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## Chapter 5

### Democratic citizenship and Teacher Education in Finland

Matti Rautiainen, Perttu Männistö & Aleksi Fornaciari

#### Introduction

Finland is considered to be among the most democratic countries in the world according to various international surveys (e.g. Economist Intelligence Unit metrics, Transparency International). However, the level of student participation in Finnish schools is below average compared to other European Union countries (e.g., Schulz *et al*, 2018), even though national curricula for comprehensive education have been emphasising values of democracy since the 1970s. According to the current national core curriculum for primary education, critical thinking and democratic principles construct the foundation for active citizenship:

Educated people strive to act rightfully and show respect for themselves, to other people and the environment. They are able to use information critically. Furthermore, an effort towards self-regulation and accepting responsibility for their own development and well-being are a part of general knowledge and ability.

Primary education is built upon respect for life and social justice. Primary education strengthens students' ability to defend these values (respect for life, social justice) and the aptitude to appreciate the inviolability of human dignity. Primary education also promotes well-being, democracy, equality and equity.

(National core curriculum for basic education 2014, Chapter 2.2)

In Finland the ideals of democracy on a societal level are built upon parliamentarism, which consists of strong belief in central governance and the state apparatuses. Thus, it is no surprise that representation is also part of Finnish schools' democratic culture; every upper secondary school has to have students' councils; councils are also part of primary and secondary schools, where they are not mandatory. There has also been a firm belief in Finland that consensus can be achieved between different people regardless of the major ideological differences that can and will exist (e.g. Stenius, 2010; Bauman, 2013). Education can be perceived as a major factor contributing towards agency, where different individuals strive for social consensus and amenable citizenship.

In this chapter, we analyse how Finnish teacher education (TE) contributes to the development of education for democracy. We do this by analysing how education for democracy has been developed in TE in Finland, and what kind of ideals form the foundation for education for democracy in Finnish TE. The findings are analysed in relation to the Competences for Democratic Culture produced by the Council of Europe (CoE) (CoE, 2016).

## **History of political ideologies in Finland and about their influence on TE**

Public school education as well as teacher education began in Finland in the 1860s. Czar Alexander II was inspired by liberal thoughts and he wanted to carry out some experiments in his empire. Finland was selected as the place for these experiments, and Uno Cygnaeus was chosen to make plans for both comprehensive education and teacher education. The plans were radical considering the context in the 1850s and 1860s because Cygnaeus maintained that school should be planned for both girls and boys, and teacher education for men and women. Cygnaeus stressed the importance of arts and crafts in school, and thought that schools should support pupils to find their own strengths which then could be developed. Cygnaeus did not, however, promote education for democracy as the ideology was not relevant for the Russian empire. On one hand though, he did emphasise that all children should have the right to access primary education. These principles then formed the foundation for school development in Finland and gave Cygnaeus a reputation as the father of public education in Finland. (Vilkuna, 2012).

Finnish society changed rapidly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and different movements, such as the labour movement and socialism, spread also to Finland. After independence was gained in December 1917, a violent civil war between the left- and right-wings was carried out from January to May of 1918. The war had a crucial influence on public education and society as the winners, the right-wing, decided to ensure through education that a new revolution would not come to fruition if civic education was removed from schools. After the Second World War communism became part of Finnish politics, and with the support of the Soviet Union its influence in Finnish politics grew rapidly. Subsequently, the term *finlandizerung* became a well-known concept in international politics. Its definition developed to mean politics where a smaller country follows, one way or another, the will of the more powerful country next to them. In this case, it meant Finland following the will of the Soviet Union.

The contemporary educational system was founded in 1970s. The reform, where Finland moved from a parallel to a comprehensive school system was a radical move towards public education supporting equal opportunities for everyone. The parallel school system, created in the 1860s, was deemed to be old-fashioned and was criticized for creating inequality in the 1960s. Consequently, the central-leftist parties demanded a radical change based on the new ideals of the Finnish welfare state. The reform meant a change into a school system consisting of an obligatory education of 9 years in length, which is similar for all pupils in Finland. This also led to a reform in TE. New teacher qualifications required that students must achieve MA degrees, including those studying to be primary school teachers (grades 1-6). New TE departments were formed in all universities, which had previously offered teacher education programmes. In addition, departments became responsible for subject teacher education programmes, which meant in practice studies of 60 ECTS (pedagogical studies for students specialising in a subject). (Valtonen & Rautiainen, 2019.)

