

LEARNING DEMOCRACY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN EUROPE



AN ANTHOLOGY

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

LEARNING DEMOCRACY IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN EUROPE

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Foreword

Vocational education and training (VET) plays a crucial role in the economic development and growth of modern societies, as it develops the skilled workforce necessary to maintain the efficiency and competitiveness of public and private enterprises. However, VET is not only a pathway to preparing learners for employment, but a cornerstone in preparing young people to participate as informed, responsible citizens in our democratic societies.

Since the publication of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) in 2018, several evaluations of the implementation of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education and the RFCDC recommended that further attention needs to be given to the relation between the RFCDC and VET, taking into consideration their specific characteristics and needs. In response, the Council of Europe Education Department convened an Expert Group and published the *RFCDC Guidance document for vocational education and training* in 2024. Building on this document and in line with the Education Strategy 2024–2030 “Learners First”, which calls for embedding democratic culture throughout all levels and forms of education, this anthology addresses critical questions about the integration of competences for democratic culture (CDC) in eight areas of VET, identifies existing gaps and practical challenges and proposes ways to address them within diverse educational contexts.

Due to its unique position at the intersection of school and work, VET is shaped by a diversity of systems, structures and actors. It is precisely these distinctive features that offer unique opportunities for developing key democratic competences, such as openness to cultural otherness, responsibility, co-operation skills and critical thinking. As learners prepare to enter or reorient themselves in professional life, VET environments can become pivotal spaces to cultivate their voice and sense of agency as active citizens. However, the successful development of CDC among VET learners requires co-ordinated efforts by all stakeholders, particularly staff in VET schools, employers and in-company trainers. By providing concrete examples, guiding questions and reference points, this publication aims to inspire policy makers, practitioners and employers to effectively develop CDC in VET.

The Education Department is particularly grateful to Dr Andrea Laczik and Dr Søren Kristensen for acting as editors of this publication, and to all the authors that expertly drafted the eight chapters of this anthology. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the expert group that participated and supported the development of this work, which included members from Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Türkiye, Ukraine, the Holy See, The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), European Student Union (ESU), the Federation for European Education (FEDE) and the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL).

This publication represents a significant next step forward to the development of the RFCDC in VET and aligns with the Council of Europe's ongoing efforts to promote the integration and learning of democratic values across education systems. It is offered in the spirit of partnership and shared responsibility, and with the conviction that vocational education and training, properly conceived, builds both careers and citizens.



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Council of Europe



Introduction

Context

Current political, societal and economic contexts pose considerable challenges for societies in Europe and beyond. It is increasingly important that citizens share democratic values and become competent at living and participating in a democratic culture. Developing responsible members of a society must start at an early age and should be inclusive.

We must create an environment where the competences for democratic culture (CDC) of those in vocational education and training (VET) learners can be developed, where they can actively participate, shape their surroundings and contribute to the betterment of society. By empowering learners, we not only fulfil our moral obligation but also lay the foundation for a more vibrant, innovative and equitable future. There is a need for those in VET to integrate democratic competences already inscribed in very broad terms in most educational legislation. However, the extent to which this is embedded and practised differs considerably. The Council of Europe has been engaged in working and advising on learning about democracy in general and higher education, including in VET. This publication focuses on initial vocational education and training (IVET) at secondary level that mainly attracts young people between the ages of 15 and 19. This group of young people is particularly important as in European Union (EU) countries on average, 50% of them are involved in VET at the upper secondary or tertiary level. Yet, a European Commission report from 2017 reveals that local policy makers and authorities often neglect citizenship education in IVET compared to general education.

These VET learners are important to target because their experiences differ from those in purely general/academic programmes. They may engage in school-based VET or work-based VET in the form of apprenticeships. They may attend multiple learning venues, VET schools or training organisations and workplaces, and they navigate back and forth between professional life and school life. This transition is unique for those in IVET as it is not experienced by learners in schools until after they graduate from secondary or tertiary education and start working. Hence, VET provides unique opportunities to capture learners' interests at an earlier stage and to help develop and strengthen the voice and participation of adolescents as active citizens at a time when they are in the process of transitioning into professional life or changing career.

Stimulating activities that enhance democratic engagement through participation are particularly important for VET learners. VET learners, especially those in IVET

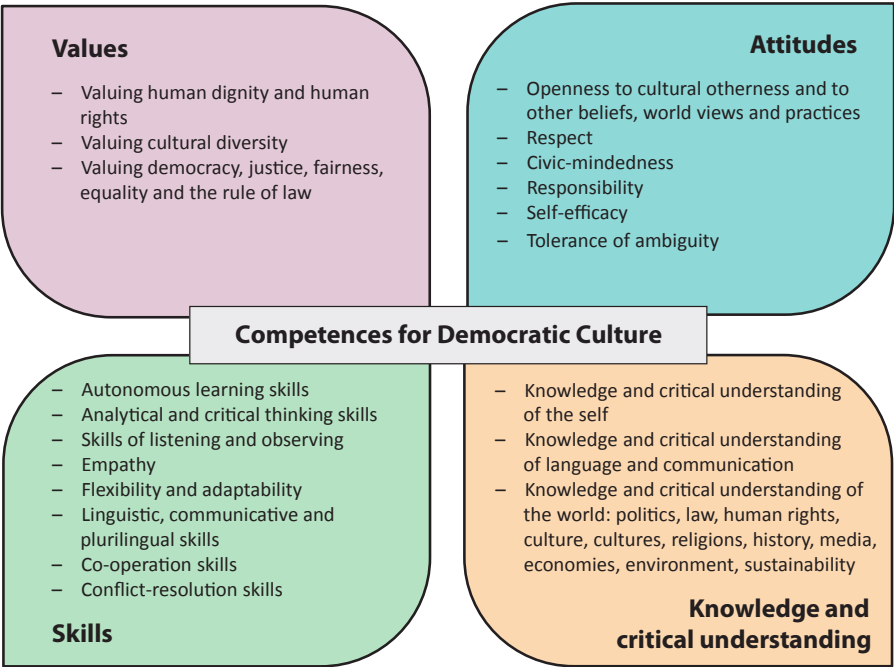
programmes, have lower political efficacy (Hoskins et al. 2014) and a lower tendency to vote or participate through other types of democratic engagement. Furthermore, learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to participate in democratic activities and as this group is over-represented within VET it is vital we consider their needs and voice.

Developing CDC for IVET learners needs to be a joint effort by all those stakeholders who engage with them during and beyond their compulsory education and training. These stakeholders include representatives of the two learning venues: staff at the VET schools, and employers and workplace staff. The development of CDC for those in IVET is also influenced by structures, processes and approaches, such as VET teacher training and an integrated approach.

This publication builds on the Council of Europe’s guidance document on a Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) for VET (Council of Europe 2024) and aims to extend the knowledge base between RFCDC and VET. It unpacks aspects that may contribute to and inspire ways to effectively develop CDC for those in VET. It aims to strengthen democratic values and practices and promote a culture of democracy in VET.

The RFCDC and VET

The Council of Europe has developed the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, which includes the model of competences for democratic culture (Council of Europe 2018), referred to as the “butterfly model”.



Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture

This model specifies the 20 competences, grouped into values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding, which are necessary for learners to develop in order to become responsible, active citizens. These competences help individuals “to take action to defend and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to participate effectively in a culture of democracy, and to live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse societies”. These 20 competences are equally relevant for VET learners as they are for learners in general education and higher education. However, the ways in which these competences are developed differ between general education and higher education, and are specific to VET contexts (Council of Europe 2024).

VET and VET systems are complex and diverse across the member states of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2024). Diversity exists in “learner profiles, stakeholder involvement, pedagogical practices, teacher and trainer qualifications, duration, mode of provision and social status” (Council of Europe 2024: 17). What unites all VET systems is their close link to the labour market. The content of VET is linked to labour market intelligence on the skills required by different industrial sectors. VET curricula are closely aligned to employers’ needs. There are two learning venues for VET: schools and workplaces. Different countries have different approaches to delivering VET; some offer it in schools, others in workplaces and for others still, there is a combination of the two.

Those in VET represent a diverse group in terms of age, backgrounds and interests. VET is offered initially to those aged 15 (or 16) to 19, and also to adult learners for upskilling and reskilling. European countries exhibit different participation rates in VET programmes by age. For example, in Germany, it is mainly taken up by young people under the age of 25, while in England, VET is more prevalent for the 25+ age group. In many countries, VET holds a lower reputation; for example in Spain, it is often seen as a “second-chance” provision for those who have struggled in general education. On the other hand, there are young people who consciously choose VET programmes and excel with top performers becoming “WorldSkills” competitors.¹

This diversity impacts the implementation of the RFCDC. In order to be successful, efforts have to be collaborative and context specific.

CDC as a European-level policy priority

CDC in VET have been a focus of the Council of Europe since 2022, when an expert group of representatives of member states and observers was set up by the Steering Committee of Education to support RFCDC and VET. The Guidance document for vocational education and training (Council of Europe 2024) is the first document to specifically address CDC in the VET context. There are two phases of the Council of Europe’s work on CDC and VET; the first phase resulted in the guidance document and the second phase will culminate with this publication.

1. WorldSkills competitions are global events where young professionals showcase their technical and technological skills and compete at the highest level, www.worldskills.org.

The guidance document is significant because it represents the first focused work linking CDC and VET. It explores how CDC can be effectively developed for those in VET across Europe. This is the first step that gives serious thought to how CDC can be developed for learners within the diverse VET landscape of the Council of Europe's member states. The document offers an overview of the complexity and diversity of VET systems across member states and outlines several key aspects fundamental to the development of active citizens in a democratic society.

This initiative marks a significant milestone in the Council of Europe's ongoing efforts to strengthen democracy through education and highlights the crucial role of VET in shaping informed, engaged and responsible citizens. The Guidance document on VET is expected to pave the way for more inclusive, democratic and culturally diverse learning environments across Europe (Council of Europe 2024).

There is a clear trend of growing interest and activity related to citizenship education and developing CDC for learners in VET. This can be observed at national level, with many countries, such as Norway, including learners' rights to participate in matters that concern them in the Education Act. At European level, transnational programmes like Erasmus+ have set objectives to encourage youth participation in Europe's democratic life. Programmes are available through competitive tender to support "active citizenship and ethics in lifelong learning; [the Erasmus+ programme] fosters the development of social and intercultural competences, critical thinking and media literacy" (European Commission n.d.). These programmes offer excellent opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds to develop skills and knowledge about youth participation in Europe's democratic life.

Comparative research about citizenship education across a number of European countries is being carried out, which will greatly contribute to addressing the lack of research in this area. Direct research on CDC and VET is limited, and evidence-based policy making and evidence-based practice are essential for achieving the ultimate aim of developing active citizens and promoting a democratic culture.

The anthology

This anthology is a natural next step after the development of the guidance document, building on the content contained therein. The main purpose of this publication is to delve into selected topics that are inherent to CDC and VET in more detail, raise questions about CDC and VET, identify gaps and challenges in practice, and think of ways to overcome them. This anthology offers provisional recommendations to policy makers and practitioners based on the discussions and arguments of each chapter.

The themes of the chapters have been carefully selected and each relates to the specificity of VET and its key stakeholders. The chapters include the subject of curricula, assessment, in-company training, teacher training and teachers' continuing development, a whole-school approach to implementation, social partner involvement, inclusion and learners' participation. The discussion and understanding of how these broad topics may contribute to the development of CDC for those in VET

are fundamental. Given the diversity of VET across the Council of Europe's member states, the chapters include examples of good practices to illustrate the importance of the national, regional and local contexts.

There are two main target audiences for this publication: policy makers at national, regional and local levels; and practitioners who implement CDC in VET. Policy makers can use this publication to generate ideas to develop policy conducive to CDC for those in VET, while learning about the challenges the implementation of CDC may pose. Practitioners can draw on ideas about, for example, how to implement CDC in VET programmes and how they can encourage those in VET to participate in activities supporting the development of CDC. Each chapter identifies certain target audiences and makes the inherent link between policy and practice. All chapters argue that the inclusion and development of CDC in VET can only succeed if based on close collaboration among stakeholders, which includes policy makers, practitioners, employers and VET learners.

During the creation of this anthology there have been some challenges. There is a limited body of relevant and publicly available research reports and data on CDC and VET. For example, there is ample literature on curricula and assessment but little to nothing about CDC in curricula or CDC and assessment. The diversity of VET systems makes it difficult to compare CDC-conducive practices across Europe. So, the individual chapters include illustrative examples for a more nuanced discussion.

Similarly to the guidance document, the drawing up of this anthology is supported by an expert group on the RFCDC and VET composed of delegates of member states and observers, officially nominated by the Steering Committee of Education (CDEDU). All authors are experts in their specific fields; they are practitioners, employers, academics and researchers. The chapters have been reviewed and there has been an ongoing communication between the Council of Europe, editors, authors and the expert working group.

In writing this publication, 79 examples of good practice were collected from across the Council of Europe's member states. These include a combination of new initiatives and long-established programmes supporting CDC for those in VET, and inspiring practices across and beyond the topics under discussion, as well as forward-looking education policy developments. They provide an excellent pool for context-specific examples to encourage further developments.

Readers' guide

Selected topics in this anthology are discussed in greater detail within their respective chapter. Each topic has been carefully chosen to reflect the characteristics of VET and its close connection to the workplace. These include curricula, assessment, VET teacher training, in-company training, implementation, inclusion, social partners' involvement and VET learners' participation. Each chapter follows a similar logic. An introduction provides definitions and identifies the focus before the bulk of each chapter considers how best CDC can be developed for those in VET and identifies what the potential challenges are and how these can be overcome. Each chapter

draws on examples of good practices from across the Council of Europe's member states to illustrate the context for the CDC in each theme under consideration. Most chapters include references to existing literature, enabling a deeper engagement with the topic.

The first chapter – CDC in VET curricula – uses the broad definition of curriculum and suggests that a curriculum needs to be understood holistically and systemically. It is argued that the development of CDC goes beyond the development of skills, attitudes and knowledge. Students in VET also need to develop the values and identity of a trade or profession, and for life. Teachers and trainers of VET are key in this process and have to be supported as these activities go beyond the delivery of prescribed content. Developing CDC is a dynamic process and VET teachers and trainers as “curriculum makers” should have the confidence to make use of opportunities that arise in VET schools, workplaces or the community. This chapter reflects on the different approaches to delivering CDC; as a stand-alone subject and/or integrated into the VET area. The chapter discusses the subject of curricula as a contested space.

The second chapter – on assessing CDC in VET – aims to answer the question “Why do we want to assess CDC when it poses so many difficult challenges?”. It argues that while assessing the cognitive aspects of VET or job-related performance is vital, transversal skills, values and attitudes are often not assessed or are informally assessed. This chapter argues that assessment of CDC should fit into the broader strategy of assessment and grading taking into consideration summative and formative aspects. It promotes the introduction of more formal assessment of CDC in VET and offers thoughts and examples to policy makers and assessment designers on how to increase and improve the assessment of CDC.

The third chapter focuses on one of the key stakeholder groups and discusses CDC in initial and continuing VET teacher training. Teachers in VET are key players for developing CDC for their learners and this requires specific skills, knowledge and competences that must be reflected in teacher education. Learning about democracy is not only about the content but the contextualisation of the approach. The chapter outlines some of the challenges of implementing and strengthening CDC in the training – initial and continuing – of VET teachers given their diversity, their roles and the qualifications they may possess to teach. The chapter assesses the current state of play with examples and points to the future potential of CDC in VET teacher training.

The fourth chapter on the role of CDC in in-company training focuses on one of the learning venues within VET, the workplace, which distinguishes VET from general education. The role and the potential of the workplace to develop the CDC of those in VET is crucial. This chapter discusses how formal structures and standards contribute to quality assurance without necessarily embracing and promoting CDC for learners in VET. Success in developing learners' CDC depends on, for example, corporate culture, organisational structures or the mindset of managers and trainers. The authors argue that companies might be more obliged to establish, maintain and implement CDC-supportive practices if they identify intrinsic motivation. Companies are businesses in the first place and this does not directly lead to the

development of CDC within learners. This chapter discusses why it is important for companies to integrate CDC into in-company training and how companies can benefit from this, offering practical illustrative examples.

The fifth chapter is concerned with implementing CDC in VET schools: the whole-school approach. Considering the two main learning venues for VET, the development of CDC formally happens in the VET schools and in the workplace. Hence, the guidance document introduced the notion of an “integrated approach”. This chapter, however, focuses on the “whole-school approach”, signalling that in many European countries exclusively school-based VET training is offered and within this formal establishment the implementation of CDC might fit better with the organisational structure and remit. This chapter argues that CDC are not a subject; they to be considered holistically and should be a development for a way of life. The chapter discusses some of the challenges and advantages of implementing CDC in VET schools, including time constraints, attitudes and expectations, learning environments and inclusivity, before examining how to apply this whole-school approach in practice. The chapter includes examples and ideas for training exercises.

The sixth chapter concerns CDC and inclusion. This is another important chapter reflecting on and discussing CDC in relation to the diverse VET learner population, how they influence the workplace and society, and what role VET learners may play in society in the future. The chapter discusses CDC and inclusion across four dimensions: individual, social, political and economic dimensions. The role and significance of CDC – values, skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding (Council of Europe 2018) – vary within each dimension of inclusion and are specific to contexts and target groups of VET learners. While the four dimensions are discussed separately, the authors argue that they are closely interlinked in practice. The chapter suggests that perhaps the discussion should not be about how individual VET learners develop CDC but how VET as a system fosters CDC in terms of being inclusive.

Chapter 7 concerns the role of social partners in developing CDC in VET learners. The involvement of trade unions and employers’ organisations in VET varies significantly across European countries and is rooted in specific historical and societal contexts. Consequently, their potential for contributing to promoting the development of CDC for VET learners differs significantly. Social partners’ engagement with the development of CDC may include three dimensions of democracy learning: learning about democracy, learning through democracy and learning for democracy. This chapter delves into questions such as “Why do social partners engage in developing CDC in VET learners?” and “How do/could they engage in developing CDC in VET learners?”. These questions are unpacked in more detail in relation to the development of CDC in VET. It is argued that social partners play a crucial role in developing CDC for VET learners. However, both social partners and training providers should ensure that what VET learners experience in relation to democratic learning is mutually supportive. The chapter identifies some evidence that social partners are already engaging with the promotion of CDC but demands systematic research in this space.

The last chapter, Chapter 8, is concerned about developing CDC through learners’ participation. Its focus is on the very population that participate in VET programmes in VET schools and in the workplace. The chapter argues that CDC is not separate

from the development of skills, knowledge and behaviour for any chosen profession. The chapter considers three key themes: democratic citizenship, empowerment and the transformative potential in relation to learners' participation in democratic practices. It argues that participation practices for learners have to be systemic rather than based on individual practices by VET teachers and trainers. It argues that learners' participation can contribute to positive changes in the organisational culture, can lead to active participatory citizenship and may lead to a healthier democratic system.

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Chapter 1

CDC in VET curricula: some ground clearing and foundation building

Prue Huddleston and Daniel Alvunger

What is a curriculum? Setting the scene for understanding democratic competences in VET curricula

The understanding of what a “curriculum” is varies across the world as a result of historical, ideological/political, social and cultural factors. Notions of curriculum – and of course also conceptualisations of democracy and citizenship – are contested, shaped over time by dominant curriculum ideologies and amalgamations of them (Schiro 2012). From the early 21st century, the view of a curriculum as structured by academic disciplines and subject-specific content knowledge to be taught has been superseded by a learner-centred and competence-based curriculum (Priestley and Biesta 2013). The emphasis is on transferrable skills across and between subjects, often expressed through an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge and a blurring of the boundaries between subjects. Competence-based curricula have been questioned and criticised for genericism and for excluding certain groups of students, by advocates of knowledge-rich and academic-disciplinary curricula (Rata 2016; Young 2014).

Another critical voice of competence-based curricula comes from Gert Biesta (2013) who questions what he regards as a trend of “learnification”. He claims this to be an apparent shift in educational discourse from teaching to learning, where the teacher is reduced to a facilitator and learning is seen as an individual process for acquiring skills, knowledge and competences. At the heart of Biesta’s argument is that learning is an unpredictable and risky process that cannot be fully controlled. Rather than focusing on input regulation, predetermined outcomes and what “efficient learning” is, education involves transformative learning experiences. This also shapes Biesta’s understanding of the relationship between education and democracy (2006). Education should prepare individuals to engage meaningfully in democratic life, which requires more than the mere acquisition of knowledge. It involves the cultivation of ethical and political agency and the ability to engage in dialogue and decision making in public. Altogether, this is an important backdrop for a critical understanding of the issue of CDC (Council of Europe 2018) in VET curricula.

A common definition of a curriculum involves making a distinction on three levels: 1) the prescribed curriculum, that is, the curriculum as “text” (or “the glossy booklet”) that states the general ideas and aims of education, the goals, skills and competences to be acquired/attained, the selection of content, the structure of the education and the organisation of teaching; 2) the implemented or taught curriculum, in brief, what teachers say they teach (described) and what they actually teach (enacted); and 3) the received curriculum, what the students experience (Dempsey 2023). The first and to some extent the second part of this definition aligns with Cedefop’s definition of curriculum as the “inventory of activities related to the design, organisation and planning of an education or training action, including definition of learning objectives, content of programmes, methods (including assessment of learners and evaluation of programmes) and material, as well as arrangements for training teachers and trainers” (Cedefop 2024; Alvunger et al. 2021). In line with the view on the purpose of education to foster human growth and to promote democratic citizenship, ethical responsibility and the ability to engage meaningfully with others outlined above, we argue for a holistic and systemic definition of curriculum (Priestley et al. 2023), that is, “the multi-layered social practices, including infrastructure, pedagogy and assessment, through which education is structured, enacted and evaluated” (Priestley 2019: 8). In this respect, we embrace Connolly’s (2013: ix) view that “[curriculum] is a complex system involving teachers, students, curricular content, social settings, and all manner of impinging matters ranging from the local to the international. It is a system that needs to be understood systemically”.

From our perspective, the curriculum is something that is created, or more aptly “made” by practitioners and other actors working with each other – not only within but also across multiple layers or sites of education systems, for example schools and district offices, policy-making arenas and national agencies (Alvunger et al. 2021). This view might be somewhat mind-bending because a curriculum is generally associated with written text. However, our perspective pays attention to how various actors may be involved in how RFCDC is integrated into VET curricula (see Chapter 5 on the implementation of CDC in VET settings and Chapter 7 on the role of social partners in developing CDC in VET learners). For example, within the English context the notion of “employer engagement” in the design and delivery of VET curricula has long been advocated within policy prescription (for a fuller discussion see Huddleston and Laczik 2018 and Huddleston 2021).

Currently, further education colleges and training providers are required to draw up Local Skills Improvement Plans in partnership with local employers to identify local skills needs and to jointly plan for change: “Employer needs are being highlighted at all skill levels, from entry level to management. As well as clear gaps in technical skills at levels 4-5, there is growing demand for digital, numeracy and other transferable skills” (Campaign for Learning n.d.).

In addition, English further education colleges have a statutory duty to submit an Annual Accountability Agreement to their local authority identifying where and how they are addressing local skills needs (Department for Education 2023a). Such agreements are also linked to funding priorities. A further example of the engagement of employers with the design and delivery of curricula is provided by the ways in which awarding organisations, that is, those organisations responsible for the design and

awarding of qualifications, are required to provide evidence of how employers have been involved to have qualifications approved by the regulator. While it is important to stress that the qualification alone does not equate with the curriculum (see our discussion above), it is integral to it. Where employers are also being required to become involved in “live projects” and contribute to assessment decisions then they are clearly involved in broader aspects of the curriculum.

It is recognised that in terms of curricula what is “intended” is not always “enacted” (Billett 2014) within classrooms and other workplaces. Much will depend upon the personal agendas of teachers/trainers, students, college managers and on others closely involved in delivery (Nylund, Rosvall and Ledman 2017). Each VET learner will have differing experiences, possibly even within the same setting, or in different classes within that setting. They also bring to that experience their own life histories, sociocultural backgrounds, personal preferences and predilections in the making of curricula. In this respect, the genuine question of what kind of knowledge is produced and formed in classrooms cannot be separated from other imperative questions such as why, how, when, by whom and for whom (Deng 2020).

In this chapter, different examples from European countries are presented and discussed from the level of integration of CDC in VET curricula. The examples span what we refer to as a holistic and integrative approach and a complementary module approach, because we have noticed that in some countries CDC appear in core curricula in broad terms, where there also can be very few specifications as to how they are enacted. The two different approaches should not be seen as dichotomies but rather as separate positions on a continuum that can be used to explore and explain variations between national contexts, that is, allowing us to point at complexities and particularities in the different contexts.



The integrative approach embraces both curricular elements (such as trans-/cross-disciplinary themes) and models or schemes that seek to involve the whole school/units. In the complementary module approach, there is often quite specific course content, which, as will be shown, may be based on a similar theoretical framework and principles of the RFCDC. They may be shaped from notions of the significance of adding on content that might not be included or supported by the general parts of the national curriculum. These modules are often of a short duration, optional and may have limited impact with regard to the teachers and students involved. In the concluding part of the chapter, we will highlight some take-aways and lessons to be learned.

Different approaches to and examples of integrating CDC into VET curricula

The first example of integrating democratic competences in VET curricula comes from England and is illustrative of a holistic and integrative approach. At national policy level the Department for Education has set out guidance (Department for

Education 2023b) in terms of what is required within all funded full-time programmes of study for 16- to 19-year-olds; these apply equally to VET and general education students. In addition to their main qualification programme – technical, applied or academic – all students must have access to a) work experience, “to give students the opportunity to develop their career choices and to apply their skills in real working conditions”, and b) “other non-qualification activity to develop students’ character, broader skills, attitudes, and confidence and so support progression” (Department for Education 2023b).

Similarly, within apprenticeships, many of whom are adult learners, there is the requirement for learners to demonstrate the “skills, knowledge and behaviours” expected within the workplace setting. Examples include: “acting in a professional and ethical manner” (grade descriptor – demonstrates the ability to work with colleagues, clients, the public and other stakeholders in a collaborative, non-confrontational and ethical way); “showing resilience under pressure” (grade descriptor – justifies their approach when they have managed a difficult, challenging and/or confrontational situation and demonstrated resilience) (Skills England n.d.).

Within the education policy and practice community these are referred to as “enrichment activities”. The topics and subjects to be included will vary according to global, national, regional and local priorities and, to some extent, institutional preference. A current example is the potential impact of “digital transformation”, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI) (see for example Ofsted 2024). VET providers will be required to recognise and respond in their provision.

Funding is attached to this provision, which must be clearly signalled within VET colleges’ mission, strategy and delivery, including evidence of their assessment. Evidence, illustrating intended “learning outcomes”, is judged within the Education Inspection Framework (Ofsted 2023). Inspection plays a key role within the education and skills sector and reports on colleges’ performance. During inspection, judgments are made on students’ “behaviour and attitudes” and “personal development”, which will have an impact on a college’s final grading (“outstanding”, “good”, “requires improvement” or “inadequate”).

In terms of colleges’ enrichment provision, Ofsted descriptors for “outstanding” include: “all learners have access to a wide, rich set of experiences that teach them why it is important to contribute actively to society” and “the provider ensures that participation in these experiences is very high, particularly among those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and all benefit from these opportunities and experiences” (Ofsted 2023).

What has been shown points to the many pressures exerted on VET colleges (Huddleston and Unwin 2024) and on the decisions they are required to make in shaping the curriculum. Though the broad direction is set nationally, and reinforced by funding and inspection regimes, regional and local priorities may differ. They may have other desired outcomes from VET, for example the reduction of young people “not in education, employment or training” (NEET) or addressing particular local skills shortages.

Clearly, this is a “call to arms” for VET systems to prepare young people not just for the labour market but for their lives as citizens. This is also highlighted within the Council of Europe’s Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)6 (Council of Europe 2007) that higher education bears a responsibility to prepare learners as “active citizens within democratic societies”. Historically VET has been used as a broad instrument to tackle a range of policy goals – social, economic, political, technological (Huddleston and Unwin 2024; Huddleston 2023; Kersch 2019) – and now it seems attitudinal and behavioural concerns as well, including those involving young people’s participation in civic society and the exercise of their democratic rights. However, there is flexibility in terms of how these are interpreted within individual colleges, workplaces and the community. Frequently, this involves lists of desirable characteristics, variously referred to over the past 30 years as “employability skills”, “transferable skills”, “common skills”, “key skills”, “soft skills” and other variants (for a fuller discussion, see Fettes 2012; Silva 2009).

Where there is no shared understanding of CDC among the range of stakeholders involved in VET, much is left to chance, to individual interpretation and crucially to context. What may be regarded as “initiative” in one context may be viewed as subversion in another. Developing CDC involves negotiation, judgment, being and acting, as well as doing. VET colleges are part of a wider ecosystem, including, but not restricted to, employers, local and regional communities, trades unions and professional organisations, the interests of which must be respected and accommodated (Education and Training Foundation 2024).

