

TEACHERS' MANUAL

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



Democracy4all Ages



Co-funded by
the European Union

Erasmus Plus
Project N. 2024-2-AT01-KA210-ADU-000266621

Table Of Contents



INTRODUCTION

1. Meet Our Team	02
2. Purpose of the Manual	03
3. Target Group	04

SECTION A: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

1. Democratic Education	05
2. Core Democratic Values	09
3. Philosophy for Children (P4C)	15
4. Janusz Korczak	18
5. Sustainable Development Goals	21

Table Of Contents



SECTION B: PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

1. Understanding Rules and Fairness 23

2. Rights and Responsibilities 34

3. Participation and Voice 40

4. Community and Belonging 43

5. Lesson Plan Design Guidelines 51

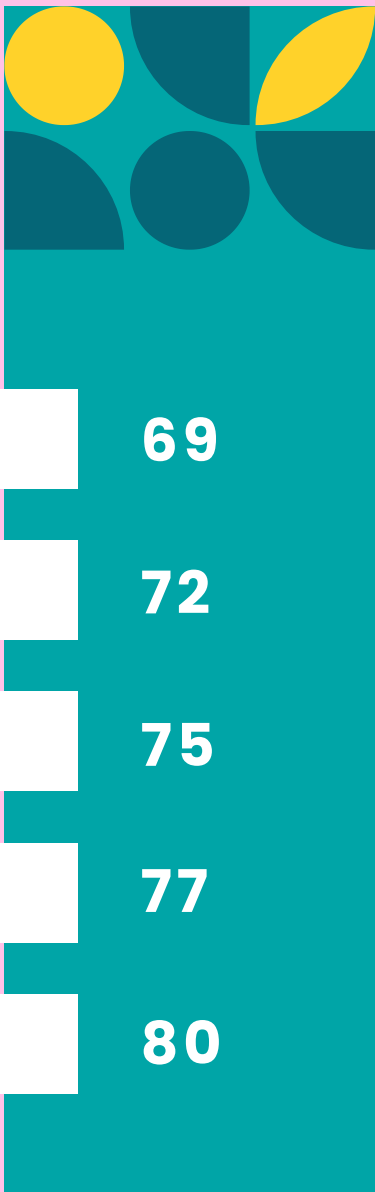
6. Philosophy for Children (P4C) 57

SECTION C: SUPPORTING TEACHERS

1. Teaching Strategies 62

2. Inclusion Guidelines 64

Table Of Contents



3. Tips for Managing Diversity	69
4. Assessmen Tools	72
5. Classroom Challenge	75
6. Accessibility and Usability	77
REFERENCES	80



Welcome

The project “Democracy in Action: Empowering Adults to Teach the Next Generation” (Democracy4All Ages) is an Erasmus+ small-scale partnership in the field of adult education that seeks to enhance the skills and competencies of educators and adult trainers in promoting democratic values, participation and civic engagement among young learners. The project aims to develop practical and flexible educational resources, including a Teachers’ Manual, an Adult Trainers’ Guidebook, and a variety of learning materials designed to help educators incorporate democratic principles into everyday educational practice from an early age.

Drawing inspiration from educational approaches such as Janusz Korczak’s child-centred pedagogy and the Philosophy for Children (P4C), the project encourages participatory learning, critical reflection, dialogue and children’s active involvement in classroom decision-making processes. The project supports the creation of inclusive and democratic learning environments that foster cooperation, empathy, responsibility and active citizenship.



1. Meet Our Team



Roma Volkshochschule Burgenland – Austria

- Melinda Tamás, MA
- Mag.a Carina Pinzker
- Mag. Herwig Wallner



Akata Makata – Greece

- Konstantina Soumpenioti
- Venia Soumpenioti

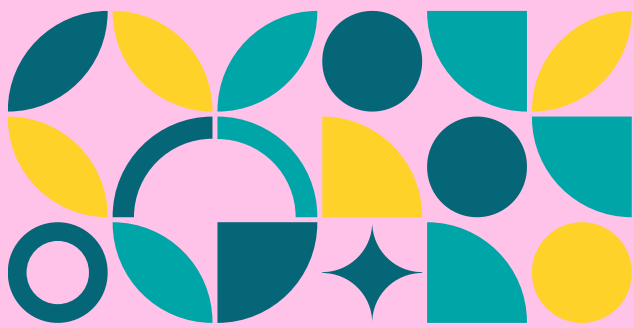


Consensus Foundation – Poland

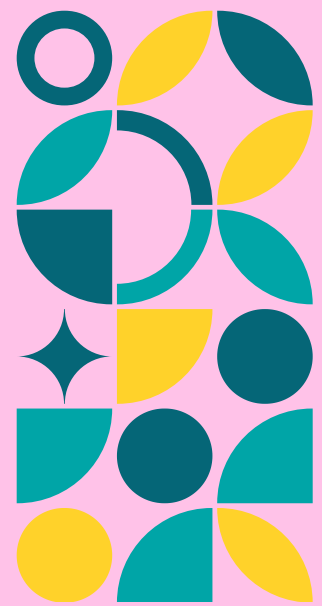
- Paulina Roś
- Krzysztof Roś

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or OeAD-GmbH. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.





2. Purpose of the Manual



The Teachers' Manual is developed to support kindergarten and early primary school educators in integrating democratic values into everyday teaching and learning practices. The manual aims to provide educators with both theoretical understanding and practical guidance on how to create inclusive, participatory and respectful classroom environments where children can actively engage, express their opinions, and learn to cooperate with others.

Democratic education plays a fundamental role in helping children develop social responsibility, empathy, critical thinking and active citizenship skills from an early age. Through interactive methodologies, experiential learning activities and child-centered approaches, the manual encourages teachers to foster children's understanding of participation, fairness, rights, responsibilities, diversity and cooperation.

The manual combines theoretical grounding with practical tools, lesson ideas, classroom activities, and reflective strategies that educators can easily adapt to different educational contexts and age groups. It is designed to be accessible, user-friendly and supportive for teachers who may have limited or no previous experience in democratic education. By strengthening teachers' competencies and confidence, the manual contributes to the creation of democratic school cultures that promote inclusion, respect, collaboration, and meaningful participation for all children.

3. Target Group

The Teachers' Manual is intended primarily for kindergarten teachers and early primary school educators working with children aged 4-10 years old. It is particularly designed for educators who wish to introduce democratic values and participatory practices into their classrooms in a simple, practical and age-appropriate way.



Target group

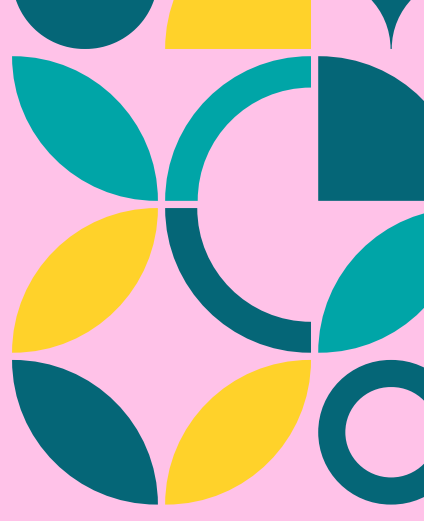
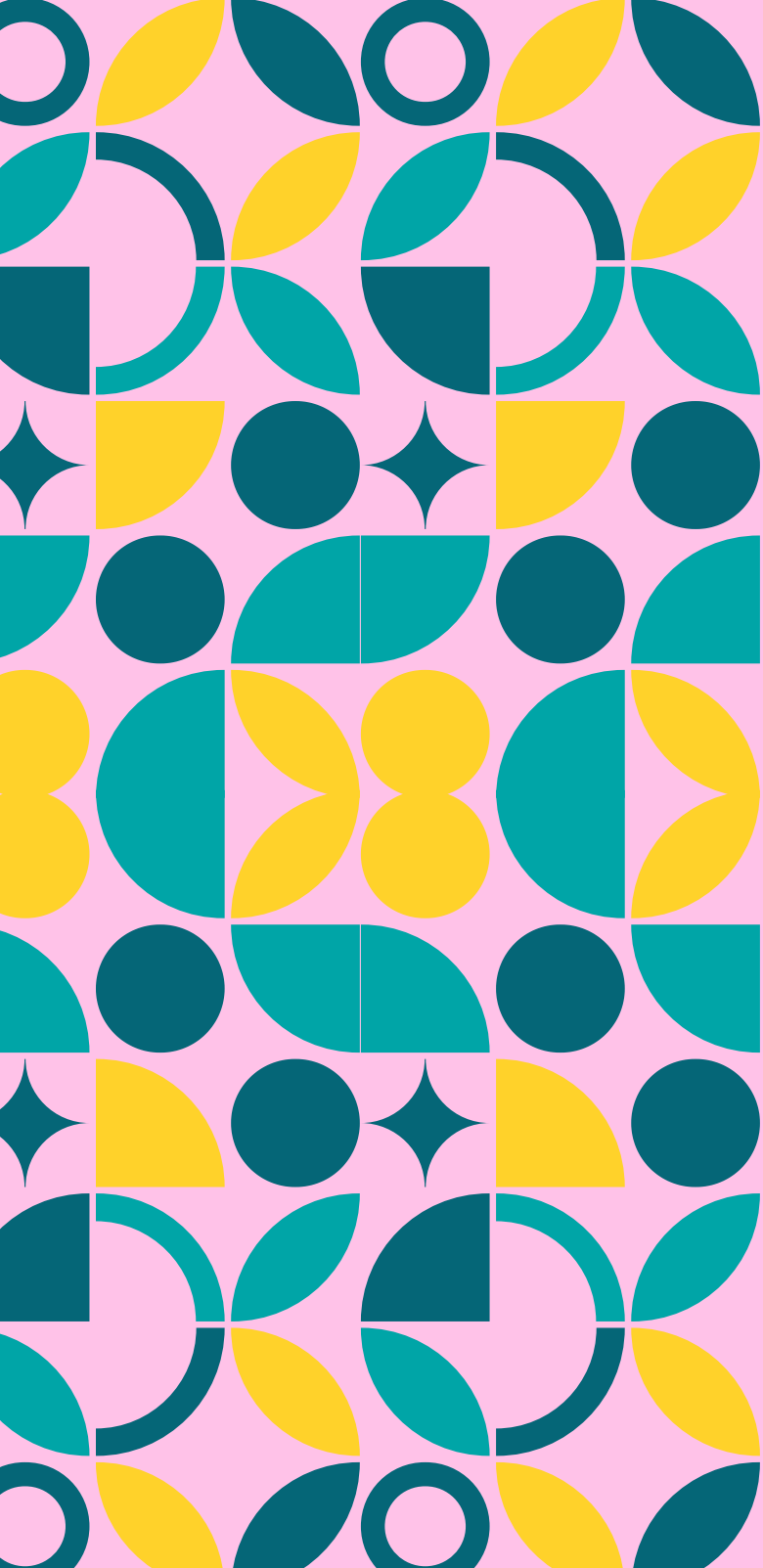
The manual also addresses the needs of educators with limited or no prior experience in democratic education by providing clear explanations, practical examples, adaptable lesson plans and interactive activities that can be easily implemented in everyday teaching practice. In addition, the manual may serve as a useful resource for teacher assistants, non-formal educators and professionals involved in inclusive and child-centered learning environments.

Target group

By offering flexible methodologies and accessible resources, the manual aims to support educators from diverse educational and cultural contexts in fostering active participation, inclusion, cooperation, and civic awareness among young learners.

SECTION A

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION



1. Democratic Education



Understanding Democratic Education in Early Childhood Education

Democratic education is an educational approach that promotes participation, inclusion, equality, dialogue, cooperation and respect for human dignity within the learning environment. It is based on the idea that children are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in the educational process and members of a broader social community. Democratic education seeks to create learning spaces where children can express

opinions, ask questions, collaborate with others, and gradually develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for active citizenship. In early childhood and primary education, democratic education does not simply mean teaching children about political systems or government institutions. Instead, it focuses on helping children experience democracy in everyday interactions and classroom life.

Democratic Education



Democratic education is also strongly connected to children's rights, social justice, inclusion and participatory learning. It emphasizes that all children should feel safe, respected, valued and included regardless of their background, language, gender, abilities, religion, ethnicity or family situation.

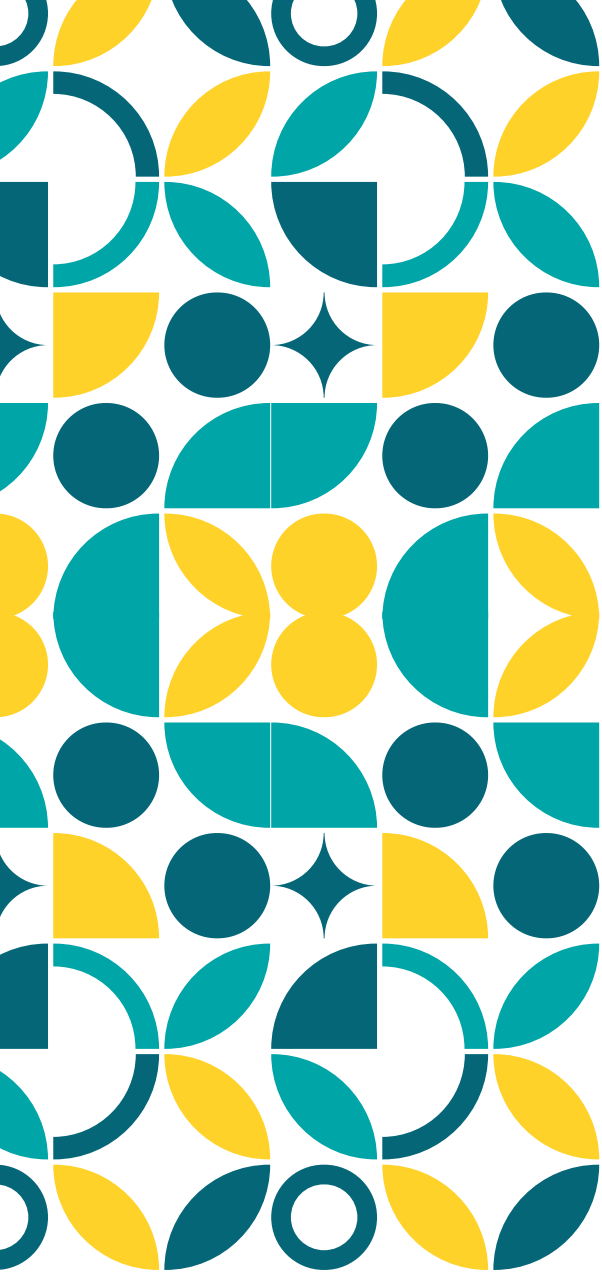
Educational researchers increasingly emphasize that democratic values should be introduced from an early age because children begin developing moral understanding, empathy, communication skills, and social awareness during the first years of life. Experiences in early childhood often shape children's attitudes toward participation, cooperation, authority, fairness and inclusion later in life.

