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**Author(s):** Rautiainen, Matti; Hiljanen, Mikko; Tallavaara, Riitta

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# 15 Education for democracy and democratic citizenship

*Matti Rautiainen, Mikko Hiljanen, and Riitta Tallavaara*

## Introduction

Educating democratic citizens who are committed to the values and principles of democracy and who are actively willing to develop democracy is at the core of crosscurricular teaching and closely related to another central theme of this book: Bildung. As pointed out in Chapter 3, “progressivist, democratic, and nonaffirmative approaches” can also highlight particular aspects of Bildung. A democratic approach emphasizes Bildung’s social aspect, and in democratic societies, social aspects are strongly connected to democratic life, its principles, and its values.

Cross- and transcurricular teaching is the basis for a successful education within and for a democracy. Content related to democracy needs to be studied in different school subjects, but democracy is more than knowledge. Fostering democratic values, attitudes toward democracy, and democratic skills requires teaching that is persistent, regular, and both cross- and transcurricular. This is at the center of this chapter, where we reflect on the idea of education for democracy in the context of crosscurricular, especially transcurricular teaching.

Teachers are crucial to implementing education for democracy and democratic citizenship in classrooms and schools. Traditionally, schools have been institutions that follow the contemporary and permanent structures and activities of democracy rather than radically challenging and renewing themselves and society. Politicians define the basic guidelines for the development of schools, which does not mean that schools and teachers do not have power concerning their profession and work. The autonomy and pedagogical freedom of teachers and schools vary between societies. Thus, teachers’ possibilities for acting as proactive developers of democracy instead of being merely reactive also vary. In principle, the teacher’s role, according to typical school curricula in democratic societies, is to be an active educator for students’ democratic participation.

However, active social participation and interest in, for example, politics among young people is lower than expected (Edling & Mooney Simmie, 2020; Männistö, 2020; Raiker et al., 2020). Additionally, in the present state of research on democracy and education, there are many studies describing

initiatives at a general level, but specific knowledge is still fragmentary (Barrett & Pachi, 2019). Furthermore, a comparative approach is difficult because democratic cultures have evolved historically and may differ from one another, even though democratic countries share the same values and principles. In countries with a strong culture of representative democracy, schools typically follow the representative principle via student councils. In addition, school systems are different. For example, Finland is an example of a homogeneous school system in which all pupils study in a nine-year comprehensive school close to their home. Private schools and schools representing alternative pedagogy are rare, while in England, on the other hand, schools follow a class society practice, in which, for example, boarding schools exist for upper-class children. In many countries, private schools are a significant part of the school system, with a background often based on religious or alternative pedagogies.

### **Education for democracy as a way of life**

Like education for democracy, democracy has many faces, and an unambiguous definition does not exist. Instead, the basic conditions for democracy, including rights such as freedom of speech and opinion, enable all citizens to engage in political activity in a democratic society. Since ancient Greece (e.g., Aristotle, 1998; Thucydides, 2005), the core question of democracy has been how to live as free citizens together in a shared society. In ancient Greece, the shared world was very concrete because citizens with full rights could meet each other in the city center. In more complex societies, direct democracy has its limitations. Thus, representativeness is characteristic of most modern democracies at all levels of society, including schools (students' councils). Contemporary democracies are plural societies where human plurality, where all people are equal, and respected citizens, should exist everywhere. According to Mouffe (1999), this should be a guiding principle for democratic societies, and democracies should enable this for all citizens, especially those at the margins. Mouffe especially argued against the proponents of deliberative democracy, like Jürgen Habermas, who defended rational decision-making and argued that the best argument should win in the public sphere (Mouffe, 1999). There is a danger of making democratic education too strongly dependent on rational discussion because this tends to benefit students with special argumentation skills and exclude those from less privileged backgrounds.

