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Education for democracy: political participation and practice in schools

Educación para la democracia: participación y práctica políticas en la escuela

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RESUMEN: Asegurar la educación para la democracia implica darle oportunidades al estudiantado para participar en procesos de toma de decisiones desde las escuelas. Este artículo utiliza datos de dos estudios de investigación previos en los que se realizó un análisis secundario de datos. El primer estudio comparó tres tipos de escolarización para observar cómo sus metodologías promovían la participación democrática. El segundo estudio recopiló datos en escuelas secundarias con el objetivo de comprender la implicación de los estudiantes y su interés en participar activamente en procesos democráticos. Se halló que los métodos de enseñanza que fomentan la autorregulación y el aprendizaje activo tienden a promover la participación de los estudiantes en los procesos de toma de decisiones. Por otro lado, aunque las escuelas secundarias pueden tener los mecanismos para involucrar a los estudiantes en la toma de decisiones, el alumnado considera que su participación es simbólica. La ciudadanía activa y las actitudes democráticas dentro de las escuelas pueden brindar a los estudiantes la oportunidad de aprender a participar en la sociedad democrática más allá de la escuela. Es necesario un enfoque más holístico al considerar la participación democrática y la ciudadanía en las escuelas incluyendo también planteamientos metodológicos globales.

Palabras clave: democracia, educación ciudadana, toma de decisiones, participación social, elecciones.

RESUM: Assegurar l'educació per a la democràcia implica donar-li oportunitats a l'estudiantat per a participar en processos de presa de decisions des de les escoles. Aquest article utilitza dades de dos estudis d'investigació previs en els quals es va portar a terme una anàlisi secundària de dades. El primer estudi va comparar tres tipus d'escolarització per a observar com les seues metodologies promovien la participació democràtica. El segon estudi va recopilar dades en escoles secundàries amb l'objectiu de comprendre la implicació dels estudiants i el seu interès a participar activament en processos democràtics. Es va trobar que els mètodes d'ensenyança que fomenten l'autoregulació i l'aprenentatge actiu tendeixen a promoure la participació dels estudiants en els processos de presa de decisions. D'altra banda, encara que les escoles secundàries poden tindre els mecanismes per a involucrar els estudiants en la presa de decisions, l'alumnat considera que la seua participació és simbòlica. La ciutadania activa i les actituds democràtiques dins de les escoles poden brindar als estudiants l'oportunitat d'aprendre a participar en la societat democràtica més enllà de l'escola. És necessari un enfocament més holístic en considerar la participació democràtica i la ciutadania a les escoles incloent-hi també plantejaments metodològics globals.

Paraules clau: democràcia, educació ciutadana, presa de decisions, participació social, eleccions.

ABSTRACT: To be successful, education for citizenship must provide students with opportunities to participate in democratic processes in schools. This paper uses data from two previous research studies that conducted a secondary data analysis. The first study compared three different types of schools (traditional, democratic and active learning schools) to learn how they promoted democratic participation. The second study gathered data in secondary schools with the aim of understanding students' involvement and interest in actively participating in democratic processes. Results showed that teaching methods which encourage self-regulation and active learning tend to promote students' involvement in decision-making processes. While secondary schools may have the mechanisms in place to involve students in decision making, students perceive this approach as tokenistic and they feel that they have no say at school. Active citizenship and democratic attitudes in schools

can give students the chance to participate and learn how to play their part in democratic society beyond and after school. Democratic participation and citizenship in schools calls for a more holistic approach. As well as considering the arenas for participation, educators must examine how teaching methods can be used to promote democratic participation within the school as a learning environment.

KEYWORDS: democracy, citizenship education, decision making, social participation, voting.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the current climate, where highly antagonistic discourses are present in society (Pais & Costa, 2018), the presence of democratic and citizenship education in schools need to be re-explored.

To ensure the continuation of democratic societies, and open free dialogue, it is imperative that children and young people understand what democracy entails, further exploring their responsibilities and rights in a democratic society. Nowadays, how schools present citizenship in different educational stages is as important as it was over 100 years ago, when Dewey (1966 [1916]) wrote Democracy and Education.

Dewey (1966 [1916]) argued that schools needed to provide activities that are grounded in the world outside school in order for them to be as relevant and useful to students as possible. Such relevance provides motivation and thus enhances learning. In addition, it is important to learn and practise democracy in schools through debates and providing opportunities to take part in democratic processes (Stone, 2016).