Democratic education also supports holistic child development. Children who participate in democratic learning environments often become more engaged learners, because they feel ownership over their learning experiences and classroom community.

Young children are naturally curious, social and eager to participate in activities that affect their daily lives. Democratic educational approaches recognize these capacities and create opportunities for meaningful participation. (Corsaro, 1997; Prout & James, 1997).

In democratic classrooms, children are encouraged to:

1. Express ideas and opinions freely
2. Ask questions and explore curiosity
3. Participate in group discussions
4. Make simple choices and decisions
5. Collaborate with peers
6. Respect differences and diversity
7. Solve problems together
8. Reflect on their experiences
9. Take responsibility within the classroom community



Democratic learning environments differ from traditional teacher-centered approaches in important ways. In traditional models, teachers often make all decisions, establish rules independently and focus primarily on discipline and knowledge transmission. In democratic education, however, teachers act as facilitators, guides and co-learners who encourage participation and dialogue. This does not mean that classrooms lack structure or expectations. On the contrary, democratic classrooms rely on shared agreements, mutual respect and collective responsibility. Children gradually learn that freedom and participation also involve listening to others, cooperating, respecting boundaries and caring for the community.

Why Democratic Values Should Be Introduced **Early**

Early childhood is a critical period for social, emotional and moral development. During these years, children develop their first understandings of fairness, empathy, cooperation, responsibility and social relationships. Introducing democratic values early helps children develop habits and attitudes that support respectful and inclusive participation throughout life.

Young children are already highly aware of fairness and justice. Statements such as “That’s not fair!” demonstrate that children actively evaluate situations and social interactions. Democratic education helps children build on these natural sensitivities by encouraging reflection, dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. When democratic values are introduced early, children learn how to communicate respectfully, listen to different opinions, resolve conflicts peacefully or take responsibility for their own actions. (Thornberg, 2008; Turiel, 1983).

Democratic education also contributes to emotional well-being. Children who feel heard and respected tend to develop stronger self-esteem, greater motivation and more positive relationships with peers and teachers. Inclusive and participatory learning environments help reduce exclusion, bullying and discrimination by fostering empathy and mutual understanding.



Democratic Education and **Active Citizenship**

One of the long-term goals of democratic education is the development of active citizenship. Active citizens participate in society responsibly, think critically, cooperate with others and contribute to democratic communities.

Children do not become active citizens suddenly in adulthood. Citizenship skills develop gradually through everyday experiences of participation, cooperation, dialogue, and shared responsibility.

Democratic classrooms function as small communities where children practice effective communication, respect for diversity, shared decision-making or community engagement. Through these experiences children begin to understand that democracy is not only a political system but also a way of living together respectfully and collaboratively.

2. Core Democratic Values



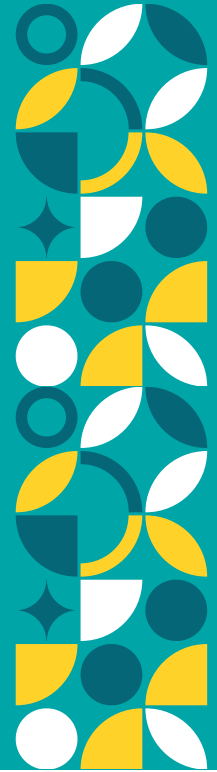
Democratic education is built upon a set of core values that guide classroom interactions, teaching approaches, and learning experiences. These values help children understand how communities function respectfully, fairly and inclusively.

Core democratic values are not taught only through direct instruction. Children learn values primarily through everyday experiences, relationships, classroom culture and participation. Teachers therefore play a key role in modeling democratic values consistently.



Participation

Participation is one of the central principles of democratic education. It means that children are encouraged to express ideas, contribute to discussions, ask questions, and influence decisions that affect their classroom experiences. This – in turn – helps children develop in many areas such as communication, critical thinking, social awareness or sense of belonging.



Meaningful participation

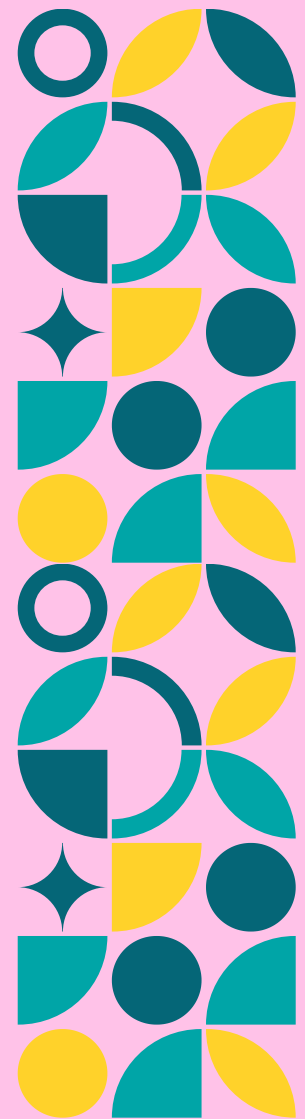
Meaningful participation requires that children feel emotionally safe and respected. Teachers should create environments where children know their ideas are valued and where mistakes are viewed as part of learning.

Participation can be encouraged through:

- Classroom discussions
- Voting activities
- Collaborative projects
- Reflection circles
- Shared classroom agreements
- Choice-based learning activities
- Group problem-solving

Importantly, participation should include all children, including quieter students, multilingual learners and children with additional support needs. (Halstead & Taylor, 2000)

Democracy and Constructive Disagreement



Democracy is often associated with cooperation and consensus. However, democratic societies also include different opinions, interests, and perspectives. Learning how to disagree respectfully is therefore an essential democratic competence.

Children should experience that disagreement is normal and that conflicts can be addressed through dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect.

Democratic education helps children understand that different viewpoints can coexist and that solutions are often developed together through discussion and reflection.

Equality and Inclusion



Equality means that all children deserve equal respect, opportunities and participation regardless of their personal characteristics or backgrounds. Inclusion means actively creating environments where all children feel welcomed, valued and able to participate meaningfully.

Inclusive democratic classrooms respect diversity and prevent discrimination which does not always mean treating every child identically. Sometimes fairness requires responding differently to individual needs so that every child can participate successfully.

Inclusive education recognizes diversity as a strength rather than a problem. Children benefit when they learn alongside peers with different perspectives, languages, experiences and abilities.

Fairness and Transparency

Fairness is deeply important to children. Young learners quickly notice unequal treatment, exclusion, or inconsistency.

Democratic classrooms promote fairness through transparent explanations for decisions, agreeing rules and then consistent application of these agreements. Transparency means also helping children understand why decisions are made. When children understand the purpose behind rules or decisions, they are more likely to cooperate and feel respected.

Teachers can support fairness especially by awarely avoiding favoritism or encouraging reflection during conflicts. (Williams, 1993; Thornberg, 2008)

Respect for Diversity

Democratic education values diversity as an important part of community life. Children encounter differences related to many different aspects such as language, culture, religion, family structures or abilities and interests.

Respect for diversity involves more than tolerance and can be promoted by encouraging discussions about differences respectfully, challenging stereotypes or celebrating cultural diversity.

Children who learn to respect diversity early are better prepared to participate in pluralistic and democratic societies.



Rights and Responsibilities

Democratic education emphasizes that rights and responsibilities are interconnected.

Some of children's basic rights – regarding the topic of democracy – include the right to participate, express opinions or be respected

At the same time, children gradually learn responsibilities such as respecting others, listening carefully or caring for shared materials.

Understanding rights and responsibilities helps children recognize that democratic participation involves both freedom and care for others.

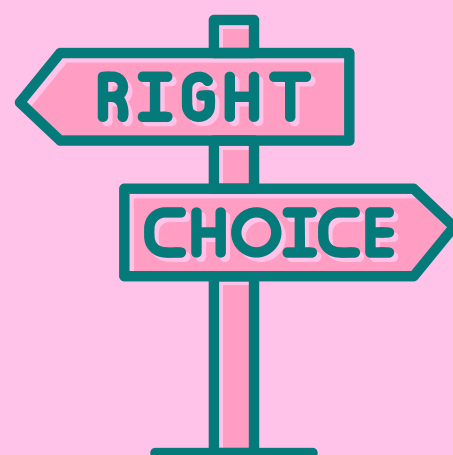
Decision-Making

Decision-making is an important democratic skill that children can begin practicing from an early age.

Simple democratic decision-making experiences may include:

- Voting on classroom activities
- Choosing stories together
- Creating classroom agreements
- Solving group problems collaboratively
- Planning projects collectively

Through decision-making experiences, children learn that different opinions exist but also that compromise is sometimes necessary.





3. Philosophy for Children

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an educational approach developed to encourage children's critical thinking, dialogue, reasoning, and collaborative inquiry. Originally created by Matthew Lipman and colleagues, P4C seeks to help children become thoughtful, reflective, and engaged participants in democratic society. (Lipman, 2003).

Unlike traditional educational approaches that focus primarily on correct answers and memorization, P4C emphasizes questioning, exploration, dialogue and reflection. P4C encourages children to ask meaningful questions, think critically and creatively, reflect on ideas and experiences, listen respectfully to others or explain reasoning.

Philosophy for Children supports democratic education because it creates opportunities for shared inquiry, respectful discussion, and active participation.

Encouraging Questioning and Curiosity

Children are naturally curious and often ask profound philosophical questions about fairness, friendship, truth, identity and justice. Examples include:

- 'What is fairness?'
- 'Why do rules exist?'
- 'Can something be true for one person but not another?'
- 'What makes someone a friend?'
- 'Why do people disagree?'

P4C values these questions and uses them as starting points for exploration and dialogue.

Encouraging questioning helps children develop intellectual curiosity, reflect critically on experiences and build confidence in expressing ideas. Importantly, teachers in P4C do not always provide final answers. Instead, they facilitate discussion and support children in exploring ideas collaboratively. (Lipman, 2003; Gregory et al., 2017)



Dialogue and Democratic Communication

Dialogue is central to P4C. Democratic dialogue involves respectful communication where participants listen carefully, consider different viewpoints and build understanding together.

In P4C discussions, children practice:

- Listening actively
- Waiting for turns
- Explaining ideas clearly
- Asking follow-up questions
- Respectfully disagreeing
- Reflecting on opinions
- Building on others' ideas

Dialogue helps children understand that democratic participation requires both speaking and listening.

Teachers support dialogue by creating emotionally safe environments, encouraging all children to participate and modeling respectful communication. What also matters in the process is the use of open-ended questions and allowing thinking time.



Critical Thinking and Reflection

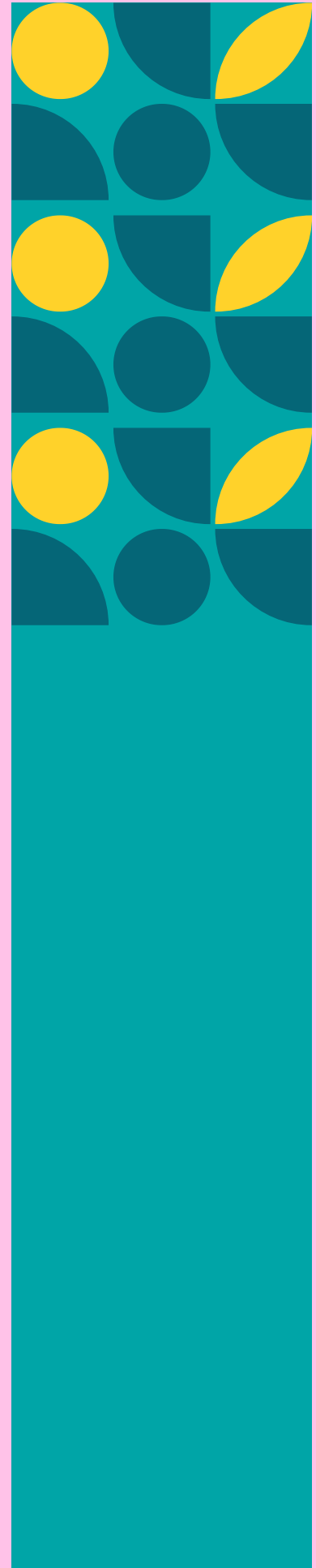
Critical thinking involves evaluating ideas carefully, considering evidence, identifying assumptions, and reflecting on reasoning.

P4C supports critical thinking by encouraging children to analyze problems collaboratively and explain why they think something. Critical thinking does not mean criticizing others harshly. Instead, it involves thoughtful reflection and careful reasoning.

These skills are essential for democratic citizenship because democratic societies require citizens who can think independently, evaluate information critically, and participate responsibly.

The Community of Inquiry

One of the most important concepts in P4C is the “community of inquiry.” A community of inquiry is a collaborative learning environment where children and teachers explore questions together through dialogue and reflection. The teacher’s role shifts then from authority figure to facilitator of inquiry.





4. Janusz Korczak

Who Was Janusz Korczak?

Janusz Korczak was a Polish-Jewish educator, pediatrician, writer and children's rights advocate whose educational philosophy continues to influence democratic and child-centered education worldwide.

Korczak believed deeply that children should be treated with dignity, respect and seriousness. At a time when children were often viewed as incomplete adults who simply needed discipline and obedience, Korczak argued that children are full human beings with thoughts, feelings, rights and perspectives deserving recognition.