But how then can we ensure students have access to and experience a curriculum that prepares them for democratic citizenship? Here we provide an example of one college’s approach to the challenge. Birmingham Metropolitan College (BMet) is a large further education college (11 500 students) situated in England’s culturally diverse and second largest city. The larger metropolitan area contains some of the most deprived wards in England. The college aims to be a strong civic leader organisation, amplifying the voice, concerns and achievements of young people to the stakeholder community. In terms of CDC, the ethos of the college is underpinned by the motto “Ready, Respectful, Safe”: “Every day we make sure we are ready to study, are respectful of each other and are in a safe environment. Ready, Respectful, Safe is more than a motto, it’s a way of life at BMet.”

This is shown on the identity badges of all students, staff and anyone working within the college, including visitors. It is reinforced by signage in lifts, corridors, recreational and workspaces. On registration all students complete a Ready, Respectful, Safe “pledge”. This sets the tone for the expectations of attitudes and behaviour and provides encouragement for those who feel disrespected or unsafe to “call it out”. It also asserts the notion of readiness for learning where other’s views are respected and informed debate encouraged, which is reflected in the college’s mission: “Our mission and values were developed in consultation with staff, students, and key stakeholders. They underpin everything that we do” (BMet Strategic Plan 2023). Flowing from this is a timetabled weekly tutorial “enrichment” calendar arranged around seven themes:

- enrichment clubs (for example, film club, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex (LGBTQI+) network, journalism club);

- ▶ enrichment events (for example, International Day of Democracy, a fake news workshop, Armistice Day);
- ▶ Learner Voice and Student Council (for example, introduction to student reps and student governor roles);
- ▶ well-being activities (for example sports clubs, mental health);
- ▶ community engagement and fundraising (for example, City Pride volunteers, City Mission);
- ▶ entrepreneurship;
- ▶ guest speakers (for example, from the Samaritans, Young Carers).

These include both in-curriculum and extracurricular activities, some are voluntary and others not. Some are compulsory, for example Staying Safe, others are bespoke. Subject and personal tutors support the delivery and record student engagement and reflection. Inspectors will look for evidence and question students during inspection visits. Resources and “tutor tips” are available on SharePoint, a digital archive.

Tutor tip: Why not create a “safe space” for your learners to discuss the topic of race equality within tutorial sessions. For further support and guidance on how to create safe spaces for learner conversations see the Tutorial Elements SharePoint Page.

Tutor tip: International Day Against Homophobia, Biophobia and Transphobia (IDAHOBIT). Why not explore the range of resources available on our Tutorial Elements SharePoint Page and use them to support conversations and learning with students during tutorials, about IDAHOBIT day and the wider subject of LGBTQI+ identity.

The involvement of subject tutors is important in helping to make connections between vocational learning and CDC, although this is not always straightforward, and some vocational areas provide more fertile ground for coverage of topics. For example, health and social care programmes provide a rich source of stimuli for discussing sensitive topics, whereas opportunities within construction programmes may seem less obvious. However, with appropriate support and guidance for tutors and trainers (see Chapter 3), it is clear that such contexts provide opportunities to discuss rights and responsibilities within the workplace, respect for others and the importance of working collaboratively. Finally, it should be noted that within all educational settings there is an obligation on providers to cover what are described as “British values”, namely “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs” (Department for Education 2014: 5).

Other examples of countries that are characterised by an integrative approach to democratic competences in VET are Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden. In Finland, the national curriculum is competence-based and learner-oriented, and teaching of VET students is built on a mandatory personal competence development plan, which each student must have. The EU key competences are integrated within the VET curriculum regarding vocational skills to be acquired and assessed. In the curriculum, there are obligatory learning outcomes that focus on how to be a citizen and member of society, fundamental human rights, equity and equality, and democratic participation. It is clearly stated that preparing students for the world of work includes knowledge and understanding of the labour market,

legislation and employment. This means that democratic skills are integrated parts of the different vocational qualifications, whereas for example, initial vocational qualifications include obligatory citizenship and working life competence studies.

In the Dutch case, and in the example of the vocational colleges Firda and Albeda, citizenship education has a flexible curriculum that can be integrated with subjects and other activities. By integrating critical thinking, social responsibility and active participation in society in the curriculum, Firda offers a broad education approach in VET to help students become resilient and confident individuals capable of meaningful participation in society. Combined with generous teaching time, extracurricular activities and an individual student citizenship portfolio, Firda aims to produce students that are engaged citizens and skilled professionals.

Finally, we would briefly like to mention the “Democracy steps”, a recent example from Sweden on how teachers and schools can work at integrating CDC into curricula (Swedish National Agency of Education 2024). In Sweden, the core curriculum prescribes that the school should foster democratic and critically thinking citizens, and democratic competences and ethical and moral questions are integrated into the VET syllabuses of each of the 12 VET programmes. This example, however, provides a different dimension as a whole-school approach. The Democracy steps is a seven-step model for how teachers and schools can systematically address democracy and human rights, prevent antisemitism and other forms of racism, increase safety and diminish bullying at the school, and promote equity and equality. The first step is to create a working group that involves students, teachers and staff at the whole school in a collegial development process. Secondly, a mapping of the school environment/teaching is made through surveys and interviews with students and, based on the outcomes, the working group identifies suggested areas and goals for improvement in a third step. The suggestions and goals are presented for all staff and students in a fourth step, and after that, the principal decides what to focus on. The fifth step comprises planning activities and content for teaching with help from a digital resource bank that can be accessed through the internet. The material is developed by the National Agency of Education and Forum for Living History. In the sixth step, activities are performed, and step 7 is an evaluation based on which decisions for further work are made. Throughout the process, teachers can receive support and guidance by a mentor from the National Agency of Education.

The following set of examples illustrate what we call a complementary module approach. What distinguishes this approach from an integrative approach is that democratic competences in the VET curriculum are presented in separate modules, courses or other activities in the curriculum that may be either subject-disciplinary/thematic courses or voluntary modules from which students can choose. In Serbia, the government has explicitly included the RFCDC in the curriculum of all VET schools. Regarding VET curricula, the RFCDC framework is included in the shape of an elective course named Entrepreneurship. Based on two modules – “Basics of Entrepreneurship” and “Business Plan” – the course aims to develop the VET students’ knowledge, skills, values and critical thinking in the areas of business and entrepreneurship. Teaching content and methods are based on official material and guidelines provided by the

Council of Europe and thus serves as inspiration and provides resources for teachers. While “entrepreneurship” is a concept that might not directly be associated with the RFCDC, this illustrates how conceptions of democratic competences such as analytical and critical thinking skills, attitudes of responsibility, civic mindedness and respect, and knowledge and critical understanding of the world, society and economy may be embedded in national discourses.

A similar example of a complementary module approach is the VET curriculum in Armenia. The national VET educational curriculum and standards include two obligatory subjects for learners: “Basics of Political and Social Sciences” and “Basics of Law”. The aim of the courses is to provide knowledge and understanding of the political system and governance, political ideas and how to participate and engage in political activities in society. This also includes issues of democratic participation and influence. Furthermore, the learners study the complex and dynamic processes of modern society and economic, political and social changes. Finally, the subject course on law provides the learners with perspectives on the legal system and central concepts and values, legal awareness, and human rights, citizenship, and rights and obligations in the constitution. Democratic competences such as critical thinking and intercultural awareness are also part of the basic subjects of Armenian and Foreign Languages, which are mandatory.

The two final examples of a complementary module approach come from Montenegro and North Macedonia. In particular, they are interesting in the way that democratic competences are taught and trained through close collaboration with the surrounding community. In the Montenegro case, the compulsory subject Sociology in the VET curriculum includes an activity on “peer mediation for conflict resolution”. This activity can be performed by teachers at the schools but also by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that train the students. These civil organisations thus serve as a resource for teaching students about issues such as domestic violence. The purpose of peer mediation is to teach VET learners responsibility, to increase awareness of how their actions may influence and affect others and to improve co-operation, problem-solving, critical thinking and communication. The students learn about different kinds of abuse and how to prevent physical or mental violence, for example. A similar example of how democratic competences in co-operation with the surrounding community are made a complementary part of the VET curriculum comes from North Macedonia. The example is an elective curriculum where first-year learners from different vocational strands of education work on questions regarding the impact and importance for cultural heritage. For students who undertake a tourism programme, this might mean investigating the effects of tourism on the local environment and measures that can be taken to preserve sensitive sites or buildings. Another possibility is for learners on a textiles programme to design and create local folk costumes and to study how these are part of cultural heritage. It is reported that this elective curriculum leads to interaction with the local governance authorities and that it promotes local well-being.

Conclusions

In attempting to construct a curriculum to support the development of CDC it needs to be borne in mind that the transmission of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes is not a one-off event, but “a continuous contextually embedded, transformative process” (Fettes, Evans and Kashefpakdel 2020: 184). What the foregoing case studies demonstrate is the significance of context, at local, regional and national level, the multiplicity of actors involved and the extent to which such activities are integrated within vocational programmes or are treated as stand-alone subjects.

Emphases and priorities may change over time, and rapidly. For example, civil unrest in several cities in the United Kingdom during the summer of 2024 has led to more intensive efforts by schools and colleges to ensure the safety of their learners and to emphasise a zero-tolerance approach to racial hatred and discrimination. Clearly, this cannot simply be manifested within a prescribed set of competences but within the ethos of the institution, its values, attitudes and behaviours. Colleges are not just places of learning; they are also essential to building and supporting community cohesion (Learning and Skills Council 2007). CDC involve the development of values, skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding (similarly, but variously, described in different countries but encompassing the same thinking). Put simply, it is essentially about “learning that”, “learning how” and “learning how to become”. Within the context of VET this involves the development of professional identity, what Shulman (2005: 52) describes as the three fundamental dimensions of professional work – “to think, to perform, and to act with integrity”. This involves endowing learners not just with knowledge, skills and attitudes but also the values and identity of a trade or profession, and for life. Teachers and workplace supervisors must be involved and supported in these processes to make sense of and to model such behaviours. This goes beyond delivering a list of content.

Engaging teachers in activities, through professional development, sharing ideas within learning communities and through “live projects” developed in partnership with employers and diverse networks can build professional agency, leading to an increased capacity for co-created creative curriculum making. Building confidence in teachers as curriculum makers (not takers) requires adequate support in terms of pedagogy and resources for teaching (see for example the English case study above and Chapters 3 and 5). Developing CDC is a dynamic endeavour. Teachers and workplace supervisors should feel confident in taking advantage of “naturally occurring” opportunities in daily life, the workplace, the community. Examples include local elections, environmental concerns, reporting abuse, online bullying and concerns relating to knife crime in the area.

The country profiles submitted to the Council of Europe’s review of current practice in CDC and VET reveal distinctions in delivery – either integrated within the main VET area or as stand-alone units (although a few demonstrate a hybrid model). Both present challenges. Stand-alone units, for example “Basics of Political and Social Sciences” and “Basics of Law” (Armenia), would require some “boundary crossing” on the part of teachers and learners to appreciate the relevance and significance to the specific VET area. Here the teacher must act as amateur rather than instructor. Some teachers may find this difficult.

In contrast, the integrated approach ideally requires all teachers and host workplaces/ employers to work collaboratively to develop a shared understanding of what is meant by values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and critical understanding within VET. Clearly, there may be a difference of view that requires accommodation. This becomes crucial where joint assessment is involved, for example in the case of apprenticeships. However, “bringing learning to life” can contribute to learner engagement and motivation (the Netherlands and North Macedonia). It also allows teachers to gain access to current workplace practices and equipment, to engage with ideas and develop resources to enrich the curriculum (for example in England, teacher industry placements allow the opportunity for professional updating as well as for the development of relationships with workplace supervisors).

Whatever the approach, it is set within a policy context which may also have a set of social, economic, educational, technological and environmental goals. As a result, the curriculum can become a contested space – what is in, what is out, whose is it and who pays? Developing competences for democratic culture and citizenship should be in everyone’s interest and is best achieved through a collaborative approach – itself an important democratic principle. While some means of quality assurance in its delivery is essential, the over-prescription of learning outcomes and accountability mechanisms, in the worst cases exemplified by a “box ticking” approach, can erode VET teacher agency and constrict curriculum making.

Some key principles and learning points can be drawn from the examples of integrating CDC in the VET curricula cited above. These include recognising the importance of context when designing CDC for VET learners, so that examples are relatable and understandable; ensuring that CDC are enshrined within the culture of organisations and agencies and that behaviours are modelled by those responsible for its delivery. Developing CDC in VET requires a robust underpinning of professional development for teachers, trainers and workplace supervisors with easily accessible resources on which they can draw. These are particularly valuable for non-specialists and for new entrants.

Curriculum making, particularly within the VET context, is a joint endeavour involving practitioners and others working across multiple sites – schools, colleges, workplaces, local and national government agencies, NGOs, regulators and examination boards. Developing a shared understanding of CDC across such a potentially disparate group of actors requires negotiation and accommodation, which is a desirable outcome of the democratic process.

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Chapter 2

Assessing CDC in VET: Why? What? How?

Lena Gray and Horacy Dębowski

Assessing CDC in VET: policy and contextual challenges

The 2024 guidance document for VET on the RFCDC points out that “assessment” can mean two things: the assessment of individuals or the evaluation of system interventions. In this chapter, we focus on the first of these:

assessment of the learning outcomes of individuals (using written tests, oral examinations, projects, portfolio-methods, observation, etc.) with a view to measuring their personal achievements and ultimately ascertaining whether they have passed or failed the course. (Council of Europe 2024: 37)

Assessments leading to VET certification are designed to verify that candidates have mastered the knowledge and skills essential for professional practice and have the minimum level of competence required to perform a role (Swygert and Williamson 2016). In some systems or sectors, completion of VET assessments is a prerequisite for obtaining a professional licence (Raymond 2016).

Changes in societies and economies due to technological progress, globalisation and ageing populations require that professionals graduating from VET possess specialised professional skills and a strong foundation of literacy and numeracy skills, complemented by non-cognitive transversal competences that extend beyond the narrowly defined skills typical of a given occupation (Deming 2017). There are several terms for these skills, including soft, interpersonal or 21st-century skills, key competences for lifelong learning, and so on. Studies show that non-cognitive skills are important predictors of educational and workforce outcomes (Balcar 2016; Rios et al. 2020). Many researchers argue schools should teach transversal skills to support the holistic development of individuals and strengthen their sense of citizenship (Cinque and Kippels 2023).

Policy documents and practices increasingly emphasise the need for assessment of non-cognitive skills. However, assessment of these transversal competences requires different approaches from those that have traditionally dominated assessment systems:

it may be that some of the reluctance apparent in the failure of current standards efforts to embrace 21st century skills education goals reflects a distrust in the capability of current

educational measurement science to measure such skills in a reliable and valid way. And it may be that future adoption will depend on the field's ability to develop creative and innovative solutions to the problem of measuring 21st century skills. (Kyllonen 2012)

The work to include CDC in assessments might be perceived as a development that aligns with the broader trend of expanding the scope of competences assessed within VET systems, and there are similar challenges in both.

The impetus to broaden the scope of assessed competences (including CDC) stems from the powerful influence that assessment exerts on what teachers teach and learners learn. Assessment provides “signals about what learning is important, and what aspects of learning merit and require more time and effort” (Siarova, Mašidlauskaitė and Sternadel 2017: 34). Research and practice show that if certain skills are not included in assessment for certification, there is a risk that these skills will not be developed. This is not easy. Assessment of non-cognitive skills is methodologically challenging and may be costly. Moreover, assessing attitudes and values may raise ethical issues and concerns about potential bias, including gender, racial, religious and socio-economic bias.

The diversity of VET training sites, teachers, in-company trainers, learners and professional contexts may suggest that assessing CDC within VET presents multifaceted challenges. Reflecting on these difficulties, the Council of Europe (2024) posed a question: “If CDC assessment in VET is fraught with so many difficulties and potential uncertainties, why bother about assessment at all?”. This chapter aims to provide answers to this question, arguing that despite the challenges an assessment of CDC remains indispensable for their development in VET. By exploring the purposes, methods and implications of CDC assessment in VET, the chapter seeks to highlight its relevance and offer practical pathways to address complexities.

Why are we assessing? The purposes of assessment

To design assessments with appropriate assessment methods, teachers must first consider the purposes to which the assessment will be put. Is the assessment designed to support learning, to shape feedback to learners that supports their learning progression? Is the primary purpose of the assessment formative? If so, then it may be relatively straightforward to select and design appropriate assessment approaches. A guidance document on assessment of CDC exemplified and evaluated 12 assessment methods (dialogue-based assessment; activity-based self-assessment; observational assessment; oral presentations; debate-based assessment; role play or simulation assessment; dynamic assessment; written answers to open-ended questions and essays; scenario-based assessment using questioning; project-based assessment; reflective journals and structured autobiographical reflections; portfolios and e-portfolios), concluding that all were suitable for low-stakes formative assessment (Council of Europe 2021).

Formative assessment helps learners understand their progress in developing competences, guiding them in refining attitudes, values, skills and knowledge related to democratic participation. Formative assessment (or “assessment for learning”) is recognised as an essential part of the learning process. It may be viewed

as “low stakes” and VET teachers are likely to be comfortable using a variety of approaches to formatively assess a range of knowledge, skills and even attitudes and values.

However, it may prove challenging to motivate VET learners and teachers to recognise the importance of formative assessment of CDC. CDC may not be perceived as critical to vocational success. This challenge is exacerbated when formative assessment of CDC is not tied to certification. Without a clear connection to credentials or qualifications, learners may not recognise the relevance of these competences to their future careers. Educators may not allocate time and resources to integrate CDC into their teaching practice, especially when faced with competing demands to prioritise technical skill development. To address these concerns, formative assessment practices must be designed to demonstrate the intrinsic value of CDC for learners’ personal and professional growth. This might include showcasing how CDC enhance workplace collaboration, adaptability and ethical decision making, or it may involve linking CDC with sector-specific requirements such as cultural awareness, health and safety issues, and so on.

In contrast, summative assessment is carried out with the aim of evaluating the extent to which learners have attained specific competences (in this case, related to democratic culture). It may be conducted at the conclusion of an educational programme and occurs at endpoints in many systems. It may confirm the fulfilment of predefined standards and serve as a basis for certification. Summative assessment (or “assessment of learning”) is often felt to be “high stakes”, especially when used for certification. VET teachers, or employers responsible for learners within work-based learning, may be less comfortable carrying out these assessments, or they may be used to using only a limited variety of assessment approaches to assess a specific range of knowledge and skills, typically technical knowledge and skills deemed essential for the occupational sector. This limited range may be an issue when starting out on CDC assessment.

However, if VET policy makers and teachers think innovatively, there is potential to go beyond these categories, and to design and implement assessment as learning. In essence, this means that the assessment method itself can be a way to develop CDC. We will discuss this idea in more detail later in this chapter.

Linking CDC to the curriculum: what should be assessed?

The second question for VET teachers planning to assess CDC is what they are going to assess. This requires the matching of two complex sets of requirements: the transversal knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of the CDC framework, and the required professional knowledge, skills and competences. VET systems pay attention to assessing occupational competences, but few pay attention to assessing transversal skills, and fewer attempt to assess attitudes and values – particularly within the processes of assessment leading to certification.

This lack of attention to assessment of transversal skills, attitudes and values may be a historical accident: perhaps there has never been a need to consider such issues. However, with VET curricula being increasingly about the development of such skills

(see Chapter 1), the challenges of assessing them must be overcome. Ideally, curriculum and assessment should be developed jointly, but this is often not the case (Greenstein 2012). The Council of Europe (2024) reminds us that in some VET systems (in Austria, France or Latvia, for example), to graduate or receive their VET diploma, learners must be assessed in general subjects (in other countries general curriculum outcomes are not part of assessment for IVET certification).

It is useful to remind ourselves of the CDC butterfly diagram, and to consider what is assessed in terms of its four categories of learning:

- ▶ knowledge and critical understanding;
- ▶ skills;
- ▶ attitudes;
- ▶ values.

Assessment of knowledge and critical understanding

Systems that require IVET learners to complete assessments in general subjects might already have a baseline of assessment of CDC, especially where the required general assessment covers social or civic knowledge. Education and training systems that do not require general education to be integrated into IVET may still require coverage of citizenship within VET curricula. In such programmes, assessment of citizenship is likely to focus on knowledge, or may cover knowledge and application of knowledge (that is, skills) through a citizenship project or activity.

Even if there is no transversal development and assessment of citizenship knowledge within the VET programme, there may well be learning and assessment on laws, rights and values that are essential for job roles within occupational sectors.

In all these instances, there will already be assessment of some of the competences defined in the “knowledge and critical understanding” category of the CDC framework. Such existing assessments will provide a useful basis and established assessment models on which to build further assessment of CDC.

Assessment of skills

Some VET systems will already include assessment of skills required in the CDC framework – perhaps not treated as transversal skills or offered universally to all learners, but certainly when relevant for the occupational sector in which the learner is learning. For example, skills of listening and observing, and of empathy, both requirements of the CDC framework, may be important skills for those training to deal with customers in the travel and tourism or health and social care sectors, and may be covered within occupational-specific assessment in those programmes.

Box 1 provides an illustration of CDC knowledge and skills assessed in the National Certificate in Health and Social Care in Scotland.

Box 1 – The National Certificate in Health and Social Care Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 6 (European Qualifications Framework (EQF) level 3) in Scotland, United Kingdom

The unit “Communicate with, and complete records for individuals” requires learners to demonstrate ability to effectively communicate with individuals in different types of health and social care settings and to:

- ▶ identify the best forms of communication in any given situation and demonstrate your ability to listen and respond appropriately;
- ▶ adhere to legal and organisational requirements on equality, diversity, discrimination and rights.

The unit “Ensure your own actions support the care, protection and well-being of individuals” requires learners to demonstrate ability to relate to and support individuals in a way they choose, treat people with respect and dignity and assist in the protection of individuals in health or social care settings and to:

- ▶ encourage and respect individuals’ preferences;
- ▶ protect people from danger, harm and abuse.

This national certificate also includes optional units in social sciences, covering knowledge of politics, law, human rights, culture, etc., providing opportunities for assessment of aspects of the knowledge required by the CDC framework.

Assessment of attitudes and values

It is the assessment of attitudes and values that is most challenging for assessment of CDC in VET. Such assessment may be viewed as problematic in both general and vocational sectors, raising concerns about whether such attributes can be reliably and validly assessed, and bringing new ethical challenges for assessment. For example, a recent publication on assessment of CDC stresses the need for “respectfulness” of the learner’s human rights and dignity, an addition to the more commonly used assessment principles (Council of Europe 2021: 59-62). The pressure to fake expected attitudes and values may be seen as a threat to the individual autonomy of the learner as well as to the integrity of the assessment (paralleling issues associated with cheating on cognitive tests, as highlighted by Kyllonen (2015)). These concerns become particularly significant when assessment outcomes carry high stakes, such as influencing future employment or educational opportunities.

Despite such misgivings, assessment of attitudes and values may be more common than at first appears. For example, in Austria, Civic Education (*Politische Bildung*) is a compulsory subject at vocational schools. Although focused on the assessment of knowledge, the assessment guidelines refer to considering and justifying your own values (Box 2).

Box 2 – The school-leaving examination in civic education in Austria

Political competence

Political competence is the ability, skill and willingness to formulate and articulate one's own positions on political issues, to understand and take up the political positions of others, and to participate in the solution of problems in the fields of politics, business and society.

Policy-related methodological competence

This competence includes the ability to dispose of procedures and methods that contribute to deciphering and questioning ready-made manifestations of the political, such as speeches by politicians, TV reports, etc., as well as to creating one's own manifestations.

Political decision-making competence

Decision-making competence essentially refers to two areas: a. to the area of ready-made judgments; b. to the area of self-made judgments, which assess political decisions, problems and controversies independently, well-founded and as objectively and/or value-oriented as possible.

Source: www.geschichtsdidaktik.com/materialien-f%C3%BCr-den-unterricht/lehrpl%C3%A4ne-kompetenzmodelle/.

Austrian apprenticeships provide us with another example of assessment of attitudes and values within VET, this time in a workplace setting. Internships are a compulsory element of training in the *Bundeshandelsakademie* (BHAK) programmes and serve to deepen knowledge and skills acquired in class. Internships must be completed within a defined period at an enterprise outside the school. Objectives include the acquisition of work values such as punctuality, reliability and responsibility, and strengthening social and communicative competence by dealing with superiors, colleagues and customers and working in a team. These social, personal and entrepreneurial competences are clearly related to CDC. By means of mandatory work records, practice diaries or portfolios, learning processes are visualised and reflected upon, and learning outcomes are documented.

How should CDC be assessed in VET?

If CDC are not integrated into summative assessment processes, there is a risk that these competences will not be prioritised within VET programmes – even if they are assessed by teachers via formative assessment. Summative assessment and certification often serve as a guiding framework for curriculum development, teaching practices and learner engagement: when CDC are excluded from this process, they may not receive the necessary attention, resources or institutional support, limiting their integration into the developmental practice of learners.

However, integrating CDC solely into the certification process may not be the only or the most effective approach. For example, literacy is widely considered a key prerequisite for the development of these competences, but in some countries,

learners in VET may lack sufficient literacy skills, and this must be considered when developing a strategy for the development and assessment of CDC. Alternative evaluation initiatives can be useful here, enhancing the development of literacy, transversal and citizenship skills. Contests such as WorldSkills, internships in companies, organisation of projects within school practice, field trips, Erasmus+ mobility projects and similar opportunities offer experiential learning environments where learners can develop and demonstrate CDC in real-life contexts.

In fact, it is likely that there will already be a range of evaluation activities that can be built on to enhance assessment of CDC. A crucial assessment design question is how assessment should be conducted, that is, what form or method of assessment should be used to facilitate valid and reliable assessment of CDC, whether that assessment is building on an existing practice or is being developed from scratch.

It is helpful to think of approaches to assessment as falling into three broad categories (see Table 1). In some systems, one broad approach may dominate, but it is likely that across the whole learning programme, a variety of approaches will be found. The three broad categories of assessment approaches are:

- ▶ end-point assessment;
- ▶ continuous or periodic assessment;
- ▶ incorporation of prior, non-formal or informal experiences.

Table 1. Categories of approaches to assessment

	End-point assessment	Continuous or periodic assessment	Incorporation of prior or informal experience
Key features	Assessments are often set and marked by an external body but may be set and marked by the teacher.	May be used for formative or summative purposes. Evidence may be gathered as a natural part of learning or workplace activities or may involve set assessment tasks at key points. Either case may be called “coursework”.	Starts with experiential learning that can develop the full spectrum of CDC. Evaluates and recognises learning that takes place in non-formal, private or NGO initiatives.
Assessment formats often associated with this category	Tests or examinations: written, oral, practical or situational.	Projects, portfolios, investigations, dissertations, research studies.	Holistic assessment methods, with evidence captured in portfolios, reflective accounts, witness statements.

	End-point assessment	Continuous or periodic assessment	Incorporation of prior or informal experience
Often used to assess	Knowledge and critical understanding.	May be used for assessing any competences, but tends to be associated with assessing skills, including transversal skills.	May be used to provide recognition or certification of any competences, but especially useful when used to recognise or certificate non-cognitive skills, attitudes and values developed in informal and non-formal learning.
Strengths	Established and credible form of assessment. May be seen as fair and reliable.	Flexible: may allow tailoring to the needs of the learning programme or the individual learner. May provide opportunities for learner agency throughout the process.	Can be useful for incorporating personal and social learning experiences in certification, especially when microcredentials and digital badges are used to facilitate this recognition.
Comments	May be the dominant form of assessment in some systems.	Most systems will make some use of such approaches to assessment.	Strictly speaking, not an assessment approach, but a way to recognise other forms of learning in certification.

Considering our broad approaches to assessment in turn, we find that each has strengths, and we can identify positive examples of how each is currently being used in assessment of CDC.

End-point assessment

In systems where formal assessment of the VET programme is mainly by end-point external examination, there may be some assessment of the knowledge aspects of the CDC framework (as exemplified above), but it may seem difficult to assess anything other than this. In such systems, assessing skills, attitudes and values will require use of other, more innovative, assessment methods, such as those suggested below. However, even in education and training systems where end-point assessment dominates, VET systems may be better positioned to assess CDC than the related general educational system. In VET, end-point assessment is more likely to include performance tasks, situational assessments or oral examinations, perhaps a defence of a project or activity that has been carried out as part of the learning programme. Such assessments provide opportunities to incorporate elements of CDC knowledge, skills, attitudes or values.

Situational assessments place learners in authentic or simulated environments where they apply their competences in contextually relevant situations, providing observable evidence of their skills, attitudes and values in action. Oral examinations can assess a learner's ability to articulate thoughts, engage in critical dialogue and reflect on ethical considerations, all of which are integral to democratic culture. For example, in France in the context of civic and moral education, the assessment comprises an oral examination involving the presentation of a dossier. This dossier, produced individually or in groups, includes three or four documents of diverse types and an analysis of these documents in relation to a topic covered during classroom instruction. The primary theme is typically drawn from history or geography. The presentation is succeeded by a 10-minute interview with teachers, during which candidates justify the choices they made in their work. The assessment methodology employed is hybrid, incorporating both summative and formative dimensions. The examination then includes both the dossier – reflecting work undertaken and supervised in class – and an oral test, the mark from which contributes towards the *certificat d'aptitude professionnelle* qualification (Galli, Paddeu and Veneau 2019).

Assessment by continuous or periodic assessment

Continuous assessment, in which assessment evidence is gathered on an ongoing basis as the learner completes learning or workplace activities, may be the dominant mode of assessment in some VET systems. Such systems provide ample and flexible opportunities to assess development of CDC in learners.