The tensions between the left wing and the central conservative political parties were visible in Finland especially in the 1970s. As the 9 year compulsory education, which was the same for all comprehensive school systems, was one of the most significant achievements by left-wing politicians, the right-wing opposed the system because they thought that socialists would try to initiate a revolution through education. In the 1970s, a school democracy experiment in an upper secondary school and a Marxian experiment in Pirkkala primary school stimulated an enormous public debate in Finnish society as well as in their parliament. This led to the Pirkkala experiment being interrupted in 1975, and the school democracy experiment in the upper secondary school being run down in the early 1980s. After these experiments, which for many teachers were traumatic, politics and political activities were removed from school curricula; more realistically what happened was that school education's political background was hidden from public debate (see, e.g., Kärenlampi, 1999; Leskinen, 2016; Rautiainen, 2017).

In public education, the political tensions were visible in pre-school to upper secondary school, but not in TE. In TE, focus was on pedagogy, not on social development of the society. One of the key features of Finnish TE since the 1860s had been its didactical and psychological orientation rather than its social and political orientation. Thus, TE in Finland has not ever been in the forefront of political battles. Instead, during its history, TE has prepared teachers to act as exemplary citizens, and the ethos of TE has been based on the ideals of conservation rather than on emancipation and social criticism (Rautiainen, 2017).

In the 2000s the situation has changed a little. According to the first Civic Education Study (CIVED, 2001), the Finnish 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were bottom of participating countries in their responses to questions about their possibilities to participate in school activities such as decision-making. In addition, the pupils' interest towards active citizenship was low. The results were surprising, and politicians reacted by resourcing different projects aimed at developing active citizenship in schools and TE. The results of these projects were followed up by a study in which the contemporary state of education for democracy in TE in Finland was researched. (Rautiainen, Vanhanen-Nuutinen & Virta, 2014).

Educational reform implemented from the 1970s has had an enormous influence on Finnish society. The ideal was that everybody should have either vocational or academic education as well as possibilities to educate themselves as far as possible. In addition, a social security system was created to make it possible for individuals to study without having to work at the same time. Meanwhile, the new academic status of primary school teachers strengthened their professional identity as well as society's respect for them. Nowadays primary school teacher education is still one of the most popular academic programmes if one considers the number of applicants. Only 10 percent of all applicants are chosen by University departments, which is internationally compared to be exceptional. More so, the pedagogical freedom and autonomy in teachers' work is something most countries do not have.

To summarize, teachers in Finland are highly respected professionals, who are usually strongly committed to their work (Raiker & Rautiainen, 2016). However, are they also

committed to promoting democracy in the society? Is TE a place, where the principles of democracy are learnt to be later implemented in schools by the teachers?

### **Critical thinking in TE in Finland**

Nowadays, when taking into consideration the history of Finnish education and all the aspects brought in by modern global society, democratic citizenship and critical thinking are not easy topics to approach. As schools are thought to represent neutral spaces, the position of critical thinking in contemporary teacher education is a controversial one. While the ability to consider different viewpoints that people can take is largely emphasised during education, still critical thinking in Finnish TE can be described as disconnected from the teachers' everyday school environments. This means that teaching critical thinking in TE is strongly connected with the ability to assess different sources of information and problem solving. However, when teaching critical thinking as a tool for emancipation, the emphasis should be on the questions of power and social phenomena such as politics, economic inequality and ecological challenges and on how a nations' moral landscape and individuals' ability for ethical decision-making collide (e.g. Brookfield, 2005; Biesta, 2006; 2013; Bauman, 2013). Another point should be made considering the ability of different people to make collective decisions, which implement diverse viewpoints (e.g. Arendt, 2013 [1958]).

