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# FROM STUDENT VOICE TO SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Effective practice in democratic school governance  
in European schools

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## Summary

- (1) How student participation in school governance is conceived - its aims and purposes - determines not only the forms it takes in practice but also the criteria by which its effectiveness can be evaluated.
- (2) Current policy and practice in democratic school governance are underpinned by a number of overlapping theoretical perspectives - such that currently there are no generally agreed, European-wide criteria of effectiveness.
- (3) Ideas of participation rooted in children's human or democratic rights sit alongside claims about impact on school improvement, personal well-being and general educational attainment.
- (4) In this study, the focus is on the educational benefits of participation – more specifically, on the part it can play in education for democratic citizenship (EDC).
- (5) Central to the idea of education for democratic citizenship is the understanding that democratic values and competencies cannot be acquired through formal teaching alone, but need to be practised.
- (6) However, despite the growing body of European literature on democratic school governance, we have as yet little reliable research evidence relating the experience of particular forms of participation to specific learning outcomes in EDC.
- (7) The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify the areas of participation that appear to offer most scope for democracy learning and would repay greater attention in schools.
- (8) In doing so, the study brings to bear a number of hypotheses current in the literature, 'expert' contributions from four member states and contemporary theory in education for democratic citizenship – about the values and competencies with which EDC is concerned and how they are best learned.
- (9) The areas or aspects of practice identified as offering most scope for development relate to:
  - range of students involved;
  - aspects of school life regarded as legitimate areas of student interest;
  - integration of student participation into wider school decision-making;
  - range of participatory structures and procedures available;
  - opportunities for shared responsibility with other stakeholders;

- application to issues and organisations beyond the school;
- links to the formal curriculum;
- a range of levels of involvement;
- forms of adult support;
- development of formal activities and procedures;
- mechanisms for school monitoring, review and evaluation.

(10) One way of taking development forward would be the creation of an instrument for auditing and evaluating practice at the school level.

## Section 1: Introduction

### Remit

The aim of this short scoping study is to identify the kinds of school-level strategies and mechanisms that are likely to be most effective in the development of democratic forms of school governance in European schools in the context of education for democratic citizenship (EDC) – that is, in equipping young people better to play their part as democratic citizens, in their communities, in their wider societies and in the framework of Europe as a whole.

It outlines a number of potential areas for development and recommends practical ways in which schools might take these forward.

### Focus

In this study, ‘school governance’ is defined widely to encompass all aspects of the way a school is led, managed and run – including:

a school’s rules and procedures, its decision-making structures, the behaviour of its personnel and how they relate to each other.

This includes the school curriculum and methods of teaching and learning as well as school ethos, management and development planning

By ‘democratic’ we mean the empowering of individuals to take an active part in the operational life of the school through consultation or actual decision-making powers.

While recognising that this has important implications for a range of stakeholders – e.g., teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and community bodies – the focus here is on students and opportunities for student participation.

### Method

The study’s recommendations are made on the basis of an analysis of current European literature on democratic school government taken together with information collected from ‘expert’ correspondents in a four member states of the Council of Europe: England, Spain, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. The ‘expert’ information was obtained through a standard questionnaire<sup>1</sup>, email correspondence, and, in the case of England, a face-to-face interview.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix B

## Section 2: Context

### Background

There is a growing body of European literature explicitly supportive of the principle of increased student involvement in school governance.<sup>2</sup> The principle is also implicit in many policy documents<sup>3</sup>, resources for professional development<sup>4</sup> and official legislation and guidance<sup>5</sup>.

Definitions of student involvement vary, however. Whereas some understand it simply to refer to the work of student representative bodies - such as school councils or pupil parliaments – others define it more widely to encompass all aspects of school life and decision-making where students may make a contribution, informally through individual negotiation as well as formally through purposely-created structures and mechanisms.<sup>6</sup>

There is also considerable variation in school practice - both within and between different member states.<sup>7</sup> The idea of school democracy does not as yet have universal acceptance within the teaching profession<sup>8</sup> and the ethos in schools in a number of countries is still often dominated by authoritarian power structures.<sup>9</sup> Opportunities for student participation are often perceived to be constrained by the requirements of nationally or regionally prescribed curricula and testing regimes and by the need that teachers and school leaders feel to moderate their principles in the light of parental and other external expectations.<sup>10</sup>

Variation in school practice and professional enthusiasm is, at least in part, due to the co-existence of a number of overlapping but logically distinct conceptions of the nature of student participation, i.e., of its aims and purposes.<sup>11</sup> Ideas rooted in children's human or democratic rights sit alongside theories about school improvement, personal well-being and educational attainment. The co-existence of this range of perspectives both within the wider educational community and, to some extent, also within

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., Durr (2004), Torney-Purta & Barber (2004), Backman & Trafford (2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Birzea et al. (2004).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Birzea et al. (2005), Huddleston & Kerr (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Of all the countries surveyed in Durr's (2004) study, only one (Russian Federation) did not provide any specific recommendations, curricular guidelines or stipulated forms of pupil participation.

<sup>6</sup> Contrast the different emphases in the English and Slovenian contributions below – Section 3.

<sup>7</sup> Birzea et al. (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Rowe (2003).

<sup>9</sup> The All-European Study reported that in the Eastern and South-Eastern European regions the democratic school is 'not yet the prevalent model ... the dominant model continues to be an authoritarian-type governance and a rigid institutional background.' Birzea et al. (2004), p.39.

<sup>10</sup> Pol, et al. (2006).

<sup>11</sup> For attempts to identify these different conceptions, see Ashworth (1995) and Rowe (2003).

interested individuals, has resulted not only in a lack of consensus about the wisdom of increasing student involvement in school governance and the appropriateness of different types of practice, but also in a lack of any generally agreed, European-wide, success criteria for activities of this kind.<sup>12</sup>

In the absence of any criteria of effectiveness, it is impossible to make any evaluation of what works or doesn't work in schools: success criteria of some sort are an essential pre-condition for judgements of this kind. In this study we are primarily concerned with the educational benefits of democratic school governance – specifically, of ways in which the experience of participating in school life and decision-making can help to develop young people's democratic values and competencies. Our evaluation of the effectiveness, or otherwise, of different types of practice is based first and foremost on their potential to contribute to democracy learning.

Conceiving student participation in this way has implications not only for the kind of success criteria we use, but also for our understanding of the areas of school life in which students may legitimately be involved and what the nature of that involvement should be. In order to gain a more practical understanding of these implications, we need first to be clear about what the other options are – i.e., alternative perspectives on student participation – and how they relate to education for democratic citizenship. We begin, therefore, by looking briefly at some of the different perspectives on democratic schooling encountered in current policy and practice and examining what they imply for practice.

## Theoretical perspectives on student participation

Different theoretical perspectives on democratic schooling can be characterised in terms of the types of justification they offer for student participation. They tend to fall into three general categories<sup>13</sup>:

### **1. Normative**

Normative justifications have their origin in ethical principles or social norms, which may or may not be promoted in legislation.

Typically, these are rooted in the idea of children's and human rights – especially Article 12 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child on the right to freedom of expression (but also, on occasions, Article 15 on the right to freedom of association and Article 19 and the right to protection from all forms of violence).

