

METHODOLOGY HANDBOOK



Democracy4all Ages

**Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults to
Teach the Next Generation**



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METHODOLOGY HANDBOOK

Erasmus+ “Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults to Teach the Next Generation”

Democracy and Civic Participation Education for Children Aged 5–9, Teachers and Teachers’ Trainers

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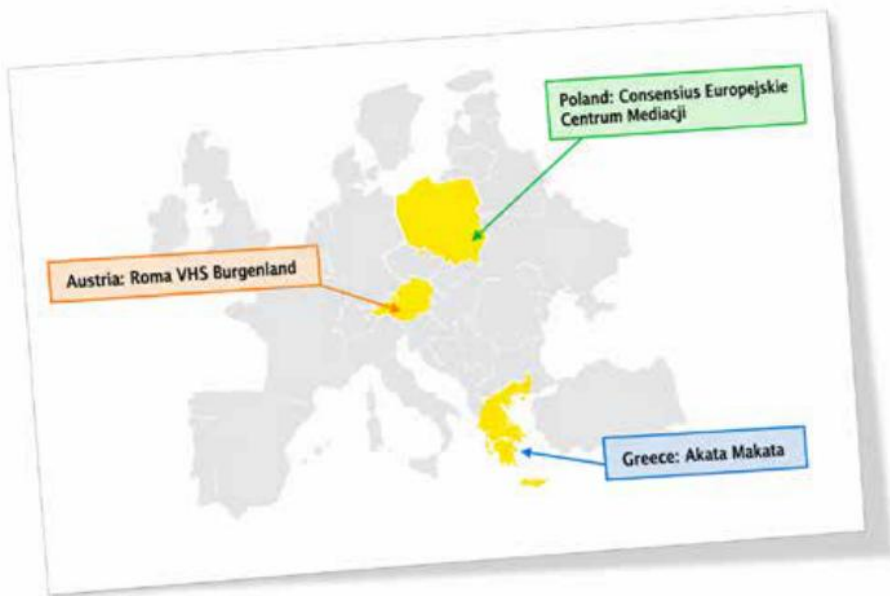


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Authors and Researchers:

For Austria: Melinda Tamás MA, Mag. Herwig Wallner, Mag.a Carina Pinzker

For Greece: Konstantina Soumpenioti, Venia Soumpenioti

For Poland Paulina Roś, Krzysztof Roś

1. Introduction

The project “Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults to Teach the Next Generation” (Democracy4All Ages) is an Erasmus+ small-scale partnership in adult education that aims to strengthen the capacity of educators and adult trainers to teach democratic values and civic engagement to young learners.

The project focuses on developing practical, adaptable educational resources - including a manual, a guidebook for trainers and a set of learning materials - to support educators in integrating democratic principles into everyday learning contexts from a very early age.

Building on pedagogical approaches such as Janusz Korczak’s child-centred philosophy and Philosophy for Children (P4C), the project promotes participatory learning, critical thinking and the active involvement of children in decision-making processes.

2. Development of the Methodology

The methodology presented in this document was developed through a structured process combining empirical input, review of practices and collaborative exchange within the consortium.

A needs analysis was conducted through a common questionnaire distributed to parents and educators working with children aged 5-9 in all partner countries. This provided empirical insights into existing practices, challenges and expectations related to democratic education, inclusion and participation.

In parallel, partners carried out a review of existing practices and approaches in their respective contexts. The results were synthesised in a comparative report identifying key approaches and shared challenges across countries.

These findings were further developed through structured exchange within the consortium, in particular during the Learning, Teaching and Training Activity (LTTA), where approaches were discussed, tested and refined. Follow-up meetings supported the continued development and alignment of the methodology.

The methodology is therefore the result of an iterative process that translates empirical findings and practice-based insights into concrete and adaptable approaches for educators.

3. Theoretical Framework - National Reports

The three national reports (attached to this document) from Austria, Greece and Poland reveal a strong common commitment to democratic education and civic participation for children aged 5-9. In all three countries, democracy education is understood primarily as an experiential and relational process rather than as formal instruction.

The reports consistently emphasize that children learn democratic values such as fairness, empathy, cooperation, responsibility, and participation mainly through everyday interactions, play-based activities, dialogue, teamwork, and observing adult role models.

All three systems are formally aligned with European and international frameworks, particularly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all acknowledge participation and children's rights as important educational principles.

Another strong similarity is the recognition of a significant gap between policy aspirations and practical implementation. Across all reports, educators face structural barriers such as limited training, insufficient pedagogical materials, time constraints, and inconsistent institutional support.

The surveys conducted in each country also demonstrate broad support among parents and educators for democratic education and child participation, alongside a preference for fostering independence, empathy, communication, and cooperation over obedience and authority-based approaches.

Furthermore, all three reports stress that democracy education should be a shared responsibility between schools, families, and communities, while highlighting the importance of participatory methodologies and reflective educational practices.

Despite these shared foundations, the reports also reveal important differences shaped by national educational structures, historical contexts, and pedagogical traditions.

Austria presents the most systematically articulated framework for democracy education, supported by strong institutional initiatives such as parliamentary educational programs and structured pedagogical guidance linked to democratic culture competences. Austrian democracy education is deeply integrated into early childhood education philosophy, although implementation varies due to the federal structure of the education system.



Greece, by contrast, emphasizes the absence of clear pedagogical mechanisms for teaching democracy despite strong policy alignment with European democratic values. The Greek report focuses heavily on methodological gaps, especially educators' limited preparation for facilitating dialogue, participation, and shared decision-making. It also highlights inclusive and intercultural democratic practices, particularly in schools working with refugee and culturally diverse communities.

Poland differs through its highly centralized educational framework and stronger connection between civic education, national identity, and historical experience. Democratic education in Poland is more implicitly embedded within moral and social education, often shaped by teachers' individual interpretations. The Polish survey also uniquely highlights concerns about adults' political or cultural insensitivity as a major obstacle to democratic learning. Moreover, Poland demonstrates a stronger coexistence of traditional patriotism with modern democratic citizenship compared to the other two countries.

Overall, while all three countries recognise democracy education as essential in early childhood, Austria appears more structurally developed, Greece more focused on pedagogical transformation and inclusion, and Poland more influenced by centralized governance and historical-cultural narratives.

4. Surveys (entry/end) from LTTA

4.1 Introduction

This report presents the results of the pre-training (Entry Survey) and post-training (Final Reflection Survey) questionnaires completed by 11 participants of workshops devoted to teaching democratic and civic education to children aged 5-9. The workshops were implemented within the framework and values of the Erasmus+ Programme, contributing to priorities related to participation in democratic life, common values, civic engagement, and inclusion.

The surveys were designed to assess changes in participants' confidence, knowledge, and practical approaches to supporting children's participation, active citizenship, and democratic values from an early age. A total of 11 participants completed both surveys.

4.2 Methodology

Participants were asked to complete an entry survey prior to the workshop and a final reflection survey after its completion, in line with Erasmus+ quality assurance, monitoring, and evaluation practices. Both surveys included three quantitative

questions measured on a 5-point scale (1 = lowest, 5 = highest), as well as two open-ended qualitative questions.

This mixed-methods approach supports evidence-based evaluation by combining quantitative indicators of learning outcomes with qualitative insights into participants' experiences, needs, and perceived impact. This report focuses on comparing average scores before and after the training and summarizing key areas of change.

4.3 Quantitative Results

The analysis of the quantitative data shows a clear positive impact of the workshop across all three measured areas.

4.3.1 Confidence in Supporting Children's Participation

Participants' self-reported confidence in supporting children aged 5-9 in expressing their opinions and participating in decision-making increased from an average score of 3.36 (pre-training) to 4.00 (post-training). This increase indicates that the workshop strengthened participants' sense of self-efficacy and preparedness to encourage children's voices in everyday contexts.

4.3.2 Knowledge of Democratic and Civic Education Approaches

The most significant increase was observed in participants' perceived knowledge of democratic and civic education approaches suitable for early childhood and early primary education. The average score rose from 2.81 before the workshop to 4.18 after the workshop, reflecting a substantial gain in understanding of concepts, methods, and age-appropriate practices related to democracy and children's rights.

4.3.3 Inclusion of Children in Everyday Decision-Making

Participants also reported a notable change in their approach to practice. The average score related to including children in everyday decisions (such as rules, activities, and routines) increased from 3.45 pre-training to 4.54 post-training. This suggests that participants not only gained knowledge and confidence but also intended to apply democratic principles in their professional or family settings.

4.4 Qualitative Feedback – Expectations and Reflections

In the entry survey, participants shared their expectations and initial needs related to teaching democracy to young children. In the final survey, they reflected on changes in their thinking, attitudes, and practices, as well as their plans for future application. Selected participant quotes (Entry Survey – Expectations What are your main expectations for this workshop?):

[Quote 1]

I would like to learn ways to introduce democracy issues differently from voting, choosing one option etc. And to broaden my knowledge on how to do it.

[Quote 2]

I am afraid democratic values are in danger nowadays so I would like to do as much as I can to protect these values from a longer perspective.

[Quote 3]

See different national perspectives, meet people practising democracy for children in different settings.

Selected participant quotes (Final Reflection Survey – Reflections on Growth

What has changed in your thinking, attitudes or practice as a result of this workshop?):

[Quote 1]

I believe I can use the materials that will be developed and I felt perfect with what we discussed.

[Quote 2]

I have realised that democracy is very important and that we need to practice it more with little children. After seeing Korczak's theory in the early 20's it made me think – where do we stand now?

[Quote 3]

I've got different views from different countries. I've seen we are on a good way in Austria.

4.5 Qualitative Feedback – Challenges and Looking Ahead

Participants also highlighted challenges they faced prior to the workshop and identified areas where further support would be beneficial. After the workshop, many participants outlined concrete plans for applying democratic practices and expressed interest in continued learning and resources.

Selected participant quotes (Entry Survey – Challenges and Needs What challenges do you currently face when trying to introduce democratic values (...) in your work or family context?):

[Quote 1]

In a school context we need time, space and motivated teachers for this subject.

[Quote 2]

Challenges related to the socio-economic situation in our country. People might feel that these values/discussions are too liberal.

[Quote 3]

Attitude of adults – which is often too sceptical, too passive. Lack of systemic solutions. Wrong understanding/ misunderstanding of democratic values.

Selected participant quotes (Final Survey – Looking Ahead How do you plan to apply what you have learned in your work or family context?):

[Quote 1]

I realised that open questions are a great form of articulating needs and ideas.

[Quote 2]

First of all I'd like to spread the idea among the teachers in my school (ones who are not fluent in English) and convince them that teaching democracy is worth the effort.

[Quote 3]

I will look more into philosophy for children and SDGs for new ideas and inspiration. I would like to see more resources at the end of the project – that I could use in my daily practice.

4.6 Conclusion

Overall, the comparison of pre-training and post-training survey results demonstrates that the workshop had a strong positive impact on participants' learning outcomes. Clear increases in confidence, knowledge, and intended practice indicate that the training effectively supported participants in developing key competences related to democratic and civic education for children aged 5-9.

The results align closely with Erasmus+ objectives of strengthening **key competences for lifelong learning**, promoting **active citizenship**, and fostering **inclusive, participatory, and rights-based approaches** in education. The qualitative feedback further underscores the relevance, transferability, and sustainability of the workshop outcomes, highlighting participants' motivation to embed democratic values, children's participation, and civic engagement more deeply into their everyday professional and family practices.

These findings confirm the added value of the workshop as a meaningful contribution to Erasmus+ priorities and its potential for wider dissemination, scalability, and impact within early childhood and primary education contexts.

5. Description of the Methodology

5.1 Aim and Scope of the Methodology

This methodology provides a structured yet flexible approach to teaching democratic values and civic competences to children **aged 5-9**. It is designed to be used by **teacher trainers** working with educators, as well as by **teachers, facilitators** and any kind of **trainers/educators** working directly with children in formal and non-formal education settings. The methodology responds to the needs identified in national reports, surveys as well as post-workshop (LTTA - Learning Teaching Training Activities) conclusions and translates theoretical principles of democratic education into everyday educational practice.

The primary aim of all our actions within the project is to enable children to *experience democracy* through participation, dialogue, shared decision-making, and reflection.

Rather than focusing on institutional or political knowledge, the methodology emphasises **democratic culture** as it is **lived in daily interactions**.

Through repeated experiences, children gradually develop attitudes, skills, and values such as respect for others, responsibility, cooperation, conflict solving, critical thinking, and openness to diversity.

For teacher trainers, the methodology serves as a framework for capacity-building activities, including training, workshops and Learning, Teaching and Training Activities (LTTAs). For teachers, facilitators and educators it offers guidance on how to organise learning environments, relationships, and processes so that democratic learning becomes an integral part of everyday practice.

5.2 Target Groups and Two-Level Approach

The methodology is built on a **two-level approach** that ensures coherence and sustainability.

At the first level, **teacher trainers** support educators through participatory training processes. Trainers model democratic attitudes and facilitation methods, create space for reflection, and help educators connect theory with practice. The way trainers organise learning processes is a key element of the methodology, as it demonstrates how democratic principles can be applied in real educational contexts.

At the second level, **teachers, facilitators** and **educators** work directly with children aged 5-9. They translate the same principles experienced during training into age-



appropriate activities, routines, and interactions. Children are recognised as active participants who are capable of expressing opinions, listening to others, and taking shared responsibility when provided with appropriate support.

The strength of the methodology lies in this continuity between training and practice: educators do not merely learn about democratic education but experience it themselves before applying it with children.

5.3 Pedagogical and Conceptual Foundations

The methodology is grounded in established European and international frameworks as well as in recognised pedagogical approaches. These provide the conceptual basis for both the design of training processes and their practical implementation in educational settings.

Rather than being applied as abstract theoretical models, these frameworks inform the methodology by linking normative principles (such as participation, equality and inclusion) with concrete pedagogical practices.

Key reference points include:

5.3.1 The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a normative foundation for democratic education, particularly through its emphasis on children's right to participation, expression and protection. Article 12 (the right to be heard) and Article 28 (the right to education) are especially relevant in this context.

Within the methodology, the UNCRC informs the understanding of children as active participants whose perspectives are to be taken seriously in educational processes. It supports the integration of participatory practices such as shared decision-making, classroom discussions and collaborative rule-setting.