The importance of understanding and enacting democratic participation in schools cannot be overstated. Educators must aim to prepare their students for life in a democratic society. For example, the 2014 Scottish referendum on independence for Scotland provided just such an opportunity as the voting age was lowered to 16- and 17-year-olds. Part of the data presented in this paper comes from the need to understand the political readiness and interest of the students that were to vote in the Scottish referendum of independence.

Bringing together two different studies, secondary qualitative data analysis was conducted to explore how schools promote democratic practices in different aspects or arenas of participation (Mannion, Sowerby & L'Anson, 2022). Teaching methods used were considered as part of this analysis. Next, literature on democratic practices and participation in decision-making in schools are reviewed, and then the two studies and the analysis conducted are explained. Finally, the key findings from this analysis are presented to be

discussed in order to understand democratic practices in school in depth and how they can be incorporated in school life, whatever their focus.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding democracy is not an easy task, but neither is it defining what democracy or democratic practices in school should look like. The definitions of democracy vary so much they can almost be perceived as contradictory (Campbell *et al.*, 2015). However, there is a consensus on some essential features of a democratic society, namely rule by the people (Campbell, 2008). Thus, people should have a choice over how they are ruled. The difficulty arises when deciding which people are allowed to make this choice and where to put the limit on "the people's" power. Buhlmann *et al.* (2008) argued that this type of society should be based on three fundamental principles: equality; freedom; and control. However, the understanding of these three concepts differs between cultures and nations and thus produces different democratic models (Vossole, 2021; Elstub & Escobar, 2019). There are still common features such as the right to vote for political representatives, the separation of powers (legislative, executive and judicial) (Jacobs, 2019) and an agreed constitution, whether written or unwritten. Becoming an active citizen in a democratic society does not begin and end with voting; it can also be regarded as an attitude of commitment to the community one lives in and working together to achieve the common good (García Díaz, 2017).

2.1. Theories for democratic schools

Education has often been conceived as a way to train citizens to become useful members of society; for example, as a tool to help politicians to rule a country more easily (Paterson, 2003; Cunningham, 2005). Since the time of Plato (2000), education has been understood not only as a way to develop a human's potential but also to satisfy society's needs. This idea was also followed by Sutherland Neill (1963), who understood education as being an instrument for democracy while Dewey (1966 [1916]) saw the importance of educating for democracy's survival.

This research is based on the theories put forward by Steiner (2011) , Freire (1970), and Ferrer i Guardia (1976), who proposed that education should free the human mind, educating people to become active, self-regulated citizens while being aware of society's needs. In other words, being aware of the community's collective needs, actively participating in its support, and engaging in the decision-making processes. Thus, people would know their potential and would be able to share it with the community, finding a balance between individual and society's needs (García Díaz, 2017), seeking paths towards finding a "Common Good".

Some of the educational institutions based on the previous theories are often called "Democratic Schools" (Garcia Diaz, 2017 ; Korkmaz & Erden, 2014). These are learning environments where the priority is to develop the individual's potential in a democratic environment. Important authors from

the last 300 years committed to democratic values such as Rousseau (1762), Tolstoy (1978), Montessori (1928) and Sutherland Neill (1963) praised this kind of education assuming it was the most natural way to learn through love, respect, self-sufficiency and self-responsibility.

Tolstoy's dream (1978) was to collaborate in the creation of a self-regulated society, which motivated him to create the Yasnaia Poliana school. That school was based on the belief that people will find the way to peace by setting themselves free. According to this author's understanding, giving students freedom would equip them with the tools to find a balance between individual and collective needs, while discovering different approaches to managing conflict and discussions through respect and empathy.

In Dewey's seminal work Democracy and Education (1966 [1916]), it was argued that the classroom and school must be authentic and bring inside as much of the outside world as possible. Furthermore, Dewey argued that schools must enable pupils to practise democracy and democratic practices so that, after leaving school, these former pupils are able to fully participate and contribute to democratic society.

Democratic schools are regarded as being part of the "educational renovation" (Menguiano Rodríguez & Del Pozo Andrés, 2021) or "pedagogical renewal" movement (Acuña, 2021), promoting alternative educational options based on democratic participation, active learning and cooperation. Regarding the effect of this particular movement, Parejo and Pinto (2019) argue that it goes beyond the benefits of the democratic development of students. It also helps teachers create active political communities to exchange experiences and support each other, improving their mental health and professional skills.

