reflection on learning, whether this takes place in a formal, non-formal or informal educational setting. Learners can use the descriptors to consider how they have behaved in specific relevant situations in the past and what they could do in the future.

Users of the Framework are advised to pay special attention to avoiding the potential misuse of descriptors. The bank of validated descriptors provided by the Framework should not be seen as a “to-do list” or as a checklist. A rigid and inappropriate use of descriptors in assessment may also generate unwanted outcomes, such as categorising, labelling or demotivating learners. This is why one of the major principles of assessment, as outlined below, is respectfulness. Descriptors should always be used only in ways that respect learners and support the development of their competences for democratic culture.

## CDC in the curriculum

The competences for democratic culture (CDC) model can be used both for auditing existing curricula and their implementation, and for the design of different types of curricula. This is valid regardless of the type of curriculum and it applies also for cross-curricular approaches. The following principles are to be considered in the planning of curriculum for developing CDC:

- ▶ Relevance: the curriculum for all subjects or areas of study can contribute to developing CDC, integrated together in various clusters with the subject-specific competences.
- ▶ Avoiding curriculum overload: it is not a matter of adding more to the curriculum, but of including CDC in the design, considering what it is realistic for the allocated time.
- ▶ Coherence and transparency: clusters of selected competences are coherently and transparently related to the overall aims of the curriculum. Both vertical (in time) and horizontal (across subjects) coherence of the selected components of the curriculum are crucial.
- ▶ Progression in CDC: a spiral curriculum can be envisaged, where some competences are revisited and others are gradually added.
- ▶ Language and the dialogic dimension: use of a precise vocabulary related to CDC and participatory processes of curriculum design are necessary.
- ▶ Contextualisation of CDC: CDC need to be interpreted by reference to national, cultural and institutional situations in which a curriculum is taught.
- ▶ Safe environments for learning CDC: addressing sensitive and controversial aspects related to CDC needs to include curriculum planning for a safe environment for discussion and debate.



## CDC and teacher education

The CDC approach applies to the preparation of future teachers and the professional development of practising teachers as well as to the education of pupils and students in schools. To be able to educate children and young adults in ways that foster the development of CDC, teachers – including teachers of teachers – need to develop these competences themselves. As part of pre- or in-service teacher education, teachers can reflect on how they develop their own CDC. This can, for example, take the form of learning diaries or logbooks, where the student teachers/teachers regularly reflect on which competences are being developed in a course, study programme or specific activity and on what they can do to further develop these competences.

Teacher education institutions are encouraged to review existing courses and identify which competences are already addressed, either through the contents, the teaching methods or student activities and assignments, and also point out which elements are missing. In a second step, content can be added, teaching methods changed or assignments included, in order to address additional competence elements and envisage the whole range of competences in the CDC model.

## CDC and pedagogy

The term “pedagogy” is used in the Framework in its broad sense, referring to the organisation of a learning process. Competences for democratic culture can be developed as part of the main school activities and within all subject matters. There is no need for teachers to abandon what they are doing, but they are invited to consider enriching their current practice by including CDC in their teaching. The Framework encourages teachers to review their current practice, reflect on it and identify ways in which they can proceed in order to support the development of CDC through activities which address learners as whole persons and engage them cognitively, emotionally and in their experience (with their head, heart and hands).

Competences for active democratic citizenship can be developed through approaches centred on the learning process, as well as through approaches focused on the content of teaching. Often an educational activity develops CDC through a combination of elements related to both content and process. The Framework discusses how teachers, as facilitators of learning, can include opportunities for experience, comparison, analysis, reflection and action in the planning of their educational activities. The Framework presents the following examples of methods and approaches recommended to teachers for contributing to the development of CDC.

- ▶ Process-oriented methods and approaches:
  - modelling democratic attitudes and behaviours
  - democratic processes in the classroom
  - co-operative learning
  - project-based learning
  - service learning.
- ▶ Content-based methods and approaches:
  - using the existing curriculum – within subject areas
  - team teaching and integrated curricular approaches
  - addressing the “hidden curriculum”.