At the same time, the Convention provides a framework for linking rights with responsibilities in age-appropriate ways. Educational activities are therefore designed to help children understand that participation involves not only expressing one's own views, but also listening to others and contributing to a shared environment.

5.3.2 The Council of Europe Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)

The RFCDC provides a structured model for developing democratic competences through the interaction of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge. It shifts the focus from



institutional knowledge about democracy to the development of competences that enable active participation in democratic life.

Within this methodology, the RFCDC informs both the selection of learning objectives and the design of activities. Particular emphasis is placed on competences such as respect for human dignity, openness to different perspectives, cooperation and critical thinking.

These competences are not taught in isolation, but are embedded in everyday interactions and participatory learning processes, allowing children to experience democratic principles in practice.

5.3.3 Janusz Korczak's Pedagogy

Janusz Korczak's pedagogical approach provides an important conceptual reference point through its emphasis on children's dignity, agency and participation. Korczak understood children as full members of society, entitled to be heard and involved in decisions affecting their lives.

In this methodology, his approach informs the creation of learning environments in which children's voices are actively included and respected. Practices such as shared rule-setting, group discussions and participatory decision-making reflect this understanding.

At the same time, Korczak's focus on responsibility and community is reflected in the emphasis on shared responsibility, mutual respect and ethical relationships within the group.

5.3.4 Democracy and Children's Rights

Democratic education is closely linked to children's rights.

Children are not only future citizens but citizens of the present. They have the right to be heard, to participate, to receive information and to be treated with dignity and respect.

Educational settings should therefore provide opportunities for children to exercise these rights in age-appropriate ways.

Examples include:

- participating in decisions affecting daily routines,
- expressing opinions and preferences,
- asking questions,
- accessing information in understandable ways,
- contributing to classroom agreements.



Democratic participation should always be balanced with children's right to protection and well-being.

5.3.5 Philosophy for Children (P4C)

Philosophy for Children contributes a structured approach to dialogue, critical thinking and collective reflection. Through facilitated discussions (communities of inquiry), children are encouraged to formulate questions, express ideas and engage with different perspectives.

Within the methodology, P4C informs the use of dialogue-based learning processes that support reasoning, reflection and meaning-making. It provides tools for structuring discussions in a way that ensures participation while maintaining focus and depth.

This approach supports the development of democratic competences by linking participation with reflection and critical engagement.

5.3.6 Peer Learning and Peer Mediation

Peer learning and peer mediation approaches contribute to the practical implementation of democratic principles by emphasising cooperation, shared responsibility and constructive conflict resolution.

Within the methodology, these approaches are used to create opportunities for children to interact, negotiate and solve problems collaboratively. Peer mediation, in particular, introduces structured ways of addressing conflicts through dialogue rather than authority.

These practices support the development of social and emotional competences, including empathy, self-regulation and perspective-taking, which are essential for democratic participation.

- Transversal Perspective

Across all frameworks, a common perspective emerges: democracy is understood not primarily as a system of institutions, but as a set of lived practices that are experienced in everyday interactions.

The methodology therefore focuses on creating learning environments in which participation, dialogue, cooperation and reflection are embedded in daily routines. In this way, theoretical principles are translated into concrete educational practice.

5.4 Core Principles of Democratic Teaching for Children Aged 5-9

Several core principles underpin all aspects of the methodology.

	Principle	Why is it important?
1	Participation	Participation is essential for democratic teaching because it allows children to experience democracy through active involvement rather than passive learning. When children are encouraged to share ideas, take part in decisions, and work collaboratively, they develop confidence, a sense of belonging, and an understanding of responsibility and respect for others. Without participation, learning becomes adult-controlled and disengaging, limiting children's sense of agency and weakening their understanding of democratic values. The absence of participation can lead to passivity and reduced motivation, undermining children's early experiences of citizenship and shared responsibility.
2	Equality and inclusion	Equality and inclusion are central to democratic teaching because they ensure that all children feel valued, respected, and able to participate fully in learning. When classrooms actively include diverse voices, abilities, and backgrounds, children learn that fairness means giving everyone the support they need to succeed. If equality and inclusion are not upheld, some children may feel excluded or marginalized, leading to unequal participation, reduced confidence, and missed learning opportunities. This weakens children's understanding of democracy and can reinforce unfairness rather than respect and shared responsibility.
3	Fairness and transparency	Fairness and transparency are essential to democratic teaching because they help children understand that rules, decisions, and consequences are applied consistently and explained openly. When children know why decisions are made and see that everyone is

		treated fairly, they develop trust, respect, and a sense of justice within the learning community. Without fairness and transparency, children may feel confused, powerless, or mistrustful, which can lead to disengagement and undermine their understanding of democratic values such as accountability, honesty, and shared responsibility.
4	Respect for diversity	Respect for diversity is vital to democratic teaching because it helps children recognize and value differences in cultures, abilities, beliefs, and perspectives. When diversity is acknowledged and respected, children learn empathy, openness, and the importance of living together peacefully in a shared community. If respect for diversity is absent, stereotypes and exclusion may develop, limiting children's understanding of equality and weakening the foundations of democratic values such as mutual respect, inclusion, and social cohesion.
5	Shared responsibility	Shared responsibility is fundamental to democratic teaching because it teaches children that everyone has a role in contributing to the well-being and functioning of their community. When children take part in group tasks, follow agreed rules, and help one another, they learn accountability, cooperation, and the impact of their actions on others. Without shared responsibility, children may become passive or self-focused, which can undermine collaboration, weaken trust, and limit their understanding of how democratic communities rely on active participation and mutual care.
6	Decision making (Majority, Minority & Consensus)	Decision-making is a key element of democratic teaching as it enables children to understand how choices are made within a group and how different voices are considered. Through practices such as voting (majority rule), listening to minority perspectives and striving for consensus, children learn that democracy is not

		only about choosing the most popular option but also about respecting differing opinions and finding fair solutions. This process helps children develop critical thinking, negotiation skills and empathy. When decision-making is absent or controlled solely by adults, children miss the opportunity to understand how democratic processes function, limiting their sense of responsibility, fairness and respect for others' viewpoints.
7	Diversity, Belonging and Anti-Discrimination	Democratic societies are diverse. Children encounter people with different languages, cultures, religions, family structures, abilities and identities. Democratic education should therefore actively promote inclusion, belonging and respect for diversity. Educators should: • challenge stereotypes, • promote empathy and perspective-taking, • ensure equal participation, • create environments where every child feels valued, • address exclusion and discrimination when they occur. Children learn democracy not only through participation but also through experiencing that everyone belongs.

Teacher trainers ensure that educators experience these principles during training, reinforcing the idea that democratic education begins with adult practice.

5.5 Methodological Structure and Learning Cycle

The methodology follows a **recurrent learning cycle** that can be applied across different contexts and over extended periods. The cycle is not linear but iterative, allowing educators to revisit and deepen democratic learning.

The learning cycle includes:

1. Establishing a democratic learning environment
2. Experiencing democratic situations
3. Practising participation and shared decision-making
4. Reflection and dialogue
5. Transfer to everyday practice

This structure is used both in teacher training and in work with children, with adaptations to age, role, and context.

5.5.1 Establishing a Democratic Learning Environment

GOAL: Create a safe, trusting, and inclusive space where participation is meaningful for both educators and children.

A) For Trainers (working with teachers/educators):

Co-create group agreements:

Example: *We listen when someone is speaking, We can ask questions without fear, We respect different opinions.*

Clarify expectations:

Explain how decisions will be made: e.g., voting, consensus, or turn-taking.

Model democratic behavior:

Use inclusive language: *What do you all think? instead of You should...*

Practice active listening: repeat or summarize participants' contributions.

Respect differing viewpoints: acknowledge minority opinions and encourage reflection.

Example activity: Start a session by asking participants to propose one rule for group discussion, then collectively agree on the final set of rules.

B) For Teachers/Facilitators (working with children 5-9):

Co-create simple rules:

Use words, drawings, or symbols.

Examples: *We take turns speaking* (picture of children raising hands) / *We help each other* (drawing of sharing) / *We clean up together* (symbol of classroom materials)

Make rules flexible:

Let children suggest changes or additions during the week.

Reinforce rules to protect everyone's participation.

Integrate rules into routines:

Group meetings: children vote or reach consensus on activities.

Collaborative projects: children decide roles and responsibilities together.

Snack time or clean-up: children follow agreed sharing and teamwork rules.

Example activity: During circle time, review the class rules and ask: *Does anyone want to change or add a rule today?* Let children discuss and agree together.

5.5.2 Experiencing Democratic Situations

The methodology prioritises experience before explanation. Children and educators engage in concrete situations that involve choice, voice, and cooperation.

Goal: Help children learn democracy by actively participating in real-life situations before introducing abstract explanations.

A) For Trainers (working with teachers/educators):

Identify everyday opportunities for democratic learning:

Examples: group choices, shared space management, minor conflict resolution.

Support intentional facilitation:

Encourage teachers to ask: *How can this activity involve choice, voice, and cooperation?*

Model ways to prompt children to reflect on their decisions and their impact on others.



Example activity: During a training session, ask educators to list daily routines (snack time, play, clean-up) and discuss how each could be adapted to include child participation.

B) For Teachers/Facilitators (working with children 5-9):

Offer concrete choices:

Examples: children vote on which game to play, choose a story for circle time, or select roles in a group project.

Support participation with age-appropriate methods:

Younger children (5–6): use visual or physical tools like voting with colored blocks, moving to corners of the room, or pointing to pictures.

Older children (7-9): use simple group discussions, consensus-building, or majority vote with reflection.

Encourage cooperation:

Organize shared tasks like arranging classroom areas or managing materials collectively.

Discuss solutions for minor conflicts: e.g., How should we share the blocks fairly?

Example activity: When organizing a reading corner, ask children to propose different layouts, discuss pros and cons, then vote on the preferred setup using coloured cards.

5.5.3 Practising Participation and Shared Decision-Making

Goal: Support children in contributing meaningfully to decisions, ensuring balanced participation and shared responsibility.

A) For Trainers (working with teachers/educators):

Introduce structured participation strategies:

Examples: turn-taking, talking objects, role rotation, small-group discussions.

Use simulations and role-play:

Educators experience these strategies as participants, noticing how different facilitation styles affect inclusion and engagement.

Encourage reflection:

Discuss power dynamics: *Who dominates discussions? Who is silent? How can facilitators ensure all voices are heard?*

Example activity: In a training session, run a “mini classroom” simulation where educators practice using a talking object to manage contributions, then reflect on challenges and solutions.

B) For Teachers/Facilitators (working with children 5-9):

Use practical participation tools:

Turn-taking systems: children take turns speaking or leading an activity.

Talking objects: a ball, puppet, or card indicates who has the floor.

Role rotation: rotate responsibilities such as group leader, materials manager, or note-taker.

Small-group discussions: break larger groups into pairs or triads to ensure quieter children can share ideas.

Balance participation:

Encourage quieter children to contribute and prevent more confident children from dominating.

Monitor discussions to ensure everyone is included in decision-making.

Example activity: During a classroom project, provide each child a “discussion card” that must be used before moving on, or have children rotate leadership of small-group tasks weekly.

5.5.4 Reflection and Dialogue

Goal: Transform experiences of participation and cooperation into meaningful learning through reflection and dialogue.

A) For Trainers (working with teachers/educators):

Focus reflection on key aspects of practice:

Participation patterns: *Who participates actively? Who is quieter?*

Inclusion and exclusion: *Are all children included fairly?*

Emotional responses: *How do children react to decisions or conflicts?*

Facilitation choices: *How do teacher actions influence participation?*

Develop critical awareness:

Encourage educators to reflect on their own facilitation style and biases.

Use guided discussion prompts or peer feedback to explore challenges and successes.

Example activity: *After a role-play simulation, ask educators: Who spoke the most? Who was silent? How could we ensure everyone is included next time?*

B) For Teachers/Facilitators (working with children 5-9):

Link reflection to feelings and experiences:

Ask simple, concrete questions: *How did you feel when we decided together? Was it fair? What could we do differently next time?*

Use visual and creative tools:

Emotions charts or faces to show how children felt.

Drawing, storytelling, or role-play to express opinions and suggest improvements.

Integrate reflection into routines:

Circle time after an activity to discuss what worked well and what could be better.

Encourage children to propose changes to rules or procedures based on reflection.

Example activity: After a group project, children draw a picture showing one thing they liked and one thing they would change about working together, then share it with the group.

5.5.5 Transfer to Everyday Practice

Goal: Make democratic learning meaningful and sustainable by embedding it into daily routines and real-life experiences.

A) For Trainers (working with teachers/educators):

Identify everyday opportunities:

Encourage educators to notice moments in classroom routines, playground activities, or institutional procedures where democratic learning can occur.

Examples: choosing classroom responsibilities, deciding group work schedules, or discussing shared rules.

Link reflection and practice:

Support teachers in connecting past participation experiences with ongoing daily activities.

Example activity: During training, ask educators to map a typical school day and highlight at least three points where children could make meaningful choices or participate in decisions.

B) For Teachers/Facilitators (working with children 5-9):

Connect decisions to real consequences:

Example: If children vote on classroom jobs, ensure the chosen children actually carry out the tasks.

Invite proposals for improvement:

Children suggest changes to routines, group agreements, or shared spaces based on reflection and experience.

Revisit agreements regularly:

At circle time or weekly meetings, review classroom rules, group agreements, or decision-making processes. Adjust them collaboratively if needed.



Example activity: Children review the classroom cleaning schedule weekly and propose rotations or improvements based on what worked or didn't work the previous week.

5.5.6 Democracy in the Digital Age

Children increasingly encounter information, communication and participation in digital environments.

Even at an early age, democratic education should support the development of basic digital citizenship skills.

This includes:

- respectful communication,
- understanding that information may be true or false,
- asking questions about sources,
- recognising unfair or harmful behaviour,
- using technology responsibly.

These competences provide a foundation for active and responsible participation in democratic societies.

5.6 Roles of Educators, Facilitators, and Learners

Teacher trainers model democratic facilitation by demonstrating inclusive dialogue, shared decision-making, and respectful communication in their work with educators. They provide the theoretical grounding that helps teachers understand the developmental and pedagogical foundations of democracy education, and they encourage continuous reflective practice so that professionals can critically examine their experiences, refine their approaches, and grow in confidence when implementing participatory methods.