The concept of democratic education is often mistaken for active learning approaches. Despite both having common grounds, they must be classified as different schooling types. The Active learning school uses specific constructivist teaching methods that are learner-centred but does not necessarily have to encourage democratic participation. In fact, active learning approaches usually focus on adapting to traditional curriculums while promoting learning by doing (Cattaneo, 2017). In contrast, democratic schools also use learning by doing pedagogies but focus on organising the educational institution to allow student and family participation.

With the aim to achieve the creation of future active citizens in a democratic society, attempts are usually made to promote democratic practices and decision-making in schools. As Andersson (2018, p. 4) notes, school students "seem to have no political influence and there is a high risk of tokenism".

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper uses data from two previous research studies, as it was not possible to gather further primary data to answer our research question due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Below, details on the two studies are provided and then it is explained how the secondary data analysis was conducted. The overarch-

ing research question was: what can schools focused on democracy and active participation teach traditional schools in order to embed democratic practices and decision-making?

3.1. Primary School Study

Qualitative data was collected in a study of Scottish and Spanish primary schools using observation notes and semi-structured interviews. A multiple case study was conducted where different schooling types from the two countries were compared, namely a Democratic and a Traditional School in Spain and an Active School in Scotland. Regarding the study sample, it included students aged 8, 9, 10, and 11, as well as all teachers who provide instruction at these educational levels.

The design chosen for the study was non-experimental, specifically *Ex Post Facto*, studying the variables in their natural context without controlling them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The purpose of the original study was to understand which schooling type could develop significant self-regulated learning skills in students. To that end, a complete and detailed overview of the characteristics of the different types of school and a study of the results produced by the primary school students were generated. The data has been returned to with the purpose of understanding how different schooling types affect children's attitudes on democratic matters.

3.2. Secondary School Study

Between 2013 and 2014, the second author was a member of a research team that conducted research in six secondary schools in two municipalities with 43 focus groups involving 202 students aged between 15 and 18 years old. In focus groups the interaction between participants produces data rather than it being produced in response to the interviewer (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). While focus groups can produce conflict (Gibbs, 2017) and feel contrived, in this study the participants were students in their usual classrooms, and so they may have been more relaxed than in another setting. The students were asked about who represented them, how they felt about rules, who should vote in the referendum and whether they would vote, but they were not asked about how they intended to vote in the referendum.

Each focus group had between 3 to 8 pupils. The focus groups were audio-recorded and notes were made by a group-appointed group leader and separately by a research facilitator who observed the focus group. These notes were all uploaded to NVivo, one of the computer-assisted qualitive data analysis software programmes, where they were stored for easy access. Below are details of the six secondary schools in Scotland that took part. All six of them were publicly funded secondary schools under the governance of the local municipality and national legislation. They could be considered "traditional" schools in their teaching methods and the structures for and level of involvement of young people in decision-making. In this study, it was the perceptions of the students that were gathered and analysed. Quintelier and Hooghe (2013, p. 580) found that a student's perception of their school as a "participatory democratic environment where he or she can express opinions

and ideas and can engage in school policy" was associated with the intention to take part in political life after school.

TABLE 1. Schools and participants in the Scottish secondary school study

Designation	Type of catchment area	Focus group participants
School A	Suburban/rural	8 final year students (S6) 61 students in S5
School B	Suburban/rural	6 students in S6 20 students in S5
School C	Rural	9 students in S5
School D	Urban in mixed area	42 students in S5
School E	Urban in deprived area	22 students in S5
School F	Urban in deprived area	34 students in S5

Source: Author's creation.

3.3. Secondary Data Analysis

When returning to the two studies to answer the research question –what can schools focused on democracy and active participation teach traditional schools in order to embed democratic practices and decision-making?–, each author interrogated their own data to ensure compliance with ethical assurances made to the participants. Each of the authors examined how democratic practices and participation in decision-making were conducted and/or described by participants in the studies. In the first study, the researcher had taken field notes during observations in classrooms and in wider school environments. These notes were re-examined to understand the practices and the differences between the three schools. In the second study, the researcher was able to re-examine focus group notes made by each of the focus group leaders and facilitators.

4. RESULTS

The findings are divided between primary school and secondary school data with primary schools reported first.

4.1. Education for democracy in Primary Schools

The presented data suggests that Active and Democratic Schools encourage active citizenship behaviour in Primary School children. The qualitative data gathered on a Democratic and a Traditional School in Spain and an Active School in Scotland are reported below. To gain a clearer understanding of these schools, Table 2 presents a description and comparison of the features of the teaching methods under review from the teacher's perspective (interview data).