His work emphasized respect for children, their true participation, emotional well-being, shared responsibility and reflective education.

Korczak's educational ideas remain highly relevant for democratic education today.



Respect for Children's Voices



One of Korczak's most important principles was listening seriously to children. He believed that children's opinions matter and that children should participate in decisions affecting them. On the other hand adults should listen respectfully as children deserve honesty and dignity.

According to Korczak the main thing in education was basing educational relationships on trust. He - at the same time - rejected authoritarian educational models based solely on obedience and punishment.

In modern classrooms, respecting children's voices may involve classroom discussions, where everyone has the right to have a say, collaborative rule-making or reflection circles (e.g. restorative circles).

Children who feel heard are more likely to participate confidently and develop positive self-esteem.

Children's Rights

Korczak was one of the earliest educators to advocate strongly for children's rights. He believed children have:

- The right to dignity
- The right to respect
- The right to be heard
- The right to express their opinions
- The right to make mistakes
- The right to participate in decisions affecting them
- The right to develop according to their individual needs and abilities

Many of his ideas later influenced the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Korczak emphasized that respecting children's rights does not weaken adult authority. Instead, it creates healthier, more respectful educational relationships. Korczak implemented democratic practices in the orphanages he directed. His children participated in children's councils, peer courts and community discussions, which helped children develop responsibility, cooperation, empathy and civic understanding.

Importantly, Korczak believed children learn democracy best through lived experience rather than abstract instruction.

Practical Implications for Today's Classroom

Korczak's ideas can be applied in modern educational settings in many practical ways. Today's teachers can use the ideas of Janusz Korczak by creating classrooms based on respect, empathy and student voice. He believed that children should be treated as individuals with their own opinions and rights, so modern educators can encourage open discussions, allow students to participate in classroom decisions and build trusting relationships rather than relying only on strict authority.

Teachers can also support emotional well-being by listening carefully to students' concerns and creating a safe environment where mistakes are seen as part of learning. By promoting fairness, responsibility and mutual respect, today's classrooms can reflect Korczak's belief that education should help children grow not only academically, but also as confident and compassionate people.

When children feel respected, safe, and valued, they are more likely to participate actively, cooperate with others, and develop positive democratic attitudes.



5. Link to Sustainable Development Goals

Democratic Education and Sustainable Development

Democratic education contributes significantly to sustainable development by helping children develop the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary to build peaceful, inclusive, and equitable societies. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize the importance of education in promoting social justice, equality, participation, peace, and sustainability. Democratic education supports several SDGs, particularly: SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

SDG 4: Quality Education

SDG 4 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”

Democratic education contributes to SDG 4 by promoting inclusive learning environments and child-centered teaching approaches, as quality education involves more than academic achievement. It also includes helping children develop social, emotional, ethical and civic competencies. Inclusive democratic education is especially important for supporting marginalized or vulnerable children and ensuring equal opportunities for participation and success.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

SDG 16 focuses on promoting peaceful, inclusive and just societies.

Democratic education contributes to this goal by helping children resolve conflicts peacefully, understand fairness and justice as well as value diversity and inclusion. Children who experience democratic participation early are more likely to become engaged citizens who contribute positively to society.

Democratic classrooms function as small communities where children practice peaceful communication, collaboration and responsibility. These everyday experiences help children understand how democratic societies function. Education therefore plays a key role in building democratic cultures and sustainable futures.



Conclusion

Democratic education in early childhood and primary education is essential for supporting children's holistic development and preparing them for active participation in democratic societies. By introducing democratic values early, educators help children develop empathy, communication skills, critical thinking, responsibility, cooperation and respect for diversity.

Democratic classrooms are not only places where children learn about democracy theoretically; they are communities where democracy is practiced daily through participation, dialogue, inclusion and shared responsibility.

Theoretical foundations such as children's rights, democratic pedagogy, Philosophy for Children, and Janusz Korczak's educational philosophy provide valuable guidance for creating respectful and participatory learning environments.

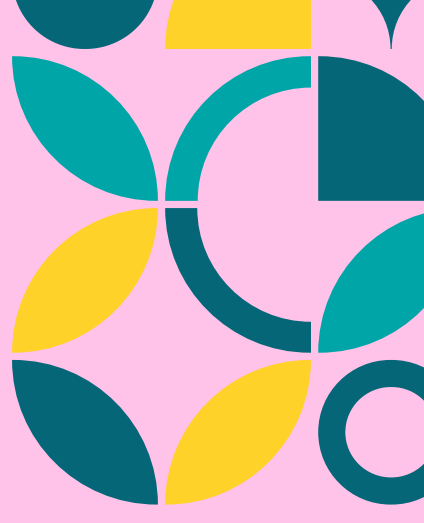
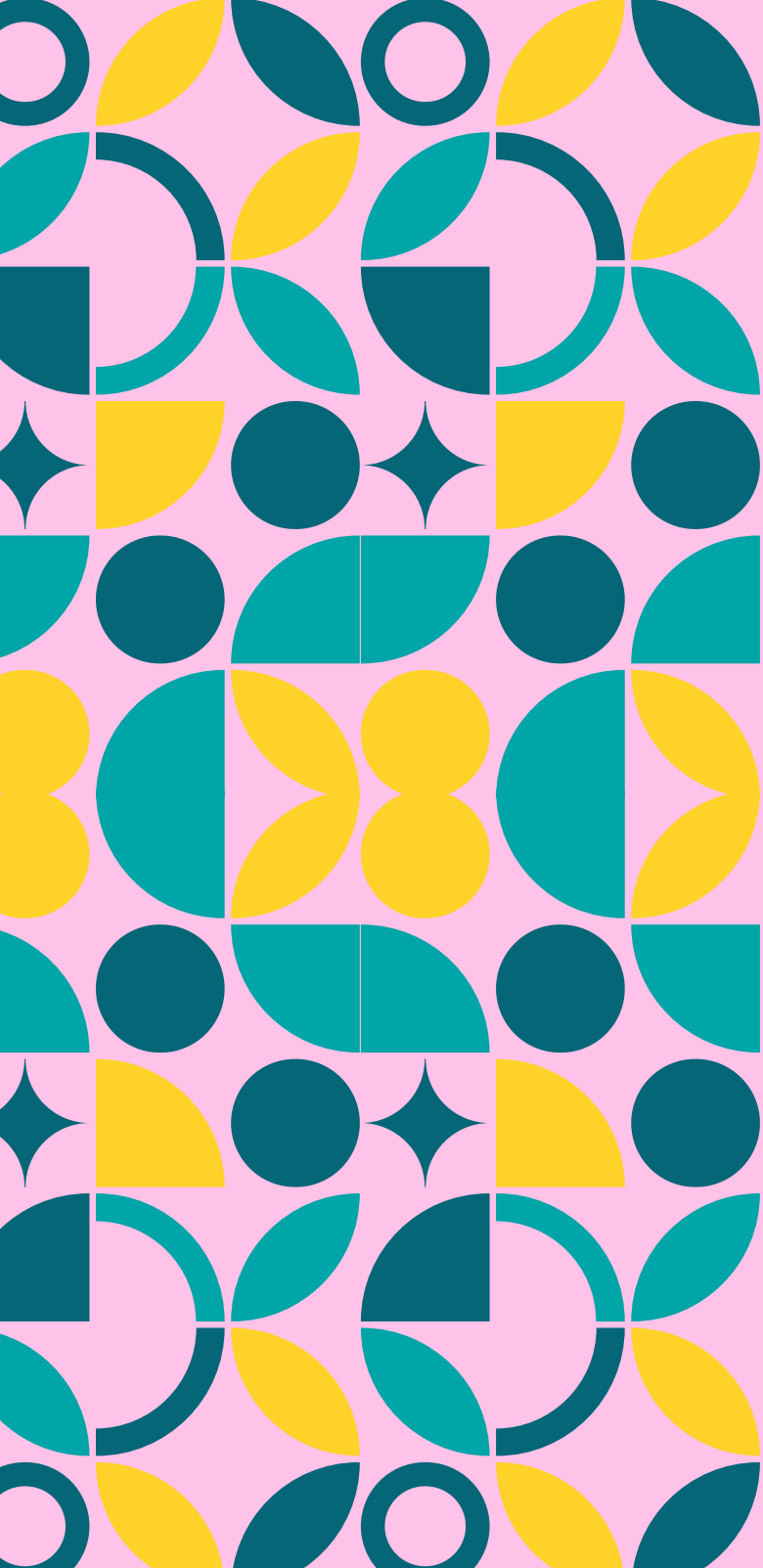
At the same time, democratic education contributes to broader social goals connected to inclusion, peace, justice, sustainability and active citizenship. Teachers play a central role in this process. Through respectful relationships, inclusive practices, and participatory teaching approaches, educators help children experience what it means to live and learn together democratically.

Ultimately, democratic education is about helping children understand that their voices matter, that diversity enriches communities, and that cooperation, empathy and participation are essential for building fairer and more sustainable societies.



SECTION B

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION



1. Understanding Rules and Fairness

Rules are a fundamental part of children's social and educational experiences. From an early age, children encounter rules within the family, school and wider community. In educational settings, rules are commonly associated with classroom management, discipline, safety and organization. However, rules play a deeper educational and social role as they help children understand how communities function, how individuals relate to one another, and how fairness and responsibility are developed within a group (Boostrom, 1991).

Socialisation theories often focus on how children are socialised in the values, norms and behaviour patterns of their society, culture, or social group in a rather unidirectional manner, according to a transmission model (Durkheim, 1961/2002). According to this perspective, schools functioned primarily as institutions where children learned obedience, conformity, and socially acceptable behavior through discipline and regulation. However, contemporary perspectives in the sociology of childhood challenge this understanding by recognizing children as active participants in their own social development.

Children do not simply accept rules unquestioningly; they interpret, negotiate, challenge, and make sense of them through everyday interactions and experiences (Corsaro, 1997; Prout & James, 1997).

Research demonstrates that children are capable of critically evaluating rules and adult behavior, especially when they perceive situations as unfair or inconsistent (Thornberg, 2008). Although students generally understand the importance of rules and expect schools to have them, they are also sensitive to unequal treatment, disrespect, and lack of participation in decision-making processes (Williams, 1993). Children often evaluate rules not only based on authority but also according to whether they believe the rules are fair, meaningful and respectful of everyone's needs (Halstead & Taylor, 2000).

This understanding is particularly important in democratic education. Democratic classrooms move beyond obedience-based discipline and instead encourage participation, dialogue, shared responsibility, and mutual respect.





In such environments, rules are not simply imposed by adults but are discussed, negotiated and understood collectively. This process helps children develop a sense of ownership, responsibility, and belonging within the classroom community.

Furthermore, rules shape children's moral and social understanding. School rules are not neutral instructions; they communicate values about what is considered right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, fair or unfair. Through rules, children learn about cooperation, empathy, equality, participation, and justice. Therefore, rules are closely connected to values education and citizenship education (Jackson et al., 1993).



Fairness and Children's Moral Development

The concept of fairness is central to democratic education and children's social development. Young children are highly sensitive to fairness and often react strongly when they perceive situations as unjust. Statements such as "It's not fair!" are common expressions through which children communicate their understanding of equality, respect, and participation (Thornberg, 2008).

According to Domain Theory, children organize social knowledge into different domains: the moral domain, the conventional domain, and the personal domain (Turiel, 1983; Nucci, 2001). The moral domain concerns issues of fairness, rights, justice, welfare and harm, while the conventional domain includes social rules, traditions, and expectations. The personal domain relates to personal choices and individual preferences

Research within this framework demonstrates that children distinguish between moral rules and social conventions. Moral issues, such as hurting someone, excluding others or acting unfairly, are usually considered wrong regardless of whether there is an official rule.

In contrast, conventional rules, such as sitting in a particular place or raising a hand before speaking, are often viewed as dependent on context, authority, or social agreement (Nucci, 2001).

Understanding this distinction is important because it shows that children are capable of ethical reasoning from an early age. They do not simply obey rules because adults demand it; they evaluate whether rules make sense and whether they promote fairness and well-being for everyone involved.

Democratic education therefore encourages educators to engage children in discussions about fairness, rights, and responsibilities instead of relying solely on control and punishment. When children are involved in creating classroom agreements and discussing rules openly, they are more likely to understand the purpose of rules and develop internal motivation to follow them.





The idea of the school as a "common" further supports this democratic perspective. Educational commons view schools as shared communities where students and teachers collaboratively create learning environments based on cooperation, participation, care, and mutual responsibility (Pechtelidis & Kioupkiolis, 2020). In this approach, children are recognized as active contributors to classroom life rather than passive recipients of adult authority. Shared decision-making and collective responsibility help strengthen children's agency, social participation and democratic competencies (Pantazidis & Bantiou, 2026).

Creating fair and democratic classroom environments also requires educators to reflect critically on their own practices. Rules should be applied consistently, respectfully, and inclusively. Teachers should ensure that all children have opportunities to participate, express opinions, and feel valued regardless of cultural background, language ability, gender or learning needs. In this way, classrooms become spaces where children not only learn about democracy theoretically but also experience democratic participation in practice.





Classroom **Agreements**

Classroom agreements are collaboratively developed expectations that help create a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning environment. Unlike rules that are imposed solely by teachers, classroom agreements encourage children's participation in decision-making processes and help them feel responsible for the classroom community. Through democratic participation, children begin to understand that rules are not only about control and discipline but also about cooperation, fairness, respect and shared responsibility.

Research in democratic education emphasizes that when children actively participate in creating classroom agreements, they are more likely to understand the purpose behind them and feel motivated to follow them (Halstead & Taylor, 2000). This participatory process also strengthens children's sense of belonging and agency, as they recognize that their voices and opinions are valued within the classroom community.

Classroom agreements can include:

- Listening when others speak
- Respecting differences
- Taking turns
- Helping classmates
- Sharing materials fairly
- Using kind language

Developing agreements together also promotes important democratic skills such as communication, negotiation, collaboration, and problem-solving. Teachers play a key role in facilitating discussions, encouraging all children to participate, and ensuring that agreements are inclusive and understandable for all learners.