Alternatively, they have their origin in the concept of democratic citizenship – a similar, but conceptually distinct notion. This reflects the

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<sup>12</sup> "There is no national-wide system of criteria to judge the effectiveness of student involvement in school governance." "I'm not aware of any criteria that would be used to judge the effectiveness of student involvement". Czech correspondents to this study.

<sup>13</sup> Suggested in Rowe (2003).

belief that school students are citizens with rights and responsibilities in their own right not simply citizens-in-waiting, and that schools have a duty to provide students with opportunities to exercise these – hence, for instance, the concept of the classroom as a ‘democratic public forum’.<sup>14</sup>

A quite different kind of normative justification builds on the value of respect. According to this view, allowing students to become more involved in their schools is a way of valuing them as individuals – rather than according them rights as such. Proponents of this view are more likely to conceive of student participation in terms of teacher-led consultation rather than democratic decision-making powers.<sup>15</sup>

## **2. Instrumental**

Instrumental or pragmatic justifications focus on the benefits of student participation to the school as a whole and/ or to wider society beyond the school.

At the school level, student participation has been associated with a range of benefits – including improved discipline, better teacher-student relations, fewer exclusions and more positive attitudes towards school and school learning.<sup>16</sup> It has also been associated with more effective school management and decision-making.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, some forms of student participation are said to have the potential to impact positively on decision-making at a regional or national level, e.g., on curriculum or educational policy.<sup>18</sup>

## **3. Educational**

Educational justifications focus on the impact on individual student learning. Student participation has been associated with a range of educational outcomes, including general attainment and aspects of personal development and well-being, such as heightened self-esteem or self-confidence, an increased sense of self-efficacy and personal and collective responsibility.

It is also associated with education for democratic citizenship. In fact, student participation in one form or another is often regarded as having a unique and essential contribution to make learning about democracy.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Huddleston & Rowe (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Apparent in evidence given by some of the teachers interviewed in Rowe (2003).

<sup>16</sup> For examples, see Hannam (2005).

<sup>17</sup> Hallgarten et al. (2004).

<sup>18</sup> For examples, see Davies et al. (nd.).

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Backman & Trafford (2006).



## Education for democratic citizenship

Essential to the idea of democratic citizenship (EDC), as it has emerged in Europe in recent years, is the understanding that democratic values and competencies cannot be acquired through formal teaching alone.<sup>20</sup>

They have to be modelled:

‘The most powerful lessons that teachers and schools teach their pupils arise from the way the act and behave, not from what they tell them. Teachers and schools are individual and corporate role models. They are public and powerful manifestations of the values and beliefs that shape thought and practice. And it is these actual practices that have the most powerful effect in forming the values and dispositions of the young people themselves.’<sup>21</sup>

They also have to be practised:

‘... if Education for Democratic Citizenship is to have any hope of success in preparing young people to play an active part in a democratic society then the necessary learning in school must be at least in part experiential’.<sup>22</sup>

Effective EDC, therefore, combines formal instruction with access to democratic role models and opportunities for active participation in school life and decision-making. It entails a shift from authoritarian to democratic child-adult relationships; from students as passive to active participants in their education, sharing responsibility for school decision-making with other stakeholders.<sup>23</sup>

Precisely what this means in practice depends to some extent upon the definition of democracy upon which it is predicated. Democracy is not just about representation or about voting, it is also about deliberation and debate. It takes different forms and has different emphases in different member states. Also, it is important to remember that schools are first and foremost educational, not political communities. They exist to promote learning rather than act as forums for the expression of public opinion. Furthermore, involving students in shared decision-making does not necessarily mean according them the same decision-making powers as other stakeholders – just as acknowledging that children are citizens does not necessarily mean according them the same political rights as adults.

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<sup>20</sup> E.g., Durr et al (2000).

<sup>21</sup> Harrison & Baumgartl (2002), p.33.

<sup>22</sup> Hannam (2005), p21.

<sup>23</sup> E.g., Harber (2004)

What is certain is that conceiving participation in terms of EDC has practical consequences. It means that one form of participation is not necessarily as good as the next – for not all participatory activities contribute equally well to democracy learning. It also means that there might be some kinds of student involvement that, to all extents and purposes effective in other ways, have a negative effect on EDC learning. Certain ways of setting up school councils, for instance, might give students unrealistic expectations about what their participation can achieve and leave them with negative attitudes towards democracy and the democratic process.

The idea that different theoretical emphases – while positive towards the general idea of student participation - might sometimes conflict in practice is largely missing from the literature.

## Typologies of participation

A number of writers have tried to develop typologies that can be applied to the analysis of student participation regardless of context.

One example is Hart's 'ladder of participation'. Hart identifies eight levels of participation, from 'manipulation' (which he actually describes as 'non-participation') to 'youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults'.<sup>24</sup> Another is Dürr's 'seven steps to pupil participation'. Dürr identifies seven levels, from 'basic information and passive reception of decisions' to 'participation in decision-making, initiation of action, implementation of solutions and evaluation of outcomes'.<sup>25</sup>

In each case the principle is the same: a hierarchy of general levels of participation is posited, each level of which is more complex than the one before. While typologies like this can be useful descriptive tools, they cannot serve – in the context of democracy learning, at least – as a set of normative criteria for evaluating practice. In democracy learning it is not necessarily the case that each level is better than the previous one. It may well be that there is value in experiencing a range of different levels of participation.

## Research

Despite the growing body of European literature in this field, we have as yet little reliable research evidence relating particular types of school practice to specific learning outcomes in democracy learning. In fact, the relative effectiveness of different forms of participation remains largely un-researched in the Europe context.

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<sup>24</sup> Hart (1992).

<sup>25</sup> Dürr (2004).

The studies that do exist – while claiming a range of definite and positive outcomes for increased student involvement in school life<sup>26</sup> - tend neither to differentiate between the effects of different types of participation nor to look at the specific impact on democracy learning. Most of these studies rely on small samples and have never been replicated. Evidence is often only anecdotal and direct causation or attribution problematic. The claimed benefits of particular approaches are rarely weighed against costs and little consideration is given to whether the recorded outcomes might be achieved in other, perhaps more cost-effective ways.<sup>27</sup>

The situation must, at least in part, be due to lack of conceptual clarity in this area – in particular, the failure to distinguish between the different sorts of theoretical perspective that underpin thought and practice in this field, and, therefore, to arrive at specific criteria by which the effectiveness of different practices and types of practice can be judged.

Nevertheless, a number of important themes recur in the literature - in particular, the significance of factors such as:

- students' level of confidence in the value of participation and sense of 'empowerment' in their schools;
- the existence of student representative structures, such as school councils or pupil parliaments;
- opportunities for students to be respected for their contribution to solving school problems;
- extent to which the school environment models democratic principles or fosters participation practices;
- links between participation and explicit teaching about democratic practice;
- an open classroom climate for discussion;
- links with the wider community and participatory organisations beyond the school.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, these are very general factors. They do not translate directly into specific strategies or mechanisms whose practical impact is easily assessable. Nor have they been arrived at solely within the context of EDC. Nevertheless, they are suggestive of important areas for development in schools. In Section 4 of this study we use these and a number of related themes derived from the requirements of democracy learning to explore what is likely to work or not work in school at a more practical level.

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<sup>26</sup> E.g., improved academic attainment, attendance and exclusion rates, Hannam (2001); improved civic knowledge and engagement, Torney-Purta et al. (2002); improved learning climate, Osler (1997, 2000c), Davies (1998).