## Process-oriented methods and approaches

---

### Modelling democratic attitudes and behaviours

The way teachers communicate and interact with students has a major influence on the values, attitudes and skills acquired by learners. Democratic values, attitudes and skills cannot be acquired through formal teaching about democracy alone but need to be practised.

Values are implicitly transmitted through the way teachers act and communicate. Educators can develop more awareness of the values they convey and mirror in their day-to-day practice, the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding one needs to develop. Choices made by educators can support – or hinder – the development of a democratic ethos among the learners. At classroom level the transmission of the Council of Europe values and principles that support sustainable democratic societies comes more from the relationships with teachers than from the power of the curriculum. Learning-by-doing approaches and

experiential learning engage students in a process of experience, challenge and reflection that has important potential for the development of CDC. Through their attitudes, behaviours and practices teachers can create safe learning environments, address discrimination and support individualised learning of a broad base or core humanistic components.

The planning and negotiating of aims, content, learning materials, assessment and programme evaluation by all participants involved in the learning process creates the conditions for transforming the roles of teachers and learners and transcending what those roles are in traditional classrooms. In this way learning for and through democracy occurs, educators demonstrating democratic behaviours and therefore contributing to the development of the CDC of learners.

Learning environments have an influence on student engagement and learning. It is important to foster open safe spaces for inclusive and effective learning and for managing difficult dialogues or emotional exchanges, where learners feel confident to voice their thoughts and disagreements. Classroom management, conflict prevention, shared decision making, shared responsibility for learning, respect in classroom communications and similar are harnessed to teach the values, attitudes and skills included in the CDC model, in a holistic approach, transcending the function of organising the learning sequence. The holistic perspective is manifest in the coherence between teaching and assessment procedures.

When teachers embrace inclusive methods for example, they send a meaningful message to learners: they say “you are all important and valuable”, “we can all learn from each other”. This is especially critical in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, where pedagogical approaches that value the specific cultural backgrounds of learners are required. On the other hand, when teachers spend most of the time standing in front of the classroom giving a lecture and writing on the board while learners listen and copy, they are also teaching a strong lesson: “I have the knowledge”, “you will passively learn and follow” – a message that is ineffective for developing intercultural and democratic values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding.

## Democratic processes in the classroom

A very effective way of developing a wide range of CDC is by experiencing democratic processes first hand. The first-hand experience of democratic processes will also empower learners and stimulate them to use these competences in the classroom, in the school and in society. Such experiences of democratic processes, which should be embedded in overall school life, can also take place in a classroom setting as part of classroom management and of the teaching process. They can include democratic decision making, development and implementation of classroom rules, providing opportunities for learners to voice their opinions and suggestions, even in an anonymous way. In so doing, teachers contribute effectively to the development of students’ CDC by establishing and using – at classroom level – procedures that ensure fairness, equality and non-discrimination, and inclusivity, providing opportunities for all children.

Democratic processes can also be applied as part of the teaching and learning methods used in a variety of subject matters. Educational activities can include simulations of elections, possibly accompanied by the simulation of a political campaign; mock parliaments or mock trials, defining and using fair procedures for making decisions to choose between various options; role-plays and simulations including testing positions of authority (a day as mayor); or the right to free speech (simulation of the work of journalists). All these methods can serve specific learning goals in the curriculum while also developing CDC.

## Co-operative learning

Teachers develop students’ co-operation skills, but also openness towards cultural otherness, respect, responsibility, tolerance of ambiguity, as well as listening and observation skills, communication skills and conflict-resolution skills, through learning processes and activities in the classroom based on co-operative learning principles.

By applying co-operative learning principles in their work, teachers deconstruct traditional classroom practices and dislodge inherited and deeply rooted ideas and beliefs about learning and learners, removing hierarchical, judgmental and anti-democratic systems and transforming classroom practices. Such structural changes will not only lead to changes in teachers’ attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding but also to changes in learners’ achievements and relationships, which, in turn, will help reach prosocial outcomes.