In democratic classrooms, classroom agreements are often displayed visually through posters, drawings, or symbols to make them accessible to younger children. Agreements should be revisited regularly through reflection and discussion so that children understand that rules are part of a shared and evolving classroom culture rather than fixed instructions imposed by authority.

Fair Vs Unfair

Situations

Understanding fairness is a central aspect of children's moral and social development. Young children are highly sensitive to fairness and often respond emotionally when they feel excluded, ignored or treated unequally. Experiences of fairness and unfairness help children develop empathy, justice, cooperation and respect for others.

According to Domain Theory (Turiel, 1983; Nucci, 2001), children are capable of distinguishing between moral issues, such as fairness and harm and conventional rules based on social expectations. Children generally consider unfair treatment wrong even when there is no explicit rule against it. For example, excluding someone from a game, not allowing equal turns, or treating classmates differently may be viewed by children as unfair because such actions negatively affect others' well-being.

Discussing fair and unfair situations in the classroom encourages children to reflect on:

- How actions affect others
- The importance of equality and inclusion
- Respect for rights and participation
- Conflict resolution and empathy

Teachers can support children's understanding of fairness by using storytelling, role-playing, picture cards and classroom discussions based on real-life situations.

Questions such as:

- "How would you feel in this situation?"
- "Was everyone treated equally?"
- "What would make this fairer?"

help children develop critical thinking and emotional understanding



It is also important for educators to model fairness in their own practices. Children observe how teachers distribute attention, apply rules, solve conflicts, and include different voices in classroom discussions. Consistent, respectful, and transparent teacher behavior contributes significantly to creating a democratic and trusting classroom environment.

Through exploring fair and unfair situations, children gradually learn that fairness is connected not only to equal treatment but also to understanding different needs, perspectives, and experiences within a community.



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 1: Creating Classroom Agreements

Objective

To involve children in developing shared classroom rules through democratic participation.

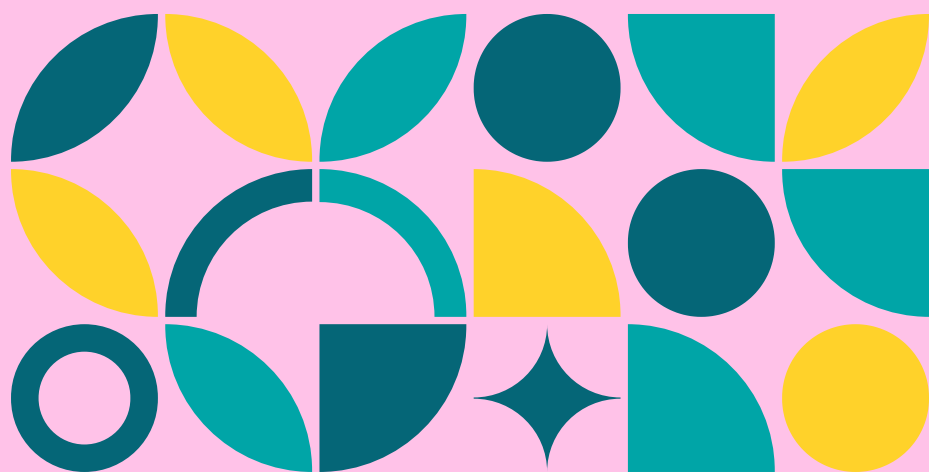
Procedure

1. Begin with a group discussion about why rules are important.
2. Ask children:
 - What helps us feel safe?
 - What helps everyone learn?
 - How should we treat each other?
3. Write children's ideas on a large poster.
4. Together, select 5–6 important classroom agreements.
5. Invite children to decorate and sign the final classroom agreement poster.

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Practice participation and collaboration
- Understand shared responsibility
- Develop ownership of classroom rules
- Experience democratic decision-making



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 2: Fair or Unfair?

Objective

To help children identify and discuss fairness in everyday situations.

Materials

- Picture cards or short stories showing different situations

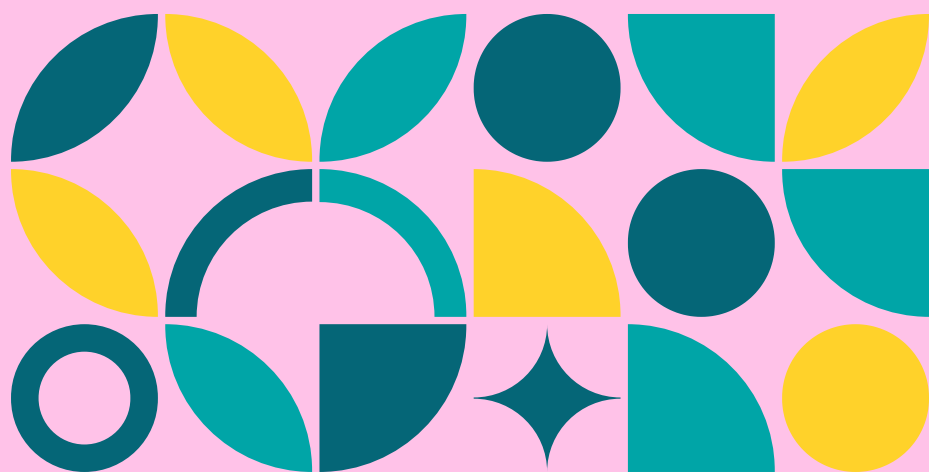
Procedure

1. Present situations such as:
 - One child always choosing the game
 - Someone not getting a turn
 - Sharing materials equally
2. Ask children whether the situation is fair or unfair.
3. Encourage discussion:
 - Why is it fair/unfair?
 - How might the people feel?
 - What could make the situation fairer?
 -

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Develop empathy
- Recognize concepts of fairness and injustice
- Practice expressing opinions respectfully
- Strengthen critical thinking skills



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 3: Classroom Voting Activity

Objective

To introduce children to simple democratic decision-making processes.

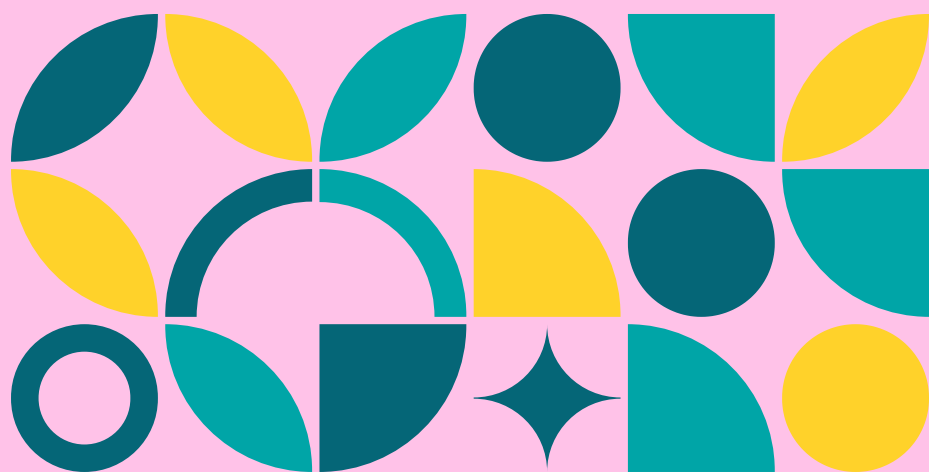
Procedure

1. Present two or three classroom activity choices.
2. Explain that each child has one vote.
3. Children vote using stickers, hands, or paper ballots.
4. Count votes together and announce the result.
5. Discuss:
 - Why is voting important?
 - How do we respect the group's decision?

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Learn the basics of democratic participation
- Understand equality in decision-making
- Respect majority decisions
- Develop communication and listening skills



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 4: Role-Play on Fairness

Objective

To encourage children to reflect on fairness through drama.

Procedure

Children act out short scenarios involving:

- Sharing
- Taking turns
- Excluding others
- Helping classmates

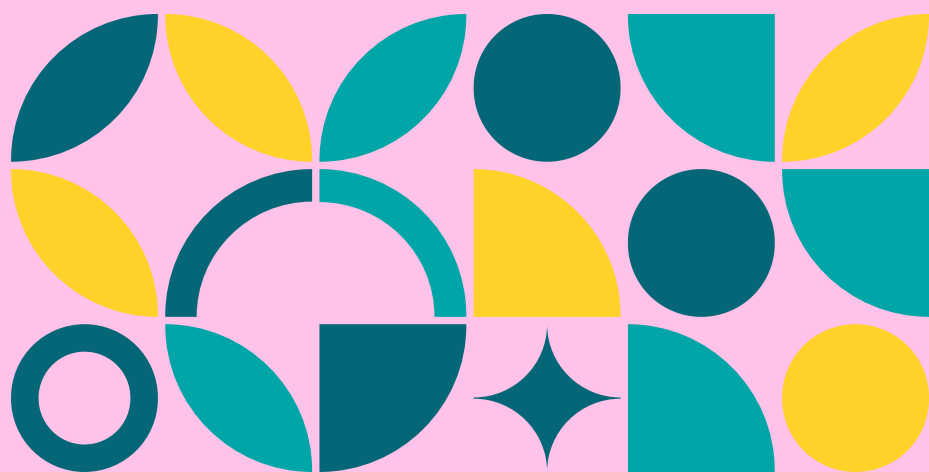
After each role-play, discuss:

- Was the behavior fair?
- How did the characters feel?
- What could be done differently?

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Develop empathy and emotional understanding
- Practice conflict resolution
- Reflect on respectful behavior
- Improve social communication skills



2. Rights and Responsibilities



Understanding Children's Rights in Democratic Education

Children's rights are a fundamental component of democratic education and inclusive learning environments. The concept of children as rights-holders is strongly connected to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which recognizes that children are not only in need of protection and care but are also active citizens with voices, opinions, and participation rights. Children's rights include the right to education, protection, participation, safety, freedom of expression and respect for their dignity and identity (UNCRC, 1989).

In democratic educational settings, children's rights are not only taught theoretically but are also practiced in everyday school life. Research on democratic education emphasizes that children learn democratic values most effectively when they actively experience participation, dialogue, respect and shared responsibility within the classroom community. Democratic schools and participatory educational environments encourage children to express opinions, contribute to decisions, and collaborate with others while respecting the rights of the wider community.

Recent research also highlights that children's rights should be understood relationally and within community contexts. Children develop agency and participation through meaningful interactions with peers, teachers, families and local communities. Educational environments that promote belonging, representation and participation help children feel respected and valued while strengthening their confidence and civic engagement.

Democratic education therefore moves beyond traditional teacher-centered approaches and instead supports child-centered learning environments where children are encouraged to participate actively in shaping their educational experiences. This approach recognizes children as capable social actors who can contribute meaningfully to classroom life and community relationships.

Responsibilities in the Classroom and **Community**

While children have rights, democratic education also emphasizes the importance of responsibilities. Rights and responsibilities are closely interconnected because participation in a democratic community requires mutual respect, cooperation, empathy, and care for others. Children gradually learn that their actions influence the well-being of classmates, teachers, families and the wider community.

Responsibilities help children understand that living and learning together involves shared expectations and collective responsibility. In classroom environments, responsibilities may include:

- Respecting others' opinions and feelings
- Listening when others speak
- Taking care of classroom materials
- Participating cooperatively in group activities
- Helping classmates
- Following shared classroom agreements

Through these experiences, children begin to understand that democratic participation involves both freedom and responsibility. The classroom becomes a small democratic community where children practice communication, collaboration, conflict resolution, and shared decision-making.

Research on participation and democratic schooling emphasizes that children develop civic competencies when they are given meaningful opportunities to contribute to their communities. Participation supports the development of confidence, autonomy, empathy and social responsibility.





Responsibilities in the Classroom and **Community**

The role of teachers is particularly important in fostering rights-based and inclusive classroom cultures. Educators should create safe and respectful environments where children feel comfortable expressing opinions, asking questions, and participating in decisions that affect them. Teachers also model democratic values through respectful communication, fairness, inclusion and consistent behavior.

Furthermore, responsibilities should not be presented only as obligations imposed by adults but as part of caring for the classroom community and respecting the rights of others. In this way, children learn that rights and responsibilities work together to create inclusive, cooperative and democratic learning environments.

Democratic education also highlights the importance of community engagement. Children should be encouraged to understand their role not only within the classroom but also within families, schools, neighborhoods and society. Participation in community projects, collaborative activities and shared initiatives helps children connect democratic values to real-life situations and strengthens their sense of belonging and active citizenship.



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 1: My Rights Flower

Objective

To introduce children to basic rights in a simple and visual way.

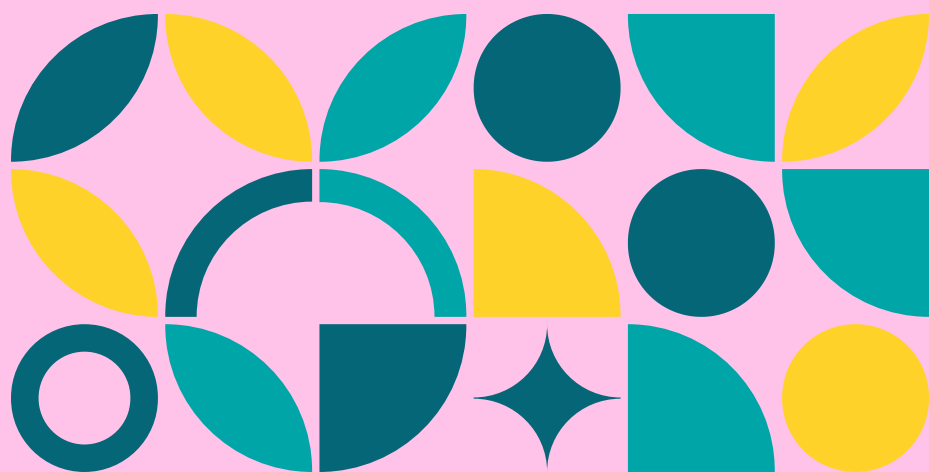
Procedure

1. Give each child a flower template.
2. In each petal, children draw or write one right (e.g., right to play, right to learn, right to be safe).
3. Discuss why each right is important.