<sup>27</sup> See the review of 75 studies in Davies et al. (n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> Torney-Purta et al. (2002).



## Section 3: Country Snapshots

In this section we outline the perspectives of five volunteer ‘experts’ in relation to the practice of democratic school governance in their respective countries, in the form of four ‘country snapshots’.

The information was obtained through a standard questionnaire<sup>29</sup>, email correspondence, and, in the case of England, a face-to-face interview.

The opinions expressed represent the interests and emphases of the individuals concerned and do not pretend to paint a comprehensive picture of the state of affairs in the country concerned. They are, however, the views of people with considerable experience in the field of EDC in their countries and provide us with important insights into issues of student participation in their countries and in Europe as a whole.

### England

There is no actual legislation relating to student representative bodies in English schools though school councils are given official encouragement by Ofsted, the national school inspection service, as well as in non-statutory guidelines. In addition, the Education Act (2000) requires local education authorities, governing bodies and schools ‘to consider the views of children and young people and involve them when making decisions.’

Despite the lack of legislation, the vast majority of secondary schools now have a student council of some sort. As do a number of primary schools, where ‘circle time’ – a form of class meeting – is also becoming increasingly common.

Our correspondent in England conceived the effectiveness of student participation in terms of a number of different outcomes, but singled out two in particular: student ‘attainment’ and ‘well-being’.

In terms of the actual measurement of effectiveness, especially in respect of ‘well-being’, he recommended a combination of methods, including: interviews with students and a range of other stakeholders – asking them what they think; and the analysis of other data such as school exclusion figures. He was particularly drawn to the idea of obtaining data on ‘long term whole-life’ outcomes, such as continuation in education, employment and the ability to sustain relationships – currently being pioneered in ongoing American research into the effects of citizenship education in general.

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<sup>29</sup> Appendix B

For him, the essence of democratic school governance could be summed up as less 'compulsion' for students and more 'freedom of choice'. He felt that schools ought to 'open up' and properly 'respect the interests of students' – which, in brief, means 'kids having an equal say with adults'. These ideas derive from a radical view of education, to some extent based on the belief that the institutional nature of schooling - as it currently exists in England – has a damaging psychological effect on young people. Thus he welcomed de-schooling experiments, such as NotSchoolUK in which students are called 'researchers' and work from home on-line.

In terms of conventional schooling, he saw the attitude of the head teacher as the key variable in the effectiveness of student participation.

He identified the key areas for practical development as:

- extending the opportunities to 'have their opinions taken seriously' to 'all students in and out of class and school';
- ensuring that participatory 'structures', such as school councils, 'permeate the whole school';
- cultivating appropriate 'relationships between children and teachers'.

The factors that militate against more effective participation he conceived in terms of different forms of external compulsion, e.g., school league tables, target-setting – even compulsion attendance at school. While he understood that lack of teacher democracy was problem in many English schools, he expressed concern – shared, he argued, by a number of English head teachers – that teachers might use more freedom for themselves to deny freedom to their students.

In terms of what can be done beyond the level of the school, he recommended:

- emphasising the importance of the quality of teacher-student relationships in teacher and school leader education;
- strengthening student unions nationally and their links with schools;
- developing instruments for auditing the quality of student involvement in school life and decision-making as a basis for improving practice;
- creating a typology to use as a basis for assessing schools' development needs;
- re-using the data being obtained in the DfES/ NFER longitudinal study to inform the development of school initiatives in this area.

## Czech Republic

The School Act (2005) introduced a legal obligation to set up school boards in all basic and secondary schools – made up of one third parents, one third teachers and one third community representatives. School students aged 18 or over can also be represented.

The same Act sanctions the setting up of elected, student self-governing bodies – the opinions of which the head teacher must deal with. It also sanctions the free expression of students on any decision relating to their education, according to their age and developmental level - to which the school must pay attention.

Both of the correspondents from the Czech said that there were no explicit or nationwide criteria in their country for the effectiveness of student participation. One responded:

'I'm not aware of any criteria that would be used to judge the effectiveness of student involvement. I personally think that so far there has been more quantitative surveys, i.e., how many student councils does exist, how many students participate in its work ... Not many surveys concentrate on the processes, results ...'

They said that the most common forms of student participation in their country were formal student councils and student-class teacher discussion on problems and issues related to school life. Formal structures exist most often at the level of the class, but also at the school level – in about half of schools in all. Agendas vary, but usually concern 'student interests in various aspects of school life' – generally 'rather "safe issues" for the adults in school'. Students are rarely represented on school governing bodies even though they are entitled to this.

They said that involving students in curriculum or teaching and learning methods is 'the hardest challenge of democratic practice in Czech schools.' The two correspondents had recently been involved in research in this area. The students they interviewed felt there was very little opportunity for them to influence curriculum content or learning methods. A number said that trying to do so was often a 'bad experience', that 'no one listens to what they say' and that 'the reaction of the teacher is negative'. So they 'start to be passive and don't think that they could influence anything at all.' The research indicates that both teachers and students see curriculum and learning methods as an individual issue for the teacher and the class, rather than as a general issue of student involvement.

Factors which militate against more effective involvement were said to be:

- lack of shared values;
- lack of time and money;
- teachers' fear of losing control;
- reluctance of teachers and students to give up their free time;
- poor information – students are not always aware of activities in which they can participate;
- lack of professional development – e.g., training manuals, seminars;
- contradictions in school life – e.g., between teachers' and parents' views, between democratic ideals and externally set demands of testing and examinations.

A key factor contributing towards effective participation was said to be the attitude of teachers and head teachers.

In the view of our correspondents, the most effective strategies they had seen related to:

- classroom-based strategies in which a number of students have particular responsibilities for specific aspects of classroom life;
- school journals and websites;
- student involvement in school self-evaluation.

## Spain

In the new education law published in 2006, involvement in school governance is regarded as a student right. Under this law, school boards should comprise no less than one third parents and students. School boards are responsible for passing yearly programmes, electing head teachers, admissions procedures and so on. Membership of school boards is open only to secondary schools and students in the first and second years of secondary education are not allowed to take part in the election of head teachers.

The correspondent from Spain was not aware of any 'common or shared' criteria by which to judge the effectiveness of student involvement in school governance.

She regarded student involvement as currently 'fairly limited'. The most common forms in Spain, she reported, are participation in the school board and a system of class representatives. Usually in secondary schools the class representative acts as the group's spokesperson, liaising with other class representatives by year or cycle to bring students' opinions and suggestions to teachers and school leaders.



The formal curriculum is specified partly by the Ministry of Education and Science and partly by regional education authorities and although aspects of the curriculum need to be adapted to suit individual school context – e.g., for students with special learning needs – students take no part in this process. However, actual teaching and learning in the classroom is often the ‘object of negotiation between teachers and students’ - without altering the essentials of the prescribed content of the curriculum. While evaluation criteria are never negotiated, assessment and instruments and strategies might be.

She said that one of the chief factors that militates against the increasing participation of students is “old school” teachers and parents’ who are ‘reluctant to give students a voice’. In general, also, private and semi-private schools are less likely to encourage student participation.

Areas with scope for development, she suggested, include:

- making more use of the class tutor sessions to develop democratic habits, e.g., in learning active listening, expressing opinion clearly and respectfully and taking the floor;
- more time for students ‘on their own’ for free discussion of their worries – together with the tools to transmit these to teachers through their class representative;
- development of in-school student associations.