Teachers and facilitators bring these principles into everyday practice by creating classroom environments where participation is meaningful and safe for all children. They adapt the methodology to their specific cultural and institutional contexts, ensuring it remains relevant and feasible, while carefully balancing guidance with children's autonomy so that structure supports exploration, collaboration, and a genuine sense of agency.

Learners (children) are active contributors to the democratic learning process. They express their opinions, listen to diverse perspectives, and take part in shared decisions that affect their group. Over time, they gradually assume responsibility for tasks,



relationships, and outcomes, developing the confidence, empathy, and cooperative skills that form the foundation of democratic participation.

5.7 Required Competencies

To implement the methodology effectively, specific competencies are required.

For **teacher trainers**, essential competencies include:

- a solid conceptual understanding of democratic education and its pedagogical implications,
- strong facilitation and group-dynamics skills that enable them to create collaborative and reflective learning spaces for adults,
- capacity for reflective practice – the ability to analyse experiences, question assumptions, and model continuous professional learning,
- knowledge of adult learning methodologies (which allows them to design training processes that are participatory, experience-based, and responsive to educators' needs, thereby aligning the training approach with the democratic values it promotes).

For **teachers and facilitators**, key competencies include:

- the ability to translate democratic principles into everyday interactions with children,
- clear and empathetic communication,
- critical thinking,
- an understanding of democracy as an ongoing process rather than a fixed set of rules,
- ability to build trusting relationships, recognise children's perspectives, and manage conflicts constructively so they become opportunities for learning.

Together, these competencies enable educators to create environments where participation is authentic, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate.

5.8 Conditions for Successful Implementation

Successful implementation depends on several conditions.

First and foremost, educators need to hold a **genuine belief in children's capacity** to participate meaningfully and be prepared to share a degree of decision-making power, recognising children as competent social actors.

Structural conditions also play an important role: group size should allow every child to be heard and engaged, ideally remaining between ten and twenty participants so that dialogue and collaboration are manageable. The **physical environment** should be intentionally designed - flexible, accessible, and adaptable - to encourage interaction, movement, and different forms of expression rather than passive participation.

Equally crucial is the **allocation of sufficient time**, both for participatory activities and for reflection, enabling children and adults to revisit experiences, make sense of group processes, and gradually build a culture of shared responsibility and democratic practice.

5.9 Reference to Supporting Materials

The methodology is supported by complementary materials for teacher trainers and educators, including manuals, activity guides, visual tools for children in the following publications:

- Teachers' Manual
- Adult Trainers' Guidebook
- Children's Resources

Which can be downloaded from the website <https://democracy-in-action.vhs-roma.eu/de-at> offering 4 different language versions: English, German, Greek and Polish.

These materials are designed to be adaptable to different cultural and educational contexts.

6. Practical Implementation Guidelines

The Austrian contribution focuses on translating the methodology into concrete and applicable practices for both training settings (teacher trainers working with educators) and educational settings (educators working directly with children aged 5–9). Particular emphasis is placed on usability, adaptability and the integration of democratic learning into everyday practice.



Implementation is understood as a process that combines preparation, facilitation and context-sensitive adaptation.

Effective implementation begins with careful preparation. This involves defining clear learning objectives that include not only content-related aspects (such as understanding fairness or decision-making), but also process-oriented goals, in particular participation, dialogue and shared responsibility. Planning therefore addresses both what is to be learned and how learning processes are structured.

The selection of methods is guided by several factors, including age group (for example differences between children aged 5–6 and 7–9), group size, prior experience of participants and the specific learning context. Across these variables, priority is given to interactive and participatory formats, such as group discussions, role play, small-group work and co-creation activities, which allow participants to actively engage rather than remain passive.

Materials are chosen with a focus on accessibility and adaptability. This includes the use of visual aids, cards or symbols that support understanding across different levels, as well as tools that actively facilitate participation, such as simple voting mechanisms or structured discussion prompts.

The physical and social learning environment is treated as an integral part of the methodology. Spaces are arranged in a way that allows movement and interaction, for example through circle seating or flexible group arrangements. At the same time, attention is given to creating a safe and supportive atmosphere in which participants feel able to express their views without hesitation.

Facilitation follows a structured but flexible sequence consisting of four interconnected phases: introduction, experience, reflection and transfer. In the introduction phase, the facilitator establishes a shared starting point, for example through a short input, a question, or a dilemma that invites engagement. This is followed by an experiential phase, in which participants engage in concrete activities involving choice, interaction and cooperation. The emphasis is placed on experiencing democratic processes rather than only discussing them.

Reflection constitutes a central element of the process. Participants are supported in analysing what has taken place, how decisions were made and how different perspectives were included or excluded. With children, reflection is adapted to their level of development and may involve simple guiding questions, visual tools or storytelling.



The transfer phase connects the experience to everyday practice. Educators reflect on how the approach can be applied in their own professional context, while children relate the experience to their daily interactions, for example in classroom or group settings.

Throughout all phases, facilitation requires continuous attention to participation dynamics. This includes ensuring that participation is balanced and not dominated by a few individuals, actively including quieter participants, acknowledging different perspectives without immediate evaluation and responding flexibly to group dynamics. Language plays an important role in this context and should remain clear and accessible. While timing is flexible, sufficient time must be allocated for reflection, as this is essential for meaningful learning.

A central characteristic of the methodology is its adaptability to different contexts. In formal educational settings, such as schools, implementation can be integrated into existing structures, including classroom routines, group work or project-based learning and aligned with curriculum requirements. In non-formal settings, such as youth work or workshops, the methodology allows for greater flexibility in structure and timing, as well as a stronger emphasis on voluntary participation and experiential learning.

Adaptation is understood in a context-sensitive manner. Facilitators take into account institutional conditions (such as time constraints, available space and organisational frameworks), group composition (including age, language, experience and diversity) and available resources. Rather than applying methods in a rigid way, the aim is to maintain the core principles of participation, inclusion and shared responsibility while adjusting their concrete implementation.

Overall, the Austrian contribution emphasises that democratic learning is not achieved through isolated activities, but through the consistent integration of participatory practices into everyday interactions. The focus is therefore not only on the content of learning, but on the organisation of learning processes themselves. By combining structured methods with flexibility and reflection, the methodology supports educators in creating environments in which democratic values are experienced in practice.

7. Testing and Evaluation Tools

The testing and evaluation framework supports the practical validation of the methodology in real educational settings. Its purpose is not limited to assessing outcomes, but extends to understanding how the methodology is applied in practice and how it can be further developed.



Evaluation is conceived as a continuous process that combines structured feedback, observation and reflection. It is implemented at different stages, including during activities, immediately after their completion and, where possible, in follow-up phases that allow for insight into longer-term application.

A central component of the framework is the use of self-assessment tools for educators. These tools support structured reflection on key aspects of facilitation, including how participation is enabled (for example, who speaks and who remains silent), how decision-making processes are organised, how inclusive the learning environment is and how conflicts and differing perspectives are addressed. Self-assessment may take the form of short reflection sheets, guided questions or observation-based checklists. The aim is to strengthen reflective practice and support educators in gradually refining their approach.

Participant feedback provides an additional perspective on the relevance, usability and experience of the methodology. In training settings with educators, this may include structured feedback forms, short written reflections or facilitated group discussions. When working with children, feedback is adapted to their level of development and may involve simple guiding questions (such as “Was it fair?” or “Did you feel heard?”), visual tools (for example smiley scales or drawings) or short reflection rounds. The emphasis is not on formal evaluation, but on understanding whether participants felt included, were able to engage with the activities and experienced them as meaningful.

To assess the impact of the methodology, a set of qualitative and quantitative indicators is used. These relate in particular to participation (for example the number of participants actively involved and the diversity of contributions), the development of democratic competences (such as expressing opinions, listening to others, engaging in shared decision-making and reflecting on fairness), and overall engagement (including interaction, willingness to contribute and continuity of participation over time). Rather than focusing exclusively on measurable outputs, the framework prioritises observable changes in behaviour, interaction and group dynamics.

Evaluation results are systematically used to inform further development. This includes adapting activities and materials based on feedback, identifying challenges in facilitation and addressing them in subsequent training processes, and refining tools and approaches to better fit different contexts. Where possible, follow-up feedback is collected to understand whether and how educators transfer the methodology into their own practice.

Democratic Competence	Observable Indicators
Participation	Child expresses ideas and opinions
Listening	Child listens without interrupting
Cooperation	Child contributes to group activities
Responsibility	Child takes responsibility for agreed tasks
Empathy	Child recognises and respects others' feelings
Fairness	Child reflects on what is fair or unfair
Decision-Making	Child participates in collective decisions
Conflict Resolution	Child seeks peaceful solutions to disagreements

Overall, the evaluation framework is designed to be practical, flexible and context-sensitive. It supports continuous learning rather than one-time assessment and is closely aligned with the participatory nature of the methodology itself.

7.1 Frequently Asked Questions for Educators

Implementing democratic education in everyday practice often raises practical questions and challenges. The following section addresses common situations that educators may encounter when facilitating democratic learning processes with children aged 5-9 and offers suggestions for reflection and action.

What if children disagree?

Disagreement is not a problem to be avoided but an important part of democratic learning. Children should experience that people can hold different opinions while still treating one another with respect.

Educators can support children by encouraging active listening, helping them express their views constructively, and guiding them towards fair decision-making processes.



Key message:

Democracy does not require everyone to agree; it requires everyone to be heard.

What if one child dominates the discussion?

Some children are naturally more confident and outspoken than others. Democratic participation means creating opportunities for all children to contribute.

Educators can use structured discussion methods such as talking circles, speaking objects, pair discussions, or turn-taking systems to ensure balanced participation.

Key message:

Equal participation does not always mean equal speaking time, but it does mean that every child has an opportunity to contribute.

What if a child expresses discriminatory or exclusionary views?

Children often repeat statements they have heard elsewhere without fully understanding their implications. Such situations should be approached as learning opportunities rather than occasions for punishment.

Educators should encourage reflection, ask open questions, explore alternative perspectives, and reinforce the values of dignity, inclusion and respect.

Examples:

- “How would you feel if someone said that about you?”
- “Do you think everyone should have the same chance to participate?”
- “Can people be different and still belong to the group?”

Key message:

Democratic education includes learning to challenge stereotypes and prejudice respectfully.

What if the majority decides unfairly?

Majority decisions are an important democratic tool, but democracy is more than majority rule. Children should learn that fairness, inclusion and the protection of minority perspectives are also democratic values.

Educators may use such situations to discuss:

- fairness,
- responsibility,

- 
- empathy,
 - the difference between what is popular and what is right.

Key message:

Democracy protects both participation and fairness.

How much participation is appropriate for young children?

Participation should always be age-appropriate. Children do not need to make every decision themselves, nor should adults transfer responsibility that children are not ready to carry.

Meaningful participation can include:

- choosing activities,
- helping establish group rules,
- expressing preferences,
- contributing ideas,
- reflecting on experiences.

Key message:

Participation is not about giving children all power; it is about giving them a meaningful voice.

What if children become frustrated when their ideas are not chosen?

Experiencing disappointment is a natural part of democratic participation. Children should learn that not every proposal can be implemented and that collective decisions sometimes lead to outcomes different from their personal preferences.

Educators can support children in expressing emotions, understanding the decision-making process, and exploring alternative ways to contribute.

Key message:

Democratic participation includes learning to cope with disappointment and respecting collective decisions.

How can democratic values be integrated into everyday practice?

Democratic education does not only happen during special projects or lessons. It can be embedded in everyday interactions and routines.

Examples include:

- involving children in decisions,
- encouraging questions and dialogue,
- resolving conflicts collaboratively,
- rotating responsibilities,
- creating opportunities for reflection.

Key message:

Democracy is learned through everyday experience, not only through instruction.

Reflection for Educators

At the end of each activity or learning cycle, educators may wish to ask themselves:

- Did all children have an opportunity to participate?
- Were different perspectives heard and respected?
- How were disagreements handled?
- Did children experience fairness and inclusion?
- What democratic competences were visible during the activity?

8. Ethical and Inclusion Considerations

The project “Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults to Teach the Next Generation - Democracy4All Ages” is firmly grounded in ethical responsibility, inclusion, and respect for diversity. These principles are not only reflected in the project design but are also deeply embedded in the identity, experience, and daily work of all partner organisations. Each partner brings extensive experience in promoting democratic values, social inclusion, and equal participation, ensuring that the project is both reliable and genuinely inclusive from its core.

This strong ethical and inclusive foundation is reflected in the complementary expertise of the consortium partners. Roma Volkshochschule Burgenland (Austria) promotes intercultural dialogue and minority inclusion through education, actively addressing discrimination and social exclusion. Consensus Fundacja Europejskie Centrum Mediacji (Poland) fosters democratic participation and conflict resolution through mediation and civic engagement initiatives, particularly among young people. Akata Makata (Greece), as an inclusive and multicultural early childhood education provider, nurtures respect for diversity, equality, and active participation from a very young age. Together, the partners consistently work towards strengthening democratic values, inclusion, and social cohesion across different educational contexts.



The project is strongly aligned with the Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy and aims to ensure equal access, meaningful participation and inclusive learning environments for all participants. Inclusion is not treated as a separate component but as a cross-cutting principle embedded in all project activities, including project management, training activities, development of materials and dissemination. The consortium is committed to creating a safe, respectful and empowering learning environment where all participants feel heard, valued and able to actively contribute regardless of their background.

At the heart of the project methodology lies the principle that democracy must be experienced as an inclusive, participatory and respectful process. All activities are therefore designed to ensure equal access and meaningful participation for all target groups, particularly educators and adult trainers, and indirectly, children from diverse socio-cultural, linguistic and economic backgrounds. A non-discriminatory approach is adopted throughout, ensuring that no participant is excluded on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, ability, age, sexual orientation / gender expression, identity, and characteristics, or social status.

Ethical considerations are embedded in both the development and implementation of project outputs. All materials and training approaches respect human dignity, promote equality, and avoid bias or stereotyping. Special attention is given to safeguarding, particularly in activities involving children, ensuring that all engagement follows child protection standards and respects children's rights as active participants in the learning process.