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Recognize basic children's rights
- Reflect on their own needs and experiences
- Develop awareness of respect and dignity



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 2: Responsibility Helpers

Objective

To encourage responsibility and cooperation in the classroom.

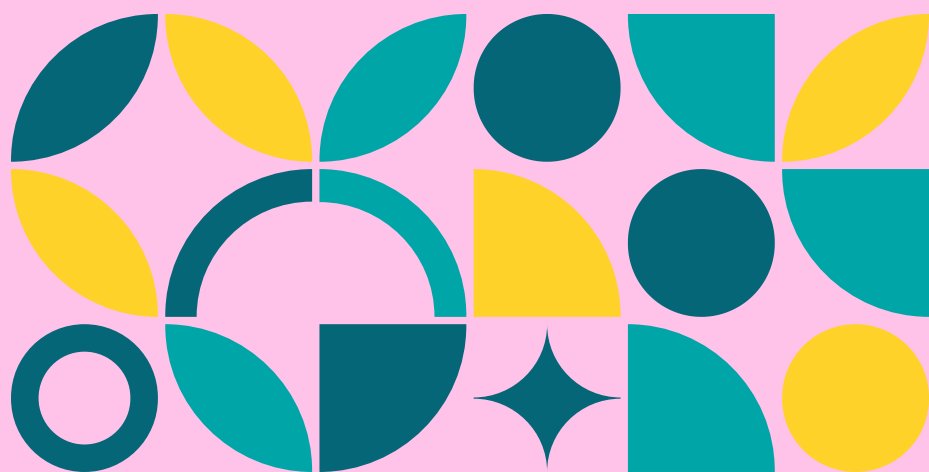
Procedure

1. Create weekly classroom helper roles such as:
 - Material organizer
 - Plant helper
 - Discussion leader
 - Clean-up helper
2. Rotate responsibilities among children.

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Develop responsibility and independence
- Experience participation in classroom life
- Practice cooperation and teamwork



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 3: Rights and Responsibilities Matching Game

Objective

To help children understand the connection between rights and responsibilities.

Procedure

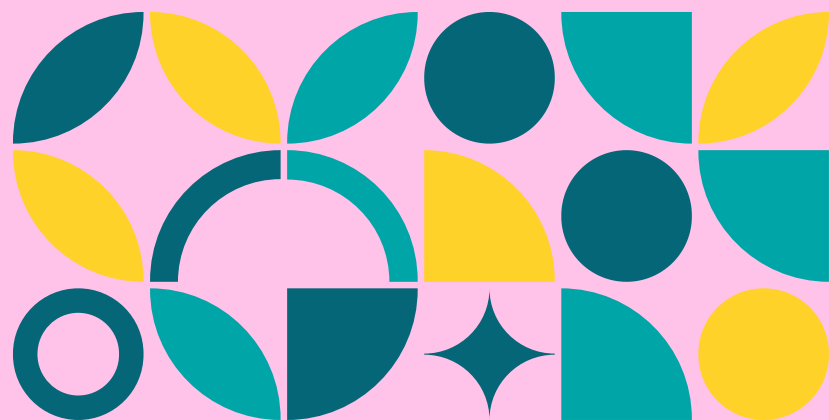
Children match cards such as:

- “Right to be heard” → “Responsibility to listen to others”
- “Right to play” → “Responsibility to include others”
- “Right to learn” → “Responsibility to respect the classroom”

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Understand the relationship between rights and responsibilities
- Develop empathy and fairness
- Strengthen critical thinking skills



3. Participation and Voice

Participation and voice are central principles of democratic education. Children should not only learn about democracy theoretically but also experience democratic participation in everyday classroom life. Democratic classrooms encourage children to express opinions, share ideas, ask questions, and contribute to decisions that affect them. When children feel heard and respected, they develop confidence, responsibility, communication skills and a stronger sense of belonging.

Research on democratic pedagogy highlights that active participation supports children's engagement, motivation, and social development. Democratic learning environments promote cooperation, equality, dialogue, and mutual respect between teachers and students. Rather than viewing children as passive recipients of knowledge, democratic education recognizes them as active contributors to the learning process (Malazonia, 2023).

Expressing opinions is an important part of children's identity development and civic learning. Children need opportunities to communicate thoughts, feelings, and preferences in safe and supportive environments. Classroom discussions, storytelling, collaborative projects and reflection activities help children practice expressing themselves respectfully and confidently.

At the same time, democratic participation also requires listening to others. Listening is a fundamental social and democratic skill because it helps children understand different perspectives, develop empathy and cooperate effectively with peers. Democratic classrooms therefore encourage respectful dialogue where all voices are valued and children learn that participation involves both speaking and listening.

Simple decision-making processes, such as classroom voting, choosing activities collectively, or discussing classroom agreements, introduce children to democratic participation in practical ways. These experiences help children understand concepts such as equality, fairness, shared responsibility and collective decision-making. Participation in decision-making also strengthens children's sense of agency and ownership within the classroom community.

Teachers play a key role in facilitating inclusive participation by ensuring that all children feel comfortable contributing, including shy students, children with different language abilities, or those requiring additional support. Inclusive democratic participation helps children understand that every voice matters and that diversity of opinions enriches the learning environment.



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 1: Talking Circle

Objective

To encourage respectful communication and active listening.

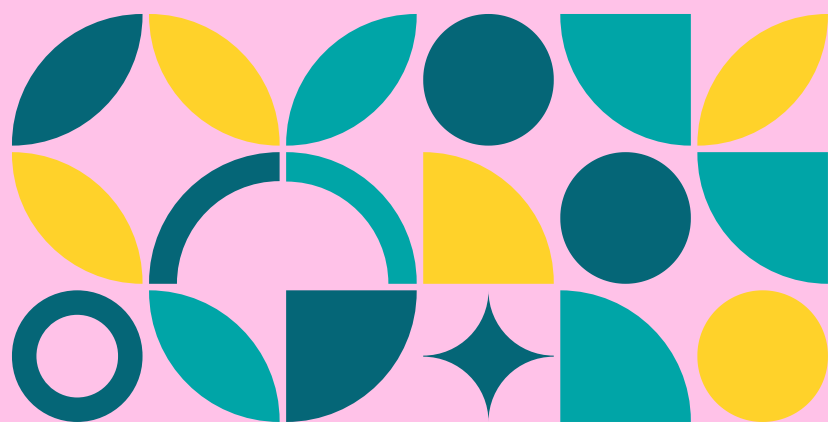
Procedure

- 1.Children sit in a circle.
- 2.Only the child holding the “talking object” may speak.
- 3.Other children listen without interrupting.
- 4.Topics may include feelings, classroom ideas, or shared experiences.

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Develop listening skills
- Learn respectful communication
- Build confidence in expressing opinions



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 2: Opinion Corners

Objective

To encourage critical thinking and dialogue.

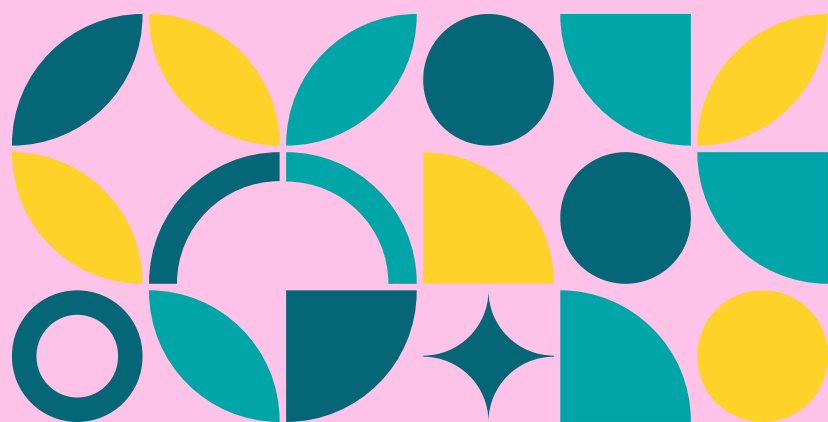
Procedure

1. Label classroom corners with:
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Not Sure
2. Read simple statements such as:
 - “Everyone should always play the same game.”
 - “It is important to listen to others.”
3. Children move to the corner matching their opinion.
4. Invite discussion about different viewpoints.

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Practice expressing opinions respectfully
- Understand different perspectives
- Strengthen communication and reasoning skills



4. Community and Belonging



A sense of community and belonging is essential for children's emotional well-being, participation, and learning. Democratic education emphasizes that classrooms should function as inclusive communities where children feel safe, respected, valued and connected to others. Community in education refers to relationships based on cooperation, trust, mutual support, and shared responsibility. Children develop a sense of belonging when they feel accepted and included within the classroom environment. Positive classroom communities encourage participation, empathy, collaboration, and respect for diversity.

Research highlights that collaborative learning environments support democratic participation by encouraging interaction, equality, and shared learning experiences. Democratic classrooms promote cooperation instead of competition and help children understand that learning is a collective process (Malazonia, 2023). Respecting diversity is also a key element of democratic education. Children encounter differences related to language, culture, abilities, family structures, interests, and experiences. Inclusive classrooms help children understand that diversity enriches communities and that every individual deserves respect and equal participation.

Interesting research findings show that collaborative learning:

- Improves children's communication and social skills
- Strengthens empathy and peer relationships
- Increases participation and engagement
- Supports problem-solving and critical thinking
- Encourages equal participation among learners (Malazonia, 2023)

Cooperation and teamwork help children learn how to work together toward shared goals, solve problems collectively, and support one another. Through group activities, collaborative projects and peer interaction, children begin to understand that communities become stronger when individuals cooperate respectfully and inclusively. Teachers contribute significantly to building classroom communities by modeling respect, empathy, fairness, and inclusive behavior. Creating opportunities for collaboration, shared responsibilities, and group reflection helps strengthen children's sense of belonging and collective responsibility.

Practical Examples and Activities

Example 1: My Community Map

Objective

To help children identify different communities they belong to.

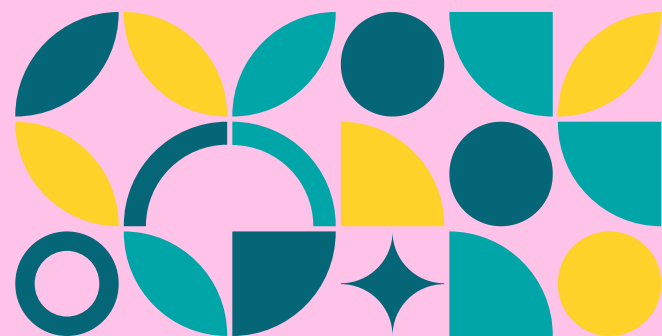
Procedure

- 1.Children draw themselves in the center of a page.
- 2.Around themselves, they add communities such as:
 - Family
 - School
 - Friends
 - Neighborhood
 - Clubs or groups
- 3.Discuss how communities help and support people.

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Understand the concept of community
- Reflect on belonging and relationships
- Recognize connections with others



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 2: Team Building Challenge

Objective

To strengthen cooperation and teamwork skills.

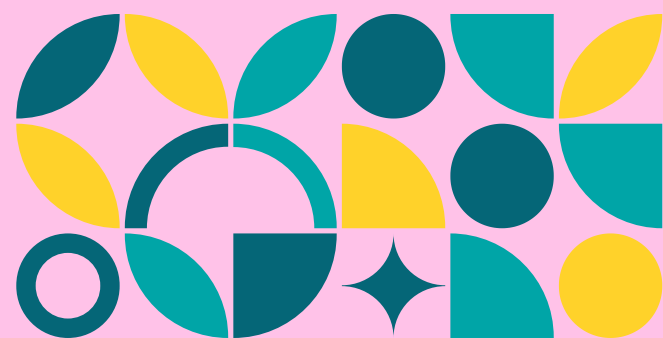
Procedure

1. Divide children into small groups.
2. Give each group a cooperative challenge such as:
 - Building a tower
 - Completing a puzzle
 - Creating a group drawing
3. Encourage collaboration and shared decision-making.

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Practice cooperation
- Improve communication skills
- Learn problem-solving strategies
- Experience teamwork positively



Practical Examples and Activities

Example 3: Diversity Story Circle

Objective

To encourage respect for diversity and inclusion.

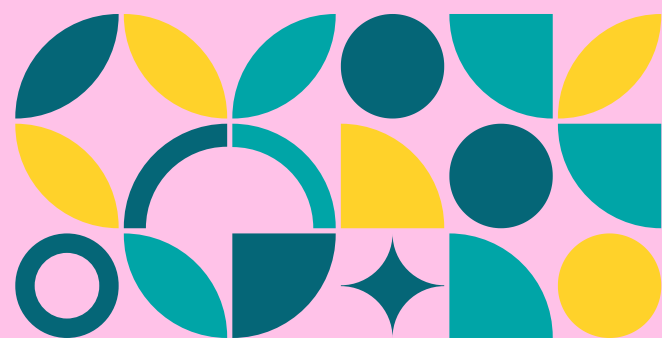
Procedure

1. Read a story about diversity, friendship, or inclusion.
2. Discuss similarities and differences among people.
3. Invite children to share something unique about themselves.

Learning Outcomes

Children:

- Develop respect for diversity
- Strengthen empathy and inclusion
- Appreciate different perspectives



Involving Parents and Families

Families play a central role in children's social and democratic development. Schools should therefore create opportunities for parents and caregivers to participate

actively in the educational process. Strong collaboration between teachers and families supports children's emotional well-being, strengthens communication and promotes consistency between school and home values.

Examples of family involvement may include:

- Parent participation days
- Family workshops and storytelling sessions
- Collaborative classroom activities
- Home-based projects connected to democratic themes
- Family discussions about fairness, respect, and participation

Encouraging family participation also helps children understand that democratic values are relevant in everyday life and relationships beyond the classroom.



Collaborating with **Local Communities**

Partnerships with local communities provide children with authentic learning experiences and opportunities to connect democratic values with real-world situations. Schools can collaborate with:

- Local organizations and NGOs
- Community centers
- Libraries and cultural institutions
- Local artists and professionals
- Municipal representatives and community leaders

These collaborations help children explore concepts such as cooperation, participation, inclusion and social responsibility in meaningful and practical ways.