## Slovenia

The Law on Primary School that came into force in Slovenia in 1996 introduced half-hour sessions for class communities which form the basis of school parliaments. The Rules on Rights and Duties of Children in Primary Schools prescribes that head teachers should summon school parliaments at least twice a year.

The Slovenian correspondent focused on the highly sophisticated national system of student representation required by law in his country. This system is firmly rooted in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. Children’s parliaments are not meant to be merely an ‘imitation of adults or role playing, but ‘genuine form of children/ youths participation’ – but it is also regarded as having an ‘important educational role’ in terms of ‘education for active and creative citizenship’.

The Rules on Rights and Duties of Children in Primary Schools carefully define the rights and duties relating to student participation in school life. Children in class communities elect a chair and deputy chair by secret ballot. At meetings of the class community, children and their teachers discuss

issues concerning the life and work of their community and school, suggesting proposals and ways of solving problems. These include:

- discussion of the learning achievements of the class and the organisation of mutual help;
- help for those in trouble;
- breaches of school rules;
- suggestions relating to lessons and extra-curricular activities;
- appropriateness of individual marks.

They also participate in marking and the commendation of fellow students for awards.

The class representatives participate in the school parliament – summoned at least twice a year. The school parliament is mentored by teachers or school advisers. Increasingly this form of participation is being supplemented by other kinds of activities, such as workshops, polls, school magazines and suggestion boxes.

One thing the school parliament does is to decide whether or not integrate into the ‘pupils’ community’. The pupils’ community helps to regulate the annual work programme – including:

- collecting comments and proposals from class communities about the programme of lessons and extra-curricular activities;
- monitoring students’ rights and duties;
- notifying the head teacher and school council when rights are violated;
- organising school events;
- planning charitable events and ‘acts of solidarity’;
- suggesting and implementing improvements to the school environment.

The pupils’ community has a mentor, selected from the school personnel by the head teacher on the opinion of the pupils’ community.

Class communities and school parliaments in Slovenia exist as part of wider system of youth participation aimed at education for democracy. In each school, representatives are elected for municipal or inter-municipal parliaments. School representatives also participate in the children’s parliament at state level – in this way all the young people in the country are represented. Sessions of this parliament are hosted by the Chairman of the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia. They are regularly attended by representatives of educational administration as other branches of executive power.

## Section 4: Strategies and Mechanisms

In this section we look more closely at the areas of student participation that seem to have most scope for making a significant contribution to EDC in schools and practical ways in which they might be developed.

### Translating principles into practice

As noted in Section 2 above, we have as yet little hard research evidence connecting specific kinds of practice with positive outcomes in EDC. However, by focusing more specifically on the nature of EDC – in particular, the kinds of learning it involves and the processes by which this learning is thought to take place – it is possible to begin to identify a number of areas of practice where there appears to be scope for development.

While situations in different member states vary and strategies that work in one country may not do so in others, there appear to be certain generic success criteria for EDC-related participatory activities that apply across schools in Europe – both in terms of specific kinds of practice and the wider educational framework in which these kinds of practices are promoted.

Typically, these are referred to in the literature in very general principles – such as the need to make participation ‘real’, avoid being ‘tokenistic’, help students to have a ‘genuine sense of empowerment’ or develop a ‘whole-school approach’. Rarely are these principles converted into practical strategies that are capable of making a definite practical impact in schools.

In what follows, therefore, we try to identify some of the key aspects of practice that, on the basis of the relevant research evidence (insofar as it exists) and the insights of the ‘expert’ contributions in our sample country case studies, appear to be of particular strategic significance in democracy learning. We suggest different ways in which they might be developed in schools and make recommendations for how these might be taken forward.

### Potential areas for development

#### **1. Opportunities for all**

If EDC is regarded as a universal entitlement for all students and experiential learning is an essential element in EDC, it follows that *all* students in a school – regardless of their academic performance or social background – are equally entitled to enjoy the educational benefits that derive from the experience of participation in school life and decision-making.

This has important implications for representative structures, such as school councils and pupil parliaments. First, it implies that the most effective forms of representative structures will be those that maximize the number of students who have the opportunity to represent their peers. One way of achieving this is through multi-levelled structures – for example, as in the statutory system of children’s parliaments in Slovenia, organised at the level of class, school, municipality and state.<sup>30</sup> The experience of the Slovenian system suggests that we should look in general towards the development of in-school structures and procedures that encourage more ‘grass-roots’ participation by students – such as class councils, or by better use of existing structures – such as the regular ‘tutor periods’ built into the school day in countries like England and Spain. Another way is through periodic ‘mass meetings’ of entire year groups, or even whole school meetings if the school is sufficiently small.<sup>31</sup>

Second, it reinforces the importance of the quality of communication between student representatives and the students who elect them. In terms of EDC, the value of school councils and pupil parliaments lies not only in the experience they give students of representing others, but also of being represented. Feedback from student representatives is essential, as is the provision of opportunities for students to lobby their representatives and interrogate them about their activities. Face-to-face meetings – in class groups or year assemblies, for example – have a role to play. So, too, do other mechanisms like dedicated notice boards, school newsletters or web sites.

Third, it implies that special arrangements may need to be made to ensure students from minority groups have equal access to involvement in school councils, e.g., through forms of special support or quotas. While it is only natural that articulate and confident students are the ones most likely to be attracted to positions on a school council or pupil parliament (and also most likely to be attractive to their electorate), it would seem important to find ways of involving as wide a range as possible, e.g., through preparatory activities, discussion or ‘taster’ experiences.

The importance of providing equal access for all students to the educational benefits of participatory activities extends far beyond the formal representative structures, of course. However, the extent to which an experience is extended equally to all students is likely to be a test of the effectiveness of any form of participation.

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<sup>30</sup> See Pavlovic & Sardoc (nd.).

<sup>31</sup> Cunningham (2000).

## 2. Areas of legitimate student interest

There is a tendency among some teachers and school leaders to define the issues which affect students quite narrowly. Student consultation and decision-making is often limited to aspects of school life that affect students only and which have no immediate relevance to other stakeholders, e.g., playgrounds, toilets and lockers.<sup>32</sup>

Defining the limits of student participation in this way is not only likely to give students the impression that the school's commitment is 'tokenistic' and therefore not to be taken seriously, but it also severely limits the possibilities for experiential learning (about the nature of schooling and the education system as well as in different forms of public decision-making). The notion is authoritarian and paternalistic, rather than democratic. It not only assumes that school students have a legitimate interest only in student-specific issues, but it also assumes that students have no right to decide for themselves the issues in which they want or do not want to be involved.

For this reason many commentators have suggested that opportunities for student participation should go beyond specifically student-related issues and extend to wider aspects of school life, as well as to society beyond the school. Effective involvement, it has been said, would:

'go beyond student comment on aspects of their lives which are seen as safe or without significant impact on the work of adults in the school ... embedded at classroom level ... at institutional level ... and at the interface between local, national and international communities.'<sup>33</sup>

There are very few aspects of school life and decision-making in which, principle at least, school students cannot be meaningfully involved – depending upon their age and experience:

'So what aspects of school life can realistically become more democratic and participative? I would answer "all of them".'<sup>34</sup>

The range of activities that make up the work of a school can be categorised in a number of different ways, but, however it is categorised, one should expect students to have opportunities for involvement in each major area – in particular in a school's:

- ethos and climate – including rules, rewards and sanctions
- curriculum, teaching and learning
- management and development planning.