A school today is one of the few places where people can come together in diversity, resulting in an immense possibility to create and develop the skills and critical thinking needed for democratic citizenship. However, critical thinking cannot be created and developed without teachers who themselves possess the ability to ethically and holistically evaluate the social reality of today. When examining the global world in an ethical and holistic manner, the aim is to transfer from an instrumental view on education, where the focus is on the economic growth of nation, to questioning how society can be made socially egalitarian and ecologically sustainable (Matikainen, Männistö & Fornaciari, 2018; Värri, 2018). From this viewpoint aspects considering human rights, economic equality, sustainable development and the well-being of every individual are emphasised.

### **Education for democracy in TE in Finland**

The Finnish government commissioned a study to evaluate the role of democracy and human rights education in TE after a national security report, made in co-operation between ministries, assessed that TE has a key role in determining the future of national security. Subsequently *Democracy and human rights - Objectives and contents in teacher education* study was released in 2014 (Rautiainen, Vanhanen-Nuutinen & Virta, 2014). The aim of the study was to analyse how the key contents of democracy and human rights are viewed in Finnish teacher education, and to evaluate what kind of abilities future teachers should acquire in teacher education for dealing with questions concerning democracy and human rights.

Data for the study consisted of the Finnish TE curricula and written statements and data collected from hearings and through interviews. A total of 105 participants' responses from university-level institutions, including teacher training schools and their student representatives, were studied. In addition, 44 teachers and students from vocational teacher training institutions were interviewed, and dozens of statements were received from different stakeholders, like non-governmental organisations, ministries, student organisations and the Trade Union of Education in Finland. Data included also policy guidelines, documents produced by public officials and prior studies.

According to the findings of the study, democracy and human rights are seen as key values in teacher education. However, there are only a few courses dealing directly with democracy and human rights and the differences between TE institutions have been growing during the 2000s. While some institutions have developmental teams whose work includes research focussed on education for democracy, others have only 1 or 2 teachers who consider democracy and human rights education being explicitly part of their work. Most themes were given some attention in various contexts, for example in pedagogic modules consisting of philosophy, sociology, multiculturalism studies and didactic modules related to certain subjects.

Even though teaching and learning are in the core of TE, students' possibilities to participate and influence outside of their respective courses in the TE community is also important. Students should have the possibility to participate in many differing ways. Typically students have representatives in committees in TE and they have non-formal opportunities to meet and talk with the staff and the heads of the TE departments.

To sum up, TE is emphasising education for democracy on the level of norms (laws, curricula, principles of educational policy and values), but democracy as a way of living is still far away from being rooted in TE. According to the study's recommendations, democracy and student participation should be made more visible and better incorporated into the education of teachers, because student teachers require practical experiences about democracy during their studies.

### **Direction of development – interventions in TE**

The Ministry of Education and Culture promoted implementation of the recommendations of the study done in 2014 by funding an in-service training for teacher educators, where teacher educators from TE departments from all around Finland aimed to develop democracy in their departments *via* different experiments (interventions). The direction of development is considered by providing an overview of these interventions and an analysis of the documented experiments to determine the nature of democracy embedded in them. Data is analysed in relation to the thematic framework of the Council of Europe's (CoE) competences for democratic culture (CoE, 2016:11).

An in-service teacher training course *Education for democracy and human rights in TE* for teacher educators from academic and vocational TE was implemented in 2016-2017. The TE units participated in the programme by sending two teacher educators for the training, so that it would be easier for them to reflect on the training together. In addition, the experiment was thought to benefit from execution in pairs. In the experiment, the teacher educators were expected to plan and execute an intervention that would deepen the level of democracy and human rights in their home departments. During the programme, the participants met together on three occasions. All three meetings lasted for two days. The programme included lectures, discussions, reflection and different exercises as well as processing the results from the interventions together with pairs from other departments.

The meetings had three aims. Firstly, to support participants' work in their own units. Secondly, to create a teacher educators' network around education for democracy and human rights. And lastly, to train teacher educators in the field of education for democracy and human rights.

<FIGURE 1 HERE>

*Figure 1 Model of TE training in course Education for democracy and Human rights.*

The current curriculum for primary education was implemented in 2016 in Finnish comprehensive schools, and it is based more strongly than ever on the ideals of democracy, human rights and student participation (see Table 1). However, the Finnish classrooms are a mixture of three different kind of school realities described in the table. Historically, comprehensives have focused on individuals, whilst having some characteristics from co-operative schools. Folk schools, which existed before the comprehensive school system, also emphasised the ideals of strong discipline. All these three school ideologies are still present in the classroom reality of today. This is why the discrepancy between different classrooms can be huge, even though the ideal goal of education in Finland is to give similar education in every school.