The methodological framework of the project is strongly influenced by the pedagogical philosophy of Janusz Korczak, which emphasizes respect for children as individuals, recognition of their voices, and their active participation in decision-making processes. This approach is complemented by the Philosophy for Children (P4C) methodology, which promotes dialogue, critical thinking, empathy, and respect for diverse perspectives. Together, these frameworks ensure that democratic values are not only taught but actively practiced in inclusive and ethically sound learning environments.

Inclusion is further ensured through the adaptability and accessibility of all project outputs. The teachers' manual, adult trainers' guidebook, and educational materials (lesson plans, videos, and interactive tools) are designed to be flexible and applicable across diverse educational contexts and learner needs. The language used is clear and inclusive, and materials are adaptable to support participants with fewer opportunities or varying levels of experience.

Data protection and privacy are also key ethical priorities. All project activities comply with GDPR regulations, ensuring that any personal data collected is handled securely,



transparently, and only for clearly defined purposes. Informed consent is obtained from all participants involved in project activities.

The project is fully aligned with core European Union values, including respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights. By enhancing the competences of educators and adult trainers, the project contributes to fostering civic engagement and active participation from an early age. It supports the development of inclusive educational environments where democratic principles are both taught and practiced, ultimately contributing to the creation of more informed, engaged, and responsible citizens across Europe.

Finally, the project promotes a culture of reflection, dialogue, and continuous improvement. Feedback from participants is actively sought and incorporated to ensure that the methodology remains inclusive, relevant, and ethically sound.

In this way, democracy is approached not only as a topic of learning but as a lived, inclusive practice, consistently reflected both in the project methodology and in the partners' long-standing work.

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APPENDIX A

AUSTRIAN NATIONAL REPORT FOR LTTA

Erasmus+

„Democracy in Action: Empowering adults to teach the next generation“

Education for democracy and civic participation for children aged 5–9, teachers and teacher trainers – AUSTRIA, 2025

ERASMUS+ Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults to Teach the Next Generation

Project Number:

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SECTION 1 – Literature and Legal Background + Best Practices

1.1 Overview of National Educational Context: Austria

In the Austrian education system, democracy education in early childhood and at primary level is not conceived as an isolated subject, but as a fundamental pedagogical principle that should be put into practice in everyday institutional life. Even in early childhood education, the cross-regional BildungsRahmenPlan emphasises that education goes beyond care and that children are to be understood as active participants in their own educational processes. Participation is regarded as a central prerequisite for children to experience self-efficacy, shared responsibility and social integration . In primary education, too, democratic learning is not understood exclusively as the imparting of knowledge about political institutions, but is linked to the development of judgement, cooperation and responsibility . Democracy education thus appears as a cross-cutting task encompassing both subject-specific and social dimensions.

Democracy education is firmly established in Austrian law and policy. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Federal Constitutional Law on the Rights of Children guarantee the right to participation and freedom of expression . Democratic education thus fulfils a dual function: it serves both individual development and preparation for participation in society.

At the same time, a structural peculiarity becomes apparent. Early childhood education falls predominantly within the remit of the federal states. Whilst this federal organisation allows for context-sensitive implementation, it leads to differences in practical application. Democratic education is therefore heavily dependent on institutional cultures and professional competencies .

Overall, it can be said that democracy education in Austria is clearly enshrined in the law, but its concrete implementation is largely shaped by educational practice.

1.2 Participation and Democracy Education in Early Childhood Education

Against the backdrop of current social developments, democracy education is becoming increasingly important. Democratic systems are no longer taken for granted, but are seen as orders to be actively shaped. Early childhood education settings play a central role in this, as they facilitate fundamental experiences of social coexistence. In early education, democracy is primarily understood as a way of life. Dewey had already emphasised that democracy is experienced above all through collective action and social interaction. It follows that democratic competences arise not primarily through instruction, but through experience. A central foundation is the right to participation as set out in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Participation is thus not an optional element, but a structural principle of educational work. Children should experience genuine co-determination, for example through joint decision-making processes or dialogical negotiations. From a developmental psychology perspective, participation is understood as the driving force behind educational processes. Democratic education therefore means opening up opportunities for children to contribute their perspectives and take on social responsibility. At the same time, its implementation places high demands on educational professionals. Participation must be age-appropriate, supported by reflection and institutionally safeguarded. It is crucial that participation does not remain symbolic, but is actually effective.

1.3 Legal and Political Framework in Austria

Early childhood education occupies a special position within the Austrian education system, as it falls predominantly under the responsibility of the federal states. Despite this federal structure, the BildungsRahmenPlan provides a nationally coordinated framework that defines fundamental educational principles. This framework is intended as a quality assurance tool and sets out key guidelines for educational processes.

At the same time, it is deliberately designed to be open-ended, leaving the practical implementation to the institutions and professionals. This creates a tension between normative guidance and professional autonomy. Supplementary documents such as 'Living Values, Shaping Values' emphasise the importance of values education as an integral part of educational practice. Values thus arise through social interaction and



lived relationships . Overall, a system emerges that is characterised by a combination of normative framing and decentralised implementation. Education for democracy is clearly intended, but not fully standardised.

1.4 Key Pedagogical Concepts and Values

The content framework of democratic education is built upon this structural foundation. The Austrian early years sector is embedded within a human rights and European values framework that encompasses values such as freedom, equality, democracy and non-discrimination. The Educational Framework Plan describes children as competent, active subjects and ‘co-constructors’ of knowledge and culture. This perspective makes participation a conceptual necessity. Educational professionals act as facilitators of dialogical processes . Democracy education is understood as an integral part of relationship-building, communication and social learning. Particularly in the educational field of ‘Ethics and Society’, the importance of value orientation, reflection and plurality is emphasised.

In summary, it can be stated that democracy education in the Austrian context is conceived as an integral part of pedagogical practice. It is lived out in everyday life and not merely taught.

1.5 Practical Implementation and Structural Challenges

Despite this clear framework, there is a tension between theory and practice. The openness of the system means that the quality of implementation depends heavily on individual and institutional factors. Responsibility for the practical implementation lies with the educational staff. Whilst this allows for flexible and context-sensitive design, it also leads to inconsistency in practice.

Democratic education requires specific skills, particularly in the areas of facilitating participation and reflection. Without appropriate support, there is a risk that participation will be reduced to symbolic forms. Overall, it is evident that the strength of the system lies in its normative orientation, whilst the challenge lies in its consistent implementation.

1.6 Academic Perspectives on Democracy Education

Educational research emphasises that democracy is learned primarily through experience and participation. Dewey understands democracy as a social



practice, whilst Biesta highlights the importance of learning environments in which responsibility and difference can be experienced. Korczak also emphasises the importance of children's rights and genuine participation. Approaches such as Philosophy for Children demonstrate that dialogical formats can foster democratic competences. What these approaches have in common is the recognition that democracy education places high pedagogical demands and cannot be reduced to formal guidelines.

1.7 Best Practices in the Country

Following the analysis of the legal, conceptual and academic foundations, the focus now turns to concrete practical examples of democratic education in the Austrian context. Of particular interest here is the question of in which formats and under what conditions democratic principles are actually implemented in early childhood and at primary level.

Best practices can be identified above all where democracy is not taught solely as abstract knowledge about political institutions, but is designed as an age-appropriate experience of participation, dialogue and responsibility.

In the Austrian context, this is particularly evident in the democracy education programmes offered by the Austrian Parliament. In recent years, the range of programmes has been systematically expanded and now includes formats for different age groups, including the pre-school sector.

A key example is the mobile workshop format ***'Polli, Hans and Theo – Democracy from an Early Age'***, which is specifically aimed at children aged four and above. This programme is delivered directly in nurseries and takes an experience-based approach: through stories, music, movement and interactive elements, children are first introduced to fundamental democratic principles before putting them into practice themselves in a 'children's parliament'. Crucially, the children vote on real, everyday issues, and the results are actually implemented. Democracy is thus not simulated, but made tangible as an effective decision-making process. Didactically, this format is characterised by several key features. Firstly, there is consistent age-appropriate adaptation, whereby complex political content is translated into narrative and aesthetic forms. Secondly, a direct link is established to the children's everyday lives by selecting decision-making topics from their daily routines. Thirdly, sustainability is supported by



accompanying materials that remain in the institutions and enable the continuation of democratic practices. This combination of experience, reflection and institutional connectivity represents a key factor for success.

Another significant example is the **Parliament's Democracy Workshop**, which is aimed at older children and young people. This programme combines political education with active media production and enables participants to create their own content, such as newspapers, podcasts or videos. Democratic education is understood here as a productive process in which young people not only learn about political issues but also become publicly influential themselves. The combination of participation, communication and media literacy is in line with current approaches to democracy education, which view democratic learning as an active, dialogical and creative process. These practice-oriented programmes are complemented by institutional support structures such as the **Zentrum polis platform – Learning Politics at School**. This platform provides educational professionals with materials, methodological approaches and theoretical foundations. Of particular relevance here is the link to the Council of Europe's Reference Framework for Competences for a Democratic Culture (RFCDC), which does not reduce democratic education to the transfer of knowledge, but describes it as an interplay of values, attitudes, skills and critical understanding. This creates a systematic framework that is applicable to both school and early childhood education contexts.

From an analytical perspective, the Austrian practical examples share several common features. Firstly, they are consistently designed to be experience-oriented: children and young people learn about democracy through concrete situations of action, not primarily through theoretical instruction. Secondly, they combine cognitive, social and emotional learning processes by linking knowledge with experience and reflection. Thirdly, they rely on pedagogically guided processes that require facilitation, structure and a subject-specific framework. Fourthly, particularly effective examples are often linked to well-resourced institutional actors, which highlights the importance of structural resources. At the same time, the limitations of these proven practices are also evident. Many of the existing programmes are organised on a project basis and reach only a portion of the target group. Their long-term impact depends largely on the



extent to which these initiatives are integrated into everyday educational practice. Without systematic embedding in institutional routines, there is a risk that democratic education will remain confined to individual activities.

In summary, it can be stated that Austria has a range of high-quality practical examples that clearly demonstrate the potential of democratic education in early childhood and at school. Particularly successful are those approaches that enable participation as a real-life experience, connect with children's everyday lives and are accompanied by pedagogical reflection. At the same time, it becomes clear that the central challenge for ' ' lies not so much in developing suitable formats, but in their widespread and sustainable integration into everyday educational practice.

1.8 Challenges and Gaps

In the Austrian context, the key challenges in the field of democracy education lie not so much in the lack of suitable concepts as in their practical implementation. Although democracy education is clearly enshrined in policy and widely recognised both in terms of education policy and pedagogy, there is often a lack of consistent structural support within the day-to-day workings of institutions. This discrepancy is particularly evident in limited time and human resources, which make continuous and in-depth implementation difficult. Furthermore, there are shortcomings in the professionalisation of educational staff, particularly with regard to the methodologically sound design of participatory processes and democratic learning environments. Another key problem lies in the often project-based organisation of such initiatives, which, whilst providing innovative impetus, are not integrated sustainably and comprehensively into regular operations.

Overall, this results in a significant normative–operational gap: whilst democratic education is clearly formulated and broadly legitimised at the conceptual level, its systematic and consistent implementation in educational practice remains adequately ensured in many cases.

SECTION 2 – Our Organisation's Experience

2.1 About the Organisation

The Educational Institute for Early Childhood Education (BAfEP) Oberwart is a key training institution in Burgenland specialising in the qualification of educational professionals for the early childhood education sector. At the heart of its educational mission lies the combination of theoretically grounded knowledge transfer with practice-oriented training, thereby comprehensively preparing prospective educators for the demands of everyday professional life.

A particular focus of the BAfEP Oberwart is on promoting key pedagogical principles such as participation, inclusion and democratic education. These are not taught solely as theoretical concepts, but are specifically integrated into the training and tested in concrete educational scenarios. This fosters an understanding of education that views children as active co-creators of their own learning processes and embeds democratic principles as a fundamental component of educational practice.

Furthermore, the BAfEP Oberwart is integrated into national and international cooperation networks, thereby fulfilling an important role as an interface between training, practice and innovation. Through its participation in research and development projects and through exchange with partner institutions, it contributes to the continuous development of early childhood education concepts. In this context, democratic education is understood not merely as a normative ideal, but as a practice that can be experienced in concrete terms, and which is reflected upon, tested and further developed within the framework of the training.

2.2 Key Programmes and Practice-oriented Initiatives in Democracy Education at BAfEP Oberwart

BAfEP Oberwart systematically integrates democracy education with training processes, practice-oriented development and international cooperation. This integration is particularly evident in the active participation in projects and initiatives aimed at strengthening democratic competences both among future professionals and in everyday educational practice.



A key example is the Erasmus+ project PLEOS – Playing and Learning for Equal Opportunities and Success in Early Childhood Education (2025–2028). This project is dedicated to promoting equality of opportunity and inclusion in the field of early childhood education and adopts an evidence-based, systemic approach. As part of the project, open educational resources (OER) are being developed, among other things, which are intended to be made available to early years educators on a long-term basis. In addition, blended learning formats are being designed that combine digital and face-to-face learning settings, enabling flexible and practice-oriented professional development.

Furthermore, the project involves a close integration of research and practice. BAfEP Oberwart is actively involved in empirical surveys, pilot projects and the further development of training content. This ensures that scientific findings are directly integrated into educational practice and into the training of future professionals.

The institution thus plays a central role in transferring innovative approaches into concrete educational processes.

In addition to the PLEOS project, BAfEP Oberwart is also involved in other initiatives that indirectly strengthen democratic education. These include, for example, the Interreg project BOUNCE BACK, which aims to promote resilience and so-called life skills. Although the focus of this project is not exclusively on democracy education, there are close thematic links, particularly with regard to the development of self-efficacy, social responsibility and cooperative problem-solving strategies.

Another key component of BAfEP Oberwart's activities is international exchange and networking programmes. Collaborations with partner institutions, for example in Hungary or Poland, enable the comparison of different education systems as well as reflection on our own pedagogical approaches. These formats are complemented by Erasmus+ mobility schemes, particularly within the framework of Learning, Teaching and Training Activities (LTTA), which promote professional exchange and the joint development of innovative methods.

From an analytical perspective, these programmes share several common features. Firstly, they adopt a systemic approach that links training, practice and research. Secondly, they are characterised by strong international networking, which facilitates the exchange of experiences and the development of new perspectives. Thirdly, the



focus is on promoting participation and self-efficacy, both among the children and the educational staff. Overall, it is clear that democracy education at the BAfEP Oberwart is not viewed in isolation, but is closely linked to other key educational objectives such as inclusion, equality of opportunity and social-emotional development.