The same can be said for periodic or coursework assessment, especially when such assessments are flexible, tailored to the learning programme or the individual student. For example, assessment methods such as group projects offer practical avenues to evaluate CDC effectively (Dębowski et al. 2021). In Austrian vocational secondary and commercial school (BHS-HAK) programmes, group projects enable learners to demonstrate collaboration, problem-solving and leadership skills within a team context, reflecting real-world democratic participation (Lachmayr and Proinger 2019). In assessment of the Vocational Baccalaureate in Slovenia, learners must choose a product or service to develop, produce it, document their approaches and defend these in an oral examination. This combination of assessment evidence allows robust judgments to be made about the student's competence and results in an assessment that is seen as valued and credible (<https://cpi.si/en/qualification-development>).

Another strength of VET assessment is that employers are often involved in assessment, especially when it is continuous or periodic. In systems where the learner spends time in workplace learning, employers will play a strong role in curriculum and assessment (see Chapter 4). While the integration of attitudes and values within formal education can be controversial, employers emphasise the importance of candidates possessing both technical abilities and cultural and interpersonal skills. Employers have experience of evaluating these skills during recruitment processes: the viewpoints and experience of employers may therefore be useful to support the development of assessment of CDC.

Inclusion of prior, non-formal or informal experiences

Another possible solution is to establish stronger linkages between practices within formal schooling with non-formal, private or NGO initiatives focused on developing and accessing CDC. These initiatives often employ innovative and experiential learning approaches that can significantly enrich the educational experience. By integrating such initiatives with school practice, educators can adopt more holistic assessment methods that capture the full spectrum of democratic competences.

An important mechanism for formalising the recognition of learning acquired through these channels is the use of microcredentials or digital badges. These credentials provide learners with portable, verifiable evidence of their achievements, enabling them to demonstrate their competences both within and beyond the traditional educational environment. Microcredentials and badges can serve as markers of diverse learning experiences, allowing students to build a rich portfolio that not only reflects their school accomplishments but also highlights their participation in non-formal, community-based or NGO-led initiatives. This approach encourages learners to engage with various educational opportunities, promotes the acquisition of democratic competences across multiple contexts and fosters stronger links between schools and the broader ecosystems of learning and civic engagement.

The Freed from theory (*Zwolnieni z Teorii*) initiative in Poland provides an example of such an approach (Box 3).

Box 3: Freed from theory – Linking an NGO initiative with formal schooling

The Freed from theory (*Zwolnieni z Teorii*) initiative is a competition where upper secondary (including VET) learners collaborate to carry out social impact projects in real-world settings. Teams receive guidance from accredited educators and professionals.

The projects (learners) are assessed against criteria including effective management, communication and the extent of evidence confirming the existence of the social issue addressed. Participants who successfully complete their projects receive certificates in project management accredited by the Project Management Institute and are invited to participate in the final. The most successful teams receive awards presented by senior officials, such as ministers and CEOs of prominent companies.

In 2019, 25% of upper secondary students participated in this initiative, and in six years, more than 3 000 projects have been implemented, benefiting 25 million people. While conducting these social projects, participants develop transversal competences, including:

- ▶ personal, social and learning competences: teamwork, time management, self-confidence;
- ▶ civic competences: active participation in community life, critical thinking, taking responsibility for others;

- ▶ entrepreneurship: the ability to take the initiative, make decisions, build partnerships, solve problems, exercise creativity;
- ▶ cultural awareness and expression: understanding local contexts, communication, empathy.

How can CDC be assessed in VET? – Further reflections

Considering the opportunities afforded by our three broad categories of assessment approaches for assessing CDC suggests both that well-established norms and assumptions may have to be challenged, but also that in many systems, there will be current practices that provide a useful basis for doing so. For example, should continuous assessment not form part of the formal or summative assessment system, assessors may find it useful to reflect on what other assessment and evaluation activities form part of the programme. Such reflection might take the form of a mapping or audit exercise and may reveal that there are more opportunities to gather evidence of CDC than at first appeared. For example, one viable strategy is the combination of end-point examinations with formative documentation accumulated throughout the learning process. This could include portfolios that showcase a learner's work and reflections, certificates of participation in relevant activities and qualitative evaluations from teachers and mentors. Such comprehensive documentation would provide a richer, more holistic view of the learner's development and engagement with democratic competences.

Kyllonen (2015) developed a taxonomy to categorise the methods commonly employed in the assessment of non-cognitive skills, which might be useful when considering what innovative assessment methods could be employed in the assessment of CDC. He identified five main assessment methods, two of which (self-ratings and others' ratings, or self and peer assessment as they are often called) could be very useful for assessing CDC. For example, "knowledge and critical understanding of the self" and "autonomous learning skills" are two competences in the CDC framework that support the development of other competences. Self and peer assessment will, of necessity, develop these two competences. Learners taking greater responsibility for their own assessment may be seen as a way to ensure that assessment supports learning, both of particular skills and as part of a lifelong learning journey in which learners use the skills of self-regulation and self-assessment (Boud and Soler 2016).

Grading within the assessment

An important methodological and ethical aspect in assessing CDC concerns the grading system used to evaluate these competences summatively. Despite widespread recognition of the need to assess CDC and the recommendation to employ various assessment methods, many countries rely on summative assessments that result in traditional grades in specific subjects. Learners receive numerical or letter grades, which are averaged into their final grades at the end of the programme. However, assigning traditional grades to CDC poses challenges. Reducing these

multifaceted competences to a simple numerical grade risks oversimplifying and misrepresenting a learner's true understanding and abilities. It can lead to what is referred to as a "behavioural grade", which may not accurately reflect the nuances of a learner's development in democratic competences.

Even within systems where summative graded external assessment is the norm, though, there are ways that VET teachers can address these issues within their classroom and workplace assessment practice. One approach is to organise "binding exercises without assessment". These might be mandatory activities or projects that learners are required to complete, but which are not evaluated using traditional grading scales. Instead of assigning marks from 1 to 5 (or equivalent), educators provide qualitative feedback. Learning to accept feedback and criticism is crucial for personal development, particularly in the context of CDC. Narrative assessments or feedback allow teachers to offer detailed comments on a learner's performance, highlighting strengths, areas for improvement and suggestions for further development. This method fosters a dialogue between educators and learners, encouraging learners to internalise feedback and apply it to their on-going learning journey.

Assessing CDC in VET: quality assurance and system issues

Assessment is important partly because it helps stakeholders to judge the quality of the learning (Cedefop 2022). Individual assessment of learners is not the only tool that can be used to assess the quality of the learning, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to set out all the ways that VET learning can be quality assured. That assuring the quality of assessment of individual learners should be a priority is borne out EQAVET's summary report (2024) "Quality assuring education for democratic citizenship in VET", which identifies important challenges to embedding citizenship education in VET.

- ▶ There is a widespread problem with the assessment of citizenship education, regardless of how it is organised. These are rooted in both the appropriateness of the design and the willingness and competence in its implementation.
- ▶ Teaching staff are often not sufficiently informed and trained on appropriate measurement tools to assess citizenship competences.
- ▶ There is a lack of community of practice, especially regarding the assessment of acquired citizenship competences and (self-)evaluation at different levels (institutional, systemic).

Assessment of attitudes and values requires assessors to make judgments about learner qualities that may be hard to measure objectively. It is likely that these will be assessed by the learner's own teacher, but they may not be comfortable doing so and are likely to be more comfortable assessing the technical skills associated with their discipline. VET lacks dedicated assessment professionals, and this is an impediment to change. Building a new profession of assessment experts requires investment by VET institutions and stakeholders but can ultimately be addressed through training and development.

Quality assuring teacher assessment judgments therefore needs to focus on ways that teachers/assessors can be provided with support for their judgments, in the form of training for assessors, written guidance materials or assessor networks/communities of practice. Often, aspects of these different forms of support can be combined in one quality assurance system.

Quality assurance is especially important in VET due to the significant role employers play in the assessment process. While employer participation can provide valuable insights into the practical application of CDC in workplace settings, it also introduces potential risks, such as inconsistency, bias or misalignment with national educational and societal goals. Employers operate outside the direct jurisdiction of education ministries and may not adhere to national curricula or policies, creating a need for robust quality assurance mechanisms to ensure fair and reliable assessments.

Looking to the future: what have we found and what can systems do to increase and improve assessment of CDC within VET?

The assessment of CDC is important within VET because assessment can ensure that teachers and learners pay attention to CDC learning. Innovations in assessment practice, such as those required to embed assessment of CDC in VET fully, can be developed “bottom up” (for example, by teachers trialling, evaluating and sharing new practices) or “top down” (initiated by policy direction). In practice, both are required to ensure that innovations are given the time and resources that they need to be developed system wide.

A factor in ensuring success is ensuring consistency between policy statements, policy levers and practice “on the ground”. A “top-down” approach is not sufficient to ensure success, it is necessary. If there are system-level policies about assessment of CDC in VET, stipulating, for example, what should be assessed, how that content should be assessed or how it will be quality assured, and policy statements are supported by policy levers such as funding and resourcing, then the actors of VET systems can put their own time and resources into implementing innovations, knowing that they have policy support.

Assessment of a framework such as the RFCDC, which does not sit easily in any subject or vocational sector, and which encompasses knowledge and skills from a range of fields as well as attitudes and values that are both social and personal, is likely to require innovation from all assessment systems and practitioners, as well as financial and organisational resources. Assessment of CDC is assessment of a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are going to challenge some of our preconceptions about how assessment should work. Assessors and learners, too, may find innovative assessment approaches surprising, and even upsetting at first; here, research has shown that familiarity and practice can very quickly change attitudes (Morselli and Ajello 2016).

Assessing CDC in VET: the way forward

This chapter has set out issues and suggested solutions for why, what and how we assess CDC in VET. We summarise our conclusions and recommendations below.

- ▶ The assessment of CDC should be designed in alignment with the curriculum, and the assessment strategy should be embedded in a broader strategy of promoting CDC.
 - Including decisions about which formal, non-formal and informal experiences will be used to provide evidence of competence, which competences will be assessed formatively and which will be assessed summatively.
- ▶ Formative assessment plays a vital role in guiding learning processes and providing feedback to learners, while summative assessment evaluates the achievement of competences at key stages.
 - VET systems should strive for a balanced approach, incorporating both formative and summative assessments for key competences.
- ▶ Literacy should be considered as a fundamental prerequisite for the development of CDC.
 - Strategies for fostering and evaluating CDC should address literacy as an integral component.
- ▶ When assessing CDC, systems should broaden assessment methods.
 - More open and flexible approaches may be required, including group projects, portfolio evaluations, situational judgment tests, self and peer assessment and holistic grading systems.
 - Ethical issues must be considered, and safeguards must be put in place to protect both learner autonomy and assessment integrity.
- ▶ More complex assessment methods will require more resources, infrastructure and training.
 - There may be a need for significant time commitments from educators, and the development of specialised tools or platforms.
- ▶ Assessors in school and employer settings need support to assess CDC within VET robustly and consistently.
- ▶ Strategies and policies must be built from both “top-down” and “bottom-up” perspectives.

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Chapter 3

Fostering CDC in VET teacher training

Stefan Schmid-Heher and Jörg Markowitsch

Introduction

Democracy is not solely and simply a form of government but a personal and social ideal (Dewey 1946: 146). It places great demands on all citizens, demands that are reflected in the RFCDC (Council of Europe 2018) and must therefore be learned. The competences necessary for developing political maturity provide a framework for all learners, regardless of age or type of school. Consequently, it is also the responsibility of all teachers to contribute to the development of a democratic society, a task that requires specific knowledge, skills and competences that must be reflected in teacher education. However, learning about democracy is never solely a matter of content but always also about the goals and methods in relation to the learners' conditions and about the interactions between learners and teachers. This applies equally to all educators, especially since a democratic learning culture always presupposes that also educators see themselves as learners (Mrnjajac 2012; Hammer, Nikolitsa-Winter and Stepanek Lockhart 2023). In this sense, this chapter discusses the challenges of implementing and strengthening CDC in the initial training and continuing education of teachers at vocational schools, while in-company trainers are dealt with in Chapter 4.

Variety of teachers' roles and functions in VET

Teachers' roles and functions in VET are as varied as VET systems themselves. They are closely linked to the teachers' training and determine the conditions under which CDC can be strengthened. A key distinguishing feature between different VET systems is the balance between general and vocational education and the share of work-based learning within vocational education. Teaching technical skills in a workshop also differs significantly from instructing a group of learners in a classroom setting. Moreover, some VET programmes are aimed at basic qualifications, while others train highly qualified specialists or provide access to higher education. This is accompanied by different challenges for teachers and consequently also for teacher training.

Typically, in a country, there are different types of teachers depending on the vocational training path, and even within these paths, there are various types of teachers. In countries with highly differentiated vocational education systems (that include vocational schools, dual training programmes and vocational high schools, for example), there are many different types of teachers even within a single school, who work together to provide a comprehensive VET curriculum and ensure the development of the right balance of necessary competences. These differences between VET teachers and their education and training not only reflect the institutional differences within VET and those between VET and general education but also reinforce them.

A recent Cedefop study, based on reports from 29 countries, highlights this diversity and reveals that in half of all EU+ countries, there are part-time or “hybrid” teachers who work simultaneously in both VET institutions and companies (Cedefop 2022).² In some training models, this approach is intentionally sought to ensure a close connection between teaching and practice. In other models, several years of industry experience are a prerequisite for becoming a VET teacher. However, such “hybrid” teachers and the emergence of second-career teachers (who enter the teaching profession after a career in industry and commerce) also partly reflect the demographic challenges and problems in recruiting vocational teachers.

Table 2 summarises the most relevant distinguishing features of VET teachers and their basic characteristics in order to illustrate the variety of their roles and functions in VET. Of course, there are far more nuances between these than can be shown here. These distinctions help on the one hand to formulate certain assumptions as to what extent and in what form knowledge of CDC can be expected on the part of VET teachers; on the other hand, they set the framework within which training and further education on CDC can be integrated or defined as a requirement.

Table 2. Selected dimensions of VET teacher recruitment, education and requirements with potential key variations

Dimensions	Key variations of the dimensions	
Teacher recruitment/ requirements	Formal/academic qualifications (and work experience)	Experience-based
Time of teacher education	Prior to employment	Parallel to employment
Duration/effort (relative to other teachers)	Similar	Shorter/lower

2. Comparative data on VET teachers and trainers are rare. There are only a few studies that have surveyed VET teachers and trainers in the EU (Cedefop 2015; Haasler and Tutschner 2011; Kirpal 2011; Kuhlee and Winch 2017) or globally (Grollmann 2008, Grollmann and Rauner 2007). However, as early as 1998, Cedefop established the TTnet network, a pan-European forum for key stakeholders focused on the professional development of vocational teachers and trainers. Later, Cedefop also co-ordinated the ET 2020 Thematic Working Group on the professional development of trainers in VET. To address the data gap, Cedefop is planning a pan-European survey targeting school principals, teachers, in-company trainers and learners, for which a pilot study has already been conducted.

Dimensions	Key variations of the dimensions	
Requirements for teachers of vocational subjects/skills	Job-related subjects only	Job-related subjects and general education
Requirements for teachers of non-vocational subjects/skills	The same as for other secondary schools	Different/lower requirements
Curricula of teacher education	Pedagogical skills added to vocational skills	Integrated/parallel

Source: Authors based on Cedefop (2022).

For example, if VET teacher education is significantly shorter, with lower entrance and graduation requirements compared to those for teachers in general secondary or higher education, and primarily focuses on work experience in a specific occupation, the acceptance of CDC may be more limited – at least compared to other teachers. Irrespective of this, this categorisation helps to formulate target- and needs-oriented solutions for the integration of CDC into teacher training according to the different national contexts.

In short, when designing CDC interventions for (future) teachers in VET schools, it is important to consider a) their recruitment and employment requirements; b) the structure and content of initial teacher training and continuing professional development (CPD); and c) the subjects/skills they are qualified for and possibly their other assignments at school.

Key challenges and potential for VET teacher education: “the political in the vocational”

The relation to occupations is the most essential distinguishing feature between general and vocational education at the secondary level. This is a fundamental, but not absolute, distinction, because on the one hand, every form of vocational education touches on aspects of general education, and on the other hand, general education is always influenced by vocational qualifications (Lewis 1998). Regardless of how general or occupation-specific VET is organised, there is always a potential for CDC in occupation-related content and teachers of all subjects need to be qualified to make use of it. To this end, it is necessary for teacher training to address and analyse political aspects in the vocational. Teachers must be enabled to understand and reflect on the interactions between the political and the vocational. Only on this basis is it possible to harness the resulting potential for democratic learning. Equally necessary is a constructive approach to the problems and contradictions that arise from integrating vocational and political aspects.

Identifying “the political” in “the vocational”

The RFCDC is based on a broad concept of democracy and politics, which cannot be reduced to democracy as a form of government or as a constitutionally anchored political system. Rather, it encompasses all areas of society. This perspective also shapes contemporary understandings of the didactics of civic education and emphasises the central role of connecting to the learners’ life experiences to CDC. Therefore,

vocational education in both schools and workplaces must also be understood as political in order to identify and develop starting points for democratic learning. This understanding contradicts the common everyday notion of politics, which is primarily limited to the media-driven actions of (top) politicians and political institutions. Such a narrow understanding of politics reflects widespread disenchantment with politics and democracy, where politics is often inherently seen in a negative light. In this respect, it is not surprising that the professional expertise that characterises the professional understanding of teachers at vocational schools in particular is generally understood to be apolitical.

The basic political science concepts of “politics”, “policy” and “polity” are analytical tools for developing a technically sound understanding of politics. Polity refers to the formal aspects of politics. These primarily include written norms and the institutions and organisations involved. Polity also includes informal norms that characterise coexistence. Policy describes the substantive dimension of a political perspective. It refers to the understanding or definition of political problems and the associated options for action and goals. Politics encompasses the political debate about different interests and the associated actors. Although almost every aspect of human coexistence can be analysed as political according to the above criteria, the concrete potential of such a perspective depends on the extent to which the characteristics that determine the political play a central role. The more different interests and needs clash in a problematic or conflictual way in a vocational context, the more a binding regulation of these appears necessary and no undoubtedly correct solutions are available, the more likely a vocational context can be understood as political.

A practical example for implementation in VET teacher training is safety in the workplace, which is an important part of training in the majority of skilled trades. While the underlying regulations are normally clear, deviations from them in practice often lead to learners questioning their meaning. If the teacher simply explains and demands the correct implementation of all regulations, there is no room for dealing with any contradictions experienced and no possibility for fostering political and professional maturity. Other options for action arise for the teacher if they are able to grasp the political dimensions of the teaching situation as described.

Legal standards (polity) exist in many contexts. On the one hand, these aim to protect employees but should nevertheless be designed in such a way that potentially dangerous activities can also be carried out in a practicable manner (policy). Conflicts arise from the different perspectives of those involved and affected (interest groups, health systems, policy makers), which require democratic negotiation (politics). In this context, the teacher creates space for contradictions that arise from different perspectives and interests. This promotes independent judgment on the part of the learners and gives teachers the opportunity to illustrate the complexity and changeability of political decisions as well as political options for action – for example, in the context of interest groups for specific occupations. At the same time, an in-depth and controversial discussion of occupational aspects is encouraged.

Contrasting vocational and democratic thinking

Democratic learning must refer to the political and the vocational, because both areas influence each other and characterise society as a whole as well as the teaching-learning situation in VET. Consequently, teacher training must address the tension between the two areas and make it understandable. The focus of the vocational sphere is on the skills of (future) employees and their professional ethos. Both aspects are co-determined by legal regulations and are also influenced by the balance of power in the labour market and the political order. In a democracy, the political is determined by the basic claim of equal participation of all citizens, a state obligation to uphold fundamental and human rights, and a broad acceptance of democratic principles among the people. The opportunities for professional self-realisation and securing an adequate livelihood through work are central to this. While the importance of occupational or professional values in vocational education and training is generally undisputed, political aspects are often subordinated to the occupational and professional practice or seen as completely irrelevant.

In teacher training, it is therefore first necessary to enable teachers to distinguish between professional and political rationalities (Rosvall and Nylund 2022: 699) in order to fulfil the respective requirements. The strengths and potential of company-based learning result from the integration of the learner into the process of company performance, whereby entrepreneurial goals dominate and training is subordinated to these. Consequently, teachers must be aware that it is also their task to focus on objectives that affect both the learner personally and society as a whole. In terms of CDC, this requires above all a constructive approach to contradictions.

Second, teachers must be enabled to see both perspectives as organically linked parts of working life. Professional action is directly related to numerous challenges for democracy (Zurstrassen 2017). On the one hand, this is the case because professional work gives rise to social, ecological or economic problems relevant for democracy. For example, professional and economic activities consume ecological resources regardless of social necessities. Work structures the daily routine of many people and can make democratic participation or even an appropriate social life difficult or impossible. Economic success in one sector can jeopardise professional livelihoods in other areas. On the other hand, there is also a connection, because professional action is often a factor in dealing with or solving political problems. New technologies can contribute to further development in a wide range of areas and changing needs in society can trigger professional developments.

One telling example is the teaching of new work techniques. In a business logic, it goes without saying that those techniques are taught, which, in the opinion of those responsible, will achieve the best business results. However, in terms of holistic vocational education, other standards must also be applied (Nylund et al. 2020). The promotion of vocational maturity requires that learners are taught the skills that will equip them in the best possible way not for a specific job or business, but for the entire occupational field. Furthermore, they should not only be equipped with certain methods and techniques but also the ability to decide on the use of a technique and the necessary knowledge to further develop it in the face of changing framework

conditions. For example, it is not enough to learn new forms of digital customer relationship management, but also the associated risks of processing personal data.

Hence, besides economic criteria, other aspects such as social and ecological effects also need to be considered. Learners must be enabled to make judgments as professionals and possible future supervisors, as well as citizens, and be able to deal with the contradictions involved (Barnett 2023). To this end, teacher training is required to demand the (future) teachers' reflection on their own professional socialisation (as an apprentice, skilled worker, supervisor, training officer or entrepreneur) in order not to reproduce business framework conditions at school.

Neglecting key political problems

Education in general and schools as institutions are commonly recognised as playing a major role in dealing with key political problems, such as mistrust of democratic political systems (Crouch 2004; Mouffe 2005), various forms of discrimination and violence online and offline (racism, sexism, antisemitism), dealing with disinformation and fake news, or labour disputes. These and similar challenges are of particular importance for learners in vocational education, as they experience more socio-economic challenges compared to learners in general secondary schools and consequently access to education is generally more difficult for them. Simultaneously, the limited time for off-the-job learning and general subjects as well as the self-image of schools and teachers, which is largely characterised by business logics, may hinder the implementation of CDC in VET.

One particular obstacle is that professional expertise is often seen as “apolitical” for a number of reasons. A differentiated concept of politics that is compatible with contemporary concepts of democratic learning must therefore be part of the initial and further training of all teachers and, in this context, also be linked to the respective vocational domains. On this basis, the argument of a lack of teaching time can be countered by integrating the relevant tasks into vocational subjects or training by qualified teachers. From the teachers' point of view, vocational learning must not compete with general content and objectives that are supposedly unrelated to the vocational content. Nor should sociopolitical content be instrumentalised solely for professional purposes, but rather be holistically related to the world in which the learners live. To this end, all teachers must be taught both exemplary specialist knowledge about key political problems themselves and the relevant skills for addressing them in a reflective manner.

Example: mandatory continuing education for VET teachers in Ukraine

In Ukraine, further training is compulsory for every teacher, meaning CDC are of great importance. One example is the 12-hour training course “Technology for the development of critical thinking” for VET teachers, which is offered by the Methodology Centre for Vocational Education and Training for Engineering Specialists in the Khmelnytsky region. The training is organised for social studies teachers and master craftsmen in industrial training. It aims to encourage critical handling of information and to help counteract propaganda and manipulation.

Conditions and challenges for implementing the RFCDC for VET teachers

The criteria described above for differentiating between types of schools and the roles of teachers within these types characterise the conditions for implementing the RFCDC and outline the potential and challenges associated with democratic learning in each case. The following typology cannot claim to reflect all professional education pathways and related teacher roles in Europe. Instead, it aims to provide examples of typical starting situations for VET teachers along with the corresponding framework conditions for measures to strengthen CDC. Yet, it should be kept in mind that in most European countries there are several, often up to six or seven, types of teachers (Cedefop 2022: 28).

Teachers of vocational subjects

Teachers from professional practice who are employed on the basis of their occupation-specific skills and qualifications with pedagogical skills acquired in parallel to the teaching profession.

This type of teacher exists in the following countries: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal. These teachers have usually gained several years of occupation-specific practical experience (including professional qualifications) before entering the teaching profession. Teacher training typically takes place alongside work and is generally less time- and labour-intensive than a full teacher-training course. The modalities of their entry into the teaching profession differ depending on a country's education system. The focus of their training is on pedagogical and didactic skills, as occupation-specific, technical knowledge can be assumed to a large extent.

For teachers of this type, the teaching profession is a second career after years in another profession. Their self-conception and understanding of their profession are therefore strongly characterised on the one hand by their previous work experience and professional qualifications and on the other hand by their teaching practice at the VET school. The associated economic-practical orientation significantly influences which educational goals these teachers set themselves and how they understand their task (Reichert, Lange and Chow 2021). It favours a manual-practical understanding of the profession in which the acquisition of routine, the minimisation of frictional losses and the avoidance of disruptions come to the fore as criteria for success (Duncker 2002: 22). These criteria are not only fundamentally justified but are also necessary elements of vocational training. However, they primarily reinforce firm perspectives, which are already a defining feature of dual systems. We find this type of teacher both at higher vocational schools and at schools that offer vocational qualifications without access to tertiary education. A special case related to this type are "hybrid" teachers (Cedefop 2022: 49-50), who also teach permanently without pedagogical training only on the basis of their professional qualification.

Against this backdrop, teacher training for CDC should link directly to vocational subjects or tasks and work out political aspects using the concepts of polity, policy and politics to explore political aspects in a problem-oriented manner. In particular, ambivalences and uncertainties with regard to the future should take centre stage so that the decision-making skills and professional maturity of learners are specifically promoted in vocational subject lessons. First, it seems important to build on the well-founded professional perspective of the teachers and value this as a resource, and at the same time make the associated experiences and ideas accessible for critical reflection. Second, it must be made clear that learning about democracy in an occupation-specific context supports the democratic political function of education and schools. In addition, a didactic approach that leaves room for controversy and discourse also favours a discussion of occupation-specific content, even though it may be perceived as contradictory in the first place.

When highly qualified, profession-specific teachers leverage their potential in this way, learners can engage with CDC in a manner that is both meaningful and motivating. For teacher training, this means that CDC must have an independent status in the curriculum and at the same time be closely linked to questions of teaching occupation-specific skills. Likewise, occupation-specific further training programmes must be designed in such a way that the aspects described are always taken into account.

Teachers with a higher education qualification for vocational training who are employed on the basis of a full-time tertiary education programme that focuses on occupation-specific and pedagogical skills.

This type of teacher exists in most EU countries, as well as in Albania and Türkiye, and essentially acquires the required qualification at a teacher-training institution and enters the teaching profession on this basis. In many cases, to access teacher training a relevant professional qualification is required in addition to a university entrance qualification. Teacher training encompasses job-specific knowledge as well as pedagogical aspects in connection with the respective subjects and additional areas of responsibility of teachers. For this group, the teaching profession is in many cases the first career choice immediately after leaving school. For those with a vocational qualification and corresponding professional experience, it may only be necessary to complete a shortened degree programme that focuses on pedagogical content.

The professionalisation of this group primarily takes place as part of a teacher-training course that covers career-specific, didactic-methodological and educational science areas. The academic approach offers the possibility to productively relate these aspects to each other so that professional and political maturity can be established as interdisciplinary cross-sectional subjects (Zuurmond et al. 2023) during teacher training. Students' own experiences as previous VET learners should also be reflected upon. An important prerequisite for such an integration of socio-political perspectives into the entire teacher training programme is that these are also represented independently in the curricula and are not merely understood as part of other domains. The teacher-training institutions should also emphasise CDC-related research and development activities.

Example: CDC as an interdisciplinary topic in VET teacher training in Finland

In Finland, VET teacher education for citizenship teaching is characterised by a strong emphasis on practical, student-centred approaches and integration of civic education across different subjects. VET teachers in Finland typically hold a master's degree, which includes pedagogical studies. Citizenship education is embedded in the broader curriculum of VET and aims to foster active citizenship, critical thinking and social responsibility among students, including topics like democracy, human rights and societal participation. Citizenship education is often integrated with other subject and problem-based learning used as a key pedagogical method, enabling students to learn through real-life scenarios and collaborative projects.

Teachers of general education subjects at vocational schools

Teachers with a (full) teacher-training programme employed on the basis of the same qualification for general education subjects as teachers at general secondary schools.

This type of teacher exists in all EU countries and also in most non-EU-countries.

For this group of teachers, it is typically only after completing their training that it becomes clear whether they will work at a general secondary school or a vocational school. They are usually employed full-time in vocational schools, where the curricula are comparable to general education schools in terms of general education subjects and vocational training can be combined with university entrance qualifications. In most cases, the teacher-training programme is started shortly after graduating from school and the teachers have no other professional experience and often have no previous experience with vocational education in their educational biography.

