

1. Introduction

This manual is part of a series, collectively a “toolkit” designed and produced by the Council of Europe to help schools and other educational institutions to promote and develop Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC – see Appendix II). EDC is a matter of paramount importance to the Council if the 46 member states are truly to progress together along the path of democracy: it lies at the heart of ensuring that the next generation of young citizens are prepared and equipped to play their democratic part – in their own communities, in their wider societies and in the framework of Europe as a whole. EDC is thus a theme that is mentioned many times throughout this volume, as it is in all the publications that make up the EDC toolkit.

What does this manual do?

This is a tool for the democratic governance of *schools* but it is applicable to all kinds of educational institutions and, indeed, other places where education of the young takes place. The word school is used for the sake of simplicity, not in any attempt to exclude other forms or settings. Similarly, those learning in such places will be called “students”, though it must be remembered that this term encompasses the very youngest children (who are never too young to live and learn democracy and democratic citizenship) as well as young adults.

The tool is designed to help readers to gauge how their school contributes to their students’ EDC, and thus to their preparation for adult citizenship in a democracy, by looking at the ways in which the school operates from day to day – and the ways in which people behave. So this is not really about teaching citizenship in schools: nor is it about the theory or principles of democracy, of democratic education, or even of EDC. It is intended as a practical tool to bridge the gap between theory (such as the question: “How do we prepare young people to become participating democratic adult citizens?”) and practice (such as the answer: “By ensuring that they experience democracy in action in every aspect of school life at every level”). Thus it begins with a few definitions; describes how the journey towards democracy tends to take shape; helps readers to estimate how far along the journey their school has so far travelled; and gives practical advice and ideas on how either to start the journey or to travel further on it, with appropriate evaluation of the progress that has been made.

Who is it for?

No democracy is perfect; no school is perfect; and no school is perfectly democratic! Much of this manual is aimed at school leaders, the term generally given nowadays to those professionals at the senior end of management who have the power and responsibility to determine to a large degree the way in which the school operates. The authors of the main part of the guide make no apology for this! We are both serving heads, though we both recognise that we are far from being the only people in our schools with the power and authority described above. But the first person in a school who is likely to read this (before passing it on, we hope!) is the head and, without the active support and work of the head, democracy is unlikely to take root and grow: so we have used the word “head” as being interchangeable with “leader”, and hope we will be forgiven for our deliberately loose terminology.

But in a democracy there are other stakeholders. This manual can be used with equal success by the other people who have an interest in the success of the school. The students – children and young people aged (in the view of this manual) from four (or below) to 20 (and beyond), and whether in formal school, in university, in technical or vocational training in college or in the workplace – are the people who have the paramount interest *both* in the education that is provided for them *and* in the manner in which it is provided. We cannot stress too strongly that democratic

participation is not something that can only be undertaken by children of a certain (perhaps secondary phase) age: on the contrary, it is best learnt in stages from the very beginning of schooling, where the youngest children readily assimilate and live the values and practices of democracy.

Parents and the wider community have an interest in both inputs and outcomes. And teachers, trainers and other workers, in schools and elsewhere, have both a right and a responsibility to have a voice in the education that is taking place there. Therefore school leaders have to establish and nurture a wide range of partnerships. This guide has something for all the partners and stakeholders in the process of educating the young.

Why?

Why should educational leaders and stakeholders want to work through this guide and evaluate or plan their path to a more democratic approach? The following two chapters will help to answer that question. In short, though, it is in their interest to do so. A democratically structured and functioning school will not only promote EDC and prepare its students to take their place in society as engaged democratic citizens: it will also become a happier, more creative and more effective institution. The value that is added is immense: the research evidence of this is growing in volume all the time. So this manual does not simply describe a mission to do something morally right: starting down the democratic path is also a pragmatic step towards making schooling a more pleasant and more productive process.

How the tool works

In many ways we hope that the manual will take the form of a professional discourse with you, the reader. You are invited throughout to compare some measures of the varying extent of democratic practice that may be identified in the way a school runs with the state of affairs in your school. This is the first step of a process. You start by evaluating where you and your school are now and end by planning the steps to take it forward democratically – with, we hope, some advice and encouragement to help you on the way. So we will describe situations or indicators that we think are common, inviting you to compare our view with your experience. We hope that is a helpful way to work together – as colleagues.

Following that method, then, we will first take you through two brief chapters explaining what we mean by the term “democratic school governance” and how we see the benefits it brings to institutions.

Then we go straight to the heart of the manual. Chapter 4 outlines what we see as four Key Areas of school governance. We hope that you will then want to perform the same kind of analysis on other issues that are important to you, by using the planning grid in Appendix I – but not, we beg, until you have read the rest of the guide first!

Examining how a school operates in relation to these Key Areas illustrates the extent to which it is contributing to – or detracting from – EDC. This is measured by identifying four stages of democratic development that might be discernible in a school, from Stage 1 where there is no trace of democratic activity (old-authoritarian) to quite a highly advanced form of democratic living (Stage 4).

Chapter 5 unpacks these ideas, exploring the values that underlie such modes of operation and the forms of behaviour that stem from them. Chapter 6 furnishes what we hope is a wealth of ideas and strategies for making the steps between the stages described in the preceding chapters.