2.3 Achievements and Impact

The programmes and initiatives described have an impact on several levels and illustrate the potential of democratic education in the interplay of training, practice and institutional development.

At the children's level, effects are particularly evident in the areas of self-efficacy and social skills. Children who are involved in participatory learning settings develop greater confidence in their own ability to express themselves and show an increased willingness to participate actively in decision-making processes. Democratic learning manifests itself less in formal knowledge of political systems and more in everyday social practices, such as jointly negotiating rules, resolving conflicts or taking on responsibility within the group. These experiences contribute significantly to the development of democratic agency.

Significant developments can also be observed among educational professionals. Through participation in international projects, professional development programmes and exchange schemes, both trainee and practising educators expand their professional competencies. In particular, skills in facilitating dialogue processes, designing participatory learning environments and engaging in reflective examination of one's own pedagogical attitudes are strengthened. This leads to a greater focus on dialogical and cooperative forms of teaching and learning.

At the institutional level, the programmes contribute to intensifying cooperation and networking. Collaboration with international partners, educational institutions and other stakeholders facilitates the exchange of knowledge and experience, as well as the joint development of pedagogical concepts. At the same time, a greater openness of educational institutions towards social contexts becomes apparent, meaning that democratic education is not confined to the institutional framework but is embedded in broader social contexts.

Overall, it is evident that democratic education is particularly effective where it is designed not as a one-off measure but as a continuous and integrative practice.

The experiences of BAfEP Oberwart illustrate that a sustainable impact can be achieved above all when training, pedagogical practice and institutional development are systematically linked.

SECTION 3 – Survey Results

3.1 Methodology

The survey was conducted in Austria prior to the implementation of LTТА Activity 2 as part of the Democracy4All project (Democracy Education, Civic Participation and Children's Rights) and aimed to capture the attitudes, experiences and perceived challenges of adults regarding democracy education for children aged 5 to 9. Furthermore, the survey was intended to help identify core values, effective educational approaches and existing support needs. The findings were to serve as a basis for the further development of educational concepts, the content and methodological design of project-related educational measures, as well as for the educational focus and methodological design of the LTТА.

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire that included both closed and open-ended questions. The questionnaire was distributed in paper form to various target groups in order to capture different perspectives on democracy education. A total of 60 people took part in the survey, including **20 parents, 20 primary school teachers**, and **20 students studying teacher training or early years education**. This mix enabled a multi-perspective view of attitudes and practical experiences in the field of democracy education to be gained.

Data collection took place over a period of one month in December 2025. All participants were informed about the aim and purpose of the survey; participation was voluntary and anonymous.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of nine thematic, closed-ended questions, primarily in multiple-choice format. Both single-choice items



(one possible answer) and multiple-choice items (several possible answers) were used. In addition, so-called pair comparisons or forced-choice questions were included, in which participants had to weigh up two value dimensions (e.g. independence vs. respect or responsibility vs. obedience).

Some questions also featured semi-open response formats with predefined categories, as well as an additional 'Other' option to allow for individual comments.

The second part of the questionnaire comprised two optional open-ended questions aimed at gaining in-depth qualitative insights. Participants were invited to provide specific practical examples, experiences, and relevant materials or further resources (e.g. links). This enabled the collection of not only quantitative trends but also perspectives from practice.

The data collected was analysed descriptively. The responses to the closed questions were analysed using frequencies and percentage distributions to identify key patterns and trends. The results were then summarised, compared with one another and presented graphically to identify key focal points and relevant areas for action in the field of democracy education. The open-ended responses were reviewed for content and used to supplement the interpretation of the quantitative results.

Overall, the chosen methodological approach enables a combined examination of quantitative and qualitative data, thereby providing a sound basis for the analysis of attitudes, experiences and development needs in the field of democracy education within the Austrian context.

3.2 Key Findings

The analysis of the collected data reveals a consistent and nuanced picture of attitudes, experiences and perceptions regarding democracy education in the Austrian context. The findings can be structured around several key thematic areas covered in the questionnaire: perceptions of how children learn democratic values, attitudes towards children's rights and participation, perceived challenges, core values and competencies, the allocation of responsibility between family and school, and cultural and societal influencing factors.

A key finding concerns the question of how children aged 5 to 9 best learn democratic values such as fairness, sharing and participation.



The data clearly show a strong preference for experience-based and participatory forms of learning. All respondents (100%, 60/60) cited playful and cooperative activities as particularly effective. Learning through real-life social experiences was rated just as highly, particularly through resolving conflicts among peers (97%, 58/60) and through observing adults who model respectful and inclusive behaviour (90%, 54/60). Dialogic processes such as guided discussions on fairness and rights were also regarded as significant by the majority of respondents (88%, 53/60). In contrast, structured teaching in the sense of formal 'democracy education' was cited significantly less frequently as a primary learning pathway (53%, 32/60). These results illustrate a clear preference for situational, relational and experience-based learning processes over instructional teaching methods

The open-ended responses also confirm this picture. Democratic learning is primarily situated in everyday life: 48 out of 60 respondents emphasise the importance of the role model provided by adults in nursery and school, whilst 21 out of 60 highlight family life and everyday interactions as key learning environments. Democracy education thus appears less as an isolated teaching topic and more as a continuous process of social experience.

With regard to the willingness to discuss topics such as children's rights, fairness and participation with children, there is a high level of openness overall. 35% (21/60) of respondents stated that they were very happy to do so, whilst a further 53% (32/60) felt at least generally comfortable doing so. Only a small proportion (12%, 7/60) expressed ambivalent feelings, whilst no explicit rejection was observed. This suggests that democratic education is based on broad normative acceptance, even if differences in subjective feelings of confidence can be identified.

However, analysis of the perceived challenges shows that structural and pedagogical barriers exist. The lack of time in everyday teaching practice or within the curriculum was cited as the greatest challenge (50%, 60/120 mentions), followed by the lack of age-appropriate materials (32%, 38/120). Lack of training (3%, 4/120) or cultural sensitivities (6%, 7/120) were cited.

The assumption that children are too young for democracy education was also held by only a minority (9%, 11/120). Overall, these results suggest that the challenges lie less in negative attitudes and more primarily in structural conditions and a lack of resources.



With regard to core values and skills for democratic participation, there is a clear prioritisation of social-emotional skills. Empathy and respect for others were mentioned particularly frequently (50%, 60/120), followed by communication skills such as listening and being able to express oneself (21%, 25/120). Traditional cognitive or rule-oriented aspects – such as understanding rights and duties (7%, 8/120) or following rules (2%, 2/120) – play a significantly lesser role, by contrast. This emphasis underscores the importance of relationships, perspective-taking and social interaction as the foundation of democratic education.

A nuanced picture also emerges regarding the question of responsibility. The largest group of respondents sees responsibility primarily with parents (42%, 25/60), followed by a shared responsibility between the home and school (33%, 20/60). Only 18% (11/60) place the responsibility mainly with teachers. Extracurricular programmes or context-dependent solutions play a subordinate role. These results illustrate that, in the Austrian context, democracy education is strongly understood as a shared social responsibility, with the family playing a central role.

The results of the pair comparisons also provide insight into normative orientations. Particularly evident is the strong preference for independence over obedience, as well as for care over mere 'good behaviour'. Curiosity is also rated significantly higher than formal manners. At the same time, a more balanced relationship emerges when comparing independence with respect for elders. Overall, these results point to a democratic understanding of values that places greater emphasis on self-determination, empathy and active participation than on an orientation towards authority.

The question of how to define democracy education also reveals clear trends: it is most frequently understood as the development of fundamental social skills (50%, 60/120), such as sharing, cooperation and adhering to rules of conversation.

Other important aspects include an understanding of rights and duties (21%, 25/120) and an appreciation of diversity (17%, 20/120). Participatory decision-making processes or formal regulatory structures, by contrast, are mentioned significantly less frequently. Democracy education is thus primarily understood as a social learning process and less as an institutionally structured practice.



In the area of cultural and societal influencing factors, particular emphasis was placed on family values and expectations (32%, 38/120), as well as cultural traditions (23%, 28/120) and historical experiences (21%, 25/120). Factors such as the media, public discourse or societal attitudes towards participation, on the other hand, were scarcely mentioned. This suggests that democracy education is primarily situated within the immediate social environment and is perceived less as a process structured across society as a whole.

In addition, respondents mentioned various practical resources that can be used to promote democracy education in early childhood. These include, in particular, platforms such as *politik-lernen.at*, the *Parliament's Democracy Workshop*, the *Journal for Political Education* of the University of Education Lower Austria, as well as international initiatives such as *DeGeDe*, *kinderrechte.de* and the *Children's Rights Network*. These references illustrate that a wide range of materials and support structures already exists, though these could be integrated more systematically into practice.

Overall, the results show that democracy education in the Austrian context enjoys broad support and is strongly understood as an experience-oriented, socially embedded process. At the same time, structural conditions – particularly time resources and materials – are perceived as key challenges.

This creates a tension between a clear pedagogical objective and the conditions for its practical implementation.

3.3 Conclusions from Survey

The present findings allow for several key conclusions regarding the current situation, the potential and the existing challenges of democracy education in the Austrian context for children aged 5 to 9.

Analysis of the Austrian survey data first reveals a clear and widely held view that democratic education takes place primarily through experience-based, social and participatory processes. The almost unanimous support for playful and cooperative forms of learning, as well as the high relevance of real-life interactions and role models, illustrate that democracy is not primarily understood as an abstract field of knowledge, but as a practice that must be experienced, negotiated and reflected upon in everyday life. Democratic competences thus arise in particular through social



negotiation processes, collaborative problem-solving and the active participation of children in everyday decision-making processes.

At the same time, the results point to a high level of normative support for democracy education. Discussions about children's rights, fairness and participation are regarded by the vast majority of respondents as meaningful and age-appropriate. Democratic values are thus not perceived as controversial or optional, but as a natural component of early childhood educational processes. This broad acceptance forms a solid foundation for the further development of democratic education concepts and initiatives.

Nevertheless, a clear discrepancy between this normative support and actual implementation is evident. Whilst the majority of respondents feel confident discussing democratic topics in informal conversations, the results suggest that uncertainties arise particularly when it comes to designing structured participatory processes. The implementation of co-determination, joint rule-making or dialogical conflict resolution requires specific methodological skills that cannot be taken for granted. This discrepancy suggests that existing trust stems more from a values-based orientation than from concrete pedagogical confidence in one's ability to act.

The challenges identified confirm this assessment. The perceived lack of time in everyday educational practice stands out particularly clearly, followed by the lack of suitable materials for age-appropriate implementation of democratic education. Less frequently, but nonetheless relevant, uncertainties in dealing with the topic and structural conditions are also mentioned. Overall, this suggests that the main obstacles do not lie in a lack of willingness to engage in democracy education, but rather in inadequate structural and pedagogical conditions. Democracy education thus appears to be a recognised goal, the consistent implementation of which is, however, hampered by limited resources and a lack of systematic support.

Furthermore, the prioritisation of certain values and competences highlights a clear focus on the social-emotional dimensions of democratic learning. Empathy, respect, care, communication skills and a willingness to cooperate are weighted significantly higher than rule-oriented or authority-related aspects. This emphasis underscores an understanding of democracy education as a process of relationship and personality development, closely linked to the ability to adopt different perspectives and engage in



constructive interaction. At the same time, it implies high demands on pedagogical design, as such competences are developed not through instruction, but through facilitated interaction and reflective practice.

The results also show that democracy education is understood as a shared responsibility between the family and educational institutions. Whilst the family is highlighted as the central setting for initial democratic experiences, the role of nursery and school as structured spaces for learning and experience is simultaneously emphasised. This dual foundation points to the need for close cooperation between institutional and family-based educational processes in order to facilitate coherent and sustainable learning experiences.

It is also striking that democracy education is predominantly defined as low-threshold and closely linked to everyday life.

The focus is on fundamental social practices such as sharing, listening, participating in decision-making and working together, whilst more complex political or institutional dimensions play a subordinate role. This perspective is developmentally plausible, but presents the challenge of not reducing democracy to social behavioural norms, but rather gradually making its structural and societal dimensions visible as well.

Finally, the results indicate that cultural and societal influences are primarily situated within the immediate social environment. Family values, traditions and everyday experiences are perceived as formative factors, whilst overarching societal discourses play a lesser role. This underscores the importance of the immediate environment as a central site of democratic socialisation, whilst at the same time highlighting the need to gradually introduce children to societal and political contexts.

Overall, the findings confirm that democracy education holds significant social and educational relevance in the Austrian context and enjoys broad support. At the same time, its practical implementation remains highly context-dependent and is shaped by individual and institutional resources on a case-by-case basis. Without targeted structural support, there is a risk that democracy education will remain fragmented and be limited to isolated, situational experiences. To bridge this gap, there is therefore a need for enhanced professional development measures, practical materials and systematic training programmes that empower teachers and other education



professionals to sustainably embed democratic participation as an integral part of everyday educational practice.

SECTION 4 – Summary and Recommendations

The analysis conducted in the Austrian context highlights a strong and broadly established normative commitment to democratic values, children's rights and participation within education policy, pedagogical guiding principles and institutional frameworks. Democracy education is understood as a fundamental component of educational processes in both early years education and primary education, particularly for children aged 5 to 9, during which key attitudes such as participation, responsibility, respect and social engagement are developed. However, an analysis of the literature, policy framework documents, best practices and empirical survey results shows that there remains a significant discrepancy between this conceptual anchoring and its systematic implementation in everyday educational practice.

At the structural and education policy level, democracy education in Austria is clearly legitimised, particularly through the cross-provincial Education Framework Plan and through the principles of human and children's rights. At the same time, the concrete design of democracy education remains largely open and organised in a decentralised manner. Whilst this openness allows for context-sensitive implementation and respects professional autonomy, it also means that educational professionals often have to interpret democratic principles independently and translate them into everyday practice. Consequently, democratic practices frequently appear inconsistent, situational and highly dependent on individual competencies, institutional cultures and available resources.