Community engagement activities may include:

- Visits to local institutions
- Community improvement projects
- Environmental initiatives
- Intergenerational activities
- Local cultural events

Through these experiences, children learn that communities function through collaboration, shared responsibility, and active participation.

Practical Examples and Activities

Examples of Community Engagement Practices

Classroom Councils

Classroom councils are regular meetings where children discuss ideas, share concerns, solve problems, and participate in decisions related to classroom life. Councils encourage active participation, respectful dialogue and shared responsibility.

Community Projects

- Children can participate in simple community-based projects such as:
- Recycling campaigns
- School gardening activities
- Kindness and inclusion initiatives
- Charity or donation projects

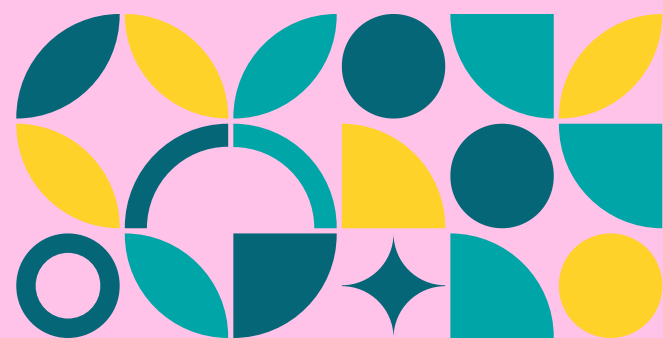
These activities strengthen cooperation, empathy, and social engagement.

Inviting Local Stakeholders

Schools may invite community members such as:

- Parents and grandparents
- Artists and authors
- Community leaders
- Health professionals
- NGO representatives
-

These interactions enrich children's learning experiences and help them understand the importance of participation and cooperation within society. Community engagement supports the development of active citizenship by helping children experience democracy as a lived and shared practice rather than only a theoretical concept.



Media Literacy and Democratic Learning

Children increasingly encounter information through digital media, television and online platforms. Although young children may not yet use social media independently, they are often exposed to information through adults and their wider environment.

Democratic education can support the development of early media literacy by encouraging children to ask questions such as:

How do we know something is true?

Can different people tell the same story differently?

Why is it important to listen to different perspectives?

How can we check information?

Developing these skills supports critical thinking, responsible participation and informed decision-making, which are important elements of democratic citizenship.



5. Lesson Plan Design Guidelines

Effective lesson planning is essential for the successful implementation of democratic education in early childhood and primary school settings. Well-structured lesson plans help educators create meaningful, inclusive, and engaging learning experiences that support children’s participation, cooperation, critical thinking and social-emotional development.

In democratic education, lesson planning should go beyond the transmission of knowledge and focus on active participation, dialogue, collaboration, and experiential learning. Lessons should encourage children to express opinions, listen to others, solve problems collaboratively, and reflect on their experiences. Activities should be flexible, child-centered, and adaptable to the diverse needs, interests and developmental levels of learners.

When planning lessons, educators should create safe and inclusive learning environments where every child feels respected, valued, and encouraged to participate. Teachers should also consider children’s emotional well-being, cultural backgrounds, language abilities and individual learning styles when selecting activities and teaching strategies.



Structuring a Lesson

A well-structured lesson helps children remain engaged and supports smooth transitions between activities. Democratic education lessons should include opportunities for participation, interaction, reflection, and collaborative learning.

A recommended lesson structure includes:

- A. Introduction / Warm-Up**
- B. Main Activity**
- C. Reflection and Discussion**
- D. Conclusion / Follow-Up**

Structuring a Lesson

A. Introduction / Warm-Up

The lesson begins with an engaging introduction that activates children's prior knowledge and creates interest in the topic.

Examples:

- Short discussion
- Storytelling
- Brainstorming activity
- Visual prompts
- Songs or movement games

The introduction should help children feel comfortable and motivated to participate.

B. Main Activity

The main part of the lesson includes interactive and participatory learning experiences connected to the lesson objectives.

Activities may include:

- Group discussions
- Role-playing
- Cooperative games
- Problem-solving tasks
- Voting activities
- Art-based or creative activities

Teachers should encourage communication, collaboration, and equal participation throughout the activity.

C. Reflection and Discussion

Reflection is an important component of democratic learning because it helps children think critically about their experiences, emotions and interactions.

Reflection questions may include:

What did we learn today?

How did we work together?

How did the activity make you feel?

What was easy or difficult?

What would you do differently next time?

Reflection supports self-awareness, empathy, and communication skills.



Structuring a Lesson

D. Conclusion / Follow-Up

The lesson should end with a short summary or calming activity that reinforces key learning points.

Possible follow-up activities:

- Drawing reflections
- Classroom agreements
- Home activities with families
- Journaling
- Group sharing

Setting Learning Objectives

Learning objectives describe what children should know, understand, or be able to do by the end of the lesson. Objectives help teachers maintain focus and support effective assessment.

In democratic education, objectives should address:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Attitudes and values

Objectives should be:

- Clear and simple
- Age-appropriate
- Observable and achievable
- Connected to participation, cooperation, inclusion and democratic values

Examples of Learning Objectives

Children will be able to:

- Express opinions respectfully
- Identify fair and unfair behaviors
- Participate in group decision-making
- Cooperate with classmates
- Listen actively during discussions



Structuring a Lesson

Choosing Age-Appropriate Activities

Activities should match children's developmental needs, interests, attention span, and abilities. Young children learn most effectively through active, hands-on and playful experiences.

When selecting activities, educators should consider:

- Age and developmental level
- Language abilities
- Attention span
- Cultural diversity
- Inclusion and accessibility
- Opportunities for movement and creativity

For younger children (ages 4-6):

- Use visual materials and storytelling
- Include movement and play
- Keep instructions simple
- Use short and interactive activities

For older children (ages 7-10):

- Introduce more discussion and reflection
- Use collaborative problem-solving
- Encourage independent thinking
- Include more structured group work

Activities should encourage equal participation and provide opportunities for all children to contribute.



Standard Lesson Plan

Template

Lesson Title

A clear and engaging title related to the lesson topic.

Age Group

Specify the recommended age range for the activity.

Example:

Ages 4-6 or Ages 7-10

Learning Objectives

State what children should know, understand or demonstrate by the end of the lesson.

Example:

- Children will identify examples of fairness.
- Children will practice respectful communication.
- Children will participate in collaborative decision-making.

Materials

List all materials and resources needed for the lesson.

Examples:

- Picture cards
- Storybooks
- Art materials
- Sticky notes
- Ballots or voting cards

Duration

Provide the estimated lesson time.

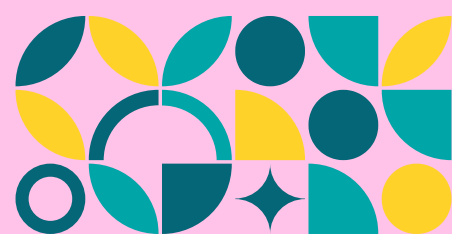
Example:

30-45 minutes

Step-by-Step Activities

Describe the lesson process clearly and sequentially. Example:

1. Introduction discussion
2. Main group activity
3. Reflection circle
4. Summary and closing er?



Standard Lesson Plan

Template

Reflection / Discussion

Include reflection questions that encourage children to think about their experiences and feelings.

Example questions:

- How did you feel during the activity?
- Was everyone included?
- What helped us work together?

Assessment / Questions

Assessment in democratic education should focus on participation, cooperation, understanding, and reflection rather than only correct answers.

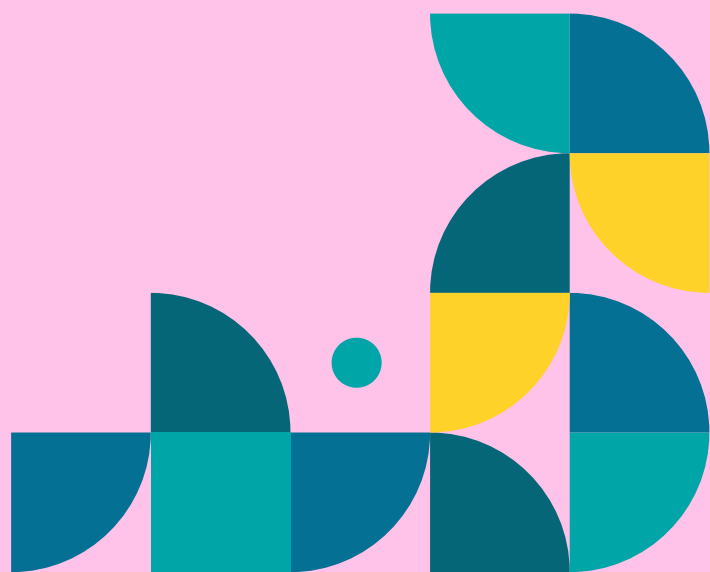
Teachers may assess:

- Participation in discussions
- Ability to cooperate
- Respectful communication
- Understanding of concepts
- Engagement during activities

Assessment methods may include:

- Observation
- Reflection questions
- Group discussions
- Simple feedback activities
- Drawings or creative responses

A flexible and reflective approach to assessment helps teachers better understand children's social, emotional and democratic learning development.



6. Philosophy for Children in Democratic Education

Structure of a P4C Session

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is an educational approach that encourages children to think critically, express ideas, ask questions, and participate in collaborative dialogue. Rather than focusing on finding one correct answer, P4C creates opportunities for children to explore concepts, reflect on experiences, and develop reasoning skills through discussion and inquiry (Lipman, 2003).

A typical P4C session follows a structured but flexible process that supports participation, reflection, and philosophical thinking.

1. Stimulus

The session usually begins with a stimulus that encourages curiosity and discussion. Stimuli may include:

- Stories
- Images
- Puppets
- Short videos
- Drama activities
- Real-life situations

The stimulus introduces a concept or dilemma that children can explore together.

2. Quiet Reflection

Children are given time to think individually about the stimulus before discussion begins. Quiet reflection helps children organize thoughts, make connections, and prepare ideas for dialogue.

3. Question Generation

Children are encouraged to generate their own questions based on the stimulus. This stage is central to P4C because it promotes ownership of learning and supports children's curiosity and participation.



Philosophy for Children in Democratic Education

4. Question Selection

The group collaboratively selects one or more questions for discussion. This democratic process allows children to practice listening, negotiation and decision-making.

5. Philosophical Dialogue

Children participate in a guided discussion where they share ideas, explain reasoning, ask follow-up questions, and respectfully disagree with others. The teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a lecturer.

6. Reflection on Thinking

At the end of the session, children reflect on:

How they thought

Why they changed or kept their opinions

How the group worked together

What they learned from others

Reflection supports metacognitive development and helps children become more aware of their thinking processes (Lipman, 2003).

Types of Questions in P4C

One of the main characteristics of P4C is the emphasis on open-ended philosophical questions. These questions do not have one correct answer and encourage deeper reflection, dialogue and reasoning.

Children's questions in P4C often focus on:

Concepts

- What is fairness?
- What is friendship?
- What makes something true?

Ethics

- Is it ever okay to lie?
- Should everyone always be treated equally?
- What makes an action right or wrong?

Logic and Reasoning

- Does this always happen?
- Can something be both true and false?

What happens if everyone does the same thing?



Philosophy for Children in **Democratic Education**

Identity and Self

- What makes me who I am?
- Can people change?
- What makes someone belong to a group?

Unlike traditional classroom questions, P4C avoids closed-answer questions and instead values inquiry, interpretation, and reasoning (Lipman, 2003).

Metacognition in P4C

P4C strongly supports metacognition, or “thinking about thinking.” Through dialogue and reflection, children learn to become more aware of:

- How they reason
- Why they hold certain beliefs
- How opinions can change through discussion
- How different perspectives influence understanding

Metacognitive reflection helps children develop self-awareness, confidence, and independent thinking skills. It also encourages children to evaluate ideas critically rather than simply accepting information passively (Filea, 2024).

Ethical and Moral Development

Ethical inquiry is a central aspect of Philosophy for Children. P4C encourages children to explore moral questions and reflect on values, fairness, justice, empathy and responsibility.

Children examine:

- Ethical dilemmas
- Moral principles
- Questions of fairness and inclusion
- Different perspectives on right and wrong

Through discussion and collaborative reasoning, children develop ethical understanding and strengthen empathy, communication, and critical thinking skills (Filea, 2024; Gregory et al., 2017). Importantly, P4C does not aim to provide children with “correct” moral answers. Instead, it encourages thoughtful reflection, respectful dialogue and reasoned judgment.



Philosophy for Children in **Democratic Education**

Classroom Strategies in P4C

The Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) developed several practical classroom strategies that support imagination, dialogue, reasoning and philosophical inquiry in early childhood education.

Using Puppets in P4C

Many P4C stories and activities are designed for puppet use. Puppets play an important role because they:

- Create an imaginative learning environment
- Reduce children's fear of making mistakes
- Encourage participation and discussion
- Help children feel emotionally safe during dialogue

Puppets function similarly to beginning a story with "Once upon a time..." because they signal entry into a creative and reflective space where children feel free to explore ideas and express opinions.

Eliciting Corrections Through Puppets

Puppets may intentionally say absurd, incorrect or illogical statements in order to encourage children's reasoning.

For example:

- "If I'm taller than you, I must be older than you."
- "If today is tomorrow, then yesterday is next week."

Children are invited to:

- Identify what is incorrect
- Explain their reasoning
- Discuss why the statement does not make sense
- This strategy encourages logical thinking, confidence and active participation.