<TABLE 1 HERE>

*Table 1 Three school realities (Suoranta, 2003:137-138).*

TE in Finland is highly autonomous within the field of education. However, TE has a strong reciprocal relationship with schools and whilst TE aims to be critical of the contemporary system, it also educates the teachers of today. Thus, the co-operative school is the common goal, that the teachers and teacher educators share and try to promote on different levels of education.

All the experiments done during the training course were documented in the book *Hyvän lähteillä – Demokratia- ja ihmisoikeuskasvatus opetustyössä* (Männistö, Rautiainen & Vanhanen-Nuutinen, 2017). Because the experiments were implemented in different units according to the units' own needs and interests, this caused diversity between individual

experiments. The experiments' data was analysed by using the CoE's twenty competences for democratic culture and titled all the individual experiments according to the core idea of the research and its objectives (see Table 2).

<TABLE 2 HERE>

*Table 2 Experiments made during the in-service training course Education for democracy and Human rights in TE by teacher educators in their own units located in the frame of CoE's competences for democratic culture.*

### *The analysis*

According to the survey (Rautiainen, Vanhanen-Nuutinen & Virta, 2014) the state of education for democracy and human rights was similar in all the TE units on a cultural and an organizational level. However, some of the TE units had individuals and/or groups who were strongly committed to developing education for democracy. Moreover, the TE units were taking the core values of democracy and human rights as granted, while the values were not visible in the every-day reality of education (Matilainen, 2011).

Five of the experiments focused on teacher educators, seven on student teachers and two on both groups. The most typical experiment was a teaching intervention done either with students or teacher educators. For example, one of these experiments was a drama session for teacher educators. In the experiment, first the participants recalled a situation from their own life that they had experienced as being unfair. Next, the experience was shared with someone else. After exchanging stories, the participants formed groups, where they told the story they had heard from their pair as their own. After sharing their stories with everyone in the group, the participants created one story based on all stories. Finally, the new story was presented for others as a statue, while one of the group members acted as a storyteller. At the end of the session, participants reflected on the process and their own experiences.

During the experiments, the teacher educators focused on skills as well as knowledge and critical understanding, while attitudes and values were mostly left untouched. In particular, co-operational skills were strongly emphasised in the experiments. This is interesting, because of one of the challenges, raised in discussion frequently, perceived by pairs of participating teacher educators of others' attitudes towards education for democracy and human rights; namely, on the one hand teacher educators are not against education for democracy or human rights, but on the other hand they do not see them being an important part of their work. In the context of *Finnish Following*, as TE in Finland is didactically and psychologically oriented, typically TE units include only one or two positions to be held by teachers in social sciences. This means that skills as well as knowledge and critical understanding are easier for teacher educators to approach, because didactic-psychologic theoretical fields and practices are better known among teacher educators than values based on philosophical and political understanding of society.



When the above-mentioned working methods were analysed within the thematic framework of the CoE's competences for democratic culture, it was concluded that the methods as well as the course, where the core contents of democracy were lectured and presented for the teacher students (see Table 2), represented education for democracy. Nevertheless, the challenge in Finnish TE is how to develop TE in a manner where the all four CoE categories of democracy – values, attitudes, skills or knowledge and critical understanding – would be addressed and developed simultaneously. Now TE units are including elements related to the phenomenon of democracy from the beginning of courses; however, this approach cannot be considered to be holistic or long lasting. Also critical approaches in projects are mostly connected to cognitive processes concerning knowledge, not for example social inclusion or climate change.

One possibility for a more holistic approach would be a phenomenon-based curriculum, as practised by the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä since 2014. The TE curriculum in Jyväskylä is structured using different phenomena such as interaction, cooperation, society, learning, knowledge, scientific thinking and expertise, resulting in the studies revolving around these distinct phenomena: 'This requires the ability to combine various scientific theories and viewpoints deriving from everyday experiences since the phenomena of education cannot be profoundly understood from a single viewpoint (Curriculum plans 2017-2020).