At the same time, an analysis of best practices shows that democratic education in the Austrian context is particularly effective where it is designed to be experience-oriented, dialogical and participatory. Initiatives such as parliamentary education programmes, project-based international collaborations or practice-oriented training formats demonstrate that children can actively participate in democratic processes from an



early age, provided suitable methodological approaches and facilitated learning environments are in place. These examples demonstrate that democratic learning is particularly successful when it is linked to real-life decision-making situations and the children's perspectives and lived experiences are taken seriously.

The survey results confirm these findings and highlight a high level of willingness among parents, educators and trainee professionals to address and promote democratic values in everyday educational practice. At the same time, a clear need for structural support is evident.

The main challenges lie less in negative attitudes and more in limited time resources, a lack of age-appropriate materials, and uncertainties regarding the practical implementation of participatory processes. This situation points to an implementation gap in which democratic education is recognised as pedagogically significant but cannot be systematically realised across the board.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights that, in the Austrian context, democratic education is strongly linked to social-emotional skills. Values such as empathy, respect, communication skills and cooperation are central, whilst institutional or political dimensions play a lesser role. This focus is understandable from a developmental psychology perspective, but at the same time makes it clear that democratic education should not be reduced to interpersonal behaviours, but must also take structural and societal aspects into account in the long term.

Against this background, several key recommendations can be derived. Firstly, a greater focus on practice-oriented professional development appears necessary. Educational professionals require targeted in-service training and further education programmes that relate not only to normative principles but, in particular, to concrete methods of participation, dialogue facilitation and conflict resolution. Such programmes should systematically promote experiential learning, reflective practice and collegial exchange.

Secondly, there is a need for a stronger structural embedding of democratic education in everyday educational practice. This encompasses the development and provision of age-appropriate materials, the integration of democratic principles into institutional routines, and the establishment of binding participation formats for children. The aim



should be to shape democracy not as a project-based additional activity, but as a continuous structural feature of educational institutions.

Thirdly, fostering the right institutional and cultural conditions appears to be of central importance. Democratic education requires not only methodological skills, but also a pedagogical approach that recognises children as equal participants.

This implies a conscious reflection on power relations, role models and decision-making processes within educational institutions, as well as greater involvement of families and social contexts.

Fourthly, the existing diversity of projects, initiatives and materials should be linked more systematically and integrated into training and further education structures in the long term. In particular, international cooperation and evidence-based programmes offer considerable potential for embedding innovative approaches sustainably within the education system.

Overall, the Austrian analysis shows that democracy education is built on a stable normative foundation and is widely recognised by society. However, its long-term effectiveness depends crucially on the extent to which these normative aspirations can be translated into consistent, reflective and structurally underpinned pedagogical practice. Strengthening professional competencies, providing suitable resources and consciously shaping participatory learning cultures are central prerequisites for supporting children early in their development to become active, responsible and democratically minded members of society.

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APPENDIX B

GREEK NATIONAL REPORT FOR

LTTA Erasmus+

“Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults

to Teach the Next Generation”

*Democracy and Civic Participation Education for Children Aged 5-9, Teachers and Teachers’
Trainers - GREECE, 2025*

***ERASMUS+ Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults to Teach
the Next Generation***

Project Number:

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SECTION 1 - Literature and Legal Background + Best Practices

1.1 Overview of National Education Context: Greece

In the Greek educational system, early childhood and primary education are formally framed around holistic child development, including social, emotional, and civic dimensions. Democratic values such as cooperation, respect, and responsibility are recognised as desirable learning outcomes. However, these values are primarily positioned as *attitudinal goals* rather than as outcomes of structured pedagogical processes.

This distinction is critical. While democratic ideals are broadly endorsed, the education system lacks a clearly articulated model of **how democracy is learned pedagogically** at early ages. As a result, democratic education tends to be conceptualised as an implicit by-product of positive classroom relationships rather than as a competence that requires intentional design, facilitation, and reflection. This implicitness produces uneven implementation, where democratic learning depends heavily on individual educators' beliefs, confidence, and prior exposure to participatory methodologies.

1.2 Legislative and Policy Framework

At policy level, Greece demonstrates strong formal alignment with international and European commitments on democratic citizenship and children's rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes children's right to express their views and participate in matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989), while European frameworks emphasise participation, inclusion, and active citizenship from an early age (European Commission, 2018; Council of Europe, 2018).

However, policy alignment does not automatically result in pedagogical transformation. National curriculum frameworks refer to citizenship and democratic values primarily through transversal objectives, without specifying mechanisms for participation, dialogue, or shared decision-making in early learning environments. This creates a **normative-operational gap**: educators are encouraged to promote democratic values, yet are not provided with concrete pedagogical pathways to do so.

Consequently, responsibility for implementation is decentralised to the classroom level without adequate professional support. In practice, democratic education becomes dependent on personal interpretation rather than institutional guidance, limiting consistency, scalability, and sustainability.

1.3 Relevant Academic Literature and Research

Educational research consistently argues that democracy is not learned through transmission but through **participatory experience** (Dewey, 1916; Biesta, 2011). Democratic competence develops when learners engage in dialogue, negotiate meaning, and experience shared responsibility within authentic social contexts. This positions pedagogy, not content, as the central mechanism of democratic education.

Janusz Korczak's work offers a foundational critique of hierarchical education models. By recognising children as rights-holders and moral agents, Korczak reframed education as a democratic relationship rather than a unidirectional process (Korczak, 1929). His work demonstrates that democratic education requires structural shifts in power relations within educational settings, not merely the inclusion of democratic themes.

Similarly, **Philosophy for Children (P4C)** operationalises democratic learning through structured dialogue, collective inquiry, and reflective reasoning (Lipman, 1976). Empirical studies show that P4C enhances critical thinking, social understanding, and civic dispositions when facilitated competently (Gorard et al., 2017). Crucially, the literature emphasises that such outcomes depend on educators' facilitation skills, highlighting professional competence as a decisive factor.

Recent systematic and meta-analytic evidence further supports the relevance of Philosophy for/with Children approaches, showing positive effects on children's reasoning, dialogue, critical thinking, and broader social learning outcomes (Ab Wahab et al., 2022; Kilby, 2025).

Together, these strands of research converge on a key insight: democratic education is **methodologically demanding** and cannot be achieved through goodwill or curriculum statements alone.

1.4 Curriculum Content and Pedagogical Approaches

The Greek curriculum promotes experiential and cooperative learning, creating favourable conditions for democratic practices in principle. However, democratic participation is rarely conceptualised as a continuous pedagogical process. Instead, it is often implemented through isolated activities, such as group work or thematic discussions, without systematic reflection on participation, power, or decision-making.

Recent OECD work also confirms that civic knowledge and citizenship skills can be developed not only through formal instruction, but also through multidisciplinary, experience-based learning opportunities inside and beyond the classroom (OECD, 2023a).

This fragmentation reflects a deeper pedagogical tension. Educators are expected to cultivate democratic dispositions while operating within instructional models that prioritise structure, authority, and predefined outcomes. Without explicit pedagogical frameworks, democratic practices risk being superficial, symbolic, or short-lived, limiting their developmental impact on children.

1.5 Best Practices in the Country

In the Greek context, some of the most robust examples of democratic education for children aged 5-11 are found in schools that have adopted a **whole school, participatory approach**, often in connection with Council of Europe frameworks and tools. These practices demonstrate that democratic culture can be meaningfully embedded in everyday school life when participation, dialogue, and shared responsibility are treated as pedagogical processes rather than isolated activities.

A representative example is the **23rd Primary School of Kalamaria (Thessaloniki)**, which implemented the project “*A School without Walls: Co-creating an Open and Sustainable Learning Community*.” The initiative addressed discrimination, inclusion, and democratic participation in a school context characterised by cultural, linguistic, and experiential diversity, including refugee pupils with limited or no prior schooling experience. Rather than approaching inclusion through compensatory or deficit-based models, the school adopted a **rights-based and participatory framework**, aligned with the Council of Europe campaign *Free to Speak, Safe to Learn - Democratic Schools for All* (Council of Europe, n.d.).

The project operationalised democratic education through concrete pedagogical mechanisms: peer cooperation groups, mediation networks, and shared learning processes that positioned children as active contributors. Greek pupils assumed responsibility in supporting refugee classmates’ integration into school life, learning to negotiate rules, rights, and responsibilities collaboratively. This redistribution of responsibility illustrates a key democratic principle: participation as a **learned social practice**, not a symbolic gesture.

Importantly, democratic competencies were not treated as abstract values but were embedded in curriculum rich activities. Oral history projects enabled pupils to explore migration and displacement as shared historical experiences, fostering empathy, critical understanding of identity, and respect for cultural diversity. The creation of a multilingual lexicon and a student-produced documentary further illustrates how linguistic, communicative, and critical skills can be developed through democratic inquiry. These practices align closely with the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) (Council of Europe, 2018), particularly in areas such as valuing diversity, listening, critical understanding of the self, and cooperation.

A second relevant practice is Greece’s contribution to the **Council of Europe Conference Democracy in Action - Learning & Teaching Resources in Democratic School Practice** (Council of Europe, 2019), which highlighted democratic responses to religious and cultural diversity. Greek participation, alongside schools such as the **87th Intercultural Primary School of Athens**, demonstrated how structured dialogue, arts-based learning, and collaborative classroom interventions can support inclusion, emotional safety, and civic competence in highly diverse school environments.

These practices share several analytical features. First, they adopt a **whole school approach**, where democratic values inform school governance, curriculum design, teacher collaboration, and family engagement. Second, they treat diversity as an educational resource rather than a challenge to be managed. Third, they emphasise **teacher reflexivity**, including peer evaluation, collective planning, and critical reflection on teaching practices.

However, despite their demonstrated impact, these good practices remain **project-based and context dependent**. Their sustainability relies heavily on motivated leadership, external frameworks (e.g. Council of Europe tools), and additional professional effort beyond standard curriculum requirements. The challenges identified such as deficit based perceptions, limited intercultural competence among staff, and curriculum time constraints highlight structural barriers to wider replication.

From an analytical perspective, these examples confirm that democratic education is achievable and impactful in Greek schools, but only when educators possess the **methodological competence** to facilitate participation, dialogue, and shared responsibility. They also underline a central gap: the absence of systematic training mechanisms that would allow such practices to be scaled and embedded within mainstream education.

Links:

- <https://rm.coe.int/workshops-description-inclusive-practices-in-schools-and-resources-con/168094bd54>
- <https://www.coe.int/en/web/campaign-free-to-speak-safe-to-learn/23rd-primary-school-of-kalamaria>

1.6 Challenges and Gaps

The analysis reveals that the core challenge in the Greek context is not ideological resistance to democratic education, but **structural underdevelopment of pedagogical capacity**. Educators are expected to foster democratic participation without having received systematic training in facilitation, dialogical pedagogy, or shared decision-making with children.

This results in a reliance on intuition rather than methodology, producing inconsistent practices and limiting educators' confidence. Without targeted professional development, democratic education risks remaining aspirational rather than transformative. Addressing these gaps requires structured, practice-oriented capacity-building, directly justifying the focus and objectives of LTTA Activity 2.

SECTION 2 - Our Organisation's Experience

2.1 About the Organization

Akata Makata is an early childhood education organisation based in Greece, with a strong focus on democratic participation, sustainability, inclusion, and children's rights. Its work is grounded in the belief that children are active social actors capable of expressing views, negotiating meaning, and participating in decision-making processes appropriate to their age. This perspective informs both the organisation's pedagogical philosophy and its practical engagement in formal and non-formal educational contexts. The organisation operates at the intersection of early childhood education, community engagement, and educator capacity building. Through its participation in national and European projects, Akata Makata has developed extensive experience in translating abstract values, such as democracy, equality, and participation—into concrete learning experiences embedded in everyday educational practice.

2.2 Key Programs Relevant to Ages 5-9

Akata Makata's engagement in European cooperation projects has provided substantial experience in designing and implementing pedagogical approaches that foreground children's participation, dialogue, and civic engagement.

Akata Makata has implemented and participated in several national and European projects addressing democratic participation, inclusion, and active citizenship in early childhood and primary education. These initiatives share a common focus on experiential learning, dialogue, and co-creation.

One key example is **UrbSTEAM**, an Erasmus+ School Education project coordinated by Akata Makata, which used urban gardens as learning environments to teach STEAM subjects through participatory, inquiry-based activities. Children were actively involved in planning, decision-making, and problem-solving, learning democratic values such as cooperation, responsibility, and respect through hands-on engagement. Gardens functioned as “co-teachers,” encouraging collective care, shared rules, and dialogue.

Through the **LISTEN** project, Akata Makata worked on intergenerational learning models that actively involved children, educators, families, and older adults in co-designed learning experiences. Children participated in storytelling, shared decision-making, and community-based activities, strengthening their sense of belonging and their ability to listen to and respect different perspectives.

Another central example is the DiCE project, a multi-partner Erasmus+ initiative focused on developing inclusive digital citizenship education for children aged 6-12. Through DiCE, Akata Makata contributed to creating and piloting pedagogical

frameworks that help children navigate digital environments as *participatory citizens* rather than passive users.

In DiCE, democratic participation was articulated through children's **co-creation of digital artefacts**, critical reflection on online social norms, and dialogues about rights and responsibilities in digital spaces. Activities included collaborative story-building, peer-mediated discussions about online behaviour, and group negotiation of digital citizenship principles. These processes helped children practise key democratic competencies, such as active listening, negotiation, shared decision-making, and ethical reasoning, in contexts that resonate with their lived digital experiences.

Educators involved in DiCE received structured support to integrate digital citizenship into daily classroom routines. This included training on facilitating reflective group dialogue, using digital tools to elicit and honour children's perspectives, and creating classroom governance rules shaped by collective input. Such practices moved democratic participation beyond abstract concepts into *hands-on classroom engagements*, highlighting the potential of democratic pedagogy when educators are equipped with appropriate methods and tools.

Alongside DiCE, Akata Makata has worked on other initiatives that focus on democratic learning through **dialogue, co-design, and participatory inquiry**, consistently emphasising practice-oriented approaches where children are active co-authors of their learning trajectories rather than passive recipients.

Across all programmes, educators were supported in reflecting on their role as facilitators of democratic processes, moving beyond directive teaching towards participatory and dialogical practices.

2.3 Achievements and Impact

The organisation's work has contributed to observable changes in children's participation and engagement. Children involved in Akata Makata's programmes demonstrate increased confidence in expressing opinions, improved cooperation skills, and greater awareness of shared responsibility within group settings. Democratic learning emerges through everyday practices such as collective rule-setting, negotiation, and reflection.