An effective co-operative learning process is structured according to four main principles:

- ▶ positive interdependence: everyone must contribute
- ▶ individual accountability: no hiding!



- ▶ equal access: non-discriminatory participation
- ▶ simultaneous interaction: all students engage in multiple interactions with their peers.

Educators adopting this approach claim that they not only help students to better master the academic content of the class, but also note that the method greatly attenuates hostile and intolerant attitudes in the classroom. Co-operative principles also contribute to improving learning in heterogeneous classrooms. When students work in small groups, they interact and serve as resources for one another. However, co-operative learning may produce situations in which students who are academically low achieving and/or who are socially isolated are excluded from the interactions in the group. Therefore, in such cases, co-operative learning needs to be consciously supported by the teacher in order to ensure equity and avoid the pitfall of reinforcing existing educational and social inequalities.

The following questions can help teachers check their planning of co-operative learning activities:

- ▶ Do learners need to co-operate with peers in order to accomplish their task and reach their goal?
- ▶ Are the learning activities meeting the needs and wishes of the learners?
- ▶ Is the learning process structured in a way that promotes equal participation for each learner?
- ▶ Can every learner participate/achieve their individual learning goals?

## Project-based learning

Project work, or learning through projects, is a pedagogical approach particularly appropriate for the development of CDC because it contributes to acquiring a combination of attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding, as well as to developing values. It can be used within a specific subject area but it is also very appropriate for a cross-curricular approach and for addressing cross-cutting issues.

Project-based learning offers its best potential when conducted in small groups and/or by a whole class. It is usually structured in a sequence of steps spread over several weeks:

- ▶ choice of a topic of study or of an open question and planning of the work;
- ▶ collection of information, organisation of the information collected and decision making (implying both individual responsibility, co-operation in a group and managing potential differences of views or disagreements);
- ▶ preparation of the product (which can take various forms, such as a poster, video, podcast, publication, website, portfolio, text, performance or event);
- ▶ presentation of the product;
- ▶ reflection on the learning experience.

Depending on the topic selected, the elements of knowledge and critical understanding of the world in the CDC model can also be developed. When the topic involves linguistic and cultural diversity, the process can also stimulate valuing diversity and openness to difference and otherness.

The role of the teacher in a project-based learning process is that of a facilitator of the learning process. Students follow the instructions given by the teacher concerning the steps to go through, but, in terms of content, the decision should remain largely with the students. The teacher's main instrument is the question, not the answer. The principles described above still apply and the teacher monitors how the collaboration in the groups is taking place. The teacher should encourage students to co-operate, support each other, give each other feedback and reflect on what they discover as well as on their interactions.

## Service learning

Service learning is also an effective way to develop the full range of CDC because it gives learners opportunities to connect the knowledge, critical understanding and skills acquired in a classroom setting with meaningful action targeting a real-world issue. Through this connection, not only are knowledge, critical understanding and skills consolidated and further developed, but processes are put in place that stimulate the development and critical awareness of attitudes and values.

Service learning is more than community service. It implies providing a community service in the context of a structured set of steps, in which the teacher plays an important role as organiser and facilitator, while keeping a strong learner-centred approach and empowering learners to make decisions and act on their own will in co-operation with peers.

As service learning is a form of project-based learning, a similar sequence of steps will serve as a reference for the process:

- ▶ assessment of community needs and identification of the improvement or change to be envisaged;
- ▶ preparation of the task to be undertaken by collecting information, identifying and contacting key community stakeholders, analysing options to address the issue and planning the intervention;
- ▶ taking action by engaging in a community service activity which is meaningful for the learners and enhances learning and the development of values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding; the action can be of several types, including:
  - direct support provided to a group of beneficiaries in need (for example visiting a centre for senior citizens, organising educational activities for smaller children in a disadvantaged area, giving gifts to citizens providing volunteer work);
  - indirect support or change in the community (for example collecting toys for a non-governmental organisation (NGO) supporting disadvantaged children, painting a wall near a playground to make it more child-friendly, setting up a web platform or application enabling senior citizens of the community to ask for support from volunteers, fundraising to support a local initiative);
  - advocacy for change (for example advocating for public policies to be adopted by local authorities, warning local citizens of certain risks or advocating for change in certain behaviours of citizens);
- ▶ presentation of the work and its outcomes to the community and celebration of the achievements;
- ▶ reflection on the learning experience, preferably throughout the whole process, and evaluation of the work done leading to conclusions and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of future similar activities.

## Content-based methods and approaches

---

The development of CDC need not be perceived as being in competition with teaching the basic skills of language, mathematics, science or all the other school subjects such as history, geography, physical education and modern languages, to name but a few.

## Using the existing curriculum – within subject areas

---

Taught in a conscious and purposeful way, all subjects within the existing curriculum can harbour learning activities that teach the values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding that the learners need to be able to contribute to a democratic culture. The temptation to “sprinkle” teaching for CDC here and there, with a few hours a year devoted to topics such as intercultural competence or democratic citizenship, can have the negative consequence of an inevitable superficiality that both obscures and scatters the fundamentally important messages. Instead, CDC should be envisaged throughout the curriculum and at the intersection of the subject-specific curricula. The Framework provides suggestions and examples on how elements of CDC can be connected with the existing curriculum in various subjects.

## Team teaching and integrated curricular approaches

---

Besides what each teacher can do in the context of a specific subject, co-operation between teachers of several subjects can lead to valuable and effective additional outcomes for the development of CDC. This co-operation can be between several teachers working with the same class, who co-ordinate their intervention to enhance CDC, but it can also be between teachers working with different classes, which are supported to engage in a partnership and co-operate in learning activities resulting in the development of CDC. Teachers working with the same class can plan their teaching together in order to ensure that they complement each other in covering all the elements of CDC, leading to a gradual progress of the class in all aspects, so as to avoid overlapping and overlooking elements of CDC. They can also plan together larger project-based learning activities or cover, from the perspective of different disciplines over a longer period of time, transversal topics particularly relevant for CDC, such as human rights, gender equality, sustainable development, socio-cultural and linguistic diversity, or the prevention of discrimination and violence.

## Addressing the “hidden curriculum”

---

Teachers should become aware and take an active approach in spotting and avoiding the unintentional lessons that are taught in their setting. The selection of resources used in teaching and the types of tasks given to learners may reinforce social inequalities or cultural domination as well as stereotypes and discrimination. They may also send other unintended messages, including the idea that the content of teaching is irrelevant to the lives of learners.

### CDC and assessment

The Framework promotes a focus on the empowerment of learners as active democratic citizens and this has particular implications for the assessment of CDC. Assessment<sup>4</sup> should enable learners not only to become aware of their achievement or level of proficiency in CDC, but also to reflect on the learning process that resulted in this particular outcome. Assessment should determine what is needed in order to develop these competences further and enable learners to take appropriate action in relationship to their own learning. In other words, assessment should contribute to the learners’ ownership of their learning process. During the assessment of learners’ achievements, learners can help teachers to understand if and to what degree the teaching process actually supported them in developing the intended competences.

### Principles of assessment

---

In order for education assessments to be acceptable to learners and, in the case of young learners, their parents or caregivers, it is important that they meet a number of criteria. These criteria include validity, reliability, equity, transparency, practicality and respectfulness.

**Validity:** assessment accurately describes and/or measures a learner’s level of proficiency or achievement of the intended learning outcomes, and not of some other unintended outcomes or extraneous factors.

**Reliability:** assessment produces results that are consistent and stable. Outcomes should be replicable if the same assessment procedure were to be administered again to the same learner and by a different assessor.