The phenomenon-based approach offers an excellent starting point for education for democracy as distinct phenomena can be reflected through the ideals of democracy. However, the shift towards phenomenon-based education can be perceived as what Michael Fullan described to be easy in theory, but extremely complex on a social level (Fullan 1995: 65). One of the hindering issues considering education for democracy in Finnish TE has been the lack of expertise among teacher educators. If only one or few educators have a deeper expertise in the field of democracy and education, it means that there are only handful of courses where the themes of democracy are under study. However, from the viewpoint of CoE's *Competences for Democratic Culture* (CDC), teacher educators can contribute to education for democracy from their own expertise concerning certain competences of democratic culture. According to this idea, education for democracy could pass and be visible in most courses of TE.

### **Democratic citizenship in TE**

Depending on the TE unit they undertake, graduated teachers may have very differing skills, attitudes, knowledge and critical understanding considering what education for democracy means in teacher's work, as well as what democratic citizenships actually means. The in-service training course *Education for Democracy and Human Rights in TE* was based on the idea that participants' work in pairs as transformative agents would make the themes of democracy and human rights more visible in their own departments. Most of the participants were already, in one way or another, connected to education for democracy in their own

work. In addition, some educators, who were interested of the themes of democracy and human rights, participated in the training period.

One of the results of the training course was that a network of educators in the field of education for democracy and human rights was formed. Subsequently, the University of Helsinki has been continuing the work under the project called *Human Rights, Democracy, Values and Dialogue in Education*. The project has thus far gathered material which has been developed for education for democracy and human rights in Finland, so that teacher educators can put it more easily into use. In addition, the notion that TE units could have a common course for education for democracy and human rights has been acknowledged. Its aim is to offer all teacher students a course on education for democracy based on the same criteria. It also offers a frame for developing the concept of democratic citizenship in the sense of CoE's CDC as well as generating interest in current global issues (e.g. inequality, climate change, automatisisation). These new approaches construct stronger bridges between education for democracy and critical thinking. The implementation of the course or parts of it will be done on a local level in years to come. The course, even though being worth only 5 ECTS, is a step forward in achieving a stronger basis for education for democracy in Finnish TE. However, universities have strong autonomies and all TE unit educators will decide by themselves how education for democracy and human rights will be implemented in their context as has been so far.

While the Finnish educational system is strongly supporting education for democracy in the level of educational policy and curricula, in practice activities supporting these aims are still sparse and few occur in both schools and TE. The culture of democracy in schools and in TE is based on the ideals of representative democracy. However, stronger democracy requires that the CoE's competences for democratic culture crosscut all education and everyday life in schools as well as in TE.

The curriculum for primary education implemented in Finland since 2016 emphasises pupils' participation, inquiry-based learning and phenomenon-based learning. However, although the curriculum is still strongly based on subjects, broader phenomenon-based themes are also seen as elementary part of education. This has caused tensions to rise among teachers, pupils, parents, citizens and researchers; it has also polarised the public debate. Some are afraid that Finland's high position in the examination results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) will be tarnished, whilst others emphasise that the current educational system is neglecting the well-being, participation and school satisfaction of pupils as the individual interests of pupils are not considered, and there are no common discussions concerning different happenings in everyday school reality. As a result, often extreme viewpoints are the most visible part of public debates, whilst the masses are supporting both aim as the core of public education. Democracy is a good example of a theme that concerns both sides of the debate. Even though subject knowledge is important, so is a way of living that is based more on world phenomenality rather than on an artificial subject division. Education towards democratic citizenship, including critical thinking, requires both.

## Conclusion

Finland has had two significant educational reforms, the first being in the 1860s when folk schools and the Teacher Education College in Jyväskylä were founded. The second, one hundred years later in the 1970s, was the introduction of the comprehensive school system. Both reforms changed radically students' positions in school. It now appears that a third reform is on its way. The new reform aims to transform students' positions towards more active, participatory and democratic agency in schools. This would mean that students have both voice and real power to influence the reality of the schools within their surrounding society. Even if no schools with excellent subject learning results and strong democratic culture yet exist anywhere in the world, this goal could be possible to achieve in Finland. However, it requires that Finnish TE as well as schools start to promote education for democracy stronger than currently by taking more seriously the democratic dimensions of everyday life.