John Dewey (1966) stated that democracy should be learned by living as democratically as possible in school. Thus, according to Dewey, school subjects, as well as other school activities, should be organized in such a way that communal life and democracy are implemented in the everyday life of classrooms and schools. In other words, democratic life is not a separate part of school life but an essential part of human life across and beyond the different subjects. Dewey was a fervent supporter of democracy and has remained the most important philosopher of education for democracy. His image of school

as a minor society, a place where pupils can grow into democratic citizens by practicing democracy in school and having many rights and duties in the school community, has been developed in, for example, Gert Biesta's (2006, 2019) thinking, in which school represents a way of living connected to equality, justice, participation, and communality.

Democratic citizenship can be implemented in various ways in schools, depending on what kind of democracy and education for democracy teachers and schools represent. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) defined three types of citizens (see Table 15.1); they emphasized that good democratic citizenship is a broad concept and is manifested in a variety of practices. Thus, it is important for teachers and school communities to reflect on their own actions and professional identity by asking the following: What kind of democratic citizens does our school educate?

Increasingly over the past ten years, education for democracy has been approached from the viewpoint of competences. The basic question, then, is what democratic competences should be at the core of teaching in schools. The Council of Europe (CoE) released the *Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (RFCDC) in 2017 (CoE, 2017), and all member states of the CoE have been committed to implementing the RFCDC in their educational systems and policies. The RFCDC was developed for use in primary and secondary schools, higher education, and vocational training institutions to strengthen the culture of democracy in education. It was constructed and coordinated by the CoE, here by using a large number of experts in the fields of education and the social sciences. Thus, it constitutes a framework based on scientific research and theorizing about the culture of democracy in education. The RFCDC's 20 competences are divided into four categories: values, attitudes, skills, and knowledge and critical understanding (see Figure 15.1). The framework fosters a culture of democracy in schools from various perspectives, from the policy level to classroom practices. It also enables the creation of guidelines on how to strengthen a culture of democracy in schools and, more broadly, in education (Lenz, 2020). The CoE has supported the implementation of the RFCDC through teaching materials and projects such as "Free to Speak – Safe to Learn: Democratic Schools for All," a CoE project for schools all over Europe.

The practices of education for democracy vary greatly nationally and in schools and classrooms because of varying curricula, the general culture of democracy, school cultures, and teachers' own attitudes and commitment to education for democracy. However, schools in all democracies attempt to promote active citizenship, which is developed via sharing power with students. All teachers have the autonomy to implement this idea in their own context, even though cultural and normative frames may vary. In school cultures that provide strong autonomy to teachers, education for democracy may vary a great deal, especially when comparing classrooms. In school cultures where autonomy is more limited, the differences are smaller (Raiker & Rautiainen,

*Table 15.1* Types of Citizens Needed to Support Effective Democratic Society According to Westheimer and Kahne (2004, p. 242)

<i>Kinds of Citizens</i>			
	<i>Personally Responsible Citizen</i>	<i>Participatory Citizen</i>	<i>Justice-Oriented Citizen</i>
Description	Acts responsibly in his/her community Works and pays taxes Obeys laws Recycles, gives blood Volunteers to lend a hand in times of crisis	Active member of community organizations and/or improvement efforts Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development, or clean up environment Knows how government agencies work Knows strategies for accomplishing collective tasks	Critically assesses social, political, and economic structures to see beyond surface causes Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice Knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change
Sample action	Contributes food to a food drive	Helps to organize a food drive	Explores why people are hungry and acts to solve root causes
Core assumptions	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures	To solve social problems and improve society, citizens must question and change established systems and structures when they reproduce patterns of injustice over time

2017). Typical practices at the school level include student councils, different types of voting, pupil-centered projects, and various discussion sessions. Just as democracy develops through diverse experiments, education for democracy has a basis in experiments. At its most radical, experimentation can develop an alternative option for a general school system, such as Freinet schools, which emphasize a democratic way of life through pedagogical methods, as well as those spaces strengthening cooperation and collaborative working in classrooms and schools (Freinet, 1990).