**Equity:** assessment is fair and does not favour or disadvantage any particular group or individual. An equitable assessment method ensures that all learners, regardless of their demographic or other characteristics, have an equal opportunity to display their level of competence.

**Transparency:** learners receive in advance explicit, accurate and clear information about the assessment, including the purpose of the assessment, the learning outcomes that are going to be assessed, the types of assessment procedures to be used, and the assessment criteria.

**Practicality:** assessment methods are feasible, given the resources, time and practical constraints that apply. A practical assessment procedure does not make unreasonable demands on the resources or time that are available to the learner or the assessor. The limitations that render a method impractical are also likely to render that method unreliable and invalid.

**Respectfulness:** assessment procedures respect the dignity and the rights of the learner who is being assessed. Learners’ rights are defined by the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>5</sup> and the Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>6</sup> and they include, *inter alia*, the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination. Assessment methods or procedures (and any other education practices) that violate one or more of these rights of learners should not be used. In its interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights explicitly allows freedom of expression even in cases where the views that are expressed are regarded as offensive, shocking or disturbing, because freedom of expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society. However, the Court also holds that, in the case of forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance, it may be necessary to sanction or even prevent such forms of expression. This is because tolerance and respect for the equal dignity of all human beings constitute a further essential foundation of

---

4. In the Framework, “assessment” refers to the systematic description and/or measurement of a learner’s level of proficiency or achievement, whereas “evaluation” refers to the systematic description and/or measurement of the effectiveness of an education system, institution, programme or learning activity. Assessment and evaluation are related because the results of assessments can be used as one element of an evaluation.

5. Available at: [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf).

6. Available at: [www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf).

a culturally diverse democratic society.<sup>7</sup> Assessment, if conducted in respectful ways, can turn a problematic behaviour into a turning point in the education process.

The principle of respectfulness does not only involve respecting the human rights of learners, it also involves respecting the dignity of learners. As such, assessments that are linked to the Framework should also observe the following general rules:

- ▶ Learners should not be placed under continual stress by being constantly assessed.
- ▶ Learners have a right to privacy and confidentiality, especially in relationship to their values and attitudes.
- ▶ There is a need for sensitivity when revealing assessment results to learners.
- ▶ Feedback to learners from assessments should focus on positive rather than negative outcomes, mainly on learners' achievements rather than their deficiencies.
- ▶ There may be cases and issues where assessments should not be conducted because the issues or topics are too sensitive for the learners concerned.
- ▶ Special precautions should also be taken where the outcomes of an assessment will be used to decide if a learner can continue to the next level of education.

In addition, users of the Framework may wish to consider whether, in order to respect the dignity of learners, learners have a right for the values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours which they have exhibited at earlier points in their development to be forgotten. It may be argued that there should be no permanent track record of learners' values, attitudes and beliefs, because this violates their right to privacy. Alternatively, it may be argued that only acceptable or positive values, attitudes and beliefs should be traceable through assessment records (and that these records should therefore not document any unacceptable speech or behaviours that have violated or aimed to violate other people's dignity or human rights, because this documentation could later harm the learner). A third possibility is that, if learners engage in behaviours or hold values, attitudes or beliefs that are democratically unacceptable, but then progress in their development, they should have the right for their previous behaviours, values, attitudes or beliefs to be removed from the records of their education. Users of the Framework will need to consider the range of possibilities and decide upon the course of action that is most suitable in their own education context, bearing in mind the need to ensure that assessment should always respect the dignity and rights of the learner who is being assessed.

Invalid, unreliable, inequitable or disrespectful conclusions about learners should never be drawn from an assessment that has been conducted in relationship to the Framework.

## Approaches to assessment

In addition to thinking through the implications of these six assessment principles, users of the Framework will need to consider the specific approach that they might use for assessing CDC. There are contrasting approaches to assessment, some of which form dichotomies and some continua. In general, types of assessment can be characterised using these dichotomies and continua (Table 2).