The training of this group of teachers typically includes little or no emphasis on vocational education. In this case, targeted and ideally mandatory professional development opportunities are recommended for the relevant types of schools. These should allow teachers of general education subjects to exchange perspectives and experiences with teachers of vocational subjects and develop joint initiatives to foster CDC, with significant consideration given to the vocational focus of the school. This could take the form of teacher bootcamps, co-teaching and project work in schools with teachers of vocational content and also job shadowing in relevant companies.

Teachers with part-time or short-cycle education for general subjects who are employed on the basis of their vocational education or experience.

This type of teacher exists for instance in Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands and Türkiye.

These teachers teach general education subjects at vocational training institutions, typically at EQF levels two and three, or at non-school educational institutions. Due

to the shortened or facilitated training, this can be attractive for people who want to reorient themselves professionally after other work experience. Previous professional experience or qualifications can also be an explicit part of the recruitment criteria. Sometimes teachers of this type teach both vocational and general education subjects or they are combined in certain subjects.

Example: industry placements for teachers in Malta

Malta's College of Arts, Science and Technology provides industry placements for teachers in order to keep them abreast with current developments. The placements are supposed to be a catalyst for the building of a community of practice and are considered to provide a holistic approach. Such programmes of continuing professional development could make an important contribution to integrating vocational aspects into general education subjects in VET schools in order to strengthen CDC.

In educational programmes with a strong practical vocational focus and a comparatively low emphasis on general education subjects, teachers face specific challenges with regard to CDC. Learners are disproportionately affected by aggravating circumstances for their educational and professional careers (Kersh et al. 2021). Teachers of general education subjects in particular are confronted with little time and low status of their subjects or content and at the same time find themselves severely challenged in teaching basic skills for employability. Against this background, vocational-practical rationalities also play a central role in the area of general education.

In this context, strengthening CDC therefore means prioritising the role of general education elements in fostering political and professional maturity over merely achieving specific performance standards. After all, such educational programmes simultaneously serve social, democratic and economic inclusion and also act as an employment policy measure. Chapter 6 highlights the various dimensions of inclusion to which CDC can make a significant contribution. Teacher training for general education subjects must therefore place special emphasis on the personal and professional life-world contexts of students, ensuring that emancipatory and anti-discriminatory principles are prioritised in the curriculum. At the same time, the focus should always be on pedagogical options for action and critical reflection on the framework conditions. Both approaches must ultimately aim to strengthen the political and professional self-efficacy of learners. In this sense, CDC can be understood as a framework for the educational mission and correspondingly must have a fundamental role in teacher education. In particular, teachers must be encouraged to critically and reflectively examine their own backgrounds to prevent the perpetuation of disadvantages through deficit-oriented approaches.

CDC interventions depending on types of VET teachers

As demonstrated, it is crucial to focus on the attitudes and values shaped by teachers’ educational and professional biographies. These factors significantly influence the professional self-concept of vocational schoolteachers and the conditions under which CDC can be integrated into teacher education. Fundamental parameters are, on the one hand, the types of qualifications of teachers at vocational schools and, on the other hand, the – vocational and/or general education – focus of their teaching activities. Table 3 summarises the particular potential that arises from the respective circumstances. The roughly simplified typology illustrates the range of possible approaches to strengthening CDC in VET. It is important to emphasise that these are not mutually exclusive perspectives, because in principle any approach to strengthening CDC can be usefully applied in a wide variety of contexts.

Example: a train-the-trainer workshop for empowerment against inequality

The Erasmus Project #getinvolved developed a comprehensive guide for a two-day train-the-trainer workshop that focuses on the empowerment of VET learners who experience inequality, discrimination and a feeling of powerlessness in schools, companies and society. The workshop aims to enhance CDC within VET by equipping teachers and instructors with the tools and methods to promote citizenship awareness, inclusiveness and anti-discrimination practices. It seeks to empower educators to address these issues effectively. By deepening their knowledge, improving self-reflection and developing practical strategies, educators can better support their learners to overcome powerlessness and contribute to a more democratic and inclusive society both within VET and beyond. The guidelines are available in English, German, Italian and Polish. Similar approaches could be integrated into initial teacher training.

Table 3. CDC interventions depending on types of VET teacher

	Emphasis on academic qualification	Emphasis on vocational qualification
Teachers of vocational content/subjects Strengthening CDC by ...	... understanding CDC as an integrating element between vocational and pedagogical training.	... including CDC in the pedagogical/didactic training building upon vocational content.
Teachers of general content/subjects Strengthening CDC by ...	... providing opportunities to engage in occupation-specific communities and their political discussions.	... emphasising general education as a means of social, economic and democratic integration.

Conclusions

Contrary to common assumptions (Rosvall and Nylund 2022: 684), VET does not offer limited possibilities for implementing CDC compared to general education, but rather provides additional potential, as outlined above. The principles of strengthening CDC apply regardless of the enormous heterogeneity in the field of VET. Vocational contexts are a valuable key to learning about democracy as teachers can grasp the social problems from multiple perspectives and make them accessible to learners. To enable teachers to utilise this potential, the following points must be taken into account in VET teacher training.

- ▶ Differentiated concepts of politics and democracy along with the corresponding didactic competences should hold an independent status while maintaining interdisciplinary relevance within VET teacher-training programmes. Ensuring proximity to the vocational field is crucial and requires a strong emphasis on research and development activities within the teacher-training institutions.
- ▶ Dealing with contradictions should be established as a fundamental educational objective in VET teacher training with an approach that highlights the potential for meaningful vocational learning.
- ▶ The ability of teachers to engage in political and professional self-reflection is a prerequisite for them to be able to critically reflect on the learning requirements of the students as well as their own.

This chapter is an initial exploration of the role of CDC in vocational teacher education from an international comparative perspective. With a theoretically sound structuring of this heterogeneous field, we have attempted to lay the foundation for further in-depth investigations. In order to shed more light on the current status and future potential of CDC in vocational teacher training, a comprehensive survey of CDC in VET teacher-training institutions and the respective national education administrations would be an essential and a logical next step.

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Chapter 4

Potential for fostering CDC in in-company training

Eszter Csepe-Bannert

The relevance of the topic of CDC in in-company training

Global and local challenges such as social inequality, demographic change and migration, political polarisation and populism, disinformation, globalisation and geopolitical tensions, discrimination, racism, environmental pollution and economic uncertainties have a profound impact on both society and the individual.

Shaping future societies requires responsible and committed actors with transversal competences who develop holistic approaches to the complexity of the challenges, including both individual and collective action.

Systemic thinking, co-operation and dialogue, education and enlightenment, and technological and social innovations, along with transformative competences such as CDC, are gaining in importance and being promoted more widely.

With regard to the topic of this chapter, VET has the potential to play a central role in promoting democratic competences by preparing young people to actively and responsibly contribute to society. This not only means imparting technical qualifications but also strengthening interdisciplinary competences such as critical thinking, social skills and responsibility. These are essential components of a functioning democracy.

On the other hand, competences for a democratic culture are also highly relevant for recognising systems, measures and situations that can lead to disadvantages or even discrimination against apprentices in a company. These can relate, for example, to unfair pay, lack of appreciation, overtime without compensation or other types of discrimination. Responsible management and ethical behaviour, which arise from a democratic culture, prevent companies from acting solely for profit and violating the rights of their employees and apprentices.

Since the structure and practice of in-company training can vary across European countries, different approaches and measures for promoting democratic competences emerge. This chapter represents the first attempt to identify some of these.

Contribution of training companies to a democratic society

Private companies are primarily economic entities whose central goal is to maximise profits. The decision to train young people in a company, however, goes beyond purely economic interests.

Qualified, skilled workers ensure the competitiveness of companies, which helps to stabilise the labour market and the economy as a whole. By providing training places, companies enable young people, regardless of their social background, to make a qualified start to their working lives. This can contribute to social justice and the reduction of inequalities in society. Furthermore, in-company training helps to reduce youth unemployment by offering young people career prospects and thus a basis for an independent and fulfilling life (International Labour Organization 2019: 2).

In order to ensure that the topic of CDC in in-company training is taken into account and also put into practice by companies, it is advisable to look at what intrinsic motivation companies may have to establish, maintain and implement these measures in the long term; since, at first glance, the promotion of democratic competences in in-company training is not directly linked to the immediate goals of a company such as profit maximisation.

This intrinsic motivation on the part of companies corresponds not only to self-interest but also to a deeper awareness of the long-term benefits of a democratic and value-oriented working environment. This may result in company-internal measures in in-company training that represent a win-win situation for both the company and the apprentices by promoting CDC.

Initial considerations for a win-win situation for the promotion of CDC in in-company training can be justified as follows.

1. Companies that promote democratic competences in in-company training are often perceived as progressive and value-oriented employers. This increases their attractiveness for young talents, who are increasingly opting for employers that embrace values such as co-determination,³ diversity and fairness. This also gives them an advantage over their competitors in the war of talents, which is particularly important in times of a shortage of skilled labour.
2. Democratic competences such as communication skills, tolerance and the ability to respect different opinions contribute to a positive working atmosphere. Companies benefit when their employees and apprentices resolve conflicts constructively and work together effectively. A respectful and co-operative working environment promotes productivity and reduces stress and conflict.
3. By promoting democratic values such as participation and co-determination, apprentices develop a stronger sense of belonging to the company. Apprentices

3. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2020): "Co-determination is a structure of decision-making within an enterprise whereby employees and their representatives exert influence on decisions, often at a senior level and at a relatively early stage. Co-determination may operate in parallel to, and complement, other industrial relations mechanisms of employee representation and influence. It does not substitute for other instruments that enable employee influence on management decision-making, such as collective bargaining".

who feel heard and respected are often more motivated and loyal to the company and stay with the company after their training.

4. Democratic competences promote an open culture of discussion in which different perspectives and ideas are heard and evaluated. This can lead to more creativity and innovation, as apprentices are also encouraged to express their opinions and actively participate in problem-solving.

5. In a globalised working world, teams are often diverse. Democratic competences such as intercultural sensitivity and the ability to work in heterogeneous teams are crucial for the success of innovation projects, as apprentices can also be involved. Companies that promote these skills create an environment in which creative solutions are developed and innovative strength is strengthened.

6. Apprentices who become future employees and acquire democratic competences during their in-company training are often better prepared for management tasks. They learn to take responsibility, make decisions in a participative manner and act ethically. Such managers are valuable to the company in the long term, as they are not only professionally competent but also able to lead teams effectively and fairly.

7. Companies that promote democratic skills create a corporate culture that emphasises ethical and responsible behaviour. This value orientation contributes to sustainable corporate management that focuses on short-term profits and on long-term success through responsible action. The company's success contributes to the long-term preservation of in-company training structures.

8. Companies that promote democratic skills recognise their responsibility to society. They contribute to strengthening democratic structures by giving young people the skills to participate actively and responsibly in society.

9. In times of change, such as digitalisation or the introduction of new working methods, companies benefit from a culture of co-determination. Apprentices who are democratically trained develop more resilience and are better able to help shape and accept change, which can accelerate the transformation process.

10. Companies are part of society and have an interest in ensuring that it remains stable and democratic. By promoting democratic competences in in-company training, companies make an important contribution to strengthening democracy. They help to ensure that young people become responsible citizens who are able to participate in society and live, help shape and accept democratic values, which can accelerate the transformation process.

In order to develop needs-based measures that take into account company-specific structures, potential and limitations, an active exchange between various companies needs to be promoted. This requires the exchange and co-operation of all stakeholders at a political, economic and social level in order to create appropriate framework conditions.

As in-company training practices in some cases show, there are also examples where companies are less aware of their social responsibility in the context of in-company training and where the self-interest of the company prevails, exposing trainees to a number of risks. For example, when it comes to the fact that apprentices receive

less pay, even if they do comparable work to regular employees, or if they regularly have to work unpaid overtime or if they have unequal access to adequate social protection (Council of Europe 2014: 3).

As the German case shows, there are legal regulations in place in companies to protect trainees from exploitation and discrimination. For instance, the labour law that protects the rights of employees by establishing minimum standards for working conditions, wages, working hours, workplace safety and freedom from discrimination. These rights strengthen the position of employees within the company and contribute to the creation of a democratic environment where everyone is treated fairly.

From a social law perspective, for example, the Anti-Discrimination Act (General Equal Treatment Act) contributes to ensuring basic social rights such as fair and equal treatment of employees regardless of their gender, religion, sexual orientation or other characteristics, or the guarantee of basic human rights. The creation of adequate and safe working conditions are further components for promoting dignified conditions in the company.

Co-determination regulations such as the Works Constitution Act may include mechanisms to promote workplace democracy and ensure the right of employees to organise or regulate the establishment of works councils or employee representations. The Works Constitution Act furthermore allows employees to join unions and engage in collective bargaining. Through these rights, employees can actively participate in decisions affecting their working conditions.

Although the existence of labour, social and anti-discrimination laws form an important basis for a democratic culture in in-company training and in general in companies, the assertion of employee rights can vary from company to company. In some countries, such as Austria, Germany, the Scandinavian countries and others, the protection of employees and the implementation of the laws is supported by social partner organisations, which is described in more detail in Chapter 7.

Taking into consideration the approaches at European level, the EU's 2014 Quality Framework for Traineeships (Council of the European Union 2014) provides quality principles to improve the working conditions of trainees, including pay, inclusiveness and quality of traineeships.

Based on the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving and enforcing working conditions of trainees, the framework includes recommendations for fair pay for trainees; ensuring access to adequate social protection for trainees, including appropriate coverage in line with national legislation of the member state; appointing a mentor, to provide trainees with targeted support and advice; promoting equal access to traineeship opportunities, through reaching out to people in vulnerable situations and by ensuring that workplaces are accessible for trainees with disabilities; allowing for hybrid and remote working, by ensuring trainees receive the equipment needed; and increasing employability by providing additional career guidance and incentives to traineeship providers to offer trainees a regular position after their traineeship (European Commission 2024: 4).

Training of in-company trainers as a means of promoting CDC in in-company training

In addition to a corporate structure that promotes democracy, positive leadership role models with social responsibility or labour, social and participative regulations in companies, the training and further education of training staff offers additional potential for the systematic and continuous promotion of democratic competences in in-company training.

As in-company training can have different forms, structures and characteristics in different European countries, the training of in-company trainers may also vary.

In the German and the Austrian dual VET system, the training of the in-company trainers is formalised with a dedicated training programme for in-company trainers.

The AEVO (*Ausbilder-Eignungsverordnung*), or Ordinance on Trainer Aptitude, is a German regulation that sets the legal framework and standards for individuals who wish to train apprentices within the German dual vocational training system (*Duales Ausbildungssystem*). Its purpose is to ensure that trainers (*Ausbilder*) possess the necessary pedagogical, professional and personal qualifications to effectively guide apprentices through their training.

When taking a closer look at the AEVO training plan, some approaches identified in the training plan can be associated with CDC.

The pedagogical approach

Based on the pedagogical principles of individualisation, participation and reflection, the AEVO recommends creating a democratic learning environment based on the needs of the apprentices and promoting their active participation.

The communication approach

The AEVO also emphasises the importance of communication and interaction between trainers and apprentices. Through open and respectful communication, trainers can promote democratic values such as tolerance, freedom of speech and dialogue.

The participation approach

According to the AEVO, apprentices should be involved in the planning and implementation of their training. This gives them the opportunity to identify their own learning goals and needs and actively participate in shaping their training process, strengthening the democratic principles of participation and self-determination.

The reflective practice approach

Regular reflection, evaluation and adaptation of training methods to meet the needs of the apprentices, taking into account their different learning conditions, needs and backgrounds, are fundamental requirements of AEVO. By promoting reflective practice, trainers can function as role models in terms of democratic values such as openness, transparency and self-criticism and encourage apprentices to internalise these values as well.

The intercultural approach

Approaching all cultural backgrounds openly, positively embracing culturally induced differences, appreciating societal diversity, respectful interaction, tolerance and promoting diversity in the workplace in terms of ethnic origin, nationality, religion or world view are fundamental principles of the intercultural competences of AEVO and contribute to the promotion of CDC.

Despite the formalisation of the training of trainers in the VET system in particular countries, the extent to which these approaches are conveyed in practice within in-company training depends not only on the personality and professional qualifications of the trainer but also on other factors such as corporate culture, organisational structure, participation opportunities in the company, collegiality and leadership style (see the section on the practical company example at Elyaf).

Company-based training systems as a means of promoting CDC in in-company training

In-company training can have different forms, structures and characteristics in different European countries. In Austria, Denmark or Germany,⁴ for example, company-based training is based on occupation-specific standards and curricula that make the monitoring and assessment of learning outcomes transparent and comparable (Cedefop 2021: 100). Company-based training in Türkiye is part of the formal vocational education system and is regulated by the Law on Vocational Training and the Regulation on Vocational and Technical Training, which is an official guide to determine rules and procedures relating to the apprenticeship (International Labour Organization 2022: 2).

In countries such as Greece and Portugal, in-company training is based on general training standards that apply regardless of the place of learning. This rather informal structure of company-based training can lead to different standards being developed by different companies within the same sector or to different specialisations within individual companies. This form of company-based training makes it more difficult to ensure the transparency and comparability of learning outcomes across individual companies (Cedefop 2021: 101).

In countries such as Cyprus, Italy or Poland, there are no explicit standards for in-company training and thus companies need to rely on curricula and standards of vocational schools. The learning agreement for in-company training, which is concluded between the school and the training company, contains the learning outcomes for the practical part from the school's curriculum. However, these can vary in practice depending on the possibilities in the individual companies (Cedefop 2021: 104).

These different formal, structural and organisational conditions can therefore have an influence on the development and implementation of measures to promote CDC.

4. Austria and Germany have dedicated training programmes for in-company trainers, which also involve issues on CDC. Further information is available in the section "Training of in-company trainers as a means of promoting CDC in in-company training" in this chapter.

In the following section, three different case studies are introduced to demonstrate the diversity of possibilities to promote CDC in in-company training.

Examples from practice

The following case studies briefly present various approaches and measures for promoting CDC in in-company training. When selecting the case studies, care was taken to ensure that they represent as wide a variety of measures with different systems of in-company training as possible. As already mentioned, VET systems in European countries have different traditions, structures and standards. Therefore, these examples do not serve as a blueprint for the promotion of CDC in in-company training but can be used as a stimulus and inspiration for company-specific measures.

Practical example from the Don Giovanni hotel and restaurant, Leipzig, Germany

The Don Giovanni hotel and restaurant is a family-run small business in its second generation. Since its foundation, the company has trained over 50 apprentices. After the German reunification, the Don Giovanni hotel and restaurant was the first Italian restaurant and training company in Leipzig and can therefore look back on a time rich in experience in in-company training. The company provides training as part of the German dual system, which means that the legal regulations related to the promotion of democratic culture in the company, such as the labour, social and co-determination laws, are integral components of the in-company training plan and thus are comprehensively taught by the trainer throughout the entire training period and are continuously demonstrated by the trainees during their practical training within the company. Furthermore, the presented practical approaches on fostering CDC in in-company training are supported by measures in line with the approaches of the professional training of the in-company trainers based on the German regulation that sets the legal framework and standards for individuals who wish to train apprentices (AEVO).

Given the German-Italian background of the founders and the in-company trainers, interculturality and diversity play a significant role not only in the company culture but also in the recruitment and training of apprentices, as apprentices from 26 countries have been trained since the company was founded. Besides the benefits of multilingualism through the apprentices and thus the customised support of international guests, the intercultural flair in the in-company training offers an experimental space to gain experience with different cultures, religions, languages and traditions during the training.

One of the examples includes the regular intercultural cooking events organised by the in-company trainer for the firm's own apprentices as well as for the regular employees of the company with the aim of introducing the culture, language, lifestyle and eating habits of the apprentices' own countries, thereby promoting an appreciation of diversity and tolerance.

In addition, to foster the intercultural competences of the native German apprentices and in-company trainers too, the company provides the opportunity to take part in transnational mobilities within the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. Transnational mobilities allow all apprentices and in-company trainers to broaden their horizons, reflect on different ways of life and get to know the working conditions and future prospects of the employees in the host company and compare them with their own situation at home. These experiences abroad enhance various competences and attitudes within the framework of democratic culture, including the openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices. Even though the German Vocational Training Act (*Berufsbildungsgesetz*, BBiG) provides a framework for international mobilities by allowing apprentices to complete parts of their vocational training abroad with a recognition of the stays as part of their formal training trajectory, this measure is still not provided in every company.

The training of apprentices in the hotel and gastronomy sectors and the direct communication with guests requires a good awareness of diversity, empathy and conflict resolution. The Don Giovanni hotel and restaurant offers situation-based learning opportunities to promote these skills and competences. This means that the apprentices have direct contact with customers from the first day of their in-company training and therefore take responsibility not only for their own actions but also for planning, implementation and evaluation of the company's core tasks.

Finally, measures like the established feedback culture and an open-door policy allow apprentices to receive daily feedback on their activities. They can make suggestions for improvements to the organisation of their training activities.

Practical example from Elyaf Tekstil Bursa, Türkiye

Elyaf Tekstil Bursa is one of the largest manufacturing companies and integrated facility providers in Türkiye and a supplier to major retailers and e-commerce companies across Europe. A key sustainable aspect of the integrated facility providers in the textile industry is their ability to implement eco-friendly practices across the entire supply chain, such as using sustainable raw materials, optimising energy and water consumption, and managing waste and emissions efficiently. By consolidating these practices under one system, they help reduce the environmental footprint of textile production and ensure compliance with global sustainability standards, benefiting both the environment and the industry. Besides the high environmental and industrial standards and certifications such as Oekotex 100, Organic Content Standard (OCS), Recycled Content Standard (RCS), Global Recycled Standard (GRS), Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Sıfır Atık (Zero Waste), the well-being of the employees and apprentices is also supported by different company-specific approaches and measures, which are underpinned by corporate culture as well as operational and strategic corporate management. According to Elyaf's mission statement, it adheres to good corporate governance principles that emphasise transparency, accountability and independence.

Elyaf provides in-company training for approximately 25 students per year. The duration of the apprenticeship – two days per week in the final year of the vocational education programme they follow – corresponds with the requirements defined in the Regulation on Vocational and Technical Training. The content of the in-company training is agreed between the human resources department in co-operation with the vocational school of the learner. However, the company also gives students the opportunity to express their interests and thus influence the training content. The implementation of the set training content is supported by experienced specialists in each department.

CDC in the in-company training at Elyaf is promoted in particular through approaches on participation, sustainability and social commitment, which are firmly anchored in the corporate culture and management and therefore also apply to every measure taken by the company, as well as in in-company training.

Elyaf fosters an open corporate culture, which has also a positive impact on the apprentices in the in-company training by giving direct access to feedback and mentorship, which accelerates their professional development and boosts confidence in their skills. Additionally, the apprentices feel more engaged and valued within the company, fostering a sense of belonging and increasing their motivation to contribute to the company's success. An open error culture in which mistakes are seen as an opportunity for improvement and learning is also practised as part of in-company training.

Besides the above-mentioned ecological standards on sustainability, sustainable social measures also play an important role in in-company training. The annual "social compliance and occupational health and safety workshop", which is mandatory for all employees and apprentices, covers topics such as freedom of organisation and collective bargaining rights, no discrimination, fair remuneration, reasonable working hours, prevention of child labour, special protection for young workers, prevention of precarious work, prevention of debt payment through forced labour, protection of the environment and ethical business conduct.

Social commitment at Elyaf has been an important component of the corporate culture since the company was founded. The support of various social projects, for example the project to strengthen the rights and self-confidence of girls as part of a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) programme through donations and participation in sporting activities such as the "Eker I run" marathon, are just some of the activities in which both employees and apprentices can participate. Participation in such social projects provides apprentices with the opportunity to shape their attitudes in terms of responsibility, self-efficacy and civic mindedness.

Practical example from PAP Corp., Thessaloniki, Greece

PAP Corp. is a hospitality company with its headquarters in Thessaloniki, Greece. The company owns and runs one city hotel in Thessaloniki and three seasonal summer hotels on the peninsula of Halkidiki. The company continues to operate a catering business, called F ZONE, which provides the food service at the American Farm School in Thessaloniki for 800 students. PAP Corp. has also set up an education

department, called HOTELIA, which runs seminars for interns, employees and entrepreneurs of the tourism and hospitality sector. PAP Corp. is an active member of the Hoteliers Association in Thessaloniki and Halkidiki, the Panhellenic Association of Hoteliers in Greece, the American Hellenic Chambers of Commerce and the German Hellenic Chambers of Commerce.

The company's broad range of tasks provides diverse training experiences for young people in the form of internships, with an annual capacity of 150 to 180 interns. The internships for vocational school students last from two weeks to six months, depending on the type of vocational school. The internships are planned, co-ordinated and finally evaluated by the human resources department. The daily internship objectives are assessed by 18 in-company trainers, who also work as managers in various departments. There is also a regular exchange between these in-company trainers and the human resources department regarding the performance of the interns. The requirements for the internship in the company vary depending on the vocational school; some vocational schools specify key areas, while others completely accept the company's internship concept.

To ensure the high-quality support of the interns, the in-company trainers take part in various continuous training courses, organised by, for example, the Greek Association of Hoteliers or by other private educational institutions. Thus, the internship content is updated once a year, to take account of all the new developments in the sector, and is drawn up by the in-company trainers.

CDC (like tolerance, cultural diversity, responsibility, the ability to work in a team, linguistic communication skills and conflict resolution skills) play an important role during the internship, as these are also fundamental components of the hotel and catering industry. The company implements various measures to promote these skills and competences during the internship. For example, the interns' activities are reflected on and evaluated daily together with their in-company trainer. In this context, the interns also work on various case studies that have occurred during the internship to promote their conflict resolution and decision-making skills. To promote interns' teamwork skills, linguistic communication skills and tolerance, they are involved into a "rotation system", whereby they rotate through each department in the company, interact with different colleagues and other interns and learn to behave flexibly in different situations and adapt to the changes in each department.

The company is a holder of the "Green Key" and "Blue Flag"⁵ certificates, therefore PAP Corp. attaches great importance to encouraging interns to volunteer in sustainability-related activities within the company to raise their awareness of their responsibilities to society and nature.

5. The Blue Flag certificate is an international eco-label awarded to beaches, marinas and sustainable boating tourism operators that meet stringent environmental, educational, safety and accessibility criteria. Managed by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), the programme aims to promote sustainable development in coastal areas. To receive the certification, a location must maintain high water quality, provide environmental education and information, ensure safe and clean amenities, and promote responsible environmental management. The Blue Flag is a globally recognised symbol of quality and environmental stewardship: www.blueflag.global/criteria.

Despite all the measures to promote CDC at PAP Corp., the greatest challenge is laying the foundations for democratic competences among interns during an internship of a maximum of six months and then promoting and strengthening them in a holistic manner.

Conclusions

The RFCDC is not just a European tool for promoting competences for a democratic culture. It also serves as an instrument of guidance to address global and local challenges.

In-company training offers a protected space to develop approaches and measures that not only equip young people with essential technical and personal skills but also ensure the long-term viability of the workforce and the company as a whole (see the section “Contribution of training companies to a democratic society”).

The approaches and measures to promote CDC in the in-company training can be diverse and should ideally take into account and build upon the existing structures and resources within the respective company, utilising their synergies. For example, an internationally operating company can offer assignments abroad such as Erasmus+ stays for their apprentices, thereby enhancing various CDC such as openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices.

Additionally, involving apprentices in social or environmental projects as part of the company’s corporate social responsibility activities provides an opportunity to shape their attitudes to responsibility, self-efficacy and civic mindedness.

Last, transparent communication and a clear feedback culture help apprentices feel heard, which increases their motivation and sense of belonging to the company and allows the company to benefit from new ideas and perspectives brought by the apprentices.

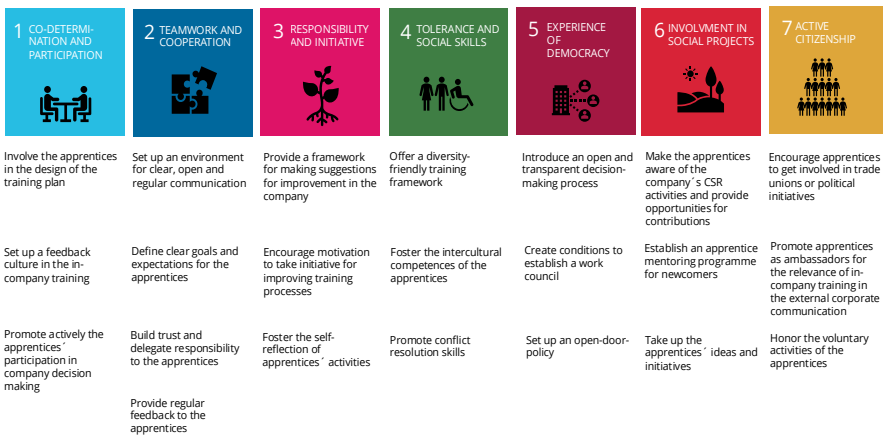
As the practical examples have shown, promoting CDC can be seen as a win-win situation for all parties involved, thereby positively influencing the commitment to developing CDC measures for in-company training.

A summary of further possible measures is included in the next overview.