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<sup>32</sup> '...generally rather "safe issues" for the adults in school', Czech correspondent.

<sup>33</sup> Fielding (1996), p.19.

<sup>34</sup> Hannam (2005), p.22.

Involvement in curriculum and teaching and learning methods is frequently recognized as being one of the least explored areas of student participation.<sup>35</sup> For one thing, school curricula and evaluation criteria are often prescribed in detail by state or regional authorities, apparently leaving little room for involvement by teachers or students. However, in reality, the curriculum as experienced in the classroom and the learning methods employed present a range of different opportunities for student involvement – from decisions about the nature of assignments and projects, for instance, to assessment strategies and marking.

This applies equally to the topics chosen by students for discussion in class and/ or school councils:

‘The most effective school councils do not exclude anything from being discussed, apart from matters of personal confidentiality ... If rigid limits are imposed on councils at the outset, students are unlikely to develop any enthusiasm for them.’<sup>36</sup>

One way for student representative bodies to deal more effectively with the range of issues students may wish to pursue is through a sub-committee system. A sub-committee system can allow students to develop an overview and interest in certain types of issue which might not otherwise be drawn to their attention.<sup>37</sup>

### **3. Integration into the school’s overall decision-making process**

One of the ways of making the experience of participation real for students is to embed it firmly into the everyday life of the school and school decision-making - rather than to treat it as a separate activity.<sup>38</sup> The more integral their participation is to the working of the school as a whole, the more students (and other stakeholders) are likely to take it seriously, and the more opportunities there are for EDC learning – through the experience of participation in a wider range of policy and practice issues at a greater number of levels.

In practical terms, this suggests that student participatory activity should be constructed in terms of the school as a whole and not simply in terms of a self-governing student interest group. In developing a sense of community membership (one of the basic building-blocks of democratic citizenship), it would seem important for students to be able to feel that their actions have the potential to have an influence on the school community as a whole – whether in terms of overall ethos, curriculum, teaching and learning or management and developing

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<sup>35</sup> See contribution from Czech Republic in Section 3 above.

<sup>36</sup> Clay at al. (2001), p.25.

<sup>37</sup> Rowe (2003).

<sup>38</sup> ‘Participation cannot be an add-on extra’, English correspondent.

planning. The first IEA Civic Education Study found that, to some extent at least, the positive value of school councils was associated with the provision of opportunities for students to be respected for their contribution to solving *school* problems.<sup>39</sup>

It implies there is scope for students to be given a role in all the key areas of decision-making in a school's life, however that decision-making is structured. It suggests an appropriate student presence on school working parties, planning groups and management bodies – up to and including governing bodies or school boards, where the law allows.<sup>40</sup> Second, it suggests that the work of student councils should be closely integrated with the work of other school bodies – for example, through the establishment of specialised school sub-committees or working parties, student council representation on whole-school bodies and/ or the provision of opportunities of student councils both to report to and receive feedback from other school bodies.

It is important that forms of communication used by student councils are not one-way - neither in terms of fellow students nor of other stakeholders:

‘Councils seem to be at their most engaged when there is genuine and ongoing dialogue between staff and students and consultation with students on the whole range of school issues is regarded as routine.’<sup>41</sup>

Aside from sitting alongside and sharing responsibility for decision-making with other stakeholders, there are other ways in which student participation can be integrated more fully into whole-school policy. One way is through procedures in which students can submit ‘expert opinion’ to school working parties and planning groups. It has long been recognised that in many aspects of school life students themselves are the ‘experts’ – not only on account of the time they actually spend in school and their experiences there, but also because their knowledge of certain curricular topics can sometimes be superior to that of their teachers, e.g., issues of drugs and drug-abuse.

Another way is to involve students in the collection of the evidence used to inform school-decision making – through questionnaires, or, more actively, through their own research. Practical experience of conducting and reporting on their own research is, among other things, a very effective way of introducing students to the issues that surround the use of research in social policy in the wider society beyond the school. There is a growing body of literature on the concept of ‘students as researchers’ and its potential to re-draw organisational

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<sup>39</sup> Torney-Purta & Barber (2004).

<sup>40</sup> E.G., Hallgarten et al. (2004)

<sup>41</sup> Rowe (2003).

lines of responsibility and accountability in school as well as promote positive attitudes towards school and school learning.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Range of participatory structures

Student self-governing bodies have an important part to play in school governance and rightly-organised are capable of making a substantial contribution to democracy learning. The important thing, from the perspective of learning, is that they are able to give students a range of experiences illustrative of representative government, both in terms of general principle - e.g., secret ballots - and of the actual processes of democratic government in the member state in which they live and, where relevant, in the EU.

There is an argument that the structure and procedures of student representative bodies should closely model those of representative government in the country in which they live (and, where relevant, those of the EU) – including responsibility for raising and spending revenue. This might include raising, spending and accounting for a budget.

To prevent student council activity from becoming an artificial activity, it is important to integrate it into the wider planning and decision-making activities of the school as a whole. Its effectiveness is not be judged simply in terms of whether it helps students to achieve their demands, but rather in terms of whether it has an influence on the running of the school as a whole – an instrument of shared school governance rather than simply of student self-governance.

There are also a number of practical considerations often alluded to in discussions of the effectiveness of schools councils. These include:

- clear terms of reference;
- regular meetings;
- a limited number of representatives for face-to-face meetings;
- resources, e.g., IT, meeting rooms
- efficient communications systems, e.g., notice boards, web sites, newsletters.<sup>43</sup>

Whatever form student representative bodies take, it is important that they are, in some respects at least, autonomous – i.e., have the power to set their own agendas, enjoy decision-making powers, implement and are accountable for implementing their own decisions. It is also important that in some respects they are allowed to operate as the equivalent of a power-sharing branch of the executive.<sup>44</sup> Not only does

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<sup>42</sup> E.g., Fielding (2004).

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Hannam (2005), Huddleston & Kerr (2006).

<sup>44</sup> 'Kids having an equal say with adults', English correspondent.



this create the potential for students to experience the processes of and working within a system of representative government, but also enables them to experience genuine power-sharing and is therefore less likely to descend into paternalism.<sup>45</sup>

The democratic process is much wider than decision-making, however: it involves a range of activities, including consulting and responding to consultation, lobbying and campaigning. If, for the purpose of democracy learning schools are expected to mirror the kinds of democratic structures and procedures found in society, then logically this should involve a range of structures and processes – including ‘quangos’ and ad hoc committees, perhaps, as well pressure groups – in addition to actual decision-making bodies.

Also, although student self-governing bodies are particularly suited to dialogue and decision-making on some school issues, other issues may be dealt with more effectively through different forms of participation, e.g., plebiscites, focus groups, or face-to-face interviews. The more effective systems of student participation, therefore, are likely to be characterised by opportunities for students to become involved in a range of structures and processes – rather than just self-governing bodies. It suggests the most effective model is likely to be an integrated in which the class and/ or student council is just one form.<sup>46</sup>

## **5. Involvement of other stakeholders**

Many of the aspects of school life that most directly affect students involve adults who themselves are not regularly consulted about or have a role in decision-making on school issues, e.g., staff involved in lunch-time or playground management, school maintenance or other forms of supervisory activity. Adults with these kinds of responsibility rarely have a role to play in the work of student councils or parliaments. Consequently, there are few, if any, opportunities for students to meet and discuss issues of mutual concern with them.<sup>47</sup>

In a similar way, many teachers feel that they do not have a big enough say in decision-making in their schools. This can lead to criticism of attempts to enhance student involvement. Why should students be given rights, they argue, which they as teachers do not possess?