TABLE 2. Comparative of schooling types

Schooling type	Characteristics	Duties	Difficulties
Traditional	Active Comprehensive Individualised Cooperative Good teacher-pupil relationship	Academic: Teaching the content; Communicative Skills. Personal: Support and motivation; Attention to diversity; Integral Education.	Lack of participation by families Differences between students/special needs Demotivated students Time and resources Too much content and paperwork
Democratic	Based on children's interest and needs. Independent learning and skills for life.	Flexibility Good teacher-pupil relationship Enjoyment Coordination	Time Resources Must change to traditional school when going to secondary school Training
Active Learning	Flexible. Open and respectful. Learning by doing. Focused on children's interests.	Communication Child-centred Open and reliable Enthusiasm and compromise Fairness	Time and budget Paperwork Change of policy

Source: Author's creation.

The table above presents the differences between teaching methods identified in the data gathered by interviewing the teachers. Therefore, it presents teachers' perception of the school's teaching method features, teachers' duties and the difficulties they face. Teachers' perception is vital to understanding how teaching methods are implemented. It is possible to see how traditional schoolteachers make a difference between attention to academic matters and students' personal issues. In contrast, active learning and democratic schools understand that both sides (academic and personal) work together.

Regarding the challenges, some issues presented by traditional schoolteachers were not considered problems for democratic and active learning schoolteachers. For example, the difficulty of attending to special needs students or individualising the learning was a concern expressed by most traditional schoolteachers. They would ask for more support teachers, separate support classes etc. to maintain the same demand level for, as they called them, "normal" students. Traditional teachers understood that the ratio of students per teacher was the main problem, hence the need to teach homogeneously. By comparison, democratic and active learning schoolteachers would not find those issues of concern since their teaching method was mainly based on individualisation and attention to diversity. Finally, demotivated students were also a problem traditional teachers perceived in their classes, that, however, was not a problem in active learning and democratic schools, where students learned by doing.

Both active and democratic schools stated that they believed in learning by doing. The learning environment appears open and is adapted for children to research and move around. Self-regulated learning is encouraged by developing research skills and allowing children to organise their time. Independent learning cannot happen without motivation; therefore, the teacher's role is to be a companion to the children throughout the path of knowledge discovery. For this to happen, each student's learning pace is respected to raise awareness of their inner processes.

After crossing information from the conducted interviews and observations, some differences in organisation matters should be highlighted.

The Active Scottish School used a project-based teaching method. They believed in the importance of individualising education and cooperation. The timetable was not as flexible as in the Spanish Democratic School since the teacher managed the timetable. However flexible, some rituals happen every day. The day in the Active School started with an assembly where students were asked how they felt. Based on the answers, the teacher might change the day's structure. There would still be some free-choice time when students could choose what to do. Self-regulation was encouraged by allowing students to organise their projects and also by promoting the student's choice when starting a new project. The day ended by asking the children what they had learned during that day.

The teachers at the Spanish Democratic school argued that children are gifted with a passion for knowledge from birth. Therefore, learning should not be forced on them; it should happen based on their interests. From their viewpoint, children are born potential learners needing knowledge to survive. This school tried to exploit this by providing pupils with the right environment to learn by themselves. There was no established way to work; however, children naturally organised their knowledge in projects. The school prioritised the development of a student's skills for life, such as emotional management or conflict resolution.

The Active and Democratic schools showed standard methodological features that encouraged children to regulate themselves and behave actively in community matters (school being the community). Active participation in decision-making was encouraged in both institutions, as observed by the researcher. Particularly, the Democratic school encouraged students' active participation in every meeting at the school, taking part in every decision made by having the right to vote and therefore, pupils were responsible for their own choices. Additionally, both schools aimed to promote research and critical thinking among children with the goal of enabling students to generate their own knowledge.

The researcher's observation notes showed a relationship between specific teaching methods that encouraged independent learning, self-regulation and the education for democracy through participation in every decision-making process. While comparing participation in the three primary schools with that in the six secondary schools in Scotland, it became apparent that the sec-

ondary schools were more similar to the traditional primary school than the democratic or active schools. This was exemplified through the responses to one particular focus group question, which is reported below.