At educator level, Akata Makata's initiatives have supported the development of facilitation skills related to dialogue, participatory learning, and inclusive classroom management. Teachers involved in these projects have engaged in reflective practice, peer exchange, and experimentation with non-hierarchical learning approaches, leading to more open and responsive learning environments.

At community level, Akata Makata's projects have strengthened connections between schools, families, and local actors. By involving parents and community members in learning activities, democratic values were reinforced beyond the classroom, supporting coherence between school life and children's broader social experiences.



Akata Makata's experience demonstrates a consistent engagement with democratic education in early childhood through practice-based, participatory methodologies. The organisation's work illustrates how democratic values can be embedded in everyday learning environments, supporting children's active participation, educators' reflective practice, and stronger school-community relationships.

SECTION 3 - Survey Results

3.1 Methodology

The survey was conducted in Greece prior to the implementation of LTTA Activity 2 within the *Democracy4All* project, with the aim of identifying perceptions, practices, and training needs related to democratic education for children aged 5-9. The results were intended to inform the pedagogical focus and methodological design of the LTTA.

An online questionnaire was distributed to parents, educators, and adult educators active in formal and non-formal education. In total, **58 respondents** participated: **36 parents (62%)**, **15 primary education teachers (26%)**, and **7 adult educators (12%)**. The questionnaire combined multiple-choice questions, Likert-scale items, and open-ended questions, allowing for both quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretation. All responses were collected anonymously and analysed at national level to identify trends and capacity gaps relevant to educator training in Greece.

3.2 Key Findings

A strong and consistent finding across all respondent groups is that democratic values are perceived to be learned primarily through **experiential and participatory processes**. Specifically, **88% of respondents (51/58)** identified *play-based and cooperative activities* as the most effective way for children to learn values such as fairness and respect. This was followed by *observing adults who act respectfully and inclusively* (**78%, 45/58**) and *discussions with parents or educators about rights and justice* (**62%, 36/58**). In contrast, only **26% (15/58)** considered structured civic education lessons to be an effective primary approach, indicating a clear preference for lived and relational learning experiences over formal instruction.

Regarding confidence levels, **62% of respondents (36/58)** reported feeling *very comfortable* discussing topics such as rights, justice, and participation with children, while **22% (13/58)** reported a moderate level of comfort. However, **16% (9/58)** expressed low to limited confidence. This differentiation suggests that although democratic values are widely supported, a notable proportion of educators and parents lack the confidence to address these topics systematically, particularly in structured or participatory formats.

The analysis of perceived barriers further clarifies this gap. The most frequently identified obstacle was the **lack of appropriate pedagogical material (55%, 32/58)**, followed by **limited training or self-confidence among parents and educators (40%, 23/58)**. Time constraints within daily routines or curricula were identified by **31% (18/58)** of respondents, while **28% (16/58)** referred to cultural or social sensitivities surrounding discussions of democracy and rights.

These findings indicate that the main challenges are internal and pedagogical rather than attitudinal, highlighting a strong need for targeted capacity-building.

In terms of values and skills considered essential for democratic participation, respondents prioritised **empathy and respect for others (72%, 42/58)**, **cooperation and teamwork (47%, 27/58)**, and **understanding fairness and equality (33%, 19/58)**. Skills related to expressing and listening to opinions were selected by **19% (11/58)** of participants. These results reinforce the need for dialogical, participatory methodologies rather than transmissive teaching approaches.

Responsibility for democratic education was largely perceived as shared between schools, families, and communities, with qualitative responses emphasising the school as the primary environment where democratic practices can be modelled consistently. Open-ended responses further revealed a conceptualisation of democratic education as an ongoing process centred on dialogue, participation, and children's right to be heard, rather than rule-based instruction.

3.3 Conclusions from Survey

The analysis of the Greek survey data highlights a strong and consistent recognition of the importance of democratic education from early childhood, shared across parents, educators, and adult educators. With **88% of respondents** identifying experiential and participatory learning as the most effective way for children to understand democratic values, the findings clearly indicate that democracy is perceived not as a theoretical concept to be taught, but as a practice to be experienced in everyday educational interactions.

At the same time, the results reveal a **significant gap between intention and implementation**. While **62% of respondents** reported feeling confident discussing democratic values with children, this confidence decreases when moving from informal conversations to the facilitation of structured democratic practices such as shared decision-making, collective rule-setting, or dialogue-based conflict resolution. This discrepancy suggests that existing confidence is largely value-based rather than methodological, underscoring the need for targeted pedagogical training.

The identification of key barriers further reinforces this conclusion. More than half of the respondents (**55%**) pointed to the lack of appropriate educational materials, while **40%** highlighted limited training and self-confidence as major obstacles. These findings indicate that resistance to democratic education is not a dominant issue; rather, the main challenge lies in the absence of concrete tools and structured learning



opportunities that would enable educators and parents to translate democratic principles into daily practice.

These findings are also consistent with recent international evidence showing that social and emotional learning is strongly connected with children's capacity to cooperate, participate, regulate behaviour, and engage constructively in school and community life (OECD, 2024).

Furthermore, the prioritisation of values such as respect, empathy, cooperation, and fairness suggests a clear alignment between stakeholders' expectations and participatory pedagogies. However, these competencies require facilitation skills that are not automatically developed through traditional teacher education pathways. The survey therefore exposes a structural need for professional development that focuses on process-oriented learning, dialogue facilitation, and reflective practice.

The survey confirms that while democratic education is widely valued in the Greek context, its consistent and systematic implementation remains uneven and dependent on individual initiative. This situation risks creating fragmented experiences for children, where democratic practices are applied sporadically rather than embedded as a stable educational culture. Addressing this gap requires coordinated, practice-oriented training that equips educators and adult trainers with the skills, confidence, and resources necessary to foster democratic participation as part of everyday learning environments.

SECTION 4 - Summary and Recommendations

The national analysis conducted in Greece highlights a strong normative commitment to democratic values, children's rights, and civic participation within education policy and pedagogical discourse. Democratic education is widely recognised as essential from early childhood, particularly for children aged 5-9, where foundational attitudes towards participation, respect, and responsibility are formed. However, the findings from literature, policy review, good practices, and stakeholder surveys reveal a persistent gap between **conceptual endorsement** of democratic education and its **systematic pedagogical implementation**.

At policy level, democratic values are primarily articulated as transversal objectives, with limited operational guidance for early childhood and primary education. While this creates flexibility, it also places a disproportionate burden on educators to interpret and enact democratic principles without structured methodological support. As a result, democratic practices are often implemented in fragmented or ad hoc ways, dependent on individual motivation rather than shared pedagogical frameworks.

The analysis of good practices demonstrates that democratic education is both feasible and impactful when grounded in participatory, dialogical, and whole-school approaches. Initiatives such as inclusive school projects, peer cooperation models, oral history work, and dialogue-based learning illustrate how children can meaningfully



engage in democratic processes when educators are equipped with appropriate facilitation skills. These practices also show that democratic learning is strengthened when children's cultural capital, lived experiences, and voices are actively valued.

Survey findings reinforce these conclusions, indicating strong support among parents and educators for experiential democratic learning, alongside clear needs for age-appropriate tools, training, and confidence-building.

The primary challenges identified relate not to resistance or lack of awareness, but to insufficient pedagogical preparation for facilitating participation, dialogue, and shared decision-making with young children.

Based on this analysis, it is recommended that future capacity-building initiatives prioritise **practice-oriented professional development** focused on democratic pedagogy. Training should emphasise experiential learning, reflective practice, and concrete methodologies that support children's participation in everyday learning environments. Approaches inspired by child-centred democratic traditions and structured dialogue frameworks (Dewey, 1916; Korczak, 1929; Lipman, 1976) offer particular value in addressing identified gaps.

Moreover, education systems are increasingly expected not only to transmit knowledge, but also to prepare children to participate as future citizens in democratic societies (OECD, 2023b).

Strengthening educators' competences in democratic facilitation is essential for moving from policy intentions to sustainable educational practice. Such efforts contribute not only to improved classroom dynamics but also to the long-term development of active, informed, and engaged citizens.

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SECTION 1 – Literature and Legal Background + Best Practices

1.1 Overview of National Education Context: Poland

The Polish education system operates within a **highly centralized legal and curricular framework**, while allowing **limited pedagogical autonomy** at the school and classroom level. Education is regulated primarily by the *Education Law Act* (Prawo oświatowe) and supervised by the Ministry of National Education (MEN). Local governments are responsible for running public preschools and primary schools, while non-public institutions may be established by foundations, associations, religious organizations, or private entities, provided they follow the national core curriculum (podstawa programowa).

Preschool education in Poland covers children **aged 3-6**, with one year of compulsory preschool preparation for six-year-olds. Primary education begins at age 7 and is divided into two stages: **early primary education (grades I-III, ages approximately 7-9)** and later primary education (grades IV-VIII). The focus of this description is on preschool and early primary education, where **learning is integrated and holistic rather than subject-based**.

Democratic and civic education is not taught as a separate subject at these stages. Instead, it is embedded across the curriculum through social education, classroom practices, and school culture. The core curriculum emphasizes values such as **cooperation, respect for others, responsibility, empathy, and basic knowledge of social rules and institutions**. Children are expected to learn how to function in a group, express opinions, listen to others, follow agreed rules, and gradually understand concepts such as community, fairness, and shared responsibility.

Public schools must strictly adhere to the national curriculum, while non-public schools - although also required to implement the core curriculum - often exercise greater flexibility in methods and organizational culture. **Alternative approaches** (e.g. Montessori, Waldorf, democratic education-inspired schools) and NGO-supported programs tend to place stronger emphasis on child participation, dialogue, and experiential civic learning.

The broader national context is shaped by Poland's post-1989 democratic transition, ongoing public debates about civic values, and strong emphasis on national identity. As a result, **early civic education tends to focus more on social adaptation and moral development than on explicit political or democratic concepts**, leaving significant responsibility to teachers' interpretations and everyday educational practices.

1.2 Legislative and Policy Framework

The legislative and policy framework governing preschool and early primary education in Poland is highly centralized and defined primarily at the national level. **Democratic and civic education for children aged 5-10 is embedded implicitly within general educational aims rather than regulated as a distinct policy area.**

The principal legal act regulating education in Poland is the *Education Law Act* (Prawo oświatowe, 2016, with subsequent amendments). This law defines the objectives of the education system, including supporting the holistic development of the child, **fostering respect for human dignity, preparing students for responsible participation in social life, and strengthening attitudes based on cooperation, solidarity, and respect for others.** Although democratic education is not explicitly named at the preschool or early primary level, these goals provide the legal foundation for civic and democratic learning.

A key policy instrument is the *national core curriculum* (podstawa programowa), issued by the Ministry of National Education. **Separate core curricula exist for preschool education and for early primary education (grades I-III).** Both documents emphasize **social competences, moral development, and the gradual introduction of civic awareness.** In preschool education, children are expected to learn how to **cooperate with peers, follow agreed rules, resolve conflicts peacefully, and express their emotions and opinions in socially acceptable ways.** These competencies are framed as prerequisites for later civic engagement rather than as political education.

In early primary education, civic and democratic elements appear primarily within integrated education, especially in the area commonly referred to as social education (edukacja społeczna). Pupils are introduced to basic concepts such as community, family, school, local environment, and national symbols. They are encouraged to understand the role of rules, mutual responsibility, and respect for diversity. Participation is promoted through classroom activities such as group work, class agreements, and simple decision-making processes, although the curriculum does not mandate formal mechanisms of pupil participation.

At the policy level, there is no comprehensive national strategy dedicated specifically to civic or democratic education in early childhood. Civic education strategies and programs developed at the national level tend to focus on older students, particularly within the subject civics (wiedza o społeczeństwie) introduced in later grades.

1.3 Relevant Academic Literature and Research

Research on democratic and civic education in Poland—particularly in preschool and early primary years (ages 5-10) is **growing but remains less extensive** than research on older students.

International research underscores the importance of early childhood as a formative period for developing social competences, empathy, and basic democratic dispositions. **Developmental scholars emphasize that young children's experiences with cooperation, conflict resolution, and participation in group decision-making lay the foundation for later civic engagement** (e.g., Hart, 1992; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). These works argue that democratic education is not restricted to formal knowledge of political systems but includes **everyday practices of listening, negotiation, and shared rule-making** competences that are teachable in preschool and early primary settings.

Comparative studies involving Polish and international contexts suggest that early civic competence is associated with **classroom practices that prioritize dialogue, reflection, and shared responsibility** rather than rote learning. Research also indicates that teachers' beliefs, training, and comfort with democratic pedagogy significantly influence the extent to which democratic and civic learning occurs in everyday classroom life.

Here are actual academic sources and research that support the themes referenced in the description of *democratic and civic education in early childhood and early primary education in Poland*:

Poland-specific research and literature:

1. **Stek-Łopatka, N. (2023). *Democratic Values in Early Childhood Education. Core Curriculum Analysis*** – analysis of democratic values and how they appear (or are limited) in the Polish *podstawa programowa* for early education, noting that formal curriculum requirements focus more on knowledge and skills than attitudes. bc.umcs.pl

(As Śliwowski points out: ***In Poland, education is primarily oriented toward education about democracy and for democracy, but not in democracy.*** This means that a graduate of a Polish school should have knowledge about the democratic system itself, its characteristics, and how it functions (about democracy), while also being prepared to be a conscious citizen (for democracy). However, the final type – education in democracy – is largely neglected. This form involves taking into account the individual predispositions of the learner during the teaching process, **using appropriate methods and forms of work that value cooperation, activity, and equality, while simultaneously fostering self-direction, reflection, and agency.**)

2. **Jakubowska, E., & Olek-Redlarska, Z. (2017). *Civic and Social Competences and the Patriotic Education of Small Children*** – a discussion of civic and social competences (including patriotic education) in early childhood, highlighting early socialization toward participation in society. Repozytorium Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku
3. **Jakubowska, E. (2020). *Wychowanie obywatelskie w procesie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*** – a doctoral research project (University of Białystok) analyzing the implementation of civic education in early primary school,

examining both school and local contexts. Repozytorium Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku

4. **Dziachkowska, L. (2022). *Wychowanie obywatelskie w przedszkolu oraz w klasach I–III szkoły podstawowej*** – pedagogical article on civic education at preschool and early primary levels, reflecting on its conceptual development and need for more research in Poland. Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych PIB
5. **Leek, J., & Szulewicz, E. (2025). *Constructivism in the Shadow of Centralism*** – research on international curricula (e.g., PYP) in Poland's early childhood education, discussing constructivist approaches that implicitly support democratic participation and active learning. ger.mercy.edu

1.4 Curriculum Content and Pedagogical Approaches

In Poland, democratic and civic education for children aged 5-10 is integrated into the national core curriculum rather than taught as a separate subject. In preschool and early primary education, emphasis is placed on social cooperation, respect for rules, empathy, and responsibility. Pedagogical approaches are predominantly teacher-guided, with democratic practices implemented mainly through everyday classroom interactions, group work, and negotiated rules rather than formal participatory structures.