Overview of approaches and measures to foster CDC in in-company training

A summary of future possible measures is included in the next overview

Overview of approaches and measures to foster CDC in in-company training



Source: Eszter Csepe-Bannert.

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Chapter 5

Implementing CDC in VET schools: the relevance of the whole-school approach

Angelos Vallianatos and Ted Huddleston

CDC are neither an academic subject nor a form of vocational training. It is education for a way of life. As such, it cannot be taught through formal instruction alone. Democratic values and attitudes are mainly developed through living and working in an environment in which they are respected, and democratic skills are most effectively learned in an environment where there are opportunities to practise them. Introducing CDC into VET learning is not, therefore, just a matter of adding a new course or unit of work to an existing teaching programme but involves a reimagining of the wider educational environment in which VET teaching and learning takes place – both in schools and the workplace.

In this chapter we examine the value of the “whole-school approach” as a tool for creating an educational environment for VET learners in which democracy and human rights are valued, taught and practised. It focuses on the role of schools and is therefore mainly applicable in the context of school-based VET systems.

CDC as preparation for a way of life

The starting point for the RFCDC is the belief that democracy does not just depend upon the existence of democratic institutions and laws. Democratic institutions and laws cannot themselves function unless citizens practise a culture of democracy and hold democratic values and attitudes (Council of Europe 2018). Education for democracy should not be seen primarily as the accumulation of factual knowledge about the institutions of democratic government, therefore, but as the initiation of learners into a democratic way of life and the acquisition of democratic values and attitudes (Council of Europe 2018).

This sort of learning is not just a matter of cognitive processes and cannot be achieved through formal instruction alone. It requires the provision of experiences that engage a learner’s whole person. Central to the acquisition of the competences that go with a democratic way of life, then, is the need for students to be able to experience this way of life in the everyday routine of their education. This includes

opportunities to “act” as democratic citizens – participating, collaborating, resolving conflicts and so on – and to engage with a culture in which democratic values and attitudes are respected as a foundation for judgments and taking action. Essential to the implementation of CDC, therefore, is the cultivation of an educational environment in which CDC are both respected and practised (Council of Europe 2018).

Montenegro: CDC through peer mediation

Peer mediation for conflict resolution is an activity implemented in the majority of VET schools in Montenegro. Schools have teams of trained learners. They are trained by NGOs or by teachers themselves, through the government’s Centre for Alternative Resolution of Conflicts (<https://centarzaars.me>), and accredited by the Bureau for Education Services for in-service training of teachers (<https://profesionalnirazvoj.edu.me/katalog>). Peer mediation provides learners with opportunities and empowers them to take responsibility for their actions and to co-operate to find solutions to problems, and improve communication between learners, and between learners and teachers. It also teaches them skills such as listening, critical thinking and problem-solving.

Implementing CDC in schools providing VET

Studies from a number of countries indicate that schools providing VET have generally been less successful in their provision of citizenship education than other schools. Data collected between 2002 and 2012 from 24 European countries showed that people educated through vocational programmes had lower levels of political engagement than those in general/academic education. A comparative study of the voting intentions of 16- to 18-year-olds in Denmark, England and Germany found that students enrolled in vocational education reported the intention to take part in elections less often than students in the general track (van de Werfhorst 2017).

There are likely to be a number of reasons for this discrepancy and it will be important to take these into account in implementing the approach to citizenship education proposed by the RFCDC in this area of schooling. Some of the factors involved will be specific to the VET sector, while others may be more extreme forms of factors common to all schools. They include the following.

Time constraints

Many VET providers suffer from curriculum overload and there is little time available for teachers to include what they perceive as additional content. It is possible that this situation is more acute in VET schools on account of the rapid evolution of industry standards and technological advances, including digitalisation, requiring constant updates to the curriculum. A 2016 study found that German VET teachers suffer from a less healthy work–life balance, less resilience and higher perceived stress than employees in other professions (Sappa, Boldrini and Barabasch 2019).

Thus, there is unlikely to be much appetite among VET teachers for new stand-alone courses in CDC, or indeed for any new CDC-related activities that appear to take time away from their set programmes.

Attitudes and expectations

Beyond the issue of time constraints, there are a number of attitudinal tendencies among VET stakeholders with which attempts to implement CDC need to work. These include, first, teachers' and trainers' expectations of their learners, and, second, their understanding of their own professional roles and the limits of these roles. For example, there can be a tendency for vocational teachers and trainers to have narrower expectations of their students on account of their social or ethnic background or gender, and not actually see them as future change agents or critical citizens. They may think of democracy as the privilege of others. While this is not true of all teachers or trainers, even those who are open to discussing CDC-related issues with learners are often put off from doing so because they feel it is not part of their job. They may see democracy as a humanities subject and not really part of vocational training at all, or simply feel it is not what they are mandated to teach (Suhonen et al. 2023).

Multiple learning environments

Another characteristic of VET schooling that affects the implementation of CDC is that learning does not always take place in the classroom, or even in the school itself. In some cases, large parts of a VET student's education take place in the workplace. Thus, VET students often experience not one but multiple learning environments, each embodying different sets of values and attitudes. This poses a number of challenges for the implementation of CDC. First, incorporating the learning and exercise of CDC into out-of-school environments. Second, cultivating an integrated CDC-friendly atmosphere across learning environments, such that one does not undermine the efforts of others. Finally, coping with reduced opportunities for the type of classroom work often associated with citizenship teaching (Suhonen et al. 2023).

Diversity of practice

A key feature of the VET sector is the diversity of practice found there, not only in relation to specifically vocational teaching but also to provision for citizenship education. Citizenship education provision varies significantly between VET institutions, both between and within different countries – from no provision at all to discrete civic education courses or units of work, dedicated extracurricular activities and student councils or learner representation on school decision-making bodies. This means that there can be no one-size-fits-all approach to CDC based around specific areas of practice. What will suit one set of practices may not be appropriate for others. What is required, therefore, is a flexible approach to CDC that is capable of being adapted to local practices.

The whole-school approach

The whole-school approach originated in the late-20th century as a response to the limitations of isolated educational interventions for enhancing social and emotional competence in young learners. In 1998 the World Health Organization recommended the whole-school approach when considering pro-health educational interventions as more likely to be effective due to its multicomponent focus (World Health Organization, 1998).

Historically, the main feature of the whole-school approach has been the embedding of learning in the daily routine of the school through the involvement of the whole school community – learners, teachers, administrators, parents and external partners. Over time, the whole-school approach has been extended to a wide range of aspects of learner development, including areas such as emotional and mental well-being, physical activity, and relationships and sexuality.

It has also been commonly used by citizenship educators. A mantra that has accompanied the development of citizenship education in English schools is that it is a “subject and more than a subject”, and several commentators have pointed to the role played by the school environment in the acquisition of citizenship competences (Bhargava and Jerome 2020). This contrasts with the traditional compartmentalised approach to civic education conceived as a stand-alone course delivered in isolation from other activities.

The whole-school approach is one of the strategies recommended in the RFCDC for developing a culture of democracy in schools. The reference framework follows the example of other authors in dividing the whole-school approach into three broad areas:

- ▶ teaching and learning;
- ▶ school governance and culture;
- ▶ co-operation with the community.

“Community” in this context refers to all the relevant stakeholders outside the school: parents, public and private services and institutions, apprenticeships and workplaces.

These three areas are not entirely separate from each other but overlap and impact on one another. Taken together, however, they make up the overall educational environment of a school or educational institution (Council of Europe 2018).

In the RFCDC the notion of a whole-school approach to CDC is applied only in the context of a single institution or learning environment. However, there are good reasons for believing it also has potential in the context of forms of education and training involving multiple learning environments – such as where workplace experience complements in-school learning in the shape of placements.⁶

6. In so-called dual systems, where the main learning venue is not the school but the enterprise, using the term “whole-school approach” is tricky. The Council of Europe *RFCDC – Guidance document for vocational education and training*, from 2024 therefore operates with the term “integrated approach” (see www.coe.int/en/web/education/-/new-isbn-publication-rfcdc-guidance-document-for-vocational-education-and-training).

The advantages of a whole-school approach to CDC in VET schools and associated learning environments

A case for the application of a whole-school approach to CDC in general schools and higher education institutions is set out in the reference framework. For democracy and human rights to become a reality in daily life in society, they must also be a daily reality in schools and colleges. Making democracy and human rights a reality in such institutions is more than a question of formal teaching, it is a function of “all aspects” of the life of the institution (Council of Europe 2018). It may also exert a positive influence on student achievement and increase learners’ personal life satisfaction (ibid.).

All of this would seem to apply equally in VET schools and their associated learning environments. Over and above this, however, there are a number of other reasons why a whole-school approach to CDC might be particularly effective in the VET system. These include the following.

A whole-school approach does not have to be time-consuming

By focusing on the wider educational environment rather than specific teaching content, a whole-school approach to CDC does not have to make extra demands on already overloaded VET teaching programmes or take away any of the limited contact time teachers and trainers might have with their learners. This does not, of course, preclude the introduction of new CDC-related teaching courses or extra-curricular activities, but simply means that these kinds of extra professional commitments are not essential to the whole-school model.

Austria: CDC through learners’ participation in curriculum implementation

In 2023, the Ministry of Education, Science and Research in Austria ran a project entitled “Democracy makes schools” (*Demokratie macht Schule*), where learners actively participated in the implementation of curricula. New curricula for VET schools were created taking into account the results of a campaign and a social media strategy developed together with learners and co-operation with schools and other organisations – through a combination of online and offline co-operation.

The Youth Advisory Board (*Jugendbeirat*) followed the whole process of curriculum development. Among the questions asked were “What do you want to learn and what not?”; “What do you need in order to be prepared for work life?”; or “Which framework conditions and methods do you need in order to be enthusiastic, effective and goal oriented?”.

A whole-school approach is open to all learners

A whole-school approach to CDC does not depend upon any particular learner profile, or linguistic or other ability. The learning potential of the VET environment is available to all, if nothing else than by the sheer dint of the fact that all participate in it. This can go some way to allaying concerns that CDC may not be relevant to certain groups of learners, such as refugees, for example. The question is not which learners are suitable for a particular course, but which sort of educational environment is suitable for particular students.

Greece: CDC for refugee learners

In the 2023-24 school year, a VET school in Egaleo accepted refugee learners from a shelter for unaccompanied minors for the first time. In order to make the school more inclusive, the school participated in the “Schools for all” project, which applies CDC in school life. To implement their new knowledge on inclusion, teachers and learners decided to create links with a nearby special education school. Starting with the self-presentation of learners and their culture, they planted an olive tree as a symbol of friendship and co-operation between the schools. To present the activities of the agriculture sector of the VET school, learners of both schools decided to plant fruits and vegetables in the special school garden and care for them together. The need to co-operate led to the creation of a table with everyday words in the languages of all learners. They also taught each other words and phrases. But they didn’t need to teach songs as many were already known and shared across cultures. In time, the teachers took an advisory role in the initiative and the learners took over the whole project. Due to the positive evaluation of the project in both schools in the first year, learners and teachers proposed continuing the project for a second year, involving more teachers and learners and expanding the activities. School visits became regular, followed by invitations to common lessons, mostly in the laboratories. New project ideas were created. The deal to continue into the 2024-25 school year was sealed with a common meal, made using products from the garden, cooked according to traditional recipes from different countries.

A whole-school approach is appropriate for any learning environment

A whole-school approach to CDC does not require any particular institutional setting. Although the idea of the whole-school approach was first formulated with general education in mind, it can be applied in any setting, including settings with multiple learning environments. In fact, it is particularly well-suited for situations where there are multiple learning venues, because it can be implemented in small steps (see below), by being first applied in one environment and then extended to another. Opportunities for CDC vary from one learning environment to another, of course – for an examination of the possibilities presented by in-company training, for example, see Chapter 4.

Ukraine: are CDC used in a business environment?

The “Company”, an entrepreneurship training programme for young people in Europe was approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine in 2023. In this programme, learners gain experience of founding their own enterprise, writing a business plan and producing and marketing goods or services, as well as financial accounting and reporting. Everything happens under the supervision of a pedagogue, and with the help of a mentor from an active successful enterprise. Learners around the world get practical experience: the ability to work in a team, leadership and presentation skills, and experience in planning and financial control. During training, young people are helped by volunteer consultants who are representatives of active businesses. They co-ordinate learner companies and provide mentoring support in the work process.

Attitudes of civic mindedness, responsibility and self-efficacy, and the skills of autonomous learning, analytical and critical thinking and co-operation are all involved here, albeit implicitly. What needs be done in practice is to make them explicit.

A whole-school approach can be motivating for teachers and trainers

A whole-school approach gives stakeholders in schools and training institutions ownership over CDC. A democratic culture cannot be imposed from outside; it has to be built by institutions and their stakeholders themselves – otherwise it is not democratic. It is they who are responsible for decisions about which democratic competences they would like to work on and how they do this. Empowering education and training stakeholders in this way not only encourages them to take responsibility for CDC and see it as part of their professional role but can be motivating in its own right.

A whole-school approach is compatible with a diversity of CDC practices

A whole-school approach to CDC can have value in VET institutions whatever the existing state of citizenship education – whether or not there are separate CDC-related courses or activities, student councils, learner representation on decision-making bodies, or dedicated extracurricular activities. This is because a whole-school approach does not presuppose any particular practice but focuses on the wider environment of the institution as a whole. Integral to the whole-school approach is the idea that it is the stakeholders who decide the practices they wish to develop or enhance.

Georgia: CDC through extracurricular activities

Within the framework of the 2022-30 unified National Strategy of Education and Science of Georgia, VET institutions, in close collaboration with civil and/or private organisations, write and implement projects that serve to introduce and develop extracurricular activities within formal educational VET institutions. Projects contribute to the close co-operation of VET institutions and civil organisations and the popularisation of VET education in general. Within this call, along with several important issues (inclusion, gender equality, etc.), youth participation is especially emphasised. In 2023, 22 VET institutions and 36 partner organisations were involved, engaging up to 3 000 participants. Planned activities included seasonal camps, the establishment of student spaces in VET schools, intellectual and sports championships, and various interest/hobby clubs.

Applying the whole-school approach in VET schools and workplaces

While there are a number of advantages to the whole-school approach for VET learners, this does not mean that the whole-school approach to CDC can be applied in VET schools and their associated workplaces in exactly the same way as it might in general/academic education. It needs to be interpreted to reflect the context in VET schools and the distinctive features that characterise them – particularly in relation to multiple learning environments, constraints on time, stakeholder attitudes and the range of practices and institutional arrangements in the VET system. It is not the whole-school approach per se that is important here, but the way in which it is applied. We can express this in the form of number of distinctive operational principles and emphases. These include the following.

Emphasising democracy as a way of life

It is important for VET school stakeholders and, where relevant, their partners in companies or in workplace training, to be able see that democracy is a way of life, not just a set of institutional arrangements and procedures, such as majority voting, laws, governments, etc. The 20 CDC show what democracy means in everyday life, e.g. solving conflicts peacefully, valuing cultural diversity, listening to others and so on – in school as well as on a national level.

Focusing on the learning potential of the educational environment

It is also important for stakeholders to be able to see that introducing CDC need not mean the creation of new teaching programmes. The acquisition of CDC can be as much a function of an institution's educational culture as its formal programmes. For example, an institution that values cultural diversity will help its learners to value cultural diversity. One good thing about this is that it does not mean taking time away from teachers' or trainers' existing teaching commitments.

Enabling stakeholders to see CDC as a legitimate part of their professional role

Schools and their partner institutions are not just collections of individuals, they are mini societies in their own right. Through their structures and rules and expectations, written and unwritten, they promote a set of social ideals and practices – such as about how people should live together, how power should be distributed, who should have a voice, etc. Whether aware of it or not, all stakeholders have a role in determining the social culture in their institution – there is no opting out. Understanding this can help VET stakeholders to see that CDC are a legitimate area of professional concern for them.

Building on the foundation of existing practice

Helping VET stakeholders to become aware that they are already implementing aspects of CDC, perhaps without realising it, tends to make CDC seem more realistic and doable. It also makes the concept of democracy as a way of life easier to grasp. Building on and enhancing existing CDC initiatives, like input on workers' rights or opportunities for learners to participate and make their voices heard,⁷ is also an important starting point.

Armenia: CDC through learners' voices

Since 2011, student councils are mandatory in all VET institutions in Armenia. The student council is a self-governing body of VET learners and protects their interests. The student council of the school is established formally and enjoys the rights provided by the charter of the VET institution. Representatives of the student council are members of the managerial board of the college (25% of all members of the board) with voting rights for all aspects related to the VET institution, including issues related to administration, budgets, teaching, etc.

Linking CDC to vocational learning

Encouraging VET teachers and trainers to link CDC to vocational learning outcomes not only has the advantage of building on existing practices but also of making the competences "real" without having to introduce new teaching content.

Belgium: CDC through vocational learning

In the city of Hasselt, in collaboration with Oxfam, learners were challenged to develop a product of the future, during a game called "Fair Enough". The learners were to think about what a piece of clothing, snack or smartphone should look like in, say, 20 years. They were challenged to develop a product that is sustainable in a social and ecological way. In their own start-up, they worked together

7. See Chapter 8 on learner participation.

as producers, workers and consumers. The game provides different paths that make change possible both in process and in end-product. In doing this, learners develop attitudes of self-efficacy and responsibility, as well as analytical and critical thinking, adaptability and co-operation skills.

Empowering stakeholders to create their own solutions

A democratic educational environment cannot be imposed from outside – otherwise it would not be democratic. It needs to be built by the stakeholders themselves. So, an essential principle of CDC implementation is that VET stakeholders interpret the competences for themselves, identify their own challenges and how to respond to them.

Implementing CDC gradually in small achievable steps

Implementing CDC through a whole-school approach is a process in which all stakeholders can have a part to play, and which involves many areas of education and training activity, including those which take place in the workplace. For these reasons, implementing such an approach cannot be a one-off activity, but needs to be understood as a gradual and incremental process taking place through an accumulation of small concrete steps over time.

Encouraging integrated working⁸

Partnership working is regarded as one of the three broad areas in the whole-school approach (see above), and is generally understood in terms of staff within a school working with partners in the community beyond. In VET schooling, where there can be multiple learning environments, this is particularly important. Where schools and workplaces or other educational venues co-operate on CDC-related issues, students will have a more integrated, therefore effective learning experience.

Austria: CDC through co-operation with external partners

The Youth Advisory Council (*Jugendvertrauensräte*) is an important contact point for apprentices and acts as a mediator between the concerns of the apprentices and the company management. The role of the Youth Advisory Council is to:

- ▶ represent the economic, social, health and cultural interests and regulations of companies to young employees or apprentices;
- ▶ eliminate existing deficiencies or to prevent any deficiencies that may arise in the future;

8. The importance of an integrated approach to school-workplace working for the implementation of CDC is highlighted in the guidance document, DGII/EDU/COMP(2023)24, p. 38, <https://rm.coe.int/dgii-edu-dce-2024-03-preparatory-study-for-dce-curriculum-framework/1680aefee8>.

- ▶ participate in the meetings of the works council in an advisory capacity;
- ▶ make suggestions on issues relating to vocational training and further vocational training.

In VET schools there is a school community committee (*Schulgemeinschaftsausschuss*) made up of nine members, consisting of three teachers, three parents and three learner representatives. Among other things, the committee is involved in autonomous school curricula regulations and school events. Learners are also represented in negotiations with the authorities by the Federal Student Council (*Bundesschülervertretung*).

Involving leadership and management

Although, in principle, a whole-school approach can start with any school/workplace personnel, in practice it is unlikely to progress far without the involvement and approval of leadership and management. This means not only school directors, but any personnel with direct accountability for the educational environment that learners experience, including managers and administrators in companies and workplaces, and those responsible for policy development, the planning cycle, and self-evaluation and improvement.

Getting started

Although there may be many ways of applying a whole-school approach in VET schools and partner institutions, including the use of the characteristic operational principles and emphases above, the starting place will always be the same. It begins with the democratic competences and descriptors outlined in the RFCDC. The competences define what is to be learned in CDC in a general sense: valuing democracy, respect, co-operation, tolerance of ambiguity, etc. The descriptors describe observable and assessable behaviour that demonstrates a certain level of proficiency in learning in relation to a specific competence. They indicate how the competences can be converted into concrete learning outcomes that can be taught and assessed. The list of descriptors included in the framework is not intended to be exhaustive, but illustrative of the nature of the learning outcomes one might plan.

As in general schools, the introduction of CDC is a two-fold process.

Reflection on CDC

It begins with an understanding of what the competences are and how they might be expressed in concrete terms in the daily life of a school, and, where relevant, its partner institutions. For example, seeing the competence of “respect” as being about treating other people as equals and giving them a voice. This involves stakeholders reflecting on how they see their own expression of the competences in the educational environment; for example, how they see themselves as expressing equality, flexibility and adaptability, openness to cultural otherness and so on. The process

of reflection allows stakeholders not only to see how the competences can be embedded in everyday life but how many of them are already part of their current practice, even if they are not made explicit.

Training exercise to encourage professional reflection on CDC

A VET school director wants to introduce the use of CDC to the school. She wants to include the teachers as partners in the initiative (respect), so she starts by organising a meeting of the Teachers' Council. She knows that, like every change, it will not be an easy task but feels capable of managing it (self-efficacy), so this doesn't stop her from setting out on the task (tolerance of ambiguity). She prepares herself to approach everyone with an open mind (openness to other practices) in order to understand the possible fears and anxieties (conflict resolution skills) that are created by change (empathy). No matter how strong her own wish for change is, she reminds herself of the need to observe the reactions of others and listen attentively to every objection expressed (skills of listening and observing). She has carefully prepared the terminology she will use when presenting (knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication), in order to emphasise that she is referring to issues of common interest (civic mindedness). She starts by mentioning the strong points and achievements of the school (knowledge and critical understanding of the self) in spite of the socio-economic and cultural diversity of learners (knowledge and critical understanding of economies and culture) and invites teachers to analyse these and find out how they have achieved them (analytical and critical thinking skills). She feels not only accountable for the school's successes but also for its failures – realising that introducing competences is something that will benefit her school (responsibility). This is also why she values the contribution of all the school stakeholders, who she hopes will start working together (co-operation skills). She does not expect that results will come quickly but realises that each step will be meaningful and important (flexibility and adaptability).⁹

Training exercise to encourage reflection on CDC¹⁰

- ▶ Think of a lesson you have enjoyed.
- ▶ Note down what made it good and the reasons why you enjoyed it. (For example, you were more illustrative, you triggered the learners' interest, they participated more, they were more co-operative, etc.).
- ▶ Visit the butterfly (see page 8), go through the CDC and note down the ones that you find relevant to the reasons that made you enjoy that lesson.
- ▶ Try to imagine how different this lesson would be if the competences you

9. This exercise was created for this chapter.

10. This exercise was created for this chapter.

- ▶ List the selected competences according to the frequency that you use them and/or the importance that they have for your lesson.
- ▶ Share your outcomes with colleagues.

Reflection on learners' needs

In the second part of the process, stakeholders reflect on learners' level of CDC, and where and how this is expressed in the life of the school and/or workplace or training institution. They consider the challenges facing learners' development as active citizens and select from the reference framework the CDC they think are most in need of development. In real life, the competences are not entirely separate but mobilised in loose clusters (Council of Europe 2018: 32). For example, "respect" combines with "empathy" and fuels "listening and observing". Having agreed on a particular cluster of competences they wish to develop, stakeholders consider what the expression of these competences would mean in concrete terms in real life. On the basis of this they identify a number of learning outcomes they would like to achieve, using the descriptors in the framework or, more likely, creating their own descriptors based on their understanding of the meaning of the competences in the context of the learners and their school. Having settled on some common competences and descriptors, they apply these to the education and training environment, deciding where and how these might be most effectively achieved.

Training exercise: relating CDC and descriptors to vocational learning outcomes

Laboratory guide – Air conditioning installations I, for the speciality of technical installations, refrigeration, ventilation and air conditioning, for third class of VET in Greece.

Exercise 8, on page 58: "Checking the correct operation of the heat pump and measurements". Sixth objective:

"Learners should be able to consult the manufacturers' manuals for the air conditioning systems, identifying the possible faults that they may face and the required corrective actions that they must take, as well as the maintenance procedures for the units".

Selection of CDC and relevant descriptors to include in learning outcomes, as follows.

A. Self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to understand issues, to make judgments and to select appropriate methods for accomplishing tasks):

- ▶ shows confidence that he/she can solve most problems if he/she invests the necessary effort;
- ▶ shows confidence that he/she is able to make decisions about the best

- ▶ shows confidence that he/she knows how to handle unforeseen situations due to his/her resourcefulness.

B. Tolerance of ambiguity (acceptance of complexity, contradictions and lack of clarity, and also willingness to undertake tasks when only incomplete or partial information is available):

- ▶ expresses a willingness to consider contradictory or incomplete information without automatically rejecting it or jumping to a premature conclusion;
- ▶ accepts a task which requires dealing with unknown or unusual circumstances;
- ▶ is comfortable encountering things that are unfamiliar to him/her.

C. Analytical and critical thinking skills systematically breaking down the materials that are under analysis into constituent elements, and organising those elements in a logical manner, and also making judgments about whether or not materials under analysis are valid, accurate, acceptable, reliable, appropriate, useful and/or persuasive:

- ▶ can identify similarities and differences between new information and what is already known;
- ▶ when faced with a problem, tries to determine what caused it;
- ▶ can reflect critically on past experiences in order to inform future progress;
- ▶ when it comes to solving a problem, he/she thinks about all of the things that are part of the problem before deciding what to do.

This example illustrates how CDC can be linked to many workplace activities.

Training exercise: selecting CDC and descriptors¹¹

- ▶ Choose your favourite lesson content, the one you like teaching the most.
- ▶ Reflect on its expected learning outcomes.
- ▶ Describe for yourself which of these learning outcomes you chose in order to teach that particular lesson, and what more are added from your personal teaching experience (this is in answer to issues like: when learners have been taught this issue, they will be capable of answering the following questions, performing these actions, discussing this dilemma or difficulty, deciding on what to do if, etc.).
- ▶ Go through the CDC and choose two to three competences that seem relevant to the learning outcomes you have listed. Go through their descriptions and underline the relevant issues.
- ▶ Choose one of them and find its relevant descriptors (RFCDC Vol. 2). Note them down.
- ▶ Combine the behaviour descriptors and match them to possible learning activities, connected to the existing learning outcomes.

11. This exercise was created for this chapter.

Conclusions

CDC is not so much a separate element in education and training as a dimension running throughout it. As such, it cannot simply be implemented through an additional stand-alone course. Rather, what is required is a reimagining of the whole environment in which education and training takes place. In this chapter we have argued that in the VET system where school and workplace often work together hand in hand, some form of the whole-school approach is likely to be the most appropriate mode of implementation. The whole-school approach not only reflects the role of the wider education and training environment in the development of CDC but it also has advantages in its own right. It is capable of respecting the time constraints and workloads to which VET staff are often subject. It includes all learners. It is motivational both for teachers and trainers. It is a flexible approach that is capable of being adapted to different learning environments and is compatible with a range of CDC practices. Applying the whole-school approach to VET learning does, however, mean extending the concept to contexts in which more than one institution is involved. The success of such an approach will depend on the extent to which the different institutions involved, school and workplaces, are able to integrate their activities. It is this meeting point between school and the workplace that we see as one of the most fruitful areas for CDC development in the VET sector in the immediate future.

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Chapter 6

CDC and inclusion

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Inclusion – Introduction and definitions

The concept of inclusion has evolved significantly over time, both in Europe and globally. The interpretation of inclusion has expanded from focusing primarily on special education to a wider understanding, highlighting the importance of equity, access and participation for all. This shift has brought attention to certain groups, often defined as marginalised or disadvantaged, who may face various degrees of vulnerability, such as migrants, ethnic minorities, low-skilled and unemployed adults and low-income families. These groups often experience different forms of social exclusion due to their specific situations as well as social and economic backgrounds. Over the past two decades, social exclusion, disengagement and disaffection among young adults have become major challenges for European countries and beyond. Increasingly, young people are being impacted by a range of destabilising social, economic and political factors. These have included the inflation crisis and rising unemployment, the climate crisis, international military conflicts and the influx of refugees and migrants as well as the effects of Brexit, acts of terrorism and the global disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Each of these issues has exacerbated the challenges faced by young adults, putting their social and economic inclusion at greater risk.

The topic of social inclusion has increasingly become central to policy and practice discussions and debates, with a strong emphasis on the role of education and training in promoting social inclusion. The debate brings attention to the need for education systems, at all levels, to be more responsive to the diverse needs of learners who are at risk of social exclusion. As a result, the social inclusion agenda has emerged as a key element within lifelong learning policies across the globe. Today, inclusion is often linked to concepts such as widening participation, civic education and active citizenship, targeting specific groups divided into categories such as social background, gender, ethnicity and special educational needs (Cedefop forthcoming). This chapter will explore different ways of thinking about inclusion and democratic competences, while also providing examples of contemporary practices.