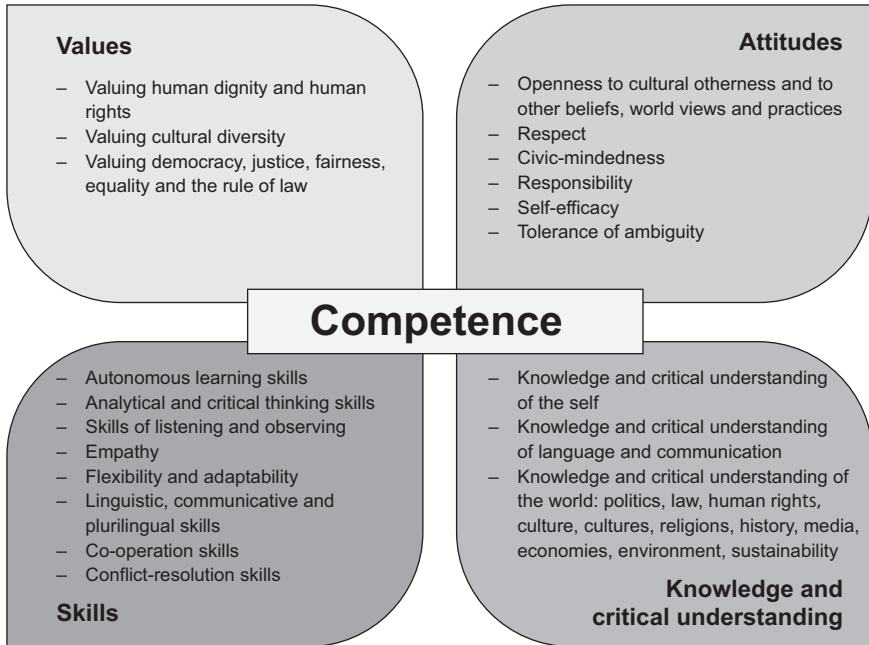


Figure 15.1 CoE’s 20 competences for democratic culture: the RFCDC “butterfly.”

### Education for democracy and crosscurricular teaching

Democracy should be the basis not just for society, but also for schoolwork. If schools do not promote the idea of democracy, the nature of society would change dramatically. Thus, education for democracy belongs to the entire school community, which fosters it by means ranging from the teaching of diverse subjects to the operational culture of the school (see Table 15.2).

The principles of democracy can permeate a school culture holistically through a transcurricular approach. In practice, however, all school systems are far from this ideal in the democratic countries when one considers, for

Table 15.2 Examples of Crosscurricular Teaching in Education for Democracy (Following Table 2.1)

<i>Crosscurricular Teaching</i>		
<i>Crosscurricular Teaching</i>	<i>Transcurricular Teaching</i>	
<b>Multidisciplinary</b>	<b>Interdisciplinary</b>	<b>Transdisciplinary</b>
Democratic competences are integrated on subject’s teaching	Teaching democratic participation	Principles of democracy are visible part of school culture (democracy as a way of living)

example, John Dewey's thoughts on education for democracy. Dewey's idea of school as a minor society requires radical changes in school culture and its routines. However, school culture changes slowly. The traditions of school are strongly connected to school subjects and crosscurricular teaching from multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives. In contrast, the transcultural approach is a more radical perspective on education for democracy, requiring a holistic and continuing democratic perspective on school work in everyday life (Raiker et al., 2020). In this chapter, we focus on the transcultural approach toward education for democracy in teacher education developed at the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä. First, we provide an overview of crosscurricular (multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary) practices in education for democracy.

### *Crosscurricular practices in education for democracy*

Alongside crosscurricular teaching, democracy is part of the content of subject teaching, traditionally in the subjects of history, social studies, and philosophy. Many skills that are prerequisites for learning and practicing democracy, such as linguistic and communicative skills, are at the core of language learning. All competences (see Figure 15.1) can be connected to distinct school subjects based on curriculum analysis, as has been done in Andorra, where the RFCDC has been implemented strongly in the national curriculum and generally in the entire education system (GFOSS, 2018).