In one English school, for instance, a number of teachers objected to a questionnaire asking students for their opinions on school issues on the grounds that the school was listening to students too much, favouring them over teaching staff and putting too much emphasis on students’ rights and not enough on their duties. The response of the head teacher was to draft another questionnaire to ensure that

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<sup>45</sup> Ashworth (1995).

<sup>46</sup> Rowe (2003).

<sup>47</sup> Ashworth (1995).

teachers (and parents) and students were equally involved in the enquiry.<sup>48</sup>

The conclusion we can draw from this is that the educational benefits of student involvement are likely to be enhanced when opportunities to participate in school governance are extended to *all* stakeholders – teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and community members alike. In particular, when students have opportunities to meet, discuss with and work together with a range of different stakeholders on issues of mutual concern in a framework of shared responsibility. The development of teacher participation would seem to be inextricably connected with the development of more effective forms of student participation.

## 6. Application beyond school

There is a certain amount of research evidence associating positive outcomes of student participation with involvement in issues and organisations outside the school - especially in the context of school councils and other kinds of student representative body.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, the involvement of school councils in issues that extend beyond the school and the representation of school council members on wider consultative and/ or decision-making bodies would seem to extend the potential for learning about democratic citizenship.

The system in place in Slovenia links children's class and school parliaments with municipal children's parliaments and a national children's parliament. The themes for the individual school parliaments are chosen by the members of the national children's parliament themselves. They have included topics like ecology, friendly schools, student-teacher relations, addictions and so on. The terms of reference of these groups are set out in detail in an executive regulation *The Rules on Rights and Duties of Children in Primary Schools*. The children's parliament sessions are hosted by the Chairman of the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia and are regularly attended by representatives of educational administration and other branches of executive power as well as representative(s) of Ombudsman.<sup>50</sup>

Three of the correspondents contributing to the country 'snapshots' in this study emphasized the positive value of making school links with national student representative bodies – though such bodies are not yet strongly developed in all member states.<sup>51</sup> The Euridem review of

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<sup>48</sup> Cunningham (2000), p.140.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., Torney-Purta & Barber (2004), Craig et al. (2004).

<sup>50</sup> Pavlovic & Sardoc (nd).

<sup>51</sup> "Students associations are not common but could be useful", Spanish correspondent. "You can't overestimate the importance of a body like ESSA (English Secondary Schools Association – though it has not yet had a knock-on effect on schools", English correspondent.

pupil democracy in Europe reported positively on the role of links with strong student unions and membership of OBESSU (European Association of School Student Unions). It highlighted the work of student unions in providing class and school representatives with training and guidance, organising conferences and general supporting school-level initiatives in democratic school governance. Where they are sufficiently well established, student unions and associations can also act as channels through which school students can have the experience of lobbying government.<sup>52</sup>

There is scope, also, for developing stronger links between schools and supportive teacher unions<sup>53</sup>. We already have examples of teacher unions negotiating hours for liaison teachers to work with student and class councils in school.<sup>54</sup>

## **7. Experiential learning and curriculum links**

Although the educational benefits claimed for student participation are often said to be brought about through ‘experiential’ learning, there is little if any discussion in the literature of the kind of processes involved and what is needed in practice to make this kind of learning effective – either about learning in general or EDC learning in particular.

Technically, experiential learning is usually conceived as a four-stage cyclical process. Concrete experience is followed by a period of reflection on that experience. This may then be followed by formulation of general rules describing the experience, or the application of known theories to it, and hence to the creation of new ways of looking at or plans for dealing with that kind of experience in the future.<sup>55</sup>

In the context of EDC learning, therefore, what makes the experience of different forms of participation effective is to a large extent determined by the opportunity for students to reflect on and engage critically with their experience. This requires time. It also requires support – among other things, with the construction of questions by which students can interrogate their experience, the ideas and theories to help them frame their understanding and the language with which to express themselves in relation to this.

The natural location for this kind of supported reflection is surely in the classroom in the context of EDC as it appears in the formal curriculum, for it is in EDC as a formal curriculum subject that the relevant questions, ideas and theories and language can be found – as well as the requisite expertise. One of the conclusions of the IEA Civic

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<sup>52</sup> Davies & Kirkpatrick (2000).

<sup>53</sup> Teacher unions vary in this respect across Europe, of course. While some are extremely supportive of enhancing student participation, others are openly critical.

<sup>54</sup> Davies & Kirkpatrick (2000).

<sup>55</sup> Kolb (1984).

Education Study was that the positive value of school councils is not related simply to membership, but coupled with explicit teaching about democratic practice.<sup>56</sup>

A second way in which experiential learning can be integrated into the formal curriculum in EDC is by using student experience of democratic participation in school as a way of helping students to reflect on and makes sense of issues of democratic participation in society beyond the school, e.g., representation, accountability, rights and responsibilities. It can be a way of making the formal curriculum more real and relevant to students.

The process is cyclical: the opportunity within the context of the formal curriculum for students to reflect critically on and engage with the concrete experience of democratic participation in their school life is likely to encourage them to take it more seriously and lead in turn to a better quality of experience in the future.

One conclusion that can be drawn from this is that although experiential learning in EDC is often described as though it were supplementary (even a superior form of learning) to EDC in the formal curriculum, it is probably more appropriate to think of it as essentially inter-related with the formal curriculum.

On the evidence of the available literature, it would seem that the idea of integrating experiential learning with learning through more formal instruction is as still largely undeveloped - either in theory or in practice. It was not mentioned by any of the 'experts' in our country case studies. Yet it would appear to have significant potential for improving the quality and standard of EDC learning across the board.

## **8. Levels of involvement**

As has already been pointed out, it is possible to identify logically distinct levels of student involvement.<sup>57</sup> There is a clear difference, for instance, between: student-initiated and teacher-initiated participation; student consultation and student decision-making; students making decisions for themselves and sharing responsibility for decision-making with other stakeholders; making decisions and implementing the results of decisions.

It is not that certain levels of involvement lead to better democracy learning than others, but that experience of a range of levels would seem to have more to contribute than just one or two. As a minimum, it would seem to be a good thing for students to have concrete experience of situations where they are involved in:

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<sup>56</sup> Torney-Purta & Barber (2004).

<sup>57</sup> See Section 2 above on typologies of participation.

- initiating or planning action;
- taking their own decisions;
- sharing responsibility for decision-making;
- implementing the results of decision-making – their own and others.

Each level of participation is likely to have its own educational benefits in terms of EDC – for example:

‘...involvement in the early stages of a project or the experience of initiating a project will provide the best learning opportunities for citizenship education. Students will find out how individuals and committee structures interact to bring an idea to fruition.’<sup>58</sup>

## 9. Adult support

A key factor in the effectiveness of different forms of student participation is likely to be the nature and extent of adult support they enjoy. While an element of student self-government is an important aspect of EDC learning, the capacity for self-government does not necessarily develop naturally or unaided - nor does the capacity to represent student interests in wider school working parties or policy groups. It is not only a matter of providing training in technical procedures associated with representation, or with public meetings – such as agenda-setting, minute-taking, chairing and so on, it also involves a certain amount of personal direction and mentoring, e.g., drawing students’ attention to aspects of school where they might have an influence, helping them formulate appropriate questions, assisting them with student-student and student-teacher relations, or simply giving them confidence.