**Table 2: Concepts and contrasts**

High-stakes (e.g. national examinations)	Low-stakes (e.g. confidential portfolios)
Achievement (e.g. end of course test)	Proficiency (e.g. test in a real-world context outside the school)
Norm-referenced (e.g. examinations for selection to next stage of education)	Criterion-referenced (e.g. portfolio demonstrating a profile of competences)
Summative (e.g. end of course examination)	Formative (e.g. mid-course assessment)
Objective (e.g. computer-based test)	Subjective (e.g. observation of behaviour)

The Framework discusses how these different approaches to assessment can be used in relation to the competences for democratic culture. Users of the Framework are encouraged to consider the advantages and disadvantages, the opportunities and the risks associated with employing various approaches and make their

7. See European Court of Human Rights (2016), "Hate speech", Council of Europe, Strasbourg, available at: [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS\\_Hate\\_speech\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/FS_Hate_speech_ENG.pdf).

choice of a certain type or of a mixed set of assessment types, taking into account their specific work context, as well as the principles of assessment mentioned above.

In addition, the distinction between achievement assessment and proficiency assessment is relevant here. Achievement assessment focuses on the performance of learners in relation to a specific education activity, task or programme, whereas proficiency assessment is an assessment reflecting the acquisition of competences whatever the source of learning. While teachers are often more interested in achievement assessment, users of the Framework may wish to consider whether assessment should be focused instead on proficiency, because contexts in the wider social, civic or political world beyond the school are particularly important and relevant for assessment in relationship to the Framework.

Assessment needs to provide a picture of how proficient a learner is in mobilising and applying a cluster of relevant competences to a range of contexts, and also of how proficient he or she is in adapting these competences as the circumstances within those contexts change. This means that assessment methods that provide only a static description of a learner's competences at one moment in time are unlikely to be adequate. Users of the Framework will need to choose methods of assessment that are suitable for detecting the dynamic use of clusters of competences within and across contexts, and that can produce a profile of a learner's performance.

## Assessment methods

---

The Framework presents and discusses advantages and disadvantages of several assessment methods which can be used in relation to CDC.

### Open-ended diaries, reflective journals and structured autobiographical reflections

These methods require the learner to record and reflect on their own behaviour, learning and personal development. The record which is produced is usually a written text, but it could also include non-verbal self-expressions or art works. The reflections may be freely structured by the learner, or they may be structured through the use of a pre-specified format that has been designed to ensure that the reflections provide evidence on the specific learning outcomes that are being assessed. In using these methods to assess CDC, the format could therefore require learners to structure their narratives or reflections in such a way that they record and reflect on the full range of competences that they have deployed across a range of situations or contexts, and how they adapted or adjusted the competences that they were using as those situations developed.

### Observational assessment

Observational assessment involves a teacher or other assessor observing learners' behaviours in a range of different situations in order to ascertain the extent to which the learner is deploying clusters of competences appropriately and is actively adjusting those clusters according to the changing situational circumstances. Using such a method requires the assessor to develop a plan of the range of situations to which the learner is to be exposed, and to make a record of the learner's behaviour in those situations. This could be a written record using either a structured observation sheet or a more open-ended logbook in which a description of the learner's behaviour is captured. Alternatively, a direct record can be made of the behaviour that is being observed using an audio or video recording, so that the assessment can be made after the event.

### Dynamic assessment

Dynamic assessment involves the teacher or other assessor actively supporting the learner during the assessment process in order to enable the learner to reveal his or her maximum level of proficiency. This is accomplished by exposing the learner to a planned range of situations or contexts in which the teacher interacts with the learner.

### Project-based assessment

Project-based assessment is an integral part of project-based learning, allowing learners to engage in activity not only in the classroom but also in the wider social, civic or political world. A project normally leads to the creation of substantial products. Learners can also be required to provide documentation on the process of conducting the project and on the learning process, as well as critical self-reflections. Thus, products and the accompanying documentation provide information about how clusters of competences have been mobilised and deployed across contexts, and about how they have been adjusted over time according to the needs of the situations encountered during the project.