Typical crosscurricular teaching in education for democracy involves the manner in which subject teaching includes the methods and actions that develop the skills, values, attitudes, and/or knowledge essential for a democratic culture. Cooperation skills are a good example of democratic competence practices that can be present in all subjects. In addition, analytical and critical thinking skills, listening and observing skills, and linguistic, communicative, or plurilingual skills are at the core of basic education in all democratic countries, while diverse subjects that have a special nature and character can be linked to specific competences, such as history to empathy (historical empathy), team sports to respect, and ethics/religious education to openness to cultural otherness and other beliefs, worldviews, and practices (see more in Chapter 3 on *Bildung*, Chapter 6 on dialogic teaching, Chapter 8 on wellbeing and skills for life, and Chapter 17 on language and literacy).

The objective of crosscurricular teaching is to develop transversal skills and competences. For example, the Finnish National Curriculum for Basic Education (2014) defined seven multidisciplinary learning modules representing interdisciplinary crosscurricular teaching. One of these multidisciplinary learning modules is *participation, involvement, and building a sustainable future*. Schools implement this module in various ways. It can be integrated into subject teaching when it comes to a crosscurricular approach. The learning module can be part of the school's operational culture when it is continuous and active, such as through participation in social activities, class

councils, or implementing systematic dialogic discussion in classrooms, which is close to the transcurricular approach in education for democracy. A typical way to implement crosscurricular teaching in education for democracy is project weeks, when students hone their participatory skills in different contexts.

### **The transcurricular approach to education for democracy**

As mentioned earlier, the transcurricular approach is not a typical way of implementing education for democracy in most countries. However, educators cannot be blamed for a lack of effort, even starting from John Dewey, who already tried to put the idea into practice in his own school experiments. In the absence of ready-made, established models, the transcurricular approach is still in an experimental phase, especially implemented by individual teachers at the classroom level (see, e.g., Kristiansson, 2021), but there is a tendency toward a broader approach. An example is our own experimental work, where the aim was to develop teacher education according to the idea of democracy as a way of life. As part of this process, a group of student teachers, called Derby, started studying democracy education in 2020.

The Derby group's design was based on a vision of a close and complex interconnection between school and society. The basic premise of education, which also served as the starting point for education, was to see the school in society and society in the school. Our experience with teacher education at that time indicated that social issues and education for democracy were discussed in teacher education as such but that the themes were often dealt with in a superficial manner (see Kasa et al., 2021). The themes emerged in a few courses, with a focus on the orientation and knowledge of the teacher of the course in question. However, longer-term implementations with a broader and deeper focus on the topic were absent. At the same time, the general discussion in the field of educational science, as well as the public debate on school more broadly, was based on a psychology paradigm, meaning questions about the relationship between school and society were not brought to the attention of students or teachers in mainstream teacher education. In other words, from a psychological perspective, certain issues in education, especially those that emphasize societal problems in schools and schooling, were only partially dealt with and were explained in a misleading way because they tend to see these problems from the individual point of view (see, e.g., Brunila et al., 2021). We believe that a more societal perspective would provide better explanatory models to understand the role of education in society and broader knowledge for future teachers to understand and be creative under the diverse cross-pressures that teachers undoubtedly face in their work and in their lives.

In addition to the emphasis on the relationship between school and society, another cornerstone of our design and subsequent implementation was a concern for radical equality among all people. Rancière's (1991) concept of equality of intelligence served as a theoretical model that did not fit into the university context without mediation (in Finland, teacher training is carried



out as university education so that classroom teachers graduate with a master's degree in education). As teachers and researchers, we were caught up in the hierarchical structure of the university and of scientific research, which we were trying to break at the same time. Furthermore, the students had adopted a model from their own school experiences, according to which the teacher was an authority of knowledge who decided the level at which knowledge would be passed on. We deliberately wanted to change this by emphasizing our own limits and the fact that we do not know everything but want to support collaborative knowledge-making.

At the same time, it was necessary to realize that equality (as a value) had to be lived out in everyday life. In our experience, it was easy for teachers and teacher-trainees to commit to equality as a principle, but difficulties would arise when this was translated into different practices in everyday schoolwork. This is something we experienced both in our own attitudes toward students and in the way students treated one another in a more or less egalitarian way.