Vocational and work-related learning has consistently been recognised as a core component of national and international lifelong learning (LLL) strategies, aimed at promoting greater participation and inclusion of both young people and adults,

including those considered vulnerable or disadvantaged. Across Europe, the VET system is central to strategies to integrate young people into society and the labour market. It plays an important role in fostering social inclusion by equipping young people and adults with the vocational, basic and personal skills required for their progression. In relation to VET, CDC and inclusion, it is important to think about historical and traditional understandings of who the VET learner is and will be as well as their place in society. Educational routes that are considered more vocational in nature typically allocate less time and content to CDC (Nylund et al. 2018; Wheelahan 2015). This division can be traced far back in history and is known by various terms, but all relate to the same phenomenon, that is, the theoretical/practical divide, the mental/manual divide, the academic/vocational divide, etc. This divide is so strongly embedded in history that we barely think about it. However, when it comes to education and its historical division into the theoretical, mental, academic track on one side and the practical, manual, vocational track on the other, there are significant consequences for individual inclusion to CDC. That brings us back to the historical and traditional understandings of who the VET learner is and will become. Academic students are typically viewed as those who will contribute to political developments in society, so their schedules and curricula often include more subjects like social sciences, focusing on understanding and reasoning. In contrast, vocational learners tend to focus more on practical, hands-on activities specific to their field (Nylund, Rosvall and Ledman 2017). However, while recognising the traditional historical divide and its implications, it is worth noting that with current technological developments, such as digital technologies and AI, some VET profiles are becoming less “manual”, with a growing tendency towards higher levels of “theoretical” input (for instance through digitalisation, such as in car mechatronics or information technology specialisation within the VET system).

How this is implemented in different countries’ curricula differs (see for example Chapter 1 and Cedefop forthcoming). Nevertheless, it is important to take into account that because of their choice of programme learners might be thought of differently when it comes to how they will contribute to democratic processes and the transformation of workplaces and society. Thus, they might be differently exposed to content and organisation that develop CDC. In this chapter it is emphasised that inclusion is closely related to VET learners’ participation, as well as their ability to exercise their voice and engage with CDC in both learning and working contexts (see also Chapter 8). It is important to recognise that supporting the active participation of young adults benefits not only them individually in their CDC but also strengthens the entire social context and democratic cultures within VET and work-related contexts. In addition, it is beneficial to VET recruitment if young people about to choose their career path see VET contexts as inclusive.

Inclusion covers many aspects and can be interpreted in different ways. To make our focus clear, we have divided this discussion into four sections, each focusing on a particular interpretation of inclusion and addressing CDC. In this chapter, we categorise inclusion into individual, social, political and economic dimensions, which relate to various aspects of participation, for instance through competences, engagement, empowerment or exercising active citizenship (Field and Schemmann 2017; Kersh et al. 2021; Holford, Riddell and Weedon 2008; Rosvall and Nylund 2022).

These dimensions are often integrated into the context of policy and practice; however, for the purpose of a more meaningful discussion, we will initially consider them separately.

- ▶ Individual inclusion refers to inclusion through gaining critical understanding, competence and knowledge. This can be gained through the individuals' own actions, or in VET, through pedagogical practices in school and at the workplace. Understanding, competence and knowledge for democratic culture contribute to the individuals' confidence to act, thus enhancing their self-efficacy.
- ▶ Social inclusion refers to the right to belong and be included socially, intellectually, culturally and personally, including the right to be autonomous. Thus, in order to develop CDC, individuals need to be included in their immediate and wider communities, and the practices within these communities need be inclusive in order to facilitate a democratic culture.
- ▶ Political inclusion refers to the possibility to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social order in the workplace and in civil society. Inclusion and CDC are essential for participating in formal and informal transformations of the workplace and society.
- ▶ Economic inclusion refers to inclusion through socio-economic participation, such as employment, developing employability and enhancing labour market and vocational skills.

CDC, as developed by the Council of Europe, including values, skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding, are relevant across all dimensions of inclusion. The role and significance of these competences within each dimension of inclusion may vary depending on factors such as specific contexts or specific target groups (migrants, refugees, young people not in education, employment or training, for example). The issue of digital inclusion and exclusion cuts across these dimensions and has been recognised as an important factor that may either facilitate or undermine the development of CDC and its inclusion in VET and the workplace. Digital technologies can support the inclusion of diverse groups in various ways, including the accessibility of resources and appropriate tools, virtual and distance learning, and social interactions (Gottschalk and Weise 2023).

Individual inclusion, CDC and VET

Individual inclusion involves achieving inclusion by developing critical understanding, skills and knowledge. One element of CDC is to have some general and basic understanding that involves democratic competences related to critical understanding. Democratic cultures are complex, and understanding one's own and others' positions in the workplace and in society involves knowledge supporting critical-evaluative (evaluate usefulness), critical-analytical (ability to draw parallels) and critical-ideological (understanding underlying world views) competences. However, it is common that inclusion in a profession through VET focuses on employability, and employability is then mainly understood as fostering profession-specific methods and procedures. This may contribute to fostering competences needed to exercise a democratic culture in the workplace implicitly rather than explicitly, and such

methods and procedures can be understood as integrated into democratic culture. (Corbett and Ackerson 2019; Seitamaa and Hakoköngäs 2022). Methods and procedures at work often involve aspects like division of labour, environmental effects and developments that require different approaches. To address these issues, individuals need to be introduced to knowledge and content that prepares VET learners to contribute to the democratic dialogue in the workplace.

Competences for navigating a democratic culture, such as knowledge of responsibility, respect and communication, are important for employability and the ability to contribute to and be included in the democratic dialogue in the workplace. However, in a formal curriculum, a time plan and assessments, those competences are not always at the forefront (see Chapter 2 for more discussion on the assessment of CDC). For example, in the assessment of workplace learning at the Swedish Health and Social Care Colleges, only specific methods and procedures related to the care of patients are evaluated. In other words, in this context, there are few incentives for mentors to include VET learners in environments where CDC can be learned (for example, in workplace meetings where the development of the workplace might be discussed), since it is not evaluated. On the other hand, health and social care programmes with a strong focus on responsibility, respect, communication skills and ethics towards a patient/customer have sometimes been noted to have spill-over effects that lead to discussions on workplace ethics among colleagues. The learners then have some training from courses including patient ethics that can be generalised to ethics and CDC among colleagues. However, it is noteworthy that programmes focusing on ethics towards patients and customers are often female dominated.

Thus, boys in male-dominated programmes/trades might be less included and exposed to CDC since these are not considered as central to the trade as they are in health and care-dominated professions (Ledman, Rosvall and Nylund 2017; Ledman et al. 2021).

A cross-European study of good practices for developing active citizenship among young adults (see Schmidt-Behlau 2019; Kersh et al. 2021) has highlighted that sociocultural competences, such as tolerance, respect, a sense of responsibility and adaptability play a crucial role in fostering democratic environments and enhancing learners' confidence and mutual understanding in VET-related settings. However, such competences are often acquired implicitly, rather than explicitly, through engaging with practical activities, acquiring digital skills and developing critical thinking and understanding. Therefore, individual inclusion in CDC involves the individual's acquisition of critical knowledge. That can be achieved through gaining factual knowledge of norms and values, including how these intersect with discriminatory structures (for example the classical sociological categories such as gender, class and ethnicity). It also involves understanding important trade-specific organisations, their connections and parliamentary structures. Individual inclusion in CDC can also encompass competences of how different actions or arguments are valued in democratic cultures. For example, the written word might be more valued than the oral, a protocol from a formal group meeting might be considered more valued than an informal individual letter, and arguments supported by both specific and general examples might be more effective

than those based only on specific or general examples. Understanding, competence and knowledge for democratic culture contribute to the inclusion of individuals and their confidence to act.

Social inclusion, CDC and VET

Social inclusion can be divided into two parts, “before” and “during”. Before refers to how VET learners are included in (or excluded from) VET, that is, how traditions, norms and/or educational structures are inclusive or not. Here we understand VET as a potential platform for developing CDC, which some might be/feel associated to, while others might be/feel excluded from through norms, structure and organisation. Inclusion then refers to widening participation (focusing on a few categories, such as gender (sexuality), special educational needs, ethnicity) as well as career guidance and counselling, structures that are to be inclusive to VET learners who need to work on the side. However, it is not enough to solely focus on recruiting non-traditional learners – one must also focus on social inclusion through the development of CDC “during” VET, both in the school-based part of the education and the workplace-based part, in order to make all learners feel socially included (Rönnlund and Rosvall 2021).

Inclusive practices are highly relevant to the development and cultivation of democratic competences, including values, skills, attitudes, and knowledge and critical understanding. Improving confidence, responsibility and co-operation skills through learning achievements and acquiring VET skills plays a crucial role for learners, facilitating their perceptions of being included in their immediate and wider contexts, where digital technologies and platforms may contribute to developing social networks. Specifically, for vulnerable young adult learners, building confidence and self-esteem through social interactions has been identified as highly significant, for fostering their sense of “belonging” and inclusion (Kersh et al. 2021).

In other words, social inclusion involves the work done before learners enter VET, often referred to as widening participation, and to practices during VET itself. Social inclusion during VET can be inclusion in workplace meetings, introduction to non-discriminatory policies and involvement in specific activities or courses that focus on collaboration, inclusion and understandings others’ perspectives (see also Chapter 5 for a discussion on implementing CDC in VET institutions). As noted above, individual inclusion, among other things, involves factual knowledge about trade-specific organisations. Similarly, social inclusion refers to the practical experience of inclusion and participation in those organisations or engaging in negotiations with other stakeholders or collaborative organisations.

Political inclusion, CDC and VET

Continuous technological advancements in the labour market, such as the shift from human-operated vehicles powered by internal combustion engines to autonomous vehicles powered by electric engines, the expanding opportunities for remote work across various industries, the ongoing transition to online retail and the introduction of AI, will present significant challenges for all learners, including those in VET.

Concerning political inclusion where CDC are involved, VET learners might ask themselves the following questions. If alterations manifest themselves in my workplace, how can I exert influence over them? Which organisations will be implicated, and what are the stances of their representatives regarding these changes? What will the landscape of my profession look like in 15 years? Will it endure at all? Might I need to retrain, and if so, how and when? It is crucial to regard democracy and inclusion within society and professional domains, alongside sociotechnological and organisational progressions, as matters open to deliberation rather than phenomena merely to be acknowledged and adjusted to. Other notable concerns encompass the influxes of asylum seekers, “economic migrants” and increasingly likely “climate refugees”. The reactions to recent surges have encompassed the bolstering of populist factions throughout Europe, as well as robust pressures to cultivate tolerance and facilitate integration. It is improbable that these issues will diminish in significance in the foreseeable future, thus it is imperative for VET learners to be included and cultivate the capacity to comprehend the associated socio-economic and political dialogues, both broadly and within work environments (see also Rosvall and Nylund 2022). Here, CDC in VET play an important role in the political inclusion of VET learners as it refers to their ability to participate in the construction, maintenance and transformation of social order in the workplace and in civil society. In a sense, political inclusion can be understood as building on both individual and social inclusion. For active political inclusion the VET learner needs CDC that support the maintenance and transformation of the workplace and civil society (individual inclusion) and a social space to act that is acknowledged and legitimised by others (social inclusion).

Economic inclusion, CDC and VET

The focus on employability, driven by policies that emphasise free markets and individual responsibility, has strongly shaped strategies to help young adults enter the workforce. These employability efforts are based on moving young people into work and helping them develop the skills needed for today’s job market, including digital skills, which have become increasingly important in recent years in the context of employability and inclusion (Cedefop 2023). The goal is to improve young people’s participation and inclusion by getting them into employment and contributing to society through paying taxes. This approach, which links lifelong learning and inclusion to economic value, has led to a focus on equipping young adults with the skills needed for the labour market. The VET system, as a means of integrating young people through the world of work, has become a core element of many inclusion approaches across Europe and beyond (Evans and Niemeyer 2004; Holford, Riddell and Weedon 2008). Sometimes these strategies have been adapted to the needs of specific target groups. For example, migration and the influx of refugees across Europe and beyond has resulted in schemes and programmes that aim to integrate newcomers, such as refugees and migrants. The role of CDC in fostering economic inclusion has been recognised as important (Kersh et al. 2021; Tacchi, Toiviainen and Kersh 2023). Values, attitudes and critical understanding have been highlighted as central competences that contribute to young people developing their employability skills. Through these competences, young people can become economically active

(by starting an apprenticeship, for instance) and perceive themselves as economically included. At the same time, their economic inclusion can also contribute to developing their CDC. Studies (Kersh et al. 2021) show that becoming economically active helps learners develop independence and confidence, allowing them to see themselves as more active citizens. In their immediate work-related contexts, this might help them develop a sense of belonging within their working and learning communities, including both physical and virtual spaces, and build their confidence to become involved with democratic practices at work and beyond. Access to and participation in VET, as well as work-related networks and resources, can facilitate these experiences, support solidarity and foster engagement and interest in social and political developments.

Here, in trajectories from unemployment to employment, countries' organisation of VET for adults has proven to be important (Kangas and Karonen 2022). However, research has shown that VET for adults usually contains fewer elements to develop CDC than VET aimed at younger people (Köpsén 2022). This is because adult VET, more commonly than youth VET, addresses re-education for the unemployed or competence development for employees. Accordingly, it is more common for adult VET to be organised as short-term courses and to address competences needed for specific processes or methods to become employed or develop at a specific workplace. Since those courses are often compressed in time and tailored to fit individuals' schedules, more complex content such as the development of CDC is often reduced or omitted (Wheelahan and Moodie 2022). This can be problematic since those groups might have less experience in developing CDC even though the contrary can also be true, that is, since they are older, they may have developed democratic competences or at least consciousness of the issues involved.

Implications and considerations for practice

The following examples will illustrate the implications and considerations for practice. In the examples, individual, social, political and economic inclusion are intertwined. However, the examples are chosen in order to exemplify the different dimensions of inclusion.

Example 1: Strong structures

Structures such as organisation and regulations might have important implications for inclusive practices and CDC in VET. The following example derives from the implementation of VET colleges in Sweden.

As a response to, among other things, a decline in young people choosing VET programmes and a regional shortage in supplying the local labour market with skilled labour, technical and health and social care colleges were established in 2007 and 2008. Through a strong structure of organisation and collaboration between regional and local enterprises, education and unions, one goal is to establish clearer routes for VET learners from education to work (see also Chapter 8). An outspoken goal for some collaborations is to attract "new" groups of learners to the VET programmes on offer, for example females to male-dominated industry programmes.

VET colleges in Sweden (primarily school-based VET)

VET systems are structures where a strong emphasis is placed on establishing collaborations between the participating parties: schools (teachers), enterprises, unions, learners, etc. This may hold the potential to increase development of CDC and political participation in the workplace. In VET college structures, it is mandatory to establish boards at different levels where VET learners are represented. In the programmes offered by some VET colleges, it is also mandatory for VET learners to try out different workplaces. Sometimes it is also mandatory that the learner tries different positions in the same workplace, that is, to develop an understanding of the chain of production as well as of colleagues' working conditions and needs.

Often in VET, learners' destinations are perceived as being one particular place, for example an apprentice often continues to work at the same location where he or she has had workplace practice. The implications for practice, as illustrated in the example above, suggest that where learners try different positions and where VET learners might be perceived as advancing through the system to potentially become the next department manager, it could require a fundamentally different way of thinking. A learner who could potentially become the next superior needs to be included in (political) discussions on transformations in the workplace and thus needs to develop CDC in the workplace. VET with a strong structure and collaborations between parties bears the potential to enhance the political inclusion of VET learners. On the other hand, when the learners move between companies, it might be difficult to enhance social inclusion and participation. A structure where the learners' transition between different enterprises also needs to include structures where the learners feel socially included. Even though CDC are not the main goal, the organisation of the colleges can, as a side effect, develop CDC. For example, trying different positions may help learners understand workplace problems from different perspectives, which is an important competence for democratic culture and inclusive practices.

Example 2: Vulnerable groups – Example minority groups

Many VET schools and trades in most countries work with widening participation in order to include "new" groups of VET learners, for example individuals from untraditional gender backgrounds, immigrants and students with special educational needs, among others.

"New" groups representing a minority in the workplace or VET might be exposed to non-inclusive practices, and in the worst cases, harassment and discrimination. Those practices can be of different kinds and be exercised by different individuals or groups representing different ways of interacting between colleagues, customers, patients and managers. Thus, in order to be inclusive, quite a few projects and initiatives have been implemented in order to develop CDC. One such initiative is called Brave Space.

A Brave Space initiative in the Netherlands

The Brave Space initiative in the nursing programme was a grassroots project aimed at creating a space where students could share their stories and develop action plans. Due to changes in management, it took time to prioritise this initiative, and there was significant resistance from some teachers. However, the students and teachers working in pedagogical partnerships successfully elevated the importance of the initiative on the agenda. As a result, more students participated in the safe spaces, and sessions were held with the inclusion office. After a workshop led by student partners for all teachers, there was a noticeable shift in how colleagues perceived the project, recognising its importance and value. Students could access all classes and reach out to all students. Building such partnership takes time. Student and teachers must adapt to their new roles. It is crucial to dedicate time to the process, finding a balance and establishing equity-based relationships. Initially the students were less vocal but over the first year, this changed, with students increasingly taking the initiative (Council of Europe 2024).

When working with CDC in VET it is important to acknowledge the traditions and environment of the school or workplace regarding how CDC are implemented. As in the example above from the Netherlands where the Brave Space initiative was implemented in the nursing programme, there was notable resistance from teachers during the implementation and it took time for the learners to become vocal and to take the initiative. Thus, when implementing new content for inclusive CDC it is important to take the time factor into account. However, the method used in the Brave Space initiative is probably also of importance. It is not unusual that young people perceive democratic processes as boring or alienating, feeling that these processes are not for them, that they do not truly have a say or that adults do not understand their perspectives (Rönnlund and Rosvall 2021). Thus, it is vital to create inclusive social spaces where discussions evolve around themes important for those who participate. However, in order to generate new ideas and solutions for democratic cultures it is important to not be absorbed by individual cases, but to take individual cases into account and expand to other contexts to achieve broader explanatory power (Muller and Young 2019). In other words, to be inclusive and strengthen the sociocultural structure and democratic cultures within VET and work-related contexts, it is important to show relations and patterns between the individuals' experiences and general patterns.

Example 3: Digital inclusion and the implications for CDC

Digital inclusion and exclusion have become increasingly important issues in contemporary debates on social inclusion and the promotion of civic participation and democratic values for young adults.

The potential of digital learning and digital media to enhance democracy by facilitating active citizen participation has been highlighted as a crucial aspect of the process of becoming citizens (Dahlgren 2011). The EduMap Horizon 2020 project has highlighted a strong causal relationship between media literacy, civic cultures

and democracy (Kersh et al. 2021; Tacchi, Toiviainen and Kersh 2022). For instance, digitally literate young adults are best positioned to participate actively in public issues. As the world becomes increasingly digitalised, being digitally literate is essential for accessing information, services and networks in a timely manner. Digital literacy has become a central skill for finding employment, learning opportunities and socialising, with significant implications for CDC and inclusion. Digital literacy fosters inclusion by facilitating engagement with various social and professional networks, which can, in turn, influence individual values, critical thinking and personal skills development.

The EduMap project: “Adult education as a means to active participatory citizenship” (Horizon 2020)

This project analysed communicative ecologies, including the role of digital communities for young people, in relation to their need for and ability to access information and participate in adult education and VET.

By examining examples of good practice across 20 countries, the project identified five essential elements that enable young people to engage with digital communities (both social and learning) and encourage more active participation: 1. the capacity to aspire and construct goals; 2. access to social networks and hubs; 3. access to relevant content and information; 4. access and use of relevant media and platforms; 5. possession of needed information and communication competences and literacies.

A significant finding was that social networks are critically important for access to adult education and VET information, particularly for isolated and hard-to-reach groups. The research emphasised the importance of adapting the variety of digital media options to the needs of an educational environment and cultivating communication competences and literacies for professionals and learners both in adult education and IVET. Digital communities and information and communication play a crucial role in providing resources for overcoming vulnerability and social exclusion.

The project provided insights into how these approaches can be integrated into adult education programmes to combat exclusion and cultivate active citizenship competences, such as CDC. It found a strong causal relationship between media and digital literacy, civic cultures and democracy.

Example 4: Inclusion through embedding democratic principles into VET curricula

This example is furnished by the Erasmus+ KA2-project GreenVETers and is concerned with embedding “citizen deliberation” and “deliberative democracy” for sustainable development into official VET curricula.

This provides an example of enhancing active citizenship and inclusive practices in VET settings through raising civic awareness and addressing climate change. The approach involves implementing “citizen deliberation” and “deliberative democracy”

for sustainable development into the official VET curricula. Deliberative democracy, a model of democratic practice, contributes to enhancing inclusion by facilitating engagement in socially significant issues and emphasising the role of discussion and debate in decision making. This approach to democracy prioritises the processes through which learners and other stakeholders engage in thoughtful, inclusive and reasoned dialogue to make policy decisions. These processes require the development and use of CDC.

As an outcome of this project, specifically, the learners of VET schools are expected to benefit from their education on environmental sustainability and from the introduction of education on deliberative democracy principles. As a result, the GreenVETers project aims to embed the democratic principles of citizen deliberation, engagement and deliberative democracy within VET agriculture and engineering courses. The project's innovative open educational resources and activities aim to achieve these objectives within European countries and beyond.¹²

Example 5: Work integration social enterprises (WISE) – Social inclusion through work integration¹³

Work integration social enterprises (WISE) are established primarily to provide employment opportunities for disadvantaged individuals who, due to various situations of vulnerability, are unable to secure jobs in conventional workplaces, even if they possess relevant skills and competences.

The goal of WISE extends beyond simply creating job opportunities, as they aim to enhance employability and promote social inclusion through a system of sheltered employment. In this sense, WISE are often described as “schools of citizenship”, helping individuals rebuild their lives and reconnect with society.

Although there are different WISE models across European countries, these initiatives are united by a shared understanding of “the relationship between employment, citizenship, and local sustainable development, in which learning, adult education, and lifelong learning play an important role” (Marhuenda 2009: 79; see also Markowitsch and Scharle (forthcoming) on the role of NGOs in VET).

Conclusions

Even though we have treated individual, social, political and economic inclusion as separate dimensions in this chapter, it is important to recognise that they are interconnected in practice. If we for example think of the role of VET learner representatives on different boards, those VET learners need individual knowledge, critical understanding and confidence to participate rather than merely serve as figureheads. In terms of social inclusion, it is also important to consider the representation and democratic culture of the board in order to make everyone feel socially included and thus politically included.

12. For further details, see <https://greenveters.eu/the-project/>.

13. For further details, see Marhuenda (2009).

The age at which learners are launched into different tracks, for example vocational or higher educational preparatory tracks, is a well-known factor that significantly impacts what young people imagine as possible. That is, young people seem to follow a specific track throughout life more strongly the earlier in age they are differentiated in tracks (Allmendinger 1989; van de Werfhorst 2021). In terms of inclusion in VET, it has proven important to keep vocational tracks open and inclusive throughout the educational system. That is, for a VET track to be a realistic option regardless of social background, gender, ethnicity, experience of special educational needs, etc., it must be accessible and equitable. This might not directly refer to the individuals' CDC but rather how VET as a system fosters CDC in terms of being inclusive (Nylund and Rosvall 2014). Norms and/or discriminatory environments certainly work as barriers that discourage participation and undermine democratic processes. By creating learning environments that recognise and address the needs and perspectives of a wide range of groups, VET as a system can promote critical thinking, collaboration, civic engagement and the development of democratic competence among learners. Inclusive practices within VET can foster an understanding of the importance of democratic culture and the value of contributing to communities. Such practices may include contextualising democratic competences in ways that are relevant to young adults' personal backgrounds, situations and learning experiences, as well as creating opportunities to exercise competences that are meaningful to the VET learners. This approach would not only enhance personal and professional development but also strengthen social inclusion by encouraging participation in democratic processes through VET. Digital technologies can support the inclusion of different groups in various ways. However, it is important to note that a focus on inclusion can sometimes unintentionally weaken the appreciation and perception of VET (see Cedefop forthcoming) and thus when working with inclusion in recruitment to VET and VET practice it is equally important to work with quality and excellence.

Recommendations for policy and practice

To VET education policy makers

- ▶ Place inclusion at the core of VET education, during recruitment to VET and throughout the VET experience.
- ▶ Acknowledge and incorporate different dimensions of inclusion – individual, social, political and economic – into all types of curricula.
- ▶ Involve VET learners in decision-making processes and encourage their input on inclusion during curriculum development.
- ▶ Recognise that fostering inclusion is integral to achieving quality and excellence in VET.
- ▶ Promote the use of digital technologies to support the inclusion of a wide range of groups, including investing in infrastructure and ensuring equitable access to technology.

To VET teachers and mentors

- ▶ Select appropriate content and organisational practices that promote inclusive participation, addressing individual, social, political and economic inclusion for all learners.
- ▶ Create safe, supportive and personalised spaces for learning and engagement.
- ▶ Encourage VET learners to actively participate in decision-making platforms, such as school councils, workplace meetings and social dialogue initiatives.
- ▶ Use digital technologies to support the inclusion of a wide range of groups by enabling flexible learning, improving accessibility and fostering personalised approaches that cater to different needs and circumstances.

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Chapter 7

The role of social partners in developing CDC in VET learners

Søren Kristensen and Peter Kerckhofs

In many countries in Europe, employers' associations and trade unions play an important – but not always well-defined and recognised – role in developing CDC in the context of VET. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and make visible their contribution to the work of promoting the acquisition of CDC in VET learners.

Despite an at times seemingly antagonistic relationship, trade unions and employers' organisations have many common interests – hence the term “social partners” – even though their motivations may differ. This also goes for VET and CDC. But social partners are labour market organisations, and the situation in the world of work is of course not comparable to political democracy. Nevertheless, many of the competences that are conducive to democratic procedures are also valuable in a workplace context and can also be fostered in these environments.

Social partner engagement can comprise all three dimensions of democracy learning: learning about democracy (knowing “the rules of the game” and the roles of relevant organisations and social institutions); learning through democracy (learning through participation in forums of dialogue); and learning for democracy (acquiring the competences necessary to become a proficient player in democratic processes) (Dembra 2019). However, the differences between VET systems, and not least the role and influence of the social partners in Europe, involve such complex issues, often deeply rooted in specific historical and societal developments, meaning that broad, sweeping statements are impossible to make. Moreover, in some countries social partner involvement is still in a nascent state and perhaps best viewed as potential that is still waiting to be fully developed.

The chapter starts out by stating the rationale – why social partners are engaged in VET and CDC respectively – and then moves on to identify and describe modes of how social partners are, or can be, involved. Examples will primarily draw on information from Denmark, which is arguably one of the European countries where the influence of the social partners on VET is most pronounced and visible, and where these are in charge of functions that in most other countries would be carried out

by the state (“the Danish model”). This will, however, be compared and contrasted with examples drawn from a wider European context whenever feasible.

Charting the role and influence of social partners on CDC in VET means navigating a highly diverse landscape when viewed from a European perspective. It is a challenge to find comparable information across the 46 member countries of the Council of Europe, as the field has not been the target of any dedicated research at European level and indeed in most European countries. The efforts at this stage are therefore necessarily mainly of an exploratory nature rather than building on an established body of knowledge.

Social partners and VET

Social partners have a priori a vested interest in VET, first and foremost due to the simple fact that it is from among graduates of VET institutions that many enterprises recruit large parts of their skilled workforce, and trade unions their members. Both recognise the need for a high-quality VET system: it provides enterprises with competent labour and trade unions with members with qualifications that enable them to negotiate good salaries and working conditions. Consequently, they have a strong motivation for being involved in the development of VET, for example through participation in relevant councils and committees at national, regional and sectoral level. In countries with apprenticeship systems, they moreover have a very direct role in the delivery of training, as VET learners spend the majority of the duration of their programme in the workplace.

The ability of social partners to influence VET systems depends, of course, on the extent to which they can be said to be representative of the total numbers of enterprises and workers. However, membership rates in trade unions and employers’ associations differ widely from country to country in Europe. Generally, in countries with high levels of membership of trade unions and employers’ associations (like in most northern European countries), the legitimacy of these organisations to participate in negotiations about relevant issues is high. On the other hand, in countries with low membership rates – and/or with competing organisations representing religious or political divides, and where not all of these may be recognised for participation in the social dialogue processes – the degree of membership-based influence these can exert is correspondingly lower (Eurofound 2023). However, even with low levels of membership, social partners may still exert a strong influence on VET policies due to their role in collective bargaining, in workplace employee representation structures or in legislation securing their presence in relevant committees (Eurofound 2016).

In Denmark, most private enterprises with employees are organised into associations that in turn are represented by the Confederation of Danish Employers (DA), and approximately 33% of all employees work in a DA-associated organisation (Confederation of Danish Employers n.d.). Similarly, the Danish Trade Union Congress, which organises trade unions in fields where a VET background is relevant (not academic staff), has a membership of 1.3 million out of a total workforce of approximately 3 million in the country (approximately 43%). It is perhaps just as important

that the social partners mutually acknowledge each other's role and legitimacy and often speak with one voice vis-à-vis government – in particular in matters pertaining to VET. Consequently, the social partners exercise a very strong influence on VET, where they advise the government on issues related to VET in the national VET council, and form what are called trade committees for each VET programme where they decide on relevant learning outcomes. Social partner representatives also make up the majority of representation on the boards of VET schools, and their influence is further exacerbated by the fact that VET in Denmark is delivered in a dual system, where learners are salaried apprentices in their workplaces.