School leaders are probably not in the best position to fill this role. While, as many have argued, the effectiveness of student participation derives in large measure from the vision of the school principal<sup>59</sup>, there are dangers in involving school leaders too closely in aspects of student participation – in particular the danger of reinforcing paternalistic or authoritarian power structures in school.<sup>60</sup>

A second important area of support relates to the co-ordination, management, monitoring and evaluation of a school’s overall programme of student participation – within the school’s overall programme for EDC. The kind of whole-school, multi-layered and integrated approach to democratic participation advocated in this study is unlikely to happen by chance or simply by the diktat of school

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<sup>58</sup> Ashworth (1995), p.29.

<sup>59</sup> “The key is head teachers”, English correspondent.

<sup>60</sup> Cunningham (2000).

leaders. To be effective it is likely to need the support of a sympathetic and trained individual or team of individuals with the time and resources required to make the rhetoric a reality.

## **10. Formal procedures**

Take up of opportunities for participation and the seriousness with which students respond to them is likely to be related to the extent to which they are given formal expression – rather than being left to chance.

Students are unlikely to expect that they can have an influence on decision-making in their schools, unless they are given this in a formal way. In the absence of any formal channels of consultation, students need to be lucky enough to speak to the right person at the right time if they are to have any chance of their plans being implemented.<sup>61</sup>

Creating formal procedures helps to make student choices real by building them into the decision-making structures of the school as a whole. It also creates opportunities for students to have direct experience of formal processes of consultation and democratic citizenship.

Formal procedures need not be restricted to representative structures like student councils: they are appropriate to any form of student participation in school life. They apply as much in the classroom as at the whole-school level, e.g., in relation to the choosing of assignments, planning projects, setting ground rules and so on.

This is not to de-value the learning potential of forms of informal participation in school life, e.g., taking part in and organising concerts, coaching sports teams, running student enterprises, monitoring computer rooms and so on, but simply to maximise the potential of participation overall.

## **11. Monitoring, review and evaluation**

The introduction of democratic forms of governance is likely to be more effective where it is done in a planned way, with progress evaluated at regular intervals – where student participation is incorporated into school self-evaluation and quality assurance.

It requires schools to develop instruments for auditing current standards and monitoring new initiatives as they are implemented – including success indicators and methods for collecting information –

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<sup>61</sup> Ashworth (1995), p33.

that can be used to identify areas for improvement and develop appropriate structures and mechanisms for achieving this.

This is the kind of approach adopted in the Council of Europe Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools.<sup>62</sup> Yet there is little evidence that many schools are doing this in practice. Accordingly, there would seem to be significant scope for development here.

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<sup>62</sup> Birzea et al. (2004).





## Section 5: Conclusions and Next Steps

### Conclusions

Student participation would seem to have a potentially important part to play in education for democratic citizenship in schools. However, this potential is not always realised in practice. For one thing, the contribution that student participation can make to democratic learning is not well researched at the moment and we have little reliable data relating particular kinds of practice to specific kinds of learning outcomes. For another, there are different theoretical perspectives on student participation, confusion between which has tended to hinder progress.

In this study we have tried to identify a number of aspects and areas of practice of particular strategic significance for democratic learning where there would appear to be the most scope for development.

The key areas identified as present most scope for development were:

- ways of opening up opportunities for participation to greater numbers of students and making more participatory activities more inclusive - including more 'grass roots' forms of involvement and measures designed to promote access for minority groups;
- ways of extending student participation beyond issues only affecting students to issues relating to other aspects of school life in which students are affected - especially in connection with the curriculum and teaching and learning methods;
- ways of integrating student participation into whole-school decision-making – including student involvement in school working parties and planning groups and 'students as researchers';
- ways of enabling students to work more closely and join in decision-making with teachers, governors, ancillary workers and other stakeholders who play a part in the running of their schools;
- ways of extending student participation to issues outside school and of integrating their participation into the work of youth representative and other participative bodies beyond the school – locally, nationally and internationally - including student unions and youth associations;
- ways of giving more autonomy to student representative bodies;
- ways of integrating the work of student representative bodies into wider school consultative and decision-making bodies;

- ways of establishing more efficient methods of communication between student representatives and their peers and between student representatives and other adults involved in school life – including opportunities for ‘two-way’ communication’ and a ‘right of reply’;
- ways of creating a range of different types of participative activities and structures in which students can be involved in addition to representative self-governing bodies – including ad hoc committees, focus groups, face-to-face interviews and questionnaire surveys;
- ways of modelling forms of student participation more closely on the range of democratic procedures and institutions found in wider national and European life – including campaign and lobby groups;
- ways of enabling students to experience different levels of participation in school life – including the experience of initiating and implementing policies and courses of action;
- ways of building in time for students to reflect upon, discuss and draw out what they have learned from the experience of participating in different aspects of school life and decision-making and linking experiential learning with formal teaching;
- ways of providing support and training for student participation – including guidance in procedural matters and mentoring;
- ways of co-ordinating different forms of student participation both with each other and with formal EDC teaching to form a coherent programme in schools – including the recruitment and training of a specialist co-ordinator or assigning a dedicated team;
- ways of formalising opportunities for student participation so that they are not left to chance – including formal channels for consultation and decision-making in and out of the classroom;
- ways of monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the kind of opportunities for participation a school provides – including instruments for auditing provision and identifying areas for improvement.

## Next steps

Having considered areas where there appears to be most scope for development, we now turn to ways of taking this development forward.

To some extent, what can be achieved within schools will be determined by the nature and existence of support structures and mechanisms at the larger regional, national or even international level – for instance, the funding of more research into the effectiveness of different forms of practice, the

provision of appropriate forms of professional development and the strengthening of student associations and representative bodies.<sup>63</sup>

However, there also in-school ways of improving practice in this area. One development of immediate practical use would be the creation of an instrument for auditing and evaluating practice in individual schools – to include success criteria, the kind of information needed to evidence these and the methods by which it is to be collected. Such an instrument could be used either externally or internally through self-evaluation to audit current practice and identify gaps in or areas of weaker provision. This would be informed by the findings of the present study and the kind of frameworks drawn up in the *Council of Europe Tool for Quality Assurance of Education for Democratic Citizenship in Schools*<sup>64</sup> and the report, *Democratic Governance in Schools*<sup>65</sup>.

Two different models suggest themselves:

- an entitlement model – a practical checklist of the different kinds of participatory experience that all students in a school would be entitled to – i.e., ‘Every student should have the experience of/ to ....’
- a quality assurance model – a way of benchmarking the global stage at which a school was operating with respect to student participation at any one time.

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<sup>63</sup> Each recommended by one or more of the country correspondents.

<sup>64</sup> Birzea et al. (2005).

<sup>65</sup> Backman & Trafford (2006).