4.1. Secondary School Study

In the analysis of the conducted study on schooling and political communities, the second author focused on what young people had said when answering one particular question in the focus groups: "Do you have any say in rules and decisions in school? And is there any way of objecting to them?" In relation to having a say in rules and decision-making in school, several focus groups referred to Pupil Councils which are a common feature in Scottish secondary schools (Cross, Hulme & McKinney, 2014) or to a similar body. Several focus groups had mixed views as despite pupils being involved, they felt that their ideas and contributions were not taken forward (School A S5 PSE focus group 8, School B S5 PSE focus group 3, School D S5 PSEE focus group 3, School D S5 PSE focus group 8) or that it depended on the situation (School A S5 PSE focus group 9).

One focus group mentioned how they couldn't object to rules as doing so would make one appear disruptive (School A S5 PSE focus group 3). One pupil stated that "It feels they just want us to feel we have a say" in relation to Pupil Councils (School A S5 PSE focus group 5) and others said they had to hope that teachers would listen (School A S5 PSE focus group 10). Others were more sceptical about their Pupil Council and stated that it was a waste of time and patronizing and that pupils aren't listened to "when it comes to big decisions" (School A S5 PSE focus group 11) or that pupils weren't that interested in it and that Pupil Councils did not meet often enough to be effective (School B S6 Advanced Higher Modern Studies focus group 1). Some focus group members also mentioned speaking directly to the school's senior management (e.g., School A S5 PSE focus group 12 and 13), to teachers and House Captains (School A S5 PSE focus group 13) or to guidance teachers (School B S5 PSE focus group 5) or pupil support (School D S5 PSE focus group 4).

In contrast, members of School A's S6 Advanced Higher Modern Studies focus group 1 reported having a say in the design of the school tie and that pupils could organize charity events despite not being allowed to have the school prom in another part of Scotland. School D's S5 PSE focus group 2 also mentioned having a say in the school uniform. A more negative view was put forward by School B S5 PSE focus group 2, which said they did not have a class rep, had no way to object, had never been asked about rules and that there were unrepresentative rewards in place as "pupils with poorer grades get more praise than students who are good and pay attention." In School D S5 PSE focus group 1, it was stated that there were occasional surveys, but they did not feel that they had a say nor that they could object. They did not feel that teachers took them seriously.

A different strategy to having a say was put forward by School B S5 PSE focus group 4, which stated they didn't have a say and the way to object to

the rules was not following them. It was also mentioned that teachers were not all alike in their attitudes towards rules, as each teacher had a different opinion of the severity of the rules (School B S5 PSE focus group 5). Some focus group members mentioned that parents were the only way to object or to discuss policies or rules (School C S5 Modern Studies focus group 1, School D S5 PSE focus group 7). They felt that in the five years they had been at the school there had not been much change. When the pupils had asked for something, they had had to involve their parents to have an impact. A small number of focus groups mentioned prefects and S6 pupils having more of a say in the school and being listened to more (School C S5 Modern Studies focus group 2, School D S5 PSE focus group 5, School D S5 PSE focus group 6) with the former group referring to recent successes of getting a TV in the canteen and about having a common room. One pupil also said that it took too much effort to get a point across (School D S5 PSE focus group 5).

In the sections that follow results are discussed and some conclusions are presented.

5. DISCUSSION

This paper aims to demonstrate the importance of the teaching methods chosen in schools as a crucial component of education for democracy and political engagement later in life. Choosing methods in which students are being controlled by adults will not enable them to understand their own personal processes for decision-making, nor their personal power within a democratic society (García Raga & López Martín, 2014). In fact, the Secondary School data show students who are not aware of their own power within society and do not find ways to express it. They show frustration when explaining that their ideas are not taken further and they needed their parents voice in order to be heard.

As stated before, in terms of methodology, the Secondary Schools that participated were closer to the Traditional Schooling type and, thus, students were not involved in any decision-making within the school. However, experiences with lowering the voting age have been shown to increase political interest among teenagers (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013; Shanks & Molloy, 2017), although they also highlight the need for young people to feel well-informed and to seek other ways to engage in politics beyond voting (Shanks & Molloy, 2017).

Could the inclusion of democratic practices in previous educational stages change the responses given by students?

In relation to participation in decision-making in schools, it has been previously argued that depriving students of democratic experiences and not allowing them to engage collectively in political activities within the school can have significant consequences for their future experiences, values, and understanding of democracy (Andersson, 2018). It can be beneficial to have conflict, as Ruitenberg (2009, p. 275) argues, so "that students can act as political adversaries, both individually and, more importantly, as members of a group".