In France, trade union membership is low, but workers' representatives in relevant committees are required by law and these are directly elected in workplace elections and without any consideration of trade union membership numbers. On the side of employers' associations, a number of these – based on an assessment of their representativeness – are selected by the state for participation in cross-industry collective bargaining and cross-industry social dialogue forums. Article L1 of the French Labour Code stipulates that:

Any reform project envisaged by the government concerning individual and collective labour relations, employment and vocational training, and which falls within the scope of national and cross-industry negotiations, shall be subject to prior consultation with the representative employee and employer trade unions at the national and cross-industry level, with a view to the possible opening of such negotiations. (Eurofound 2023)

In France, both school-based VET and apprenticeship training exist; the latter being the most common side by side.

In Bulgaria, only 8.5% of the total workforce is organised into one of the two recognised trade unions, whereas approximately 34% of the enterprises are organised into the five recognised employers' associations. Both of these trade unions and all five employers' associations are represented on the Supervisory Council of the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training, which advises the government on issues related to the development of the VET system (Eurofound 2023). The majority of VET programmes are school-based, and only a minority of learners undertake apprenticeship (dual) training (Cedefop 2018).

Social partners may also set up what are termed "paritarian" organisations at sectoral level to support and develop issues related to VET. Paritarian organisations are structures, established by collective agreement, in which trade unions and employers' organisations jointly organise and co-manage the practical implementation of agreed measures. In Germany, SOKA-BAU (www.soka-bau.de) is (among other activities) also involved in co-funding and organising vocational training in the construction sector. In Spain, the Fundación Laboral de la Construcción (www.fundacionlaboral.org/) aims to improve vocational training and skills among workers, promote health and safety in the workplace and generally improve employment. In Italy, Formedil (www.formedil.it) promotes, implements and co-ordinates initiatives for training, safety, qualifications and professional requalification in the construction sector (AIEP n.d.).

However, it must be borne in mind that the term "social partners", which makes sense in a Danish context, may be misleading in other contexts, as it would seem to indicate

a situation where both parties are in agreement and share influence between them on an equal basis. This is not the case everywhere.

In England, employers play a key role when it comes to developing apprenticeship standards, whereas trade unions have no formal role in this (British Council n.d.). The Institute of Apprenticeship and Technical Education and, most recently from 2024, Skills England gather labour market intelligence and organise the groups of employers that develop apprenticeship standards. Awarding organisations develop VET qualifications that are delivered in further education colleges and other training providers. Awarding organisations must provide evidence that they have consulted with employers. They also work with partners across the VET landscape to support the development of sector-specific curricula, qualifications, training and accreditation.

Social partners and CDC

While the motives for trade unions and employers' associations to engage in the development of VET systems are fairly evident, their motivation and legitimacy for engaging in the promotion of CDC is less straightforward and is indeed sometimes called into question.

In 1970, the American economist Milton Friedman formulated the "Friedman doctrine" in which he argued that enterprises have no responsibility to the public or society, but only to their shareholders by maximising profits. Earning money will directly or indirectly ensure welfare and societal development (Friedman 1970).

The equivalent of the "Friedman doctrine" also exists on the trade union side through the emergence of "yellow" or "alternative" unions that provide strictly personalised services to members without engaging in affairs of wider societal interest, including contractual bargaining processes and participation in committees and platforms engaged in development and quality assurance of VET systems. This significantly reduces their costs, and they compete with "traditional" trade unions by offering membership at rates that lie significantly below what these charge their members. According to this perspective, enterprises and workers should concentrate on what is perceived as their "core business", and thus leave CDC out of their focus.

On the other hand, it can be argued that management and owners of enterprises, as well as trade union members, are citizens in the democratic societies of Europe, and as such they are (or should be) naturally concerned with the continued functioning of the system. In Denmark this is most visible because many labour market issues (such as minimum wage levels) are regulated by collective agreements and negotiated between the social partners, rather than through state legislation ("the Danish model"). The underlying logic here is that democratic competences should be a concern for the labour market because enterprises do not exist in isolation but are an integral part of society, and as such they must assume a broader responsibility for providing stable and secure societal frameworks, including workplaces. It can also be argued in a narrower sense that democratic dialogue is of direct importance to their own interests, since social unrest – expressed through unpredictable "wildcat strikes", for instance – poses a threat to the economic viability and profitability of

enterprises, and also to the welfare of the workforce. Of course, enterprises are as a rule not democratic institutions where decisions are taken by majority vote, but many enterprises see the value of an organised dialogue arranged along democratic principles between management and employees, where important decisions can be discussed – if not negotiated, as is the case in Denmark – before they are implemented and potential conflictual themes defused. Similarly, trade unions may consider it advantageous to try to advance the interests of workers through peaceful means rather than through costly (and not necessarily successful) industrial action, and save the latter as a last resort. These concerns are openly expressed in various policy documents:

The Confederation of Danish Employers wishes – also at European level – to promote and support the social dialogue between employers and workers, so that economic and social progress go hand in hand. (Dansk Arbejdsgiverforening 2024)

Trade unions have always been a big part of – and a guarantee for – our democratic society. We see direct parallels between how well our democracy functions and trade union membership. (3F Ungdoms Principprogram 2024, lines 218–220)

This dialogue is often institutionalised in work councils that in many countries is a legal requirement.

As European enterprises are increasingly faced with shortages of (especially) qualified workers, a further argument for focusing on CDC in VET is linked to the need to attract and retain apprentices and young workers in the enterprise. Forums of dialogue can make the enterprise more attractive to these groups, as their voices are heard and grievances can be addressed before they become acrimonious.¹⁴ To sit down around a table and discuss conflictual issues is not necessarily something that comes naturally, but requires preparation and training, preferably from an early stage. Social partners recognise this and have in many countries and enterprises taken steps to ensure that VET learners develop such knowledge, skills and competences – basically, CDC – either through practices integrated into the workplace or the VET school. This happens in a number of contexts and in different ways.

About democracy – Social partners' influence on CDC in VET legislation, curricula and local school policies

In most – if not all¹⁵ – European countries, the social partners are represented in national or regional councils or committees that advise the government on matters relating to VET policies. Their actual influence is, of course, circumscribed by a number of factors, notably their representation vis-à-vis the labour market, their ability to co-operate and reach consensus between themselves, and their strength in relation to other stakeholders, notably ministries and public authorities. The picture is consequently highly differentiated across the spectrum of European countries (Eurofund 2019). In principle, however, they do have the possibility to push for the inclusion of CDC-related content in relevant legislation and policy

14. See Chapter 8 "Learners' voice and participation".

15. No overview of the situation in the 46 member states of the Council of Europe exists.

orders on VET, but we have no information about the extent to which this actually happens (or has happened in the past) – not even at anecdotal level. However, within relevant VET legislation in many European countries,¹⁶ it is stipulated that VET programmes must promote issues of democratic citizenship among learners, so presumably they have at least reached agreement on the inclusion of this theme, if not actively promoted it.

In countries with strong social partner organisations, these are often very directly involved in curriculum development and the definition of detailed learning objectives. In Denmark, it is thus the social partners that identify and formulate learning objectives for VET in the framework of the trade committees, which are composed of an equal number of representatives from both trade unions and employers, and of which there is one for each of the 103 VET programmes that currently exist. A similar situation exists in Germany, where the social partners have a say in deciding which VET programmes are offered and what content is provided. At the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), committees made up of employer and union representatives create and develop professions and content (curricula). As with CDC in VET legislation, we do not have any insight into the extent to which social partners involved in curriculum design are actively pushing for the inclusion of CDC-related issues. A comparative report from Eurydice from 2018 (European Education and Culture Executive Agency 2012), covering primary and secondary education (including IVET) in 31 European countries concludes that all of these include provisions for “citizenship education” in their curricula. CDC issues are present in most IVET curricula (Council of Europe 2024), so again the social partners – insofar as they are involved in curriculum design – will in all likelihood at least have condoned this.

In most countries with dual systems, an important part of the curriculum is delivered by enterprises. These have appointed staff responsible for the learning of apprentices (in-company trainers), and in many cases formulate specific learning objectives for the training undertaken. In countries with overwhelmingly apprenticeship-based systems, in-company trainers will usually (but not always)¹⁷ need to acquire a short formal qualification to equip them for the task of assuming responsibility for overseeing apprentices’ learning pathway in the enterprise. In some cases, such as in Germany, this programme contains specific references to CDC-related competences that learners should acquire, intercultural competence, for example. This aspect has been covered in a separate chapter (Chapter 5) in this publication and therefore will not be further elaborated on here.

VET schools can also influence agendas on CDC as they in most cases have the possibility to profile themselves by offering training that lies above and beyond the minimum requirements of the curriculum, for example through optional subjects or dedicated projects. Schools may be directly under the state or regional authority, or they can be private institutions receiving funding from the state to provide recognised qualifications. In the latter case, they will often have a “board of governors”

16. Again, no overview exists, so the statement is made on the basis of anecdotal evidence.

17. This is not the case in Denmark, for example, where no formal qualification for in-company trainers exists.

consisting of competent persons to guide and advise management on strategic issues in the running of the institution and often also to assume responsibility vis-à-vis the state on issues like quality of provision and economy. Board members may be either recruited according to an analysis of needs, as is the case with the United Kingdom's further education colleges (the main providers of VET in the country) (Department for Education United Kingdom 2022), or appointed as representatives of local/regional stakeholders. In both cases, social partner representatives may sit on the board and may thus be able to influence school policies – potentially in the direction of CDC as an integral part of provision.

In Denmark, both representatives of local trade unions and employers' associations are by legislation required to be present in VET schools in equal numbers, and together they form the majority of the board. Moreover, local trade committees are formed for each of the programmes offered by the school, which are composed of social partner representatives and representatives of staff and learners, with the former in the majority. They advise the school on a number of issues, including on how the school can best accommodate the skills and competence needs of local enterprises, and as such they may influence the way curricula are delivered (Industriens Uddannelser n.d.).

Due to the lack of any dedicated research and hard-nosed evidence, any statements on social partner influence on CDC agendas in relation to VET legislation, curriculum development and local school policies must be somewhat conjectural. However, we know that the social partners do engage themselves in promoting CDC among VET learners at school and enterprise level, so it seems reasonable to assume that this is also the case at systemic level – even though this conclusion admittedly is built on circumstantial evidence.

Through democracy – Social partner-supported platforms for democratic dialogue

An important pedagogical principle in VET is learning by doing – that learners through their participation in practical contexts (such as production processes in the workplace) pick up the knowledge, skills and attitude they need to become competent in their trade. This is also the case when it comes to CDC. The most conspicuous example of this is student councils, which engage in dialogues with school management and elect representatives among VET learners to participate in school boards' deliberations about issues concerning school management and pedagogy (Industriens Uddannelser n.d.). Through their engagement in student councils, learners can develop and hone competences needed for democratic culture, and by participating in elections, other learners may acquire an understanding of larger democratic processes. It is important to note, however, that the social partners themselves, in an analogy with what happens at school level, also offer platforms in a workplace context where elected representatives of VET learners may engage in a dialogue with management. This occurs in relation to two interrelated and sometimes overlapping practices: that of social dialogue and corporate social responsibility (CSR), of which the former is the most relevant in our context.

Social dialogue is the process whereby social partners exchange information and negotiate on work-related issues that affect – or may affect – workers in a given enterprise. This can happen at the level of the individual workplace, but (for example, where the enterprise is present in several locations) also at regional, sectoral or national level – or even across borders (for multinational enterprises). Social dialogue is often embedded in legislation through the mandatory creation of platforms like work councils or other more targeted committees dealing with issues connected to working conditions and welfare. As with student councils, the actual remit of work councils may differ across Europe or even from case to case – they can be platforms for information exchange, but also for more extended consultation procedures, and in some instances even negotiations, where shared decisions are reached (International Labour Organization 2024).

VET learners do not necessarily participate in work councils or committees, but in some countries with dual systems, legislation is in place that prescribes enterprises above a certain size to set up structures or forums to enable the dialogue between apprentices as a distinct group of employees and management. Apprentices will elect representatives among themselves, and these will participate in regular meetings and discuss pertinent issues with representatives of management, in a similar way to student councils in VET school settings.

In Austria, since 1973 it has been embedded in legislation that apprentices in enterprises with more than five apprentices have the right to elect a representative from among themselves (*Jugendvertraungsrat*) who can take up any issues related to the situation of apprentices with management. Representatives are elected for a two-year period, and during this time they can take up to two weeks off from work duties to prepare for and participate in meetings with management. The representative can also take part in meetings of the work council in an advisory role and as the voice of the apprentices. A particular focus of the function is to highlight any issues related to the training of apprentices – problems or proposals for improvement (ÖGB n.d.). Similar legislation is in place in Germany (Von Betriebsräten 2022). In Denmark, there are no designated forums for apprentices, but as employees of enterprises, they can propose themselves for election to all committees and councils as workers' representatives.

CSR has become – especially since the start of the 21st century – an integral part of the policies of many (especially larger) enterprises, where they acknowledge their responsibility vis-à-vis the wider society and engage in various activities in opposition to the “Friedman doctrine”. These are voluntary efforts and could be directed at environmental protection and philanthropic contributions as well as by issuing guidelines for financial and ethical practices, some of which contain issues related to equity and democratic participation. Most are directed at the public outside of the enterprise, but CSR may also reach inwards into the enterprise itself and affect conditions for those employed in the enterprise (such as policies for inclusion). With regard to developing CDC in VET learners, there are examples of enterprises organising networks of apprentices (Council of Europe 2024), either vertically within large corporate structures or horizontally between many smaller enterprises in order to provide a platform for these to discuss pertinent issues (regarding health, for instance) and address management.

For democracy –

Social partners' initiatives to promote CDC in VET learners

Even for VET learners who are not directly involved in social dialogue activities, the workplace still constitutes an important venue for VET learners to develop CDC, especially in enterprises with a formulated set of values to guide their actions and a constructive interplay between management and workers at shopfloor level. Through the interaction with colleagues and by following the examples set by role models, learners can develop skills conducive to democratic citizenship, notably connected to communicative and social skills, peaceful conflict resolution, tolerance, intercultural competence, etc.

There are, however, also instances where the social partners – either individually as trade unions or employers' associations, or in unison – take a more direct role in developing CDC in VET learners through targeted initiatives, either in the workplace or in a VET school setting.

An example of a joint social partner initiative comes from Austria, where the Austrian Federal Railways at least twice per year organises a seminar (about an hour and a half long) on CDC-related issues for all their approximately 2 000 apprentices. Members of the works council co-operate with their youth representatives, the trade union and the Austrian Chamber of Labour to implement these seminars, where key topics are the promotion of democratic competences and an introduction to apprentices' representation of interests (in works councils, trade unions, chambers of labour). Besides the key topics, specific focus may be introduced in consultation with local in-company trainers and supervisors.

In Denmark, social partners help to set up (and in some cases also participate in) the annual "Day of Democracy" for VET schools, organised by the Danish Youth Council, where they participate in panel discussions on democratic issues, identified by the learners themselves (DUF). The Day of Democracy has been an annual feature since 2017, and topics are chosen by the learners themselves in the VET schools that decide to participate. These have in the past included the lack of placement opportunities (apprenticeships) for young people in VET, job creation for young people, faith in democratic processes and crime prevention. The Day of Democracy is organised in collaboration with the Danish Trade Union Confederation and TEKNIQ (one of the largest employer organisations in Denmark) as well as organisations representing VET learners and youth sections of political parties represented in parliament.

There are also examples that are initiated by just one of the social partners, as follows.

In Germany, the organisation Gelbe Hand (Yellow Hand) (www.gelbehand.de/ueber-uns) has been set up and is financed by the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) and affiliated trade unions to offer tailor-made democracy sessions with a specific focus on inclusion, particularly for VET schools and enterprises with apprentices. It has been active for over 30 years.

Trade unions in many European countries furthermore play an important role in equipping apprentices with the knowledge, skills and competences needed to

represent learners in platforms of social dialogue. They have developed material and regularly conduct courses and training sessions for this purpose.

In Austria, the trade unions produce information material and conduct courses for apprentices that have been elected for the *Jugendvertraungsrat* (see above), so that these are able and competent to engage in the dialogue with the employers (ÖGJ n.d.).

Trade unions and employers' associations also exist within the education and training sector, and they share a joint concern about democracy and democracy learning in their workplace and developing the democratic competences of learners.

The CONVINCe project (2018-2020) is an initiative by the European Trade Union Committee for Education, the European Federation of Education Employers and the European School Heads' Association that aims to provide teachers and indeed the whole school community with tools and methods to optimise the development of CDC in learners. Through a questionnaire-based study among European schools, examples of good practice have been identified and analysed, and the lessons learned have subsequently been disseminated across Europe through workshops and online courses. The CONVINCe project addresses all school forms, including IVET (European Trade Union Committee for Education 2025).

Conclusions

While the role and influence of social partners in the development of VET is fairly well documented at European level, their involvement with issues of CDC is largely uncatalogued in terms of European-level overviews and dedicated research. Even at the level of individual countries, the theme has received very scant attention and its importance is consequently often underrated.

One may encounter the viewpoint that the development of democratic competences in VET learners – together with other general subjects – is exclusively an issue that should be covered in schools, whereas only strictly vocational competences are dealt with on the shopfloor. This is implicit in formulations like the following concerning curriculum development: "Learning outcomes-based qualifications will normally not be exclusively based on information from the labour market. Important information will usually have to be combined with input from other stakeholders, for example on broader objectives linked to citizenship, democracy etc." (Cedefop 2022). In other words, labour market organisations (employers and trade unions) are exclusively concerned with knowledge, skills and attitudes linked to hard-nosed, technological and organisational aspects, whereas "soft" aspects like citizenship and democracy are covered by input from ministries and schools. This dichotomy – school vs enterprise – is potentially harmful if learners experience it as two distinct realities.

On the basis of what has emerged from the research for this chapter, it can be convincingly argued that the role – real or potential – of social partners with regard to the development of CDC is not just tangential, it is – or rather, it can be – crucial. The time spent in enterprises during their learning trajectory – in apprenticeships or (in school-based systems) on placements – represents "the real life" that VET learners prepare for, and if during their apprenticeship and placements they experience an

environment that is hostile to democratic and inclusive practices in the enterprises, all the efforts of the VET school in this respect may be negated. Similarly, if the CDC curricula and practices that are promoted at the VET school are of a nature that does not relate to the situation in the enterprises, learners may come to deem it irrelevant. For this, the involvement of the social partners is essential.

It is not within the scope of this chapter to conduct a full overview of social partner involvement in all 46 member countries in the Council of Europe. From the examples that we have identified, however, it emerges that the social partners are already actively engaged in promoting CDC for VET learners, but that these efforts often are compartmentalised, context-tied and specific, and hence not very visible, especially in terms of a European perspective. As no overviews or dedicated research exist at this level, information has to be collated from a large number of very diverse sources, where issues of comparability and representativity can be very challenging indeed, as conditions differ significantly from one European country to the other. This means that material for inspiration and further development of initiatives can be very hard to come by, and that the wheel may be reinvented several times over in various national contexts as the work to develop social partner involvement in CDC in VET continues.

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Chapter 8

Learners' voice and participation

Andrea Laczik, Tessa Eriksen Grevle and Simon Hawthorn

Developing CDC through learners' participation

It is the right of young people to take part in decisions that impact their lives, a right enshrined in Article 12 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989). In support, the RFCDC emphasises that a flourishing democracy requires not only democratic institutions, but also a culture of democracy, where citizens hold democratic values and attitudes and actively engage in democratic processes (Council of Europe 2018). Given the current political and societal context, the active participation of young people in shaping their communities and institutions is more crucial than ever.

By fostering CDC in VET and creating opportunities for participation, we can encourage VET learners to become active participatory citizens who could contribute to the betterment of society. This empowerment is not just about fulfilling legal obligations or moral duties; it is about enriching our democratic processes with diverse perspectives and innovative ideas leading to a more equitable future. The development of CDC should go hand in hand with the development of skills, knowledge and behaviour for any chosen profession.

In this chapter we address the following questions.

- ▶ Why is it important to focus on learner participation and to strengthen CDC in IVET?
- ▶ How do existing participation processes and structures in workplaces and learning institutions help develop CDC in IVET?
- ▶ How does participation support IVET learners and encourage them to engage in democratic processes and develop democratic behaviour? What are the barriers to a learner's participation in activities that develop CDC?
- ▶ How do society, the learning venues and IVET learners themselves benefit from learners' participation?

One of the challenges most commonly addressed in research on participation and voice concerns the variety of interpretations of these concepts (see for example Graham et al. 2018; Jones and Hall 2022). VET learners' voice and participation are

often discussed together – however, they are not synonyms. Participation can be understood at different levels, and many models and illustrations have been developed to explain and assess participation and voice, for example by ranging participation from tokenistic involvement to full empowerment (Rudd, Colligan and Naik 2006), or by categorising different forms of participation in Roger Hart’s ladder of participation (Hart 1992). Other examples are Sarah White’s table of interests in participation (White 1996) or Harry Shier’s model for pathways to participation (Shier 2001), to mention just two. In recent years, a strand of research on participation and voice has come to consider learner voice from the framework of intergenerational dialogue, in which the dialogue is considered key to the effort to develop more egalitarian relationships within schools. Within this strand, participation presupposes that learners have a voice, that they are able to influence their circumstance and surroundings, that they have choices and that they can exercise collaborative relationships (Graham et al. 2018). The use of the word “voice” by itself has been criticised for merely focusing on the learner’s verbal contributions and not directly addressing the dialogical nature that is required to enhance their influence in a given situation (Jones 2022: 1). The more general term “participation”, on the other hand, can also be criticised for not explicitly including learners’ voices. However, most scholars that only use the word “participation” would consider voice a crucial aspect of learners’ participation. In this chapter, we have chosen to use the word “participation”, but we also emphasise that we consider student voices a core part of participation. Through this choice, we want to signal the importance of all these different and often overlapping aspects of participation within IVET, which is our focal point in this chapter.

VET learners occupy a unique position in the educational spectrum. Unlike their peers in purely academic programmes, they often straddle two distinct learning environments: the VET school or training organisation and the workplace. This dual context provides a rich tapestry of experiences, as learners navigate between professional and school life. IVET schemes provide qualifications to young learners ready to enter the professional world, which – while challenging – presents a distinctive opportunity to nurture the CDC outlined in the RFCDC. The constant transition between school and work offers a unique opportunity to capture VET learners’ interests and help develop participation as citizens at a time when they are in the process of transitioning into professional life. However, there is a need for more research on participation practices in VET specifically (Geurts et al. 2024a).

It is important to support VET learners’ democratic experiences through participation practices, as they have statistically lower levels of political engagement than their peers in academic programmes (van de Werfhorst 2017). A comparative research study found that learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to enter IVET programmes, as is the case for example in Germany and England, and were also less likely to have their political efficacy strengthened or to take part in democratic activities, such as voting (Hoskins et al. 2014). Taking part in participatory practices and influencing decisions that impact society can support learners’ knowledge of and belief in democratic processes, and their own ability as individual(s) to make a difference through active participation is therefore essential.

Inclusive participation in activities linked to CDC would ensure that all VET learners, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds or circumstances, develop the opportunity to express their views and participate. This is particularly important for learners with special educational needs and disabilities, who may require additional support to participate (for a treatment of inclusion in the context of CDC and VET, see Chapter 6).

In some countries, such as Norway, it is obligatory to facilitate the learner's right to participation, something that is included in the formal curriculum and also in the Education Act, which came into effect in 2024 (Stette 2023). The Norwegian Education Act asserts that "Students have the right to participate in all matters concerning themselves according to this law, and they have the right to freely express their opinions. The students shall be heard, and their opinions shall be given weight in accordance with their age and maturity" (Ministry of Education and Research 2024, section 10.2).

In the Norwegian core curriculum, it is stated that:

School should be a place where children and adolescents experience democracy in practice. The students should experience that they are listened to in everyday school life, that they have actual influence, and that they can affect matters that concern them. They shall get experience with and practice different forms of democratic participation. (Ministry of Education and Research 2017, 1.6 Democracy and participation)

This support to learners' right to participate through educational legislation is an important signal to teachers, school leaders and policy makers. However, participation is voluntary, and some VET learners may choose to exclude themselves from experiences that could be essential for developing CDC. Similarly, learners' participation is often quoted as an ultimate aim, and learner representation in many organisations has become an integral part of governing. While this can have a positive impact and transformational power, questions arise as to the extent to which a "truly" co-operative and equitable partnership between the VET learners and teachers, trainers and employers can be achieved. VET schools, training organisations and companies are not necessarily democratic organisations, and there may be power imbalances or conflicting priorities that limit meaningful learner participation. Research conducted by Rosvall and Nylund (2022) suggests that schools and educational or training organisations may be better placed for teaching civic education than the workplace. This is important, as it illuminates the advantage of different learning venues in vocational education for the purpose of developing CDC.

Nevertheless, the workplace has considerable potential to develop CDC in partnership with educational institutions (Fettes 2005) and may provide unique environments to demonstrate certain democratic values (see Chapter 1). It is vital that VET learners are given the opportunity to learn and experience participation practices in decision-making processes concerning questions of power structures in their educational and/or training establishment. This may better prepare them to challenge potential injustices and also actively participate in their workplace and beyond (Rönnlund and Rosvall 2021).

Additionally, there are concerns about which learners end up participating and whether they can truly represent the diverse VET learner body. Research indicates

that the most engaged, academically successful learners are often over-represented in activities and representative bodies. There may also be logistical barriers like scheduling conflicts with work placements that prevent some vocational learners, for example apprentices, from participating consistently.

By focusing on the transformative potential of learner participation and its connection to democratic citizenship, it is clear that communicating the benefits, barriers and the potential for the centrality of learners' participation is key to the implementation of CDC within VET. In relation to participation, we discuss three key themes: democratic citizenship, empowerment and transformative potential.

Democratic citizenship

Democratic citizenship has been described as a “polysemous and contested concept” (Starkey 2012). According to the Council of Europe (2010), education for democratic citizenship entails:

education, training, awareness raising, information, practices and activities which aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and developing their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law.

This broad definition refers to the informed and active participation of VET learners in the civic and political life of their communities and broader society. It includes the knowledge of democratic processes and institutions, but also the skills, attitudes and values necessary for meaningful engagement in a pluralistic, democratic society. Democratic citizenship involves VET learners developing, for example, critical thinking, respect for diversity, civic mindedness and a sense of responsibility for their own actions and their impact on others.

One local project in Norway was developed to support public health and a democratic culture through building self-efficacy and empowerment among youth with a special attention to marginalised youth.

Example: Acro Park

The Acro Park is a fellowship for youth aged 13-20 years, which is located in a vocational upper secondary school in the south-east of Norway. This is a large social network arena in the core of the school buildings, next to the students' dining area in the VET school. It consists of many different spaces where students can be together, for example a makerspace, a podcast studio, outdoor and indoor adventure parks, dancing rooms, music studios, open rooms, homework areas, places to play games and a stage. The park is run by both learners and employed adults, and they decide together which activities to run, equipment to buy and arrangements to make. The youth have their own organisation called RÅ (meaning raw/fierce/awesome), which is the formal owner of most equipment. This organisation is run by young people in co-operation with adults and the youth are involved with all aspects of the administration of this space, including the financial management. The Acro Park is co-financed by external organisations

and the VET school. The park is open from morning until the evening, during weekends and holidays. During the opening hours adult employees are available to talk to the young people and make it a safe space for them. It is free and its slogan is “for youth, by youth”.

Erasmus+ programmes of the European Commission provide an example of a European-scale initiative and of how short-term stays abroad can support VET learners to develop skills, attitudes and behaviours that are necessary to become democratic citizens.

Erasmus+ short-term stays abroad programmes – either in the shape of school stays or placements in enterprises (or a combination) – are frequently used by VET schools as a way of exposing learners to different environments (culturally, vocationally and professionally) in order to develop their skills, for example reflection, adaptation and tolerance, and to enable them to develop a broader horizon and more comprehensive outlook. For VET learners, it could for instance be in the shape of a two-week placement in a company abroad, where they report to work every morning and perform various duties related to their programme and according to their abilities in collaboration with employees there. During the stay they are monitored in order to ensure their well-being, either by an accompanying teacher or by the partner organisation abroad, but it is generally their responsibility to process the many impressions they experience and the differences they notice with their life in their home country. Erasmus PRO offers similar but longer-term placements for apprentices and VET learners seeking both work and educational experiences across differing cultural and national boundaries. This type of exchange is a generally accepted pedagogical practice that also involves a phase of preparation before the stay and a phase of debriefing after homecoming. Participants may travel out individually or in groups, and be accommodated in hostels or with host families, according to the budget available and not least the desired degree of proximity to the culture of the host country.

Participatory schemes such as Erasmus emphasise the importance of learners’ voices being heard and valued in educational and workplace settings, and their ability to influence decision-making processes that affect them. It includes learning and practising the capacity to engage in constructive dialogue, resolve conflicts peacefully and contribute positively to both local and global communities. Importantly, democratic citizenship in VET prepares learners not just for their professional roles, but for active participation in shaping the democratic fabric of society, fostering a culture of inclusivity, equity and shared responsibility for the common good.