The third cornerstone of the experiment was related to equality as well. It consisted of teachers' (including us as the supervisors of the group) perceptions of their own insecurities and imperfections and of turning these into assets. At the design stage, we felt it was important to emphasize that there was no single model of a "teacher" to which all teacher-trainees should conform. Instead, the starting point was that we all were – and would remain – very different, so the task was to learn to live and work together in that diversity in a way that valued and nurtured one another's humanity and competence. We felt that, regarding this, as well as the other cornerstones, our role and example as instructors of the group were paramount. It was important to highlight our own insecurities about the different teaching situations and topics and, more broadly, about our perceptions of our own teaching and identity as teachers.

The experiment was both planned and implemented in a team-teaching manner. During the planning phase, a larger group of teachers was involved in the design of the training, but the activities were led by the teachers, who also jointly delivered the training. Although there is some discussion of team- or co-teaching in Finland in general and in teacher education specifically, there are not many examples or models of it. Part of the aim of this team-teaching was to break down perceptions of the teacher as a "lone wolf" working independently behind closed doors. We believe that breaking this perception is crucial to enabling democracy as a way of life in schools (see also Chapter 5).

A further cornerstone of the experiment was inquiry-based learning, aiming to combine theory and practice. This meant that our aim was to create a working culture that would encourage experimentation and, above all, offer students (despite the COVID-19 pandemic) as many opportunities as possible to try out the experiments in practice. In this way, we sought to provide students with meaningful learning experiences (see, e.g., Kostiainen et al., 2018; Kostiainen & Pöysä-Tarhonen, 2019; Tarnanen & Kostiainen, 2020) that would provide and concretize new perspectives for students and for us on what democracy as a way of life could be.

From this starting point, teaching for democracy as a way of life was established by studying the various aspects of teacher education and, ultimately, education for democracy from a transcultural approach. In practice, this was carried out in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Jyväskylä, whose structures supported and enabled the development work. First, during the experiment and at the time of writing this chapter, the department had a phenomenon-based curriculum, meaning teacher education was built up around five different phenomena: learning and guidance; interaction and collaboration; education, society, and change; competence and expertise; and scientific knowledge and thinking (on the phenomenon-based curriculum and especially the transition process to it, see Naukkarinen & Rautiainen, 2020; Naukkarinen et al., 2022). These phenomena were also the topics of the individual courses in the basic studies of educational science that the group carried out during their first year of study. In other words, the basic studies were conducted by exploring these phenomena, and in later studies, the treatment of the phenomena was expanded and deepened. The phenomenon-based curriculum allowed for the long-term development of the topics to be covered and the linking of individual courses so that the same phenomenon could be dealt with in many different courses from different perspectives.

Guided by these plans and under a set of constraints, a group of 19 students and 2 teacher trainers started their journey toward democracy as a way of life in autumn 2020. Soon after, we realized that pursuing a democratic way of life was not a simple process. On the one hand, working in a new group – with different perceptions, expectations, and interaction skills of the individuals – and the difficulties in group interaction that arose because of those drove the group into a crisis. On the other hand, the principles of equality, freedom, and responsibility; co-learning and co-teaching; and collective knowledge formation also caused crises for individual students and the group because they were not familiar to the students, and learning these new things took time. For example, responsibility and freedom could be intimidating for students who were accustomed to an atmosphere in which the teacher was the leader of the class and teaching. As the group's instructors, we tried to break this perception and build a culture that encouraged activity, experimentation, and exploration and supported students' autonomy and agency. We did not leave crises unaddressed, but we dealt with them together with the students, which, in retrospect, had a democratizing effect on the group's culture (Hiljanen et al., 2021; also see Fornaciari & Männistö, 2017). In other words, dealing with crises was an activity in which democracy became part of the group's way of life.