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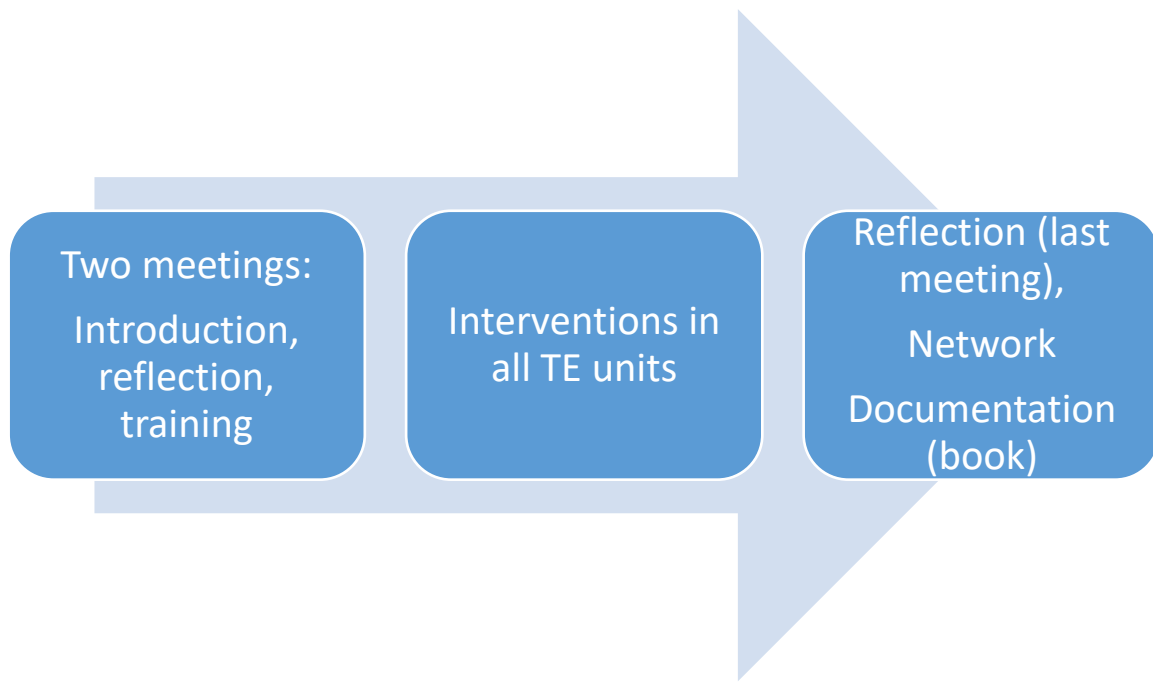
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|                                 | <b>Discipline school</b>                                 | <b>Competition school</b>                               | <b>Co-operative school</b>                               |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Sociopolitical dimension</b> | Discipline<br>Manners<br>Traditional values<br>Nostalgia | Working-life focus<br>Entrepreneurship<br>Individualism | Solidarity<br>Fairness<br>Hope and optimism<br>Democracy |
| <b>Pedagogical dimension</b>    | Teacher-driven<br>Division into subjects                 | Constructivism<br>Individual learning                   | Collaboration<br>Phenomenon based                        |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Values</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Day for democracy and human rights.</li> <li>2. Analysis of the state of TE unit.</li> <li>3. Voice for teacher educators in their own community.</li> </ol>   | <p><b>Attitudes</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training for teacher educators.</li> </ol>   |
| <p><b>Skills</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Education for democracy in teaching practices.</li> <li>2. Analysis of teacher educators' teaching practices.</li> <li>3. Simulation as a method for education for democracy and human rights.</li> <li>4. Drama as a method for education for democracy and human rights.</li> <li>5. Workshop for student teachers.</li> <li>6. Cross-curricular co-operation between different school subjects.</li> <li>7. Philosophy for children – a teaching experiment.</li> </ol> | <p><b>Knowledge and critical understanding</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Democratic learning environments in the future school.</li> <li>2. Course of democracy and human rights in teacher's work.</li> <li>3. Education for democracy among teacher educators – critical reflection</li> </ol> |