Philosophy for Children in Democratic Education

Story Repetition

In P4C, repetition is viewed as an important learning strategy, especially in early childhood education. Children often ask to hear the same story repeatedly and this repetition supports:

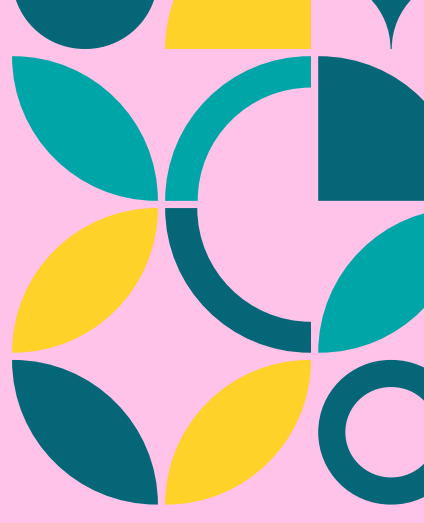
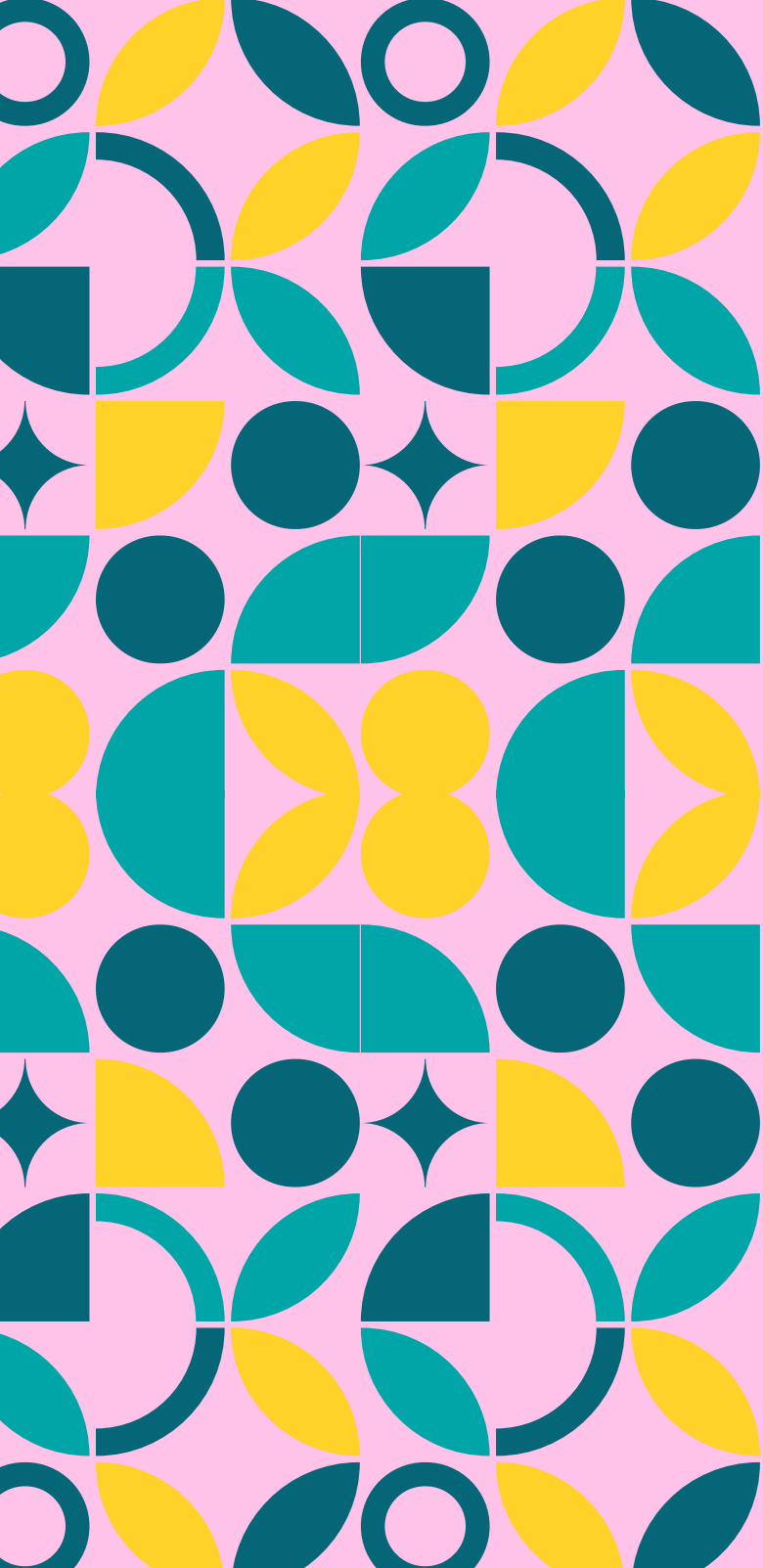
- Deeper understanding
- Familiarity with concepts
- Anticipation of dialogue
- Confidence in participation
- Reflection on meaning

Familiar stories allow children to focus less on remembering events and more on exploring ideas, questions, and interpretations.



SECTION C

SUPPORTING TEACHERS



1. Teaching Strategies

Teaching Strategies for Democratic Classrooms

Democratic education is most effective when children actively participate in the learning process rather than passively receive information. Teachers therefore play an important role in creating learning environments that encourage participation, dialogue, cooperation and critical reflection.

A variety of child-centred and participatory methods can support democratic learning in everyday educational practice.

Storytelling

Stories provide children with opportunities to explore values, emotions, relationships and social situations in a safe and accessible way. Through storytelling, children can reflect on themes such as fairness, inclusion, friendship, responsibility, diversity and decision-making. Educators can use stories as a starting point for discussions, role-playing activities or reflection exercises that encourage children to express their opinions and consider different perspectives.

Role-Playing

Role-playing allows children to experience situations from different viewpoints and develop empathy, communication skills and conflict-resolution strategies. By acting out real-life scenarios, children can explore democratic concepts such as participation, cooperation, fairness and respect for others. Role-playing also helps children practice problem-solving and decision-making in a supportive environment.



Group Discussions

Structured discussions encourage children to express their ideas, listen to others, and engage in respectful dialogue. Through guided conversations, children learn that different opinions can exist simultaneously and that disagreement can be managed constructively. Teachers should create an atmosphere where all children feel safe to contribute and where every voice is valued.



Teaching Strategies

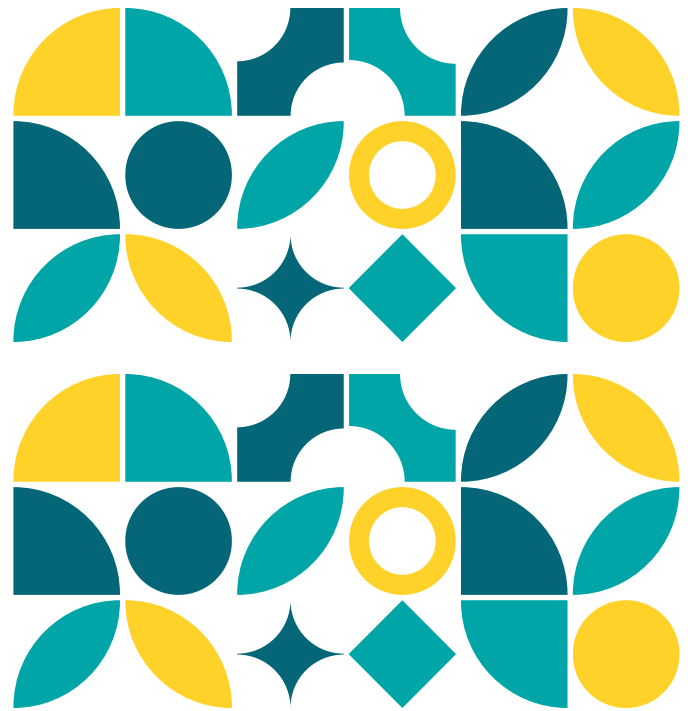
Teaching Strategies for Democratic Classrooms

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning activities encourage children to work together towards a common goal. Rather than competing against one another, children learn to share responsibilities, support their peers, negotiate solutions, and celebrate collective achievements. These experiences help develop social responsibility, mutual respect and a sense of belonging within the group.

Games and Creative Activities

Play-based learning is particularly important in early childhood and primary education. Games, art projects, music, movement activities and creative tasks provide engaging opportunities for children to explore democratic values in practice. Creative activities can support participation, self-expression, collaboration and critical thinking while making learning enjoyable and meaningful.



Creating an Inclusive Learning Environment

Regardless of the methods used, teachers should ensure that activities are accessible and inclusive for all children. Special attention should be given to encouraging participation from quieter children, children with different linguistic or cultural backgrounds, and children with additional support needs.

Democratic teaching is not only about the content being taught but also about the way learning takes place. Children learn democratic values most effectively when they experience respect, participation, cooperation, and inclusion in their everyday interactions within the classroom.



2. Inclusion Guidelines

Promoting Inclusion in Democratic Education

Democratic education can only be successful when all children have meaningful opportunities to participate, contribute and feel that they belong. Inclusion is therefore not an additional element of democratic learning but one of its core principles.

Children bring diverse experiences, identities, languages, abilities, family backgrounds and perspectives into the learning environment. Educators should actively create conditions that ensure equal participation and recognise diversity as a valuable resource for learning.

An inclusive classroom encourages every child to express their views, engage with others respectfully and participate in decision-making processes. Teachers should pay particular attention to children who may be at risk of exclusion, marginalisation or underrepresentation.

Democracy, Inclusion and Minority Voices

Democratic education seeks to ensure that all children feel represented, valued and able to participate fully in classroom life. This is particularly important for children belonging to minority groups, who may experience exclusion, prejudice or barriers to participation.

Educators can strengthen democratic culture by creating learning environments where different languages, cultures, traditions and experiences are recognised as valuable contributions to the classroom community.

Children should have opportunities to see themselves reflected in learning materials, classroom discussions and school activities. At the same time, all children benefit from learning about different perspectives and experiences.

By actively including minority voices, educators help foster belonging, mutual respect and equal participation, which are essential foundations of democratic societies.

Recognising and Challenging Stereotypes

Children are exposed to stereotypes through media, everyday conversations and social environments. These stereotypes may relate to gender, ethnicity, language, religion, disability, family background or other characteristics.

Democratic education encourages children to question assumptions and understand that individuals should not be judged based on group stereotypes.

Teachers can support this process by:

- encouraging curiosity rather than judgement,
- discussing differences respectfully,
- presenting diverse role models,
- challenging exclusionary behaviour,
- creating opportunities for children to learn from one another.

Helping children recognise stereotypes contributes to more inclusive, respectful and democratic learning environments.

Preventing Discrimination and Exclusion

Democratic learning environments are built on the principle that all children deserve equal respect and opportunities to participate.

Educators play an important role in recognising and addressing situations where children may be excluded, marginalised or treated unfairly because of their background, language, identity, abilities or family circumstances.

When discrimination or exclusion occurs, teachers can use these situations as learning opportunities by encouraging empathy, reflection and constructive dialogue.

Creating a culture where all children feel safe, respected and included helps strengthen democratic values and supports positive social relationships.



Reflection Checklist for Educators

Participation and Accessibility

- ☐ Are all children able to participate meaningfully in the activity?
- ☐ Have potential barriers to participation been identified and addressed?
- ☐ Are different ways of participating offered (speaking, drawing, writing, movement, small-group work)?
- ☐ Are activities adaptable to different learning needs and abilities?

Diversity and Representation

- ☐ Are different cultural, linguistic, social and family backgrounds acknowledged and respected?
- ☐ Do learning materials reflect diversity in a positive and inclusive way?
- ☐ Are stereotypes or prejudices challenged when they arise?
- ☐ Are examples and case studies relevant to children from different backgrounds?



Reflection Checklist for Educators

Language and Communication

- ☐ Are language barriers addressed appropriately?
- ☐ Is clear, age-appropriate and inclusive language being used?
- ☐ Do children have sufficient opportunities to express themselves in ways that are comfortable for them?
- ☐ Are visual supports or alternative communication methods available where needed?

Inclusion of Minority Voices

- ☐ Are quieter children encouraged and supported to contribute?
- ☐ Are minority voices actively included and valued?
- ☐ Are children given opportunities to share different perspectives and experiences?
- ☐ Is every child treated with equal respect regardless of their background, identity or abilities?



Reflection Checklist for Educators

Classroom Climate

- ☐ Do children feel safe expressing opinions and asking questions?
- ☐ Is respectful disagreement encouraged and modelled?
- ☐ Are empathy, active listening, and cooperation promoted throughout the learning process?
- ☐ Does every child experience a sense of belonging within the group?

The above questions can support educators in planning, implementing and reflecting on democratic learning activities

Key Principle

Inclusive democratic education is not about treating every child in exactly the same way. Rather, it means recognising individual needs and ensuring that every child has equitable opportunities to participate, learn and contribute. When children experience respect, recognition, and belonging in their daily learning environment, they are more likely to develop democratic values, empathy and a commitment to participation in society.



3. Tips for Managing Diversity

Embracing Diversity in Democratic Learning Environments

Diversity is a natural and valuable characteristic of every learning group. Children differ in their abilities, interests, learning styles, languages, cultural backgrounds, experiences, and levels of confidence. Democratic education recognises these differences not as obstacles but as opportunities for learning, cooperation and personal growth.

Teachers play an important role in creating inclusive environments where every child feels respected, valued and able to contribute.

Strategies for Mixed-Ability Classrooms

Children develop at different rates and possess different strengths. Effective democratic learning therefore requires flexible and differentiated approaches.

Educators can support mixed-ability groups by:

- Offering activities with different levels of complexity.
- Using cooperative learning methods that allow children to contribute according to their strengths.
- Combining individual, pair, and group work.
- Providing additional support where needed without isolating children from the group.
- Celebrating effort, progress, and participation rather than focusing solely on performance.
- Encouraging peer learning and mutual support among children.

Mixed-ability classrooms can provide valuable opportunities for children to learn cooperation, empathy and appreciation for different strengths and perspectives.



Tips for Managing Diversity



Supporting Children with Limited Language Skills

Language differences should never become barriers to participation. Children with limited proficiency in the language of instruction can still actively contribute when appropriate support is provided.

Teachers can support participation by:

- Using clear, simple and age-appropriate language.
- Providing visual materials, images, symbols and demonstrations.
- Encouraging non-verbal forms of participation such as drawing, acting or using visual aids.
- Allowing additional time for understanding and responding.
- Using pair and small-group activities to create less intimidating communication settings.
- Valuing multilingualism and encouraging children to share aspects of their linguistic backgrounds.