Learners’ voice organisations such as the European Apprentices Network (EAN) play a crucial role in amplifying VET learners’ voices at national and international levels. Their support of JobMBO in the Netherlands, for example, helped vocational learners make representations to the Dutch Government about accessibility to VET training, showcasing how learner organisations can influence policy decisions. This kind of engagement helps VET learners understand the mechanisms of governance and policy making, and this is essential knowledge for active citizenship.

In countries where VET learner representation is still developing, organisations like EAN have been instrumental in fostering democratic participation from a learner-led perspective. Their work in Georgia supported the creation of the country's first VET learner representative body. This illustrates how democratic principles can be introduced and nurtured within educational systems by learner-led organisations that stand outside of traditional school structures. By facilitating direct communication between learners and decision makers, such initiatives not only empower learners but also contribute to the democratisation of educational governance.

Enabling and supporting CDC-conducive environments within VET training organisations and workplaces would allow IVET learners to express their views and participate more fully. These require supporting robust, formal and informal participation structures and processes. These can include dedicated staff roles for facilitating learner participation, regular forums for dialogue between learners and decision makers and training programmes to develop learners' advocacy skills. Informal peer networks and mentoring systems play a vital role in encouraging participation. Additionally, digital platforms are increasingly important for providing accessible channels for participation, especially for learners in work-based settings, and for enabling wider informal inclusive participation. The most successful support structures are those that are responsive to the specific needs and circumstances of VET learners, recognising the unique challenges they face in balancing education, work and civic engagement.

Student unions, apprentices' organisations and other VET learner representative organisations play a crucial role in amplifying VET learner voices. These organisations provide a collective platform for advocating learners' interests, often having the capacity to influence policy at institutional, regional and even national levels. There are also international representative bodies such as EAN, which works in collaboration with the European Commission and the Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions. They create regional and national-level frameworks and set up organisations to represent learners in partnership with national trade unions and the European Trade Unions Confederation, national and regional employers and educators, and government and industry. These representative structures offer valuable opportunities for leadership development and can serve as a bridge between individual learners and decision-making bodies. However, the effectiveness of these organisations can vary depending on the acceptance of educators, industry and governments, and there are challenges in ensuring they truly represent the diverse VET learner population. Strengthening these representative bodies and ensuring they are inclusive and accountable is an important aspect of fostering a culture of democratic participation in VET.

In the United Kingdom for example, the National Society of Apprentices (NSoA) represents 700 000 apprentices and other VET learners and has used its links with trade unions and the higher education movement to grow democratic systems for learner voice and participation in VET. By joining forces, they were able to identify that almost 200 000 young apprentices were excluded from statutory sick pay. They were able to gather evidence of the impacts, present this to parliament and the government, and have the law changed. This improved conditions for apprentices but also taught valuable lessons about advocacy and democratic processes. This led to greater participation in IVET by those from less socio-economically privileged backgrounds.

Getting VET learners to actively participate in activities that have a direct impact on their educational experiences is important. These activities enable them to gain practice at working in partnership, learn how to negotiate solutions and reconcile different opinions. They can achieve short-term goals in participation and voice and at the same time prepare VET learners to constructively contribute to society at a later stage.

Empowering VET learners

Learner participation is essential for empowering VET learners to become active and engaged citizens. By giving learners a voice in their educational, employment and democratic journey, we enable them to become self-directed agents in their own learning and development trajectory. This is particularly vital for VET learners, both apprentices and those who are school based, who may encounter workplace environments at a young age and need to be equipped to advocate their rights and interests.

Creating a culture of empowerment in VET requires thoughtful implementation of structures and processes, both in educational/training institutions and workplaces. These should provide safe spaces for learners to express their views, practise democratic skills and contribute to decision making, which will allow them to be heard and enable the development of CDC and their practice.

Empowerment strategies in VET should be designed to strengthen learners' political efficacy – their belief in their ability to understand and participate effectively in political processes. This can be achieved through a combination of formal structures like student councils, skills development opportunities and ensuring access to clear information about rights and responsibilities. For example, in the United Kingdom many apprentices complete a logbook about their experiences and progress that requires them to read, critically understand and answer questions on their workplace rights, responsibilities and where they can access support. Increasingly, we have to consider how digital platforms can also play a significant role, offering new avenues for participation and collaboration and what role digital democracy has to play.

Learning about democratic ideas and practising them in schools is inherently empowering for young people. It provides them with the knowledge and skills, such as confidence, to engage in civic life and shape their communities. In VET settings, this empowerment takes on additional significance as learners are simultaneously preparing for both their professional lives and their roles as active citizens. By integrating democratic practices into VET curricula and institutional structures, we equip learners with the tools to navigate both workplace dynamics and broader societal issues. For example, involving VET learners in decision-making processes about their learning environment or curriculum not only improves the relevance of their education but also instils a sense of ownership and responsibility that carries over into their life as citizens. When learners see that their voices can influence tangible changes in their immediate surroundings, it builds confidence in their ability to effect change on a larger scale (Fielding 2004).

Moreover, empowerment in VET extends beyond the classroom or workshop. Organisations like NSoA, EAN, Association Nationale des Apprentis de France and other European VET and apprentice representative groups play a crucial role in amplifying the collective voice of VET learners. These organisations help to build and reinforce democratic practices, providing platforms for learners to engage with issues that affect them at national and international levels.

NSoA, for instance, aims to “capture and promote the voice of apprentices, on a local and national scale, in order to enable better apprenticeship provision and increased participation in apprenticeships” (National Society of Apprentices 2014). By involving apprentices in active citizenship and democracy, and promoting equality of access to quality apprenticeships, NSoA empowers learners to shape the future of VET and their own professional pathways through collaboration with industry, professional organisations and the educational authorities.

Empowerment through such representative bodies also helps VET learners develop crucial skills for democratic participation. By engaging in debates, formulating policy positions and advocating for their peers, learners gain practical experience of democratic processes that complement their formal education. These organisations demonstrate how VET learners can have a “true” political voice that reaches the highest levels of national and international governments, industries and decision makers. For example, EAN has been involved in consultations with the European Commission on the European Framework for Quality and Effective Apprenticeships, ensuring that the perspectives of apprentices are considered in policy formation.

However, it is important to note that true empowerment requires ongoing commitment and support from educational institutions, employers and policy makers. It involves creating sustainable structures for learner participation, providing resources for learner-led initiatives and genuinely valuing the input of VET learners in decision-making processes.

Empowering VET learners through voice and participation is not just about improving their educational experience – it is about nurturing the next generation of skilled professionals as participating citizens. By learning about democracy, practising it in educational, workplace and policy settings, and by engaging with representative organisations, VET learners can develop the competences and confidence to shape both their careers and their societies. This empowerment is crucial for our democracies and the adaptability of our workforce in an ever-changing socio-economic landscape.

Transformative potential

Participation holds the potential to shape and transform an education that is adaptive to the inherent plurality of a learner group (Messiou et al. 2024). Participation simultaneously teaches vital aspects of democratic citizenship and puts them into practice. However, this presupposes an approach to participation that is reflexive, dialogical and consistently in flux (Geurts et al. 2024b; Jones and Hall 2022). This integral and systematic understanding of participation stands in contrast to the idea

of participation as a “ticking the boxes” exercise that can be checked as completed. It can be helpful to recognise that the ideal of participation as something unfinished may in itself be what challenges people to actively explore and critically pinpoint undemocratic or exclusive practices within their context and co-construct new alternatives, much like with inclusive education (Hausstätter 2014).

Through the process of actively questioning existing social norms, power structures or traditional organisational procedures through dialogue and co-operation, learners can shape their educational establishments into a vivid and inclusive learning community (Jones and Hall 2022). However, this requires actively working to build courage and trust, and hence a consistent focus on creating an open and safe learning environment is crucial for the development of participation and the enhancement of democratic competences (Siegel-Stechler 2021).

In this process, an educational leader can play an influential role as a change agent to enhance learners’ participation or vice versa (Gamsjäger and Langer 2019). Moreover, it is important that participation practices are developed in symbiosis with teachers’ agency, in which the teachers are given the autonomy within a framework to enhance collective knowledge development through actively supporting learner participation practices and hence strengthening inclusive and equitable classroom practices and curriculum making. If, however, participation practices are interpreted as control measures for teachers, it is unlikely that the relational and collaborative context that sustains participation practices in the long run will be established (Jones and Hall 2022; Priestley et al. 2023). Such an approach enhances motivation, ownership and learning outcomes, in addition to supporting future democratic participation.

Further, these benefits are particularly crucial for learners in IVET programmes, as they are often in education for a shorter period of time, which entails less time to build both cognitive and non-cognitive democratic competences. VET learners benefit more from citizenship education and participation practices than learners in academic study programmes, as a considerable number of learners in vocational study programmes come from lower socio-economic backgrounds that entail less economic security and support (Hoskins and Janmaat 2019). When learners are given the opportunity to understand their rights and strengthen the beliefs in their voices before entering the workforce, this may also support them in challenging unfair or exclusive treatment in work life and help them identify ways of building community and inclusive practices within their communities.

It is worthwhile considering how the enhanced focus on participation has already changed education and its democratic practices during the last three decades. In many countries, learners are now represented in forums where major decisions about the school and (for apprentices) the company they are associated with are made. In Austria, for example, pupils are represented by a federal learner council and through a more local school community committee, whereas in their role as apprentices, their voice is represented through youth trust councils.

Many countries have spent years having VET learners and teachers and trainers co-develop programmes to support the development of CDC through ensuring VET learners’ active participation in both academic and extracurricular activities.

There are challenges identified related to participation and learner voice practices. Many qualitative research studies provide practitioners and policy makers with rigorously described examples that can serve to inspire the development of new local practices.

Clearly, the focus and investment in participation has already transformed several aspects of a traditionally authoritarian school system. This rich and solid base supports practitioners and those who work with VET in new participation endeavours. Furthermore, the integration of participation as an ideal into formal curricula and legal frameworks and policy goes to show both enthusiasts and critics that learner participation has now become the expected norm, and the notion can no longer be categorised as “radical”.

Even though some VET practices have already been transformed, there are considerable challenges that need to be addressed through research and policy, and most importantly practice. Research underscores the challenges of conceptual confusion, formal barriers, resource barriers and power barriers (see for example Cook-Sather 2018; Graham et al. 2018; Lundy and Cook-Sather 2024; Mannion 2009). It has also been acknowledged that it is a challenge to move from individual practices, in which access to participation is determined by the level of enthusiasm of the individual trainer or teacher, to more integrated approaches to practices that may enhance democratic competences (Council of Europe 2024; KS Konsulent 2022). Accordingly, it is crucial to recognise that sustainable participation practices go beyond individual practices and require systemic changes. Incorporating learners’ access to participation necessitates a shift from isolated initiatives to integrated, institution-wide and even region-wide approaches. This involves creating sustainable structures, policies and processes that embed participatory practices into the very fabric of VET institutions.

VET learners often face unique obstacles that hinder their participation. These barriers can range from practical constraints like time limitations due to work commitments, to more systemic issues such as lack of awareness about participation opportunities or fear of repercussions in the workplace (see Empowering VET learners, second paragraph).

Further, the multiple learning environments in VET programmes can create fragmented experiences that make consistent engagement with democratic processes challenging. Comprehensive approaches to participation can help bridge the gap between educational and workplace environments, ensuring that VET learners develop a coherent understanding of their role as active citizens across different contexts. By integrating participatory practices throughout the VET experience, institutions can better prepare learners for active citizenship in both their professional lives and broader society.

Moreover, new questions will arise in relation to digital citizenship and how to best teach and enhance participation practices with the new opportunities and challenges presented by AI, for example. Digital technologies provide new opportunities and also challenges for the enablement of participation and voice of VET learners. There have been several interesting research projects undertaken that show how digital tools can be used to enhance participation and critical thinking,

and how these are interlinked with participation in life in general (see for example Gonzalez-Mohino et al. 2023; Lu et al. 2023; Tomé et al. 2019).

Finally, it is important to consider the democratic attitudes underpinning the ambition of moving towards participation in an international society that is experiencing increased tension and shifts in democratic equality. This shows that even though major progress has already been made towards incorporating learner participation practices in many aspects of VET, it is crucial to build on existing practices and research evidence to fully reach the transformative potential of lifting and enabling young people's beliefs in their voices and motivation that it is possible to co-create an inclusive society, during their education and training and beyond.

To truly enable meaningful participation, VET training institutions must also provide learners with the necessary skills, knowledge, resources and representative structures to effectively engage in decision-making processes in education and training, in the workplace, in society and in government. This includes offering training in communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, as well as creating or funding safe and inclusive spaces and structures for learners to express their opinions and ideas. Furthermore, it is essential to establish feedback mechanisms and regular evaluations to assess the effectiveness of participatory practices and identify areas for improvement.

By moving towards systemic participatory practices, VET institutions can create a culture of engagement and empowerment, where learners feel valued and motivated to actively contribute to their education and the broader society. This shift requires a commitment from all stakeholders, including policy makers, educators, employers and learners themselves, to work collaboratively towards a common goal of inclusive and democratic participation.

Conclusions

The enhancement and acceptance of CDC in VET hinges on strengthening participation practices for learners. This necessitates a shift that goes beyond individual practices by some trainers or teachers to the establishment of systemic practices that integrate participatory approaches as a natural element of VET.

By strengthening the practices for learners' participation in both educational and workplace venues, there is potential to contribute to positive changes in the organisational culture. This is particularly important given that most democratic theories agree that the health of democracies can be determined by the level of active citizenship. Consequently, it is important to activate VET learners, not only for the ideal of active participation in VET, but also to strengthen the overall health of the democratic system.

Ensuring access to democratic structures or organisations to enable learners to have their voices heard in their educational setting and in their workplace and to develop the skills and knowledge to participate in wider democratic systems and society in general is a prerequisite. Through the use of school councils and national and international learner-led organisations, learners can be encouraged to develop their competences in a way that might otherwise be barred to them within single

educational institutions or workplaces. However, there are inherent limitations on any system of participation that are mirrored throughout society and governmental systems, and regardless of legal requirements learners' participation might be curtailed. Consequently, it is important to provide spaces and systems that support young people in VET as individuals in their personal and professional lives and as active participatory citizens as part of a democratic society.

To ensure a coherent experience of participation for learners, it is important to facilitate seamless transitions between professional life and school, teaching learners how to understand different situations and represent themselves in professional settings, how to challenge constructively and participate respectfully. This requires robust collaboration and co-ordination among all stakeholders involved in VET, enabling learners to move freely between these environments while maintaining a consistent understanding of their role as active citizens. Such coherence can help reinforce democratic values and practices across different contexts.

Developing frameworks that facilitate age-appropriate, voluntary, respectful, relevant, child-friendly, inclusive, safe and accountable participation is crucial (UNICEF 2020). These frameworks should also incorporate education on how participatory practices can be developed for all. By working together, VET institutions, policy makers and learners can create an environment that fosters a culture of democracy based on genuine participation and empowerment.

The goal of establishing systemic practices for VET learner participation means that access to participatory practices should not be determined by individual trainers, teachers or employers, but be integrated as a natural element into all practices and aspects of VET. This systemic approach ensures consistency and sustainability in fostering democratic competences.

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Key messages

The very last sentence in the guidance document for VET in the RFCDC sums up the role and purpose of the publication by calling it “a prelude to a long overdue discussion”. This statement was based on the fact that this was the first time in over 25 years of work on education for democratic citizenship carried out under the aegis of the Council of Europe that VET was specifically targeted. While it is true that some of the work on general and higher education and even the field of youth can also be applied in a VET context (or can be applied with relatively minor changes), the guidance document pointed out that VET in significant ways differs so much from these that merely modifying existing material will not suffice. Hence a new approach is required – still based on the RFCDC, but taking into account the specificities of VET as well as the diversity that characterises this field when viewed from a European perspective.

For all of the chapters, it has therefore been a challenge to locate relevant research, especially at a comparative, European level. Whereas education for democratic citizenship has been a priority of the Council of Europe for over 20 years, the work on the implementation of this has been focused around general and higher education, and VET has only received scant, if any, dedicated attention. Other international actors in the field of VET and the world of work – such as Cedefop, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others¹⁸ – have not given priority to the subject of citizenship education and even though this is now changing, we are still not in a position where we can draw on an established body of knowledge. True, isolated aspects of CDC have been the subject of work in a comparative VET context, notably for issues like “inclusion”, but these have been approached not from a CDC perspective, but rather from perspectives such as “recruitment” and “retention”.

In the absence of dedicated, European-level research, the main sources have either been identified at national level, where CDC in VET have received some attention in a handful of countries, or from research on CDC in other sectors of the educational system. Both these sources come with obvious shortcomings. For national sources, the problem is representativity. VET systems in Europe are very diverse, as are related issues like social partner involvement and VET teacher training. Practices that make perfect sense in one European country cannot automatically be applied in another. Even for countries that share geographical borders and many cultural affinities, major adaptations may be needed. With European-level research from other educational sectors, like general and higher education, the problem is (also) linked to validity. For these sectors, the learning environment is almost exclusively the institution/school; but in VET, significant parts of the curriculum are acquired in a work context – for apprenticeship systems, up to 80% of the total duration of a VET programme may take place in an enterprise. A key concept in CDC implementation in general

18. UNESCO has, however, issued publications on the issue of “global citizenship”.

and higher education – the whole-school approach – thus cannot be uncritically carried over to VET, as the VET school is only one of several learning venues, and not necessarily the most important.

Due to the lack of targeted information and research, the writing of these chapters in a Council of Europe context with its 46 member countries must necessarily still be largely carried out as a heuristic exercise, and as such it is a springboard for more systematic and comprehensive data collection. A very apt phrase used during one of the project seminars to describe this situation was “building the bridge while crossing the river”.

This anthology constitutes the second step in the journey that was initiated with the publishing of the guidance document, and as such, we have moved beyond the “prelude” stage. While the guidance document creates the holistic framework, the anthology represents an attempt to dig one level further down. The purpose is – as mentioned in the introduction – to achieve further conceptual clarity, sum up existing, accessible knowledge and not least to establish a baseline and a direction for further research and development work on these issues in the future.

In respect of the latter objective – pointing the way forward – each chapter has formulated conclusions and, in some, also tentative policy recommendations that indicate specific lacunae in our knowledge of the phenomenon, where additional efforts are required. The aim of this concluding section is not to repeat these, but to move one step up and try to identify meta-issues that have emerged. These have been formulated in the shape of key messages (or conclusions) that are not linked to individual chapters as such but constitute general aspects that in principle must be taken into account, albeit to varying degrees, in any work that seeks to address the issue of CDC in VET.

These key messages are presented below.

- ▶ A new narrative of citizen education in VET must be formulated.
- ▶ Learning CDC in VET is more than “citizenship education” as a stand-alone subject in schools.
- ▶ There is a need for innovative practices in teaching and assessment.
- ▶ An integrated approach is necessary to capture the scope of the work on education for democratic citizenship in VET.
- ▶ The participation of learners is achieved by “learning by doing”.

It is time to change the narrative of citizenship competences in VET

It is a widespread assumption that CDC play a minuscule role in VET because of its proximity to the world of work. It is not deemed relevant here, as the focus is on “employability”, and hence on the acquisition of concrete, technical skills. This assumption is seemingly backed up by studies (Hoskins et al. 2014), that indicate that people with VET backgrounds are less likely to exhibit “democratic behaviour” – voting (or intending to vote) in national elections – than their peers from upper secondary general education. This is undoubtedly true in a narrow sense, yet democratic

dialogues may appear in many other forms than national or municipal election campaigns, and the competences needed to engage in these may be acquired in many ways and in different forums.

Enterprises (whether private or public) are, of course, not democratic institutions, but in most countries – in particular those with strong social partner influence – there are enterprise-level platforms for dialogue between management and workers where issues of relevance and importance are discussed. This “social dialogue” may also involve representatives of learners (apprentices or learners on placement). Participants in this dialogue may develop some of the competences needed to become an active citizen in a democratic society – either directly as an elected representative or indirectly due to reflections as a voter in the election process; in particular because this may be perceived as being closer to their everyday lives than voting in a parliamentary election every four years. In the context of this anthology, many examples have been identified of how enterprises or social partner organisations engaging in activities aimed at developing CDC in VET learners, either consciously to support the functioning of the democratic societies in which they ply their trade or in order to promote certain CDC-related skill sets among learners that they deem important for the functioning and profitability of the enterprise (such as intercultural competence or inclusion). Because this is not necessarily defined and perceived as a CDC-conducive practice, it is often invisible in discussions on CDC in VET, but the importance can be crucial since enterprises are seen by many VET learners as “the real deal” compared to the “artificial” environment of the school. It therefore adds a significant extra potential to CDC learning, which is not available to forms of education that are overwhelmingly school-based.

It is therefore time to challenge the traditional assumptions of VET and citizenship education as incompatible entities like oil and water. We need to create a new narrative where this sector is seen in terms of its added potential rather than its limitations when it comes to developing CDC in learners, and concerted effort must be made to exploit this.

Learning CDC in VET is much more than “citizenship education”

This is a message that was already highlighted in the guidance document that established the framework for CDC in VET and that the anthology uses as its point of departure. Also, it is one that runs as a red thread through all the work that has been done on the subject so far and in other CDC contexts, but it bears repeating: CDC in VET cannot be compartmentalised into those (usually very short) courses that go under titles such as citizenship education (or civic education, social studies, political education, etc.). Practically all VET curricula (at least in IVET) have, at least in their preamble, an abstract sentence to the effect that learners must also acquire competences that enable them to function as active citizens in democratic societies. Often, this requirement is implemented in the shape of such a course, like an item on a long list that has now been ticked off. It can also be implemented as part of other (usually general) subjects: the cross-curricular approach (Šalaj 2024).

But as the chapters in this anthology show, CDC in VET go beyond learning about how representative democracy functions in modern societies (“learning about democracy”). It is also about acquiring the skills and the attitudes that are required as an active citizen, not just in civic life but also in the workplace (“learning for democracy”). Not least it is about how CDC can be absorbed through learners’ active participation in councils, committees and meetings, where there is dialogue and decision making about issues that concern their education and training pathway as well as by adopting participative and co-operative pedagogical methods (“learning through democracy”).

Developments in technology, work organisation and society as a whole happen at a rapid pace, and all of this must be integrated into VET programmes to keep them updated and relevant. This can easily lead to a situation where curricula become dangerously overloaded. Learners experience this as stressful, and it may ultimately be a contributing factor to burnout and dropout – but another risk is that what are often called the “softer” issues like CDC are neglected. Therefore, it is important to underline that the measures suggested in this anthology to promote CDC in VET do not necessarily mean that specific time must be earmarked for this purpose, and thus taken away from other learning objectives. Rather, they are concerned with a heightened consciousness about CDC-related issues and the exploitation of potential that is already there. Most learning processes and procedures that are contained in any given VET programme have a CDC angle that can be activated; it only requires that those involved – in particular VET teachers and in-company trainers – are made aware of this and provided with the knowledge and the skills to exploit them pedagogically.

The need for innovative practices in teaching and assessment

VET is often understood as existing in a one-to-one relationship with a specific occupation – carpenter, plumber, office clerk, etc. – and curricula are regularly revisited to ensure that learning objectives are updated to comply with labour market demands and to promote the employability of learners once they have finished their programme. Most curricula – in particular in IVET – also contain elements of general education, including CDC, since carpenters, plumbers and office clerks are also citizens of democratic societies, but these elements are under constant pressure from new learning requirements related to developments in technology and work organisation within a given occupation. This situation is at times described in terms of an ongoing competition, where the space allotted to CDC-related learning must be “defended” against the encroachment from other, vocationally oriented learning objectives. But maybe there are ways of combining the two.

Several chapters in this anthology have argued that this juxtaposition of “vocational” versus “CDC-related” learning objectives is – at least to some extent – artificial, and there is indeed potential for introducing a CDC angle to many vocational subjects, mainly linked to competences of knowledge and critical understanding. The examples given in the chapters refer to such “dry” instruments as user manuals and health and safety instructions, which on the surface may seem entirely factual and therefore uncontroversial, but which in reality are often the result of negotiations

and compromises between relevant actors, authorities, technical experts, workers' representatives, management, etc. Looking at them from a critical perspective and seeing them as political constructs may lead to a deeper understanding of the issues at stake, and the exercise may encourage learners to also apply this critical perspective to other aspects of societal life. Knowledge of the true nature of these rules and regulations will also lead to an increased awareness of their purpose and implementation, thus increasing efficiency and responsibility in the workplace. For this to happen, however, it is necessary that both VET teachers and in-company trainers are sensitive to this aspect and possess the ability to detect these angles and implement them as part of their daily activities with learners. This is primarily a challenge for teacher-training programmes and the continued professional development of teachers and instructors.

The comprehensive inclusion of CDC as a transversal theme in VET programmes rather than compartmentalising it into self-contained courses of citizenship education also has implications for assessment. More open and flexible approaches may be required, including group projects, portfolio evaluations, situational judgment tests, self-assessment and peer assessment, and holistic grading systems. Ethical issues must be considered, and safeguards must be put in place to protect both learner autonomy and assessment integrity.

Finally, such methods must be integrated into the training of new generations of VET teachers as well as offered as continuing professional development for those already qualified.

An integrated approach is necessary

In general and higher education, the school is the natural pivot for all learning activities, whereas in VET, it is just one of several learning environments, and not necessarily the most important one. This is most notable in connection with apprenticeships, where learners spend far more time in the enterprise than in school, but even with VET systems that are primarily school-based, learners tend to spend significant periods on placements in enterprises where important learning processes are enacted. This means that if we focus exclusively on the school when we discuss the acquisition of CDC in VET learners, we fail to take into account the added potential that the enterprises represent. It is important not to see these as two separate systems, however – they should mutually underpin and reinforce each other to achieve the maximum effect. We call this joint effort the “integrated approach” to CDC in VET, because it subsumes both learning venues under a single perspective.

This integration should take place at both systemic and institutional level. At systemic level, the world of work – in the shape of social partner representatives – is in most countries already deeply involved in curriculum development through their participation in relevant committees and other forums where this work is undertaken. It is important that discussions here are not exclusively focused on technological issues, but also take into account the issue of CDC, and not just as an abstract declaration of intent that is implemented into VET programmes in the shape of a separate course

on citizenship education. Ideally, CDC should be expressed in terms of concrete learning outcomes, linked to issues of direct relevance to the world of work, such as social dialogue and the CSR policies of enterprises.

Just as important is the integration of CDC at institutional level – between VET schools and the enterprises that either send their apprentices to the school or host students from the VET school during placements. Key actors are first and foremost the frontline teachers from schools and in-company trainers from enterprises. In schools where CDC are compartmentalised in courses on citizenship education, it may be difficult to establish a dialogue with the enterprises, as teachers of this subject often do not have a VET background. However, in schools where CDC are a clearly defined priority at institutional level, teachers with a VET qualification and experience from industry (“second-career teachers”) are important for the acquisition of CDC in VET learners, and they can as a rule relate directly to their counterparts in the enterprises (the in-company trainers). Often, this contact is expressed through concrete projects, like transnational mobility activities that can foster the development of intercultural competences in participants.

Participation as “learning by doing”

CDC are not something that can be acquired through passive listening alone (learning about democracy). The knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable VET learners to function as competent citizens in democratic societies are to a very large extent acquired through active participation in processes where their voice is taken into account and where they feel that they can influence the state of affairs (learning through democracy). These learning processes can happen in the classroom through participative, pedagogical methods that promote a learner’s active engagement (such as co-operative learning), but they can also happen through participation in decision-making platforms at a VET school or in the enterprise: student and school councils, workplace meetings and social dialogue structures, where learners are directly involved as a legitimate interest group.

Whereas the involvement in participative, pedagogical practices in the classroom can be facilitated by the accompanying teacher, it is more complex with learners’ participation in decision-making platforms. Some of these – such as school and work councils – are based on the principles of representative democracy, where only those who are elected can participate. In other contexts, it is only those who already have the self-confidence to stand up and speak who will practise and hone their skills. Others who feel shy or intimidated are much less likely to make their voice heard in the discussions, or they may even feel too timid to show up at all, let alone present themselves for election. When viewed from a learning perspective, it is essential that as many learners as possible get the opportunity to actively participate in these processes. Therefore, the issue of “learners’ participation” is intricately linked to the issue of “inclusion”.

In practically all countries, VET learners in any given VET programme represent a much more complex group (in terms of age, ethnicity, gender or social status, for instance) than students in upper secondary general education – also because VET

in some countries has a significantly lower status as a “second-chance” option for those who failed to access more prestigious educational pathways. Inclusion in a VET context is therefore a challenging task that needs to address individual and social issues as well as have political and economic dimensions. It also has, however, a practical dimension insofar as systemic aspects or institutional practices may hinder active participation, for example for apprentices who cannot get time off from their enterprises for meetings in the student or school council.

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This publication explores the crucial role of vocational education and training (VET), not only in driving economic development through the creation of a skilled workforce but also in preparing learners to participate actively in democratic societies.

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Addressing topics such as curriculum, assessment, in-company training, teacher training and teacher continuing development, implementation of RFCDG through a whole-school approach, social partners involvement, inclusion and learners' participation, this anthology identifies key challenges, gaps and opportunities for implementation across diverse European contexts.

Aimed at both policy makers and practitioners, this publication serves as a practical tool to support the integration of competences for democratic culture in VET and contributes to the Council of Europe's efforts in promoting the development of a culture of democracy and the cultivation of democratic values across education systems.

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