In a variety of practical experiments (three in total during the first academic year), the students were able to practice activities and assume responsibility unknown to them from their previous school paths. These experiments were important both for building the spirit of the community of the group and for learning overall. The joint planning and ownership of the projects and shared experiences created a sense of cohesion within the group. Additionally, the fact that the experiments allowed students to transform the theoretical

knowledge and skills acquired during their studies into practical learning situations gave depth to the learning of phenomena. This was also supported by the fact that, in addition to planning and implementing the experiments, the students studied the outcomes of the experiments and reflected on what could have been done differently to achieve an even better or different result. All this supports the democratic lifestyle, which itself (but especially the pursuit of such a lifestyle) is a process of building a lifestyle through trial, error, and then new trial. Put differently, a democratic way of life is not a clear-cut entity but is instead formed in a living process of reconciling the expectations, desires, and meanings of different actors in a full-time process, which is very much in line with the ideal of *Bildung* (see Chapter 3), which here pertains not only to individual students, but to a whole learning community (see also Chapter 8). In this sense, it is important that the group was driven into crises because interpreting crises as spaces showing the dysfunctionality of old ways of thinking and acting prompted the invention of new ones (see Hämeen-Anttila et al., 2013). As such, experiments served both as places of learning and as points of reference, the development of which was of paramount importance to democracy as a way of life.

After the first year, work and studying in the Derby group were less intensive, and courses were largely carried out in other groups. However, it was important that the group work did not stop completely after the first year; therefore, two courses were completed in the same group. One of the courses was tailored so that the group was largely maintained, and the theme of the course was democracy education. A few special education students also joined the group. The group's starting point was an inquiry-based learning assignment carried out in a primary school in Jyväskylä.

We examined the views of the Derby students on meaningful teaching experiences in relation to democracy education during the first two years of study (Fornaciari et al., 2023). We found that the students' meaningful learning experiences were broadly distributed over the entire period of study, and the experiences were thematically distributed over a wide range of topics. In other words, although we had designed themes in which education for democracy was supposed to be concentrated, it seems that, surprisingly, some of the students' meaningful experiences did not fully correlate with the themes and activities that we had planned to be significant. On the one hand, it seems that the students saw meaningfulness from their own perspective, and the meaningfulness in these situations was linked to their own situation in their journey to be a teacher. On the other hand, it seems that democracy as a way of life supported not only some predetermined aspects of democratic education, but also the students' overall growth (see Fornaciari et al., 2023).

From a transcurricular perspective, this finding is interesting. It seems that, when democratic education is done or at least attempted in a transcurricular way, it allows students to grasp the topic they are studying from their own premises and standpoints. We argue that the outcome would not have been the same if the studies had been more strongly subject specific; some students

might never have found the meanings we wanted to offer them. With some, we might have gone deeper into the subject at the expense of potential “drop-outs.” Either way, we are almost certain that not everyone’s attachment to democratic education would have been so personal, making the cultivation of students’ identities as democratic educators more difficult.

## **Conclusion**

Democracy is not self-evident. Instead, it is prone to vulnerability and is in progress all the time. Thus, if school represents an institution of democracy, it must focus on this, emphasize that teachers are educators of democracy, and promote diverse, crosscurricular teaching in school, educating democratic citizens via versatile methods, phenomena, and content (see Figure 15.1). Democracy is a common value and the basis of our social life, which should be based on empowering the interaction between citizens and, in the school context, between students.

In many initial and in-service teacher training sessions, we encountered teachers and student teachers who doubted their own expertise in promoting democracy in their work. Thus, the question of what kind of expertise educators of democracy need (compared with the current situation) is relevant. We emphasize curiosity and interest in education for democracy together as a school community. Nobody can strengthen and construct democracy alone, but it can be done together. Thus, we argue that education for democracy will strengthen if teachers, together with students, show openness, interest, and curiosity toward one another and develop teaching for democracy toward democracy as a way of living. If this is achieved, schools could also become proactive instead of reactive actors in a society in which expertise belongs to the community, not merely to individuals.

Because democracy is a phenomenon that is not strictly confined to school subjects and comprises more than knowledge and skills that are taught only in specific subjects in schools, democracy education should take place in cross- and transcurricular teaching. In our teacher education development work, we have tried to do this, and the results are encouraging. Students’ democratic education skills have developed significantly, and everyone has had the opportunity to engage with democracy education from their own perspective. This has enabled students to grow in their own direction, fostering their *Bildung* and supporting the creation of a democratic way of life. From this perspective, cross- and transcurricular teaching truly is a win-win situation.

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