When children feel that their language and identity are respected, they are more likely to participate confidently in democratic learning processes.

Encouraging Shy or Less Active Students

Not all children feel comfortable speaking in front of groups or expressing their opinions openly. Democratic participation should therefore include different forms of engagement.

Educators can encourage quieter children by:

- Creating a safe and supportive classroom atmosphere.
- Using small-group discussions before whole-class conversations.
- Allowing children time to think before responding.
- Offering alternative ways of participation, such as drawing, writing, voting or using visual prompts.
- Recognising contributions positively and respectfully.
- Avoiding pressure or embarrassment when children choose not to speak immediately.

Participation should be understood as more than speaking frequently. Listening carefully, reflecting thoughtfully and contributing in different ways are also valuable forms of democratic engagement.

Tips for Managing Diversity

Key Principle

Democratic education does not require every child to participate in the same way. Rather, it aims to create conditions in which every child can participate meaningfully, according to their abilities, needs and circumstances.

By recognising and valuing diversity, educators help children develop empathy, respect, inclusion and the skills needed to live and participate in diverse democratic societies.



4. Assessment Tools

Assessing Democratic Learning

Assessment in democratic education should support learning, reflection and participation rather than focus solely on academic achievement. The aim is to understand how children engage with democratic processes, develop social and emotional competencies and apply democratic values in everyday interactions.

Because many democratic competencies are demonstrated through behaviour, communication and cooperation, assessment should be ongoing, observation-based and developmentally appropriate.

Teachers are encouraged to use a variety of assessment methods that focus on children's participation, understanding, collaboration and personal growth.

Observation Checklists

Observation is one of the most effective tools for assessing democratic learning, particularly with younger children.

Educators can observe whether children:

- Participate actively in discussions and activities.
- Listen respectfully to others.
- Express their opinions and ideas confidently.
- Respect different viewpoints.
- Cooperate with peers during group activities.
- Share responsibilities and contribute to collective tasks.
- Demonstrate empathy and consideration for others.
- Engage constructively in conflict resolution.

Observation checklists can help teachers document progress over time and identify areas where additional support may be beneficial.



Assessment Tools

Participation Indicators

Participation is a central element of democratic education. Assessment should therefore focus not only on whether children are present, but also on how they engage with learning activities and democratic processes.

Possible indicators include:

- Willingness to contribute ideas and opinions.
- Active involvement in discussions and group work.
- Ability to make choices and take responsibility.
- Respect for agreed rules and group decisions.
- Confidence in expressing personal views.
- Ability to listen and respond to others constructively.

Participation indicators should be interpreted flexibly, recognising that children participate in different ways and at different levels.

Reflection-Based Assessment

Reflection encourages children to think about their experiences, learning processes, and relationships with others.

- Educators can support reflection through questions such as:
- What did you learn today?
- What was easy or difficult for you?
- How did you contribute to the group?
- How did the group make decisions?
- How did you feel during the activity?
- What would you do differently next time?

Reflection activities help children develop self-awareness, critical thinking and a deeper understanding of democratic participation.





Assessment Tools

Simple Feedback Activities

Regular feedback provides valuable insights into children's experiences and supports continuous improvement of learning activities.

Age-appropriate feedback methods may include:

- Thumbs up / thumbs down activities.
- Emotion cards or smiley scales.
- Exit tickets with simple questions.
- Drawing or creative reflection tasks.
- Group reflection circles.
- One-word feedback rounds.

Feedback activities should be brief, accessible and designed to encourage honest participation.

Areas of Assessment

When evaluating democratic learning, teachers may focus on three key dimensions:

Engagement

- Is the child actively participating?
- Does the child show interest and curiosity?
- Is the child willing to contribute ideas and opinions?

Understanding

- Does the child demonstrate an understanding of democratic concepts such as fairness, participation, respect and responsibility?
- Can the child apply these concepts in everyday situations?

Collaboration

- Does the child work constructively with others?
- Does the child listen, cooperate and support peers?
- Can the child contribute positively to group decision-making and problem-solving?

Key Principle

Assessment in democratic education should be supportive, inclusive, and growth-oriented. The goal is not to judge children but to help them develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed for active participation in democratic life.

By combining observation, reflection, participation indicators and feedback activities, educators can gain a holistic understanding of children's democratic learning and development.



5. Classroom Challenges

Managing Challenging Situations in Democratic Learning

Democratic learning environments encourage participation, dialogue and cooperation. However, democratic education also involves navigating disagreement, conflict, exclusion and diverse perspectives. Educators therefore need strategies to respond constructively to challenging situations while maintaining an inclusive and respectful learning environment.

What if children disagree?

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

Educators can support children by encouraging active listening, helping them articulate their views constructively, and facilitating fair decision-making processes. Rather than seeking immediate consensus, teachers should help children understand that democratic participation includes dialogue, negotiation, and compromise.

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

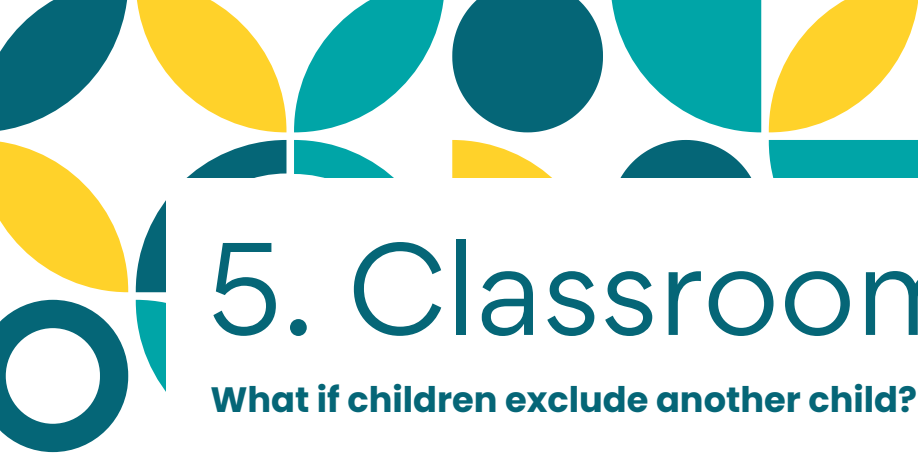
What if one child dominates the discussion?

Some children are naturally more confident and outspoken than others. Democratic participation means ensuring that all children have opportunities to contribute.

Educators can use structured discussion techniques such as talking circles, speaking objects, turn-taking systems, pair discussions or small-group work to create balanced participation. Teachers should acknowledge contributions positively while actively inviting quieter children to share their ideas.

Key message: Every voice matters, not only the loudest one.





5. Classroom Challenges

What if children exclude another child?

Exclusion can occur intentionally or unintentionally and provides important learning opportunities about fairness, empathy and belonging.

Teachers should address exclusion immediately and encourage children to reflect on how exclusion affects others. Activities that promote perspective-taking, cooperation and shared responsibility can help children develop inclusive attitudes.

Key message: Democratic communities are strengthened when everyone feels they belong.

What if a child expresses stereotypes or prejudice?

Children may repeat stereotypes or prejudiced statements they have heard elsewhere without fully understanding their implications.

Rather than reacting punitively, educators should treat such moments as opportunities for learning and reflection. Questions such as “How might someone else feel about this?” or “Is this true for everyone?” can encourage critical thinking and empathy.

Democratic education promotes respect for diversity, human dignity, and equal participation for all members of society.

Key message: Democratic learning challenges harmful ideas while respecting the dignity of every child.

What if parents disagree with democratic activities?

Some families may be unfamiliar with democratic education approaches or may question classroom activities that encourage participation, dialogue or critical thinking. Educators should communicate openly with parents, explain the educational goals of democratic learning, and emphasise that democratic education supports skills such as cooperation, respect, responsibility, and active citizenship. Constructive partnerships between schools and families help create consistency between children's learning experiences at school and at home.

Key message: Dialogue and mutual understanding are essential for successful cooperation between educators and families.

6. Accessibility and Usability

Ensuring Accessible and Inclusive Democratic Learning

For democratic education to be meaningful, all children must have the opportunity to participate, contribute, and feel included. Accessibility and usability are therefore essential principles when planning and implementing democratic learning activities.

Educational materials, teaching methods and classroom practices should be designed in ways that accommodate diverse learning needs, abilities, communication styles and cultural backgrounds. The goal is to remove barriers to participation and create learning environments where every child can engage successfully.



Accessible Learning Materials

Teachers should ensure that learning materials are clear, age-appropriate, and easy to understand.

Good practices include:

- Using simple and understandable language.
- Providing visual support such as pictures, symbols, diagrams, and illustrations.
- Combining verbal explanations with visual and practical demonstrations.
- Breaking complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps.
- Providing examples that are relevant to children's everyday experiences.
- Offering materials in different formats where possible.

Accessible materials support understanding and participation for all learners, including children with different language backgrounds and learning needs.



6. Accessibility and Usability

Multiple Ways of Participation

Children express themselves and learn in different ways. Democratic learning should therefore offer multiple opportunities for engagement.

Participation can take many forms, including:

- Speaking and group discussions.
- Drawing and creative expression.
- Role-playing and drama activities.
- Movement-based activities.
- Small-group and pair work.
- Voting and decision-making exercises.
- Reflection activities using visual or non-verbal methods.

Providing different options allows every child to contribute according to their strengths and preferences.

Supporting Diverse Learning Needs

Inclusive democratic education recognises that children may require different types and levels of support.

Educators should consider:

- Different learning styles and preferences.
- Language and communication needs.
- Physical accessibility requirements.
- Attention and concentration differences.
- Social and emotional support needs.
- Cultural and linguistic diversity.

Flexibility and adaptation are important aspects of democratic teaching and help ensure that no child is excluded from participation.



Accessibility and Usability

Creating Safe and Supportive Learning Environments

Children are more likely to participate actively when they feel safe, respected, and valued. Teachers can support this by:

- Establishing clear and respectful classroom agreements.
- Encouraging positive and supportive interactions.
- Responding constructively to mistakes and misunderstandings.
- Addressing exclusion, bullying and discriminatory behaviour.
- Promoting empathy, active listening and mutual respect.
- Ensuring that every child's voice is acknowledged.

A positive classroom climate strengthens children's confidence and willingness to engage in democratic processes.

Usability for Educators

The activities and materials contained in this manual are designed to be flexible and adaptable to different educational contexts.

Educators are encouraged to:

- Select activities that match the age and needs of their learners.
- Adapt examples and discussions to local contexts.
- Modify activities according to available time and resources.
- Combine activities with existing curricula and educational programmes.
- Use the materials as inspiration for developing additional democratic learning experiences.

The manual is intended as a practical resource that can support both experienced educators and those who are new to democratic education.

Key Principle

Accessibility and usability are not separate from democratic education; they are fundamental to it. Democratic learning can only take place when all children have genuine opportunities to participate, express themselves and contribute to the learning community.

By creating accessible, inclusive and user-friendly learning environments, educators help ensure that democratic values are experienced by every child in practice, not only discussed in theory.

References

Boostrom, R. (1991). The nature and functions of classroom rules. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 21(2), 193–216.

Corsaro, W. A. (1997). *The sociology of childhood*. Pine Forge Press.

Council of Europe. (2018). *Reference framework of competences for democratic culture: Volume 1 – Context, concepts and model*. Council of Europe Publishing.

Council of Europe. (2019). *Digital citizenship education handbook*. Council of Europe Publishing.

Covell, K., Howe, R. B., & McNeil, J. K. (2010). *Implementing children's human rights education in schools*. *Improving Schools*, 13(2), 117–132.

Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. Macmillan.

Durkheim, E. (2002). *Moral education*. Dover Publications. (Original work published 1961)

Filea, E. (2024). *Philosophy for children and democratic thinking in early childhood education*. *Journal of Educational Philosophy*, 12(1), 45–59.

Gregory, M., Haynes, J., & Murrells, K. (2017). *The Routledge international handbook of philosophy for children*. Routledge.

Halstead, J. M., & Taylor, M. J. (2000). *Learning and teaching about values: A review of recent research*. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 30(2), 169–202.

Howe, R. B., & Covell, K. (2007). *Empowering children: Children's rights education as a pathway to citizenship*. University of Toronto Press.

Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC). (n.d.). *Preschool and early childhood curriculum*. Montclair State University.

Jackson, P. W., Boostrom, R., & Hansen, D. (1993). *The moral life of schools*. Jossey-Bass.

References

Korczak, J. (2007). *The child's right to respect*. Council of Europe Publishing. (Original work published 1929)

Lipman, M. (2003). *Thinking in education* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Malazonia, D. (2023). *The role of collaborative learning in education for democratic citizenship*. *Cogent Education*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2167299>

Nucci, L. (2001). *Education in the moral domain*. Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton University Press.

Pantazidis, P., & Bantiou, A. (2026). *Schools as commons: Participation, cooperation and co-governance in education*. *Education Sciences*, 16(3), 456.

Pechtelidis, Y., & Kioupiolis, A. (2020). *Education as commons: Democratic participation and collective learning*. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 10(2), 173–184.

Prout, A., & James, A. (1997). *Constructing and reconstructing childhood*. Falmer Press.

Thornberg, R. (2008). *"It's not fair!"—Voicing pupils' criticisms of school rules*. *Children & Society*, 22(6), 418–428. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2007.00121.x>

Turiel, E. (1983). *The development of social knowledge: Morality and convention*. Cambridge University Press.

UNESCO. (2023). *Recommendation on education for peace, human rights and sustainable development*. UNESCO.

United Nations. (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations.

References

Williams, B. (1993). *Students' perceptions of fairness and teacher authority. Educational Psychology, 13*(3–4), 305–317.

Wood, B. E. (2025). *Children's rights: Belonging and participating in communities. Childhood, 32*(1), 45–60.

Online Resources

Korczak – pedagog. Culture.pl. Accessed 25 June 2026.
[Culture.pl – Korczak pedagog](#)

Podmiotowość dziecka. Accessed 25 May 2026.
[Podmiotowość dziecka](#)