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## Appendix B: Questionnaire

### Effective Practice in the Democratic Governance of Schools

#### Country Descriptions

##### Introduction

The Citizenship Foundation has been commissioned by the Council of Europe to undertake a small scoping study on the effectiveness of different forms of student involvement in school governance in a sample of member states. The study seeks to identify the kinds of school-level strategies and mechanisms that are perceived to be the most effective, e.g., that impact most positively on students, their schools and communities.

We would be very grateful if you were able to complete this questionnaire and/ or copy it and pass it on to other researchers or practitioners in your country for them to do so.

##### Definition

In this context, 'school governance' is defined broadly to include:

- *all* aspects of the way a school is led, managed and run – including its rules and procedures, its decision-making structures, the behaviour of its personnel and how they relate to each other.

It includes informal participation on the part of students in shaping the day-to-day life of their classrooms, their curriculum and how they are taught, as well as representative structures, such as student councils or parliaments, or school management boards.

Completed questionnaires should be returned by 2 April 2007 to [ted.huddleston@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk](mailto:ted.huddleston@citizenshipfoundation.org.uk)

## QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questionnaire is designed to elicit information about perceptions of the effectiveness of different forms of student involvement in school governance in your country.

The information you give should relate to school students aged around 11 and above.

Please answer in as much detail as you can.

Remember, the questionnaire is not so much concerned with the existence of participatory activities in schools as such, but with their outcomes.

### A: GENERAL SITUATION

1 Is there any legislation relating to student involvement in school governance in your country?

Please specify.

2 In your experience, what are the most common forms of student involvement in school governance in your country? How widespread are they?

Please specify – giving examples, if you can.



3 In your experience, how – if at all - are school students in your country involved in decisions relating to the content of the curriculum or teaching and learning methods?

Please specify – giving examples, if you can.

4 What factors do you think contribute to and militate against effective student involvement in school governance in your country?

Please specify – giving examples, if you can.

5 What criteria do you use to judge the effectiveness of student involvement in school governance? How widely do you think these criteria are shared in your country as a whole?

Please specify – giving examples, if you can.

## B: INDIVIDUAL STRATEGIES AND MECHANISMS

- 6 In this section you are asked to reflect on individual strategies or mechanisms employed by schools in your country for involving students in their governance.

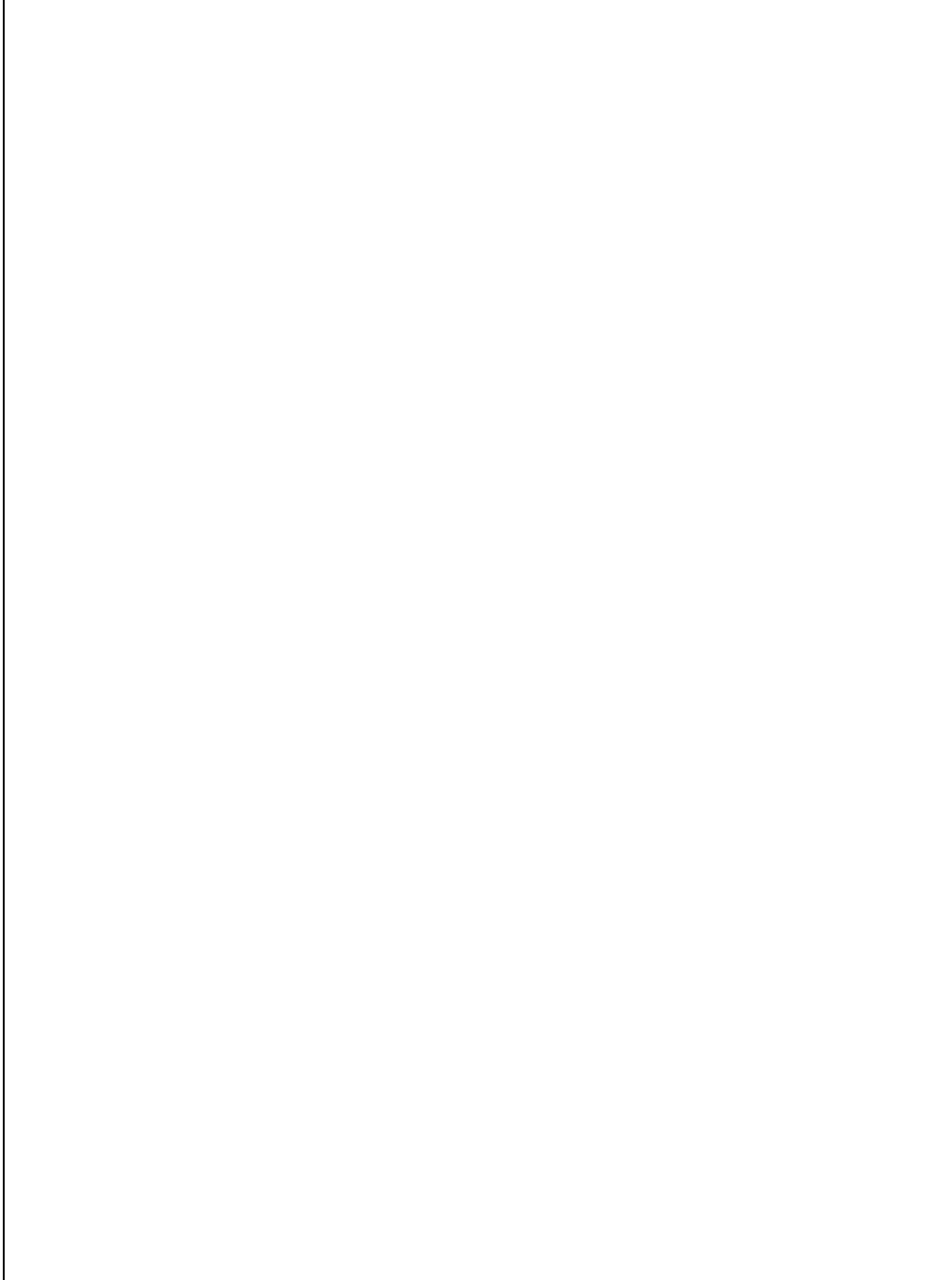
Which strategies or mechanisms do you think have been most effective and which least effective? What do you think are the main factors leading to their success or lack of success?

Please go into as much detail as you can, including innovative or experimental programmes as well as more established practices.

You may wish to consider strategies or mechanisms related to one or more of the following:

- Ways of increasing the number of students involved and their level of participation
- Ways of modelling student participation on democratic structures and procedures found beyond the school, e.g., elections, secret ballots
- Ways of involving student other than through representative structures like school councils
- Ways of creating opportunities for students to implement decisions they have been involved in
- Ways of encouraging students to initiate participation themselves
- Ways of involving students in the content of their curriculum and how they are taught
- Ways of integrating student participation into the formal curriculum and vice versa, e.g., discussion of their student parliament in a lesson on democracy
- Ways of introducing forms of student participation with application in the local community, or at a wider regional, national or international level, e.g., discussing community issues in a school council
- Ways of training students to improve the quality of their participation

- Ways of integrating different forms of student participation into a coherent 'whole-school' approach.



C: RESEARCH STUDIES

7 Are you aware of any research into the effectiveness of student involvement in school governance in your country?

Please specify.

D: FURTHER CONTACTS

8 Are you able to give the names and contact details of researchers or practitioners in your country who could provide information for this study?

Please specify:

E: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND COMMENTS

9 Is there any additional information you would like to share or comments you would like to make about the effectiveness of democratic school governance in your country or in other European countries?