## Portfolio assessment

A portfolio is a systematic, cumulative and ongoing collection of materials that is produced by the learner as evidence of his or her learning, progress, performance, efforts and proficiency. The materials are selected for inclusion following a set of guidelines, and the learner has to explain and reflect on the contents of the portfolio. Portfolios can be tailored to the needs of particular learners, levels of education, education programmes and education contexts.

The Framework also recommends specific measures that can be taken to maximise the validity and reliability of assessments and draws attention to the risks and challenges related to the use of certain assessment approaches and methods. When considering appropriate assessments in the context of the Framework, educators need to bear in mind the strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches and methods. Mixed-method approaches, including self- and peer-assessment, as well as co-assessment, might be most feasible in many cases.

## CDC and the whole-school approach

### The added value of a whole-school approach

---

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. 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. A whole-school approach implies the active involvement and commitment of all stakeholders in a school, including school administration, teachers, students and parents, as well as local community members.

At least three key areas need to be considered as part of a whole-school approach to develop a democratic culture at school and competences for democratic culture in learners: teaching and learning, school governance and culture, and co-operation with the community. These three areas are not entirely separated from each other but overlap, which means that actions in one area will have an impact on the others. However, it is important to remember that creating a democratic functioning school, and thus integrating principles of democracy and human rights into all areas, is a gradual process and will take time.

### Teaching and learning

---

Some of the ways in which competences for democratic culture might be incorporated into the curriculum and lesson planning, as well as in teaching and learning methodologies, are described in the chapters on curriculum and pedagogy. This section underlines the importance of creating and maintaining an open, participative and respectful classroom environment and the fact that various extracurricular activities can complement classroom practice and contribute also to the development of CDC.

### School governance and culture

---

The organisational culture of a school, based on a democratic approach to school governance, as well as an inclusive school ethos which is safe and welcoming, where relations between staff and between staff and students are positive, and 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.



## **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 active 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.

## **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.
- ▶ 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 to participate in decision making at school and in the community, for example through class discussion, student councils, surveys and suggestion boxes.
- ▶ Make sure that participative approaches that the students are involved in are authentic and avoid pseudo-participation or the notion of “just pretending”.

## **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 can co-operate with the community in a number of ways.

### **Parents and community participation**

- ▶ Encourage parents or community members to contribute to school activities on a voluntary basis.
- ▶ Facilitate student projects designed to solve community problems or challenges.

### **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 on issues that are of mutual concern to the students.

### **Partnerships with community institutions**

- ▶ Develop partnerships, for example with NGOs, youth organisations or higher education institutions.
- ▶ 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, as well as with advocacy groups promoting human rights.

Applying a whole-school approach to developing competences for democratic culture in learners generates important benefits for individuals, for the school and for the local community.

## A whole-school approach to develop CDC in learners in practice

### Key principles

These include:

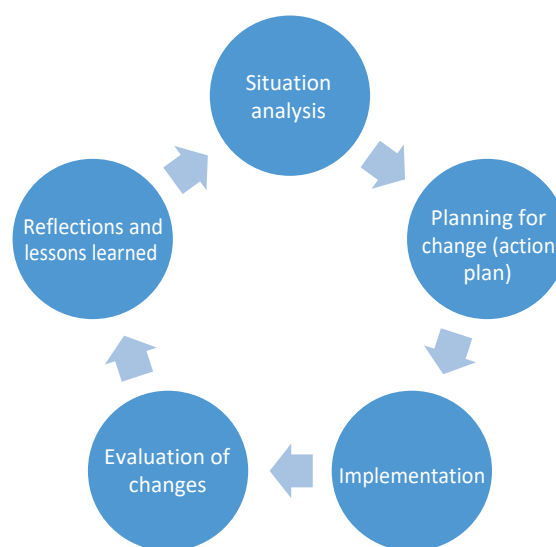
- ▶ respect for the local context and local ways of working;
- ▶ empowering all stakeholders to develop their own solutions to challenges based on situation assessment;
- ▶ encouraging learning by doing with the participation of all stakeholders;
- ▶ integrating capacity building into the school planning process;
- ▶ supporting local projects and initiatives over the long term.