Chapter 7 deals with frequently asked questions (FAQs) about developing democratic practice in schools: such questions often grow out of natural and widespread anxieties about letting go of power, and we hope that such fears will be dispelled, or allayed, in this chapter.

The following chapter provides more examples of good practice from around Europe. Chapter 9 then gives the positive alternative to fears and anxieties, a consideration of some common traits and patterns likely to be found in a school that has made significant strides down the democratic

path: as examples of good practice these may give readers ideas for strategies that they can try in their own schools.

Appendix I is the blank grid designed to allow you to conduct your own analysis, adopting the approach described in the manual. Finally, Appendix II, by Delphine Liégeois, a consultant to the Council of Europe, provides an overview of the EDC background to educational policies in Europe and in the work of the Council of Europe.

We hope that you will find this guide interesting and enjoyable – and above all something that is both useful and usable.

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2. What is democratic school governance?

School leaders have to take into account many powerful factors in their operational and strategic work: legislation, curriculum, local authorities, parents, pupils, financial resources, socio-economic environment, competition, etc. Many of these factors are constantly changing and beyond the school leader's control. Good management is not enough. A school leader today works "in more or less decentralised systems based on complex interplay of many autonomous partners".¹ The term "school governance" is used throughout this manual as a wide definition of school leadership, including both instrumental and ideological aspects. "Democratic" indicates that school governance is based on human rights values, empowerment and involvement of students, staff and stakeholders in all important decisions in the school.

Halász identifies the difference between "governance" and "management" in schools: it is important to stress the strongly interlinked but very different meanings of these two terms. While the word "governance" is used to stress the openness of schools and educational systems, the term "management" is used rather in order to underline the technical and instrumental dimensions of governing. We govern those things or beings the behaviour of which cannot be predicted totally (because of, for instance, the existence of autonomous units capable of asserting their interests and to negotiate alternative solutions). We manage things or beings, the behaviour of which is easier to predict. When we govern, we negotiate, persuade, bargain, apply pressure, etc., because we do not have full control of those we govern. When we manage, we tend to instruct and order because we think we have strong and legitimate power to do so. When we speak about educational systems, we prefer using the term "governance". When speaking about schools as organisational units, we more often use the term "management". However, as schools are becoming more and more open institutions, rooted in specific local social and economic settings, and characterised by a complex array of different needs and interests, we tend to resort, also at this level, to using the term "governance".

Since so many factors cannot be controlled by executive powers alone, an open and democratic approach is the only way to a successful and sustainable leadership in a modern school. However, democratic school governance is not merely a means of survival for the school head; there are other, far more important reasons.

Ethical reasons

There is universal agreement in theory on democratic values: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."² "The child who is capable of forming his or her views [has] the right to express those views [and] the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion."³ Practically every country and even every school has written policies of this kind. But if we really want to implement democratic values in society, we need to practise them in our daily work. This is particularly important for leaders of all kinds of organisations, but particularly of schools.

Political reasons

A genuine striving for democracy in a country must be evident and practised from an early age. There is a clear risk in old democracies that young people take democracy for granted and therefore lose interest in participating. Where the history of democracy is shorter and the foundations are shakier, any setback might result in withdrawals of rights. But if you have learnt

1. Halász, Gabor: Governing schools and education systems in the era of diversity: A paper prepared for the 21st Session of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education on "Intercultural education". Budapest 2003.

2. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

3. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 12-14, UN 1989.

from practical experience to overcome at least some of the usual problems in democratic decision-making, your faith in democracy will probably be strengthened, and you will be more willing to participate actively in politics, locally and, perhaps, nationally.

Rapidly changing society

The flood of information is impossible to stop or even control. We cannot protect our children from it. On the other hand, it makes today's young people the most well-informed generation so far. So how can we teach the young to select and judge, when we are not there to decide what information is good or bad for them? Instead of futile attempts at censorship or restrictions, we have to teach them critical and self-governed thinking.

Today there is a shift in values from the group to the individual, a tendency to see oneself more as a customer than a citizen in the welfare society. When parents are dissatisfied in some way with the local school their child is attending, they do not take political action, contact the school board or become active in the parents' association. Instead, a more likely outcome is a feeling of alienation from school, withdrawal from real engagement in their child's education or even parental connivance in the child's non-attendance at school. In communities or societies where it is possible, parents may otherwise move their child to another school. All these outcomes have powerful negative effects on the child's education, on the school, or on both. To enhance interest in active citizenship, therefore, we have to prove to our children throughout their formative years that taking part in common decisions is worth the effort – and quite fun, too.

Society is changing, rapidly and constantly. Among the things we have to cope with at the beginning of the 21st century, some are important to mention here. Enterprises and people move from one part of the world to another, changing economic, demographic and cultural structures. Technical innovations offer threats and opportunities. A state or a local community is exposed to and has to interact with global forces beyond democratic control. On the other hand, we must acknowledge all the positive effects globalisation has had on our daily lives, see diversity and change as opportunities and give our children the right education for this kind of world.