1.5 Best Practices in the Country

In Poland, examples of good practice in democratic and civic education for children aged 5-10 are most often found at the level of everyday school culture rather than in formal curriculum requirements. Effective practices include involving children in co-creating classroom rules, using circle time for discussion and conflict resolution, and encouraging peer cooperation through project-based and group learning. Some public schools implement class councils or simple voting activities to introduce decision-making and responsibility. In non-public and alternative settings, such as Montessori or democratic-inspired schools, child agency and participation are more explicit, with greater emphasis on choice, dialogue, and self-reflection. NGOs and cultural institutions also support schools through workshops and educational programs that promote empathy, media awareness, and respectful communication, enriching early civic learning beyond the formal system.

1.6 Challenges and Gaps

Despite the presence of civic and democratic elements in the Polish core curriculum for preschool and early primary education, significant challenges and gaps remain. Democratic education is framed implicitly and subordinated to broader social and moral goals, which results in inconsistent implementation and strong dependence on individual teachers' beliefs and competences. Many educators lack formal training in participatory and democratic pedagogy, and teacher education programs devote limited attention to children's rights, agency, and early civic learning.



The highly centralized education system and emphasis on curriculum compliance and assessment reduce space for experimentation, dialogue, and shared decision-making in classrooms. Democratic practices are often perceived as time-consuming or incompatible with accountability requirements. In public discourse, civic education is frequently associated with patriotism and knowledge transmission rather than lived democratic experience, reinforcing an approach focused on “education about and for democracy” rather than “education in democracy.”

Structural inequalities between public and non-public schools also create uneven access to high-quality democratic practices. While some alternative and NGO-supported initiatives model participatory approaches, these remain fragmented and non-systemic.

Finally, there is a lack of longitudinal research and policy evaluation on early democratic education, limiting evidence-based development and scaling of effective practices.

SECTION 2 – Our Organisation’s Experience

In addition to its day-to-day activities, which include **conducting mediation processes** (also in cases rooted in family and educational environments), the organization focuses its work on promoting the idea of **effective communication and advancing democratic values** – particularly when they concern children and young people.

To date, we have implemented, among others, the following projects:

Cooperation within the framework of **Open Days and Mediation Weeks in district and regional courts in Warsaw and Lower Silesia** (District Courts and Regional Courts) in the years 2015–2025.

2016–2017 project “As the Twig Is Bent, So the Tree Grows – Peer Mediation in Lower Silesian Schools” – implementation of a year-long peer mediation program in three schools in Ziębice. As part of the project, young people from Ziębice participated in an international conference in Warsaw (2017), visiting the Polish Parliament and the Regional Court in Warsaw, where they took part in a mock trial chaired by Judge Igor Tuleya. During the simulation, young peer mediators assumed the roles of judges, prosecutors, defendants, and defense counsels.

2021–2022 project “Citizen Preschooler – A Journey of Wrocław’s Children into Democracy and Civil Rights” (<https://obywatel-przedszkolak.pl/>), funded by the Active Citizens Fund and implemented in cooperation with Wrocław’s largest preschool, Niezapominajka No. 56, and the Wrocław Youth and Education Centre. The main goal of the project was to show the youngest children that they can have an impact on the reality around them (e.g. electing a Preschool Council, which has become a permanent part of the preschool’s annual work plan, and writing letters to members of parliament). The project’s concluding conference (May 2022) was honored by the presence of Adam Bodnar, who delivered a lecture on the importance of teaching democracy to the youngest citizens. Elections to the Preschool Children’s Council have since become a permanent element of the preschool calendar and were held for the fifth time this year.

2024–2025 project “EU Rights and Values and Mediation Proceedings in Employment-Related Cases”, funded by the Foundation in Support of Local Democracy (FRDL), aimed at promoting and disseminating the values and rights enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

2025–2027 Erasmus+ project implemented with the Austrian NGO Roma Volkshochschule and the Greek preschool AkataMakata, titled **“Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults to Teach the Next Generation”**, focused on teaching democracy to children aged 5-9.

SECTION 3 – Survey Results

3.1 Methodology

The survey was conducted in November and December 2025 among preschool, school teachers and parents of children aged 5-9. All process was fully anonymous, as the survey was available only in Google Docs format without any need of registering. Most

questions were obligatory to answer, a few not. The survey was filled in by 41 respondents in Poland.

3.2 Key Findings

Section 1: Close Questions (OBLIGATORY)

Q1 – obligatory

In your opinion, how do children aged 5-9 best learn values such as honesty, sharing, taking turns, and standing up for others? (Select two answers)

- Through play and team games – 31 (75.6%)
- By observing adults who model these attitudes – 29 (70.7%)
- During structured lessons or formal civic education programs – 1 (2.4%)

Q2 – obligatory

How comfortable do you feel talking with children of this age about topics such as children's rights, equality, honesty, or a sense of influence over reality? (Select one answer)

Very comfortable – I do it often – 39%

Rather comfortable – I try to when opportunities arise – 61%

Q3 – obligatory

In your opinion, what are the main challenges in teaching democracy and citizenship to younger children? (Select two answers)

- Cultural, democratic, or political insensitivity of adults – 59%
- Limited training or confidence among teachers/parents – 43,8%
- Lack of structured approach of the state (added answer) – 2,4%
- Children are too young to grasp these ideas – 7,3%

Q4 – obligatory

Which of the following values or skills do you believe are most important to promote democratic participation in early childhood? (Select two answers)

- Empathy and respect for others – 75,6%
- Ability to express opinions and listen to others – 48,8%
- Awareness of rights and responsibilities – 9,8%
- Following rules and authority – 17,1%

Q5 – obligatory

How should parents and teachers ideally share responsibility for introducing democratic principles and rights to children? (Select one answer)

- Mainly parents, as part of moral upbringing – 19,5%
- Shared equally between school and home – 68,3%
- It depends on cultural or family context – 12,2%

Q6 – obligatory

In your opinion, which is more important for the child? (pick one in each pair)

- independence (70%) or respect for elders (30%)?
- **self-reliance (100%) or obedience (0%)?**
- caring for others (87%) or good behavior (13%)?
- curiosity (85%) or good manners (15%)?

Q7 – obligatory

How do you define “democracy education” for children aged 5-9 in your own context (school, family, or country)? (Select two)

- Understanding rights and responsibilities in simple terms, like knowing their voice matters and they must also respect others – 51,2%
- Developing respect for diversity, including learning that people may have different opinions, cultures, or backgrounds – 53,7%
- Following fair rules and processes, such as understanding why rules exist and how they are applied equally – 19,5%
- Engaging in community or group projects that teach teamwork, participation, and contributing to a shared goal -17,1%

Q8 – obligatory

Which - in your view - makes more sense: teaching children traditional (loyalty and pride in your nation, symbols, and history) or modern (active commitment to shared democratic values and civic responsibility) approach to patriotism? Or maybe both?

- Traditional – 7,5%
- modern – 30%
- both – 62,5%

Q9 – obligatory

In your opinion, what cultural or national factors influence how democracy and rights are taught to young children in your country? (Select two)

- Historical experiences – 32,5%
- National education policies – 30%
- Cultural values and traditions – 60%
- Level of society's religiousness – 17,5%
- Media and public discourse – 2,5%

Section 2: Open Questions (OPTIONAL)

Q10 – Can you describe any example or activity that helps children participate in decision-making or express their opinions meaningfully?

1. Little Experts' Council

On a designated day, I organized a "Little Experts' Council" – a short meeting where children could decide how to change or improve play areas, such as construction, kitchen, or art corners.

2. Charity Fair Voting

During a school charity fair, children presented organizations they wanted to support, then voted to select one. This allowed them to practice meaningful decision-making and understand collective responsibility.

3. Group Problem-Solving

Children are given situations requiring a shared strategy. Afterwards, we discuss the outcome and the process, reflecting on decisions and consequences in ways adapted to their age.

4. Duty System in Daily Life

Children take responsibility for daily tasks through a shared duty system in the preschool or orphanage, learning accountability and cooperation.

5. "Vote on the Day"

Children decide simple daily choices, like whether to stay indoors or go to the playground, or what activities follow lunch. Voting gives them a direct voice in everyday life.

6. Co-Created Class Code

Children propose rules for the classroom, which are written on colorful cards and signed by everyone. This teaches negotiation, fairness, and joint responsibility.

7. Open Conversations and Respect

Teachers actively listen to children's opinions without judgment. We use open questions, turn-taking signals (like raising a hand), and discuss rights and responsibilities during regular activities or outings.

8. Expert Play Council

A weekly "Play Experts Council" lets children suggest and plan activities. Teachers record ideas visually, helping younger children participate fully. This empowers children to influence their environment.

9. Choosing the Meal

Once a week, children vote between two healthy side dishes for lunch. Their choice is served, giving them a real impact on daily routines and teaching that their voice matters.

10. Weekend or Outfit Choices

Children are asked how they'd like to spend the weekend, which clothes to wear, or their thoughts on a film or book. Even small choices teach autonomy, reflection, and respectful expression of opinions.

Q11 – Can you share any links / information on resources helpful for preschool and school teachers spreading the idea of democracy among children aged 5-9?

- **Project: “Children’s Journey to Democracy and Civic Rights”** – Example: Preschool No. 56 Niezapominajka in Wrocław, <https://obywatel-przedszkolak.pl/>
- **Eurotest educational boards, UNICEF Poland, Council of Europe “Kompasik”** – Materials on children’s rights and human rights education for working with children.
- **Center for Civic Education (CEO) – “School of Democracy”** – Guides and scenarios for grades 1–3, introducing school councils and co-decision making; materials can be adapted for preschool. <https://szkolademokracji2021.ceo.org.pl/>
- **Lundy Model (Children’s Participation Model)** – Useful for designing participatory processes: giving children space, a voice, influence, and feedback. https://eu-for-children.europa.eu/about/lundy-model_en
- Pedagogical concepts of **Friedrich Froebel** and **Maria Montessori** – Froebel Gifts

3.3 Conclusions from Survey

1. **Learning democracy through experience** – Polish teachers and parents believe children learn values like honesty, sharing, and standing up for others best through **play, teamwork, and observing adult role models, rather than formal lessons**. This emphasizes the importance of everyday, lived experiences in civic education.
2. **Confidence but limited training** – while nearly all respondents feel comfortable discussing topics like children’s rights, equality, and personal agency, many perceive a **lack of structured training or guidance for adults**, highlighting the need for professional development in early civic education.
3. **Adult attitudes as a barrier** – the main challenge in teaching democracy is the **cultural or political insensitivity of adults** (59%). Polish educators note



that if adults themselves are not attuned to democratic practices, children's participation is limited.

4. **Empathy and voice matter most** – respondents prioritized **empathy, respect, and the ability to express opinions** as essential skills for fostering democratic participation, more than knowledge of rules or obedience. This aligns with a child-centered, participatory approach.
5. **Shared responsibility between home and school** – most teachers and parents (68%) see **introducing democratic principles as a shared task**.
6. **Independence and autonomy are valued** – survey participants overwhelmingly favor fostering **independence, self-reliance, curiosity, and caring for others** over obedience, loyalty to authority, or strict manners.
7. **Democracy as practical and relational** – respondents define democracy education as helping children **understand their voice matters, respect diversity, follow fair rules, and engage in cooperative activities**.
8. **Blending traditional and modern patriotism** – most respondents (62.5%) support teaching a **mix of traditional symbols/history and modern civic responsibility**, reflecting Poland's cultural context, where national identity and democratic engagement seem to coexist.
9. **Cultural context shapes civic education** – the dominant influences on how democracy is taught are **cultural values and traditions (60%)**, historical experiences (32.5%), and national education policies (30%), highlighting that early civic education in Poland cannot be separated from its historical and cultural narrative.

SECTION 4 – Summary and Recommendations

This report highlights that in Poland, democratic and civic education for children aged 5–9 is **embedded implicitly within preschool and early primary education rather than implemented as a distinct subject or policy area**. While the national core



curriculum emphasizes social competences such as cooperation, empathy, respect for rules, and responsibility, **democratic education is largely understood as a set of everyday practices rather than explicit instruction.** As a result, the quality and depth of democratic learning depend heavily on teachers' attitudes, competences, and institutional culture. Survey findings confirm that both teachers and parents recognize experiential learning, adult role-modeling, and child participation in everyday decisions as the most effective ways to introduce democratic values at an early age.

The report also reveals significant gaps. **There is no coherent national strategy for early civic education, limited professional training for educators in participatory and democratic pedagogy, and strong centralization that constrains experimentation.** Democratic education is often framed as “education about or for democracy,” while opportunities for “education in democracy” – where children actively experience agency, dialogue, and shared responsibility – remain fragmented and uneven. Nevertheless, promising practices exist, particularly in NGO-supported initiatives, alternative pedagogical approaches, and projects such as “Citizen Preschooler,” which demonstrate that meaningful participation is possible even with very young children.

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge. **First, early democratic education should be more explicitly recognized in national and institutional frameworks as a core developmental goal,** not merely an implicit social outcome. **Second, targeted professional development for teachers and teacher trainers is needed,** focusing on children's rights, participation models (such as the Lundy Model), mediation, and democratic classroom practices. **Third, schools and preschools should be encouraged to systematically integrate child participation into daily routines** through class councils, co-created rules, voting, and shared decision-making. **Finally, stronger cooperation between schools, parents, NGOs, and local communities should be promoted** to ensure consistency between democratic values taught at home and at school. Strengthening these areas would help move Polish early education closer to a lived, inclusive, and participatory model of democracy.

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