In the current climate, where different discourses seem to try to radicalise society politically (Dehghan & Nagappa, 2022; Marko, 2022), democratic practices open a window to assertive and informed discussion within schools, creating spaces where respectful and empathetic dialogue is encouraged (Dalehefte, Fjalsett & Kristiansen, 2022). Also, Dalehefte, Fjalsett and Kristiansen (2022) argue that democratic practices in schools can become a tool to fight against political and ideological radicalisation. It is another topic that needs further exploration, but that seems to be vital to develop critical thinking skills in the ICT era.

The democratic and active primary schools in the study encouraged emotional awareness as a way to develop peaceful conflict resolution skills, allowing students to build harmonious relationships with each other. Becoming self-aware means getting to understand the reason for one's behaviour, both the internal and external influences for it. Through this process, the individuals develop necessary critical thinking skills which are essential to become active citizens (Dewey, 1966 [1916]; Freire, 1970; Ferrer i Guardia, 1976; Ortega y Gasset, 1946 ; Tolstoy, 1978; Steiner , 2011; Zimmerman , 2002). Educating for political emotions is of benefit at the individual level and for developing a sense of the collective, of solidarity with others and feeling anger on behalf of others who are in a less advantageous situation (Ruitenberg, 2009).

Children in the Democratic Primary School were taken seriously and their opinion was regarded as valuable as that of the adults, whereas in the Scottish secondary schools students felt that their opinions were not valuable or taken into account. Andersson (2018) points out that the fruit of tokenistic involvement in decision-making in schools is the miseducation of students, which may stunt or restrict the growth of present and future democratic experience. From the primary school study, it was found that living in a democratic environment at school from an early age can provide children with a safe space where they can become aware of their power and the consequences of not using it correctly. Thus, in active learning and democratic school environments research is encouraged, as it allows students to learn to use their power as citizens through trial and error, and in democratic schools, students also learn how to work at a collective level when making decisions. Not settling for what they are told but looking for different points of view before making a decision, such as voting, is a significant learning mechanism for children (Riddle & Apple, 2019; Camicia & Si, 2021; Caspary, 2019).

Giving students the power to create rules and make decisions provides opportunities to make them committed to following those rules and decisions. It also helps students understand how important it is to participate in conventional democratic processes. Students are able to realise the consequences of their choices. This may be easier to do at primary school level rather than at secondary school. In a previous study which compared participation practices in two primary schools and one secondary school in Scotland, the pressure of delivering examination results at secondary level was raised as a barrier to interdepartmental participation activities (Cross, Hulme & McKinney, 2014).

Finally, when examining the data presented, it becomes clear that the teacher's role, while often understated, is also highly significant in creating a respectful and

safe environment that fosters democratic participation in schools. Dalehefte, Fjalsett and Kristiansen (2022) state that teachers are not aware of the relevance of their role when exploring democratic practices in schools, so it becomes essential to review how to include those practices in teacher training programs.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Teaching methods that encourage self-regulation were seen to develop democratic attitudes due to the opportunities given to children to have a choice in their own learning life, schedule, pace, etc.

If democracy and participation in decision-making are not central to a school's mission, then attempts to involve young people in decision-making later in life may appear tokenistic and fail to provide a solid foundation for participating in a democratic society beyond school and after leaving it. Contrasting practices in democratic, active and traditional schools highlights how participation in decision-making is experienced by students in the different settings. In answering the research question –what can schools focused on democracy and active participation teach traditional schools in order to embed democratic practices and decision-making?–, we found that the example of the democratic primary school, and to a lesser extent, the active school show traditional schools that a holistic approach to democracy and democratic practices . Decision-making in schools provides a much firmer foundation for developing current and future democratic citizenship. This holistic approach includes not only decision-making within the school such as pupil councils, but also in all arenas the students are part of and, furthermore, it includes the teaching methods that teachers use. Students are involved in decisions about how the school is organised, what is taught and how it is taught.

In addition, it was shown that 16- and 17-year-olds are interested in politics, but they might lack knowledge on how to participate or how to get involved in it. Could this be addressed by incorporating democratic practices starting in Primary Schools and continuing in Secondary Schools?

Additionally, the secondary school data show that participants felt frustrated when attempting to convey their ideas, encountering numerous obstacles and requiring their parents' involvement in order to be taken seriously. Could there be a relationship between the promotion of democratic practices and the development of the students' self-esteem and sense of self-worth?

Many questions remain unanswered on this topic and a longitudinal study to examine the long-term effects of these practices observed in primary schools on students later in life is necessary.

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