### Five stages of application

Applying a whole-school approach to the development of a democratic school culture and the development of competences for democratic culture in learners can be done through a process structured in five stages (see Figure 2).

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 (for example whole-school assessments, SWOT analysis).
2. Identify potential areas of change and develop an action plan with concrete activities you will undertake to achieve these changes (for example 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 learnt with all stakeholders involved, as well as with other schools and plan further actions accordingly.

Figure 2: The five stages of a whole-school approach



## CDC and building resilience to radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism

The Framework can help to build students' resilience to radicalisation by equipping students not only with the competences needed for democratic culture and intercultural dialogue, but also with the competences needed for recognising and dealing with extremist and terrorist propaganda (for example analytical and critical thinking skills), for recognising misinformation, fake news and hate speech in broadcast, print and online news media (for example knowledge and critical understanding of media), and for valuing human dignity, human rights and democratic processes.

The relevant guidance document explains in detail how the Framework can build students' resilience. It begins by examining the nature of radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism. It also describes the predisposing conditions that can lead to radicalisation (for example difficulties with personal identity, simplistic thinking style, grievances and injustices, disillusionment with politicians and conventional politics) and the enabling conditions that can help to facilitate the transition into violent extremism and terrorism (for example exposure



to violent extremist ideology, finding a sense of community, identity and belonging among the members of an extremist organisation). It is emphasised that different subsets of conditions operate in the case of different individuals, and that no single condition by itself is likely to lead to radicalisation. Even if a large subset of conditions applies, this will still not necessarily lead an individual into violent extremism and terrorism, especially if that individual is equipped with the competences that confer resilience to violent extremist and terrorist propaganda and rhetoric.

Research results indicate how resilience to radicalisation can be built. Actions that can be taken include:

- ▶ de-glamorising violent extremism and terrorism;
- ▶ deconstructing violent extremist narratives and providing counter-narratives;
- ▶ training students in the use of a more complex thinking style;
- ▶ providing education on the identification and deconstruction of propaganda;
- ▶ providing education in digital literacy;
- ▶ providing education in the use of democratic means for the expression of political views.

These various actions are based on fostering one or more of the specific competences that are included within the Framework. In other words, education based on the Framework provides a systematic, comprehensive and powerful method for building students' resilience to radicalisation, precisely because it equips students with all of the competences that are required to:

- ▶ understand the nature of violent extremism and terrorism;
- ▶ understand how violent extremist and terrorist narratives operate;
- ▶ understand how digital media are used to disseminate misinformation, fake news and hate speech;
- ▶ identify and deconstruct propaganda;
- ▶ use a complex and sophisticated reasoning style when thinking about the claims that are made by extremist and terrorist propaganda;
- ▶ use peaceful democratic means for the expression of political views.

Using a whole-school approach to foster the development of the 20 competences, which enables students to become knowledgeable, thoughtful, responsible, engaged and empowered democratic citizens can therefore also develop resilience to radicalisation.

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture also includes chapters on higher education and language learning. The complete content is available in several languages on the website.

## Conclusion

The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture provides a systematic approach to designing the teaching, learning and assessment of competences for democratic culture, and to introducing them into education systems in ways that are coherent, comprehensive and transparent. The Framework has been designed in such a way that it can support education decision-making and planning by both policy makers and practitioners and assist in the harnessing of educational systems for the purpose of preparing learners for life as democratically and interculturally competent citizens. Equipping learners with the competences specified by the Framework is an essential step which needs to be taken to empower them as active participatory citizens, based on respect for human rights and democratic processes. Equipping them with these competences through the educational system is crucial to ensure the future health of our culturally diverse democratic societies and the empowerment and flourishing of all young people who live within them.

**[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)**

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.