THE CALL FOR DEMOCRACY EDUCATION IN EUROPE

In the year 2007, the European Union, in the understanding laid down in the so-called Lisbon Accords, defined democratic citizenship and human rights, together with social cohesion and sustainable economic progress, as fundamental goals of the Union. These goals were to serve as a cornerstone of its ongoing and future development as one of the most advanced regions of the world. Ten years earlier, in 1997, the Council of Europe, the agency of political and cultural cooperation of more than 40 European nations, launched a program of citizenship and human rights education designed to support and evolve democratic citizenship education in schools across Europe. Starting with the study of exemplary projects and schools, it continued from 2002 onwards with a program of education for democratic citizenship developing local, national, and transnational initiatives, curricula, and standards, and publishing handbooks and teaching materials (Bîrzéa et al., 2004; Dürr, Ferreira Martins, & Spajic Vrkas, 2001). The program reached a new level of intensity with its European Year of Citizenship through Education in 2005. In the wake of this programmatic high point a new phase of the program was launched in 2006 under the heading Learning and Living Democracy for All. A center for democratic education, the European Wergeland Center, was established in Oslo with support of the Norwegian government to organize and coordinate European action in the field of democracy education and school-based action for democratic development. In May 2005, the heads of state and governments in Europe agreed upon action according to the so-called Warsaw Action Plan to implement the following three lines of action: (1) Education policy development and implementation for democratic citizenship and social inclusion; (2) Democratic governance of educational institutions; (3) New roles and competencies of teachers and other educational staff in a common program enterprise of Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE).
Finally, in 2010, the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe debated and decided on the main goals and objectives of the EDC/HRE program for the coming years, strengthening policy development and policy implementation with special focus on social cohesion, social inclusion, and respect for human rights; with special attention to democratic governance of educational institutions. They called for a special effort to disseminate knowledge and best practice and to foster research in the field to establish a satisfactory knowledge base. and, finally and most importantly, to develop sustainable frameworks and mechanisms that make EDC/HRE part of everyday practices and processes at all levels of society. In May 2010 the Committee of Ministers adopted a Council of Europe *Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education* that sums up the history of the endeavor. This document provides a serious and substantive set of definitions, objectives, and principles as well as detailed policy measures, which are aptly summed up by Section 13 of the Charter under the heading *Skills for promoting social cohesion, valuing diversity and handling differences and conflict.*

In all areas of education, member states should promote educational approaches and teaching methods which aim at living together in a democratic and multicultural society and at enabling learners to acquire the knowledge and skills to promote cohesion, value diversity and equality, appreciate differences—particularly between different faith and ethnic groups—and settle disagreements and conflicts in a non-violent manner with respect for each others’ rights, as well as to combat all forms of discrimination and violence, especially bullying and harassment.

(Council of Europe, 2010, p. 12)

Evidently, education for democratic citizenship has rapidly moved up in the policy agendas of national and supranational organizations in Europe over the past two decades and is now considered a top priority in many of the European Ministries of education (see also Georgi, 2008; Kerr, 2008). There are plenty of reasons for this increased emphasis on democratic citizenship education. Some of them are global in nature; others are specific to Europe. For a long time, social scientists have been issuing warnings about a decrease in political and civic engagement in particular among youth. Renowned political scientists such as Herfried Münkler in Germany (Münkler & Wassermann, 2008) and Colin Crouch in the UK (Crouch, 2004) have identified serious threats to the very foundation of modern democracies that are manifest in an erosion of trust in political institutions. These long-term threats more or less affect all Western societies and are hardly specific to Europe. They have been associated with excessive *utilitarian individualism* (Durkheim, 1898/1969), which is corrosive of any social bonds beyond economic self-interest, as well as with globalization, which confronts democratically legitimized national institutions with unprecedented challenges on the level of international governance. After the end of the cold war and the fall of the Soviet Regime, Europe had to manage the integration of former communist countries from Central and Eastern Europe into the Union and find appropriate ways to support their fledgling democratic institutions. Although the European Union fared reasonably well in this process (as recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize committee in 2012) many countries faced economic challenges and declines in social-welfare systems that were further exacerbated in the wake of the financial crisis in 2008. As a consequence, even
well-established democracies in Western Europe with long-standing traditions of
democratic governance have experienced an upsurge of right-wing, xenophobic, and
nationalistic movements that threaten immigrants living in these countries and ques-
tion the process of European integration itself.

All these trends make obvious that a democratically unified Europe which promotes
social cohesion, respect for human rights, value diversity, and the peaceful cohabitation
of different faith and ethnic groups (as defined in the Lisbon Accords and the Charter
of the European Council) cannot be taken for granted but has to be actively promoted
and cultivated. Once achieved, democratic forms of governance are not self-sustaining
and have to be constantly reinforced. Thus, education for democratic citizenship is no
luxury. It is a necessity. This insight led to the strong emphasis in the European Union on
Education for Democratic Citizenship. The question then arises, how shall we go about
when organizing education for democracy? What are the competencies children and
adolescents need to develop for engaging in democratic governance at local, provincial,
national, and supranational levels? What are the operational characteristics of the cor-
responding learning environments? And what are the challenges and barriers for demo-
cracy education that thwart the education for democratic citizenship in a unified and
diverse Europe? These are the main questions addressed in this chapter. In the following,
we will first deal with the importance of schools for democracy education. This focus on
schools will be maintained throughout the chapter. This is not to deny the importance
of other social institutions for promoting democratic forms of life (e.g., the family, youth
organizations). However, schools are in a particularly privileged position for teaching
democracy as will become evident in the following section. This privilege defines an
important institutional responsibility. In the subsequent sections, after describing key
competencies that can be considered essential for participating in democratic forms of
life, we will turn to important principles and practices that are suitable for promot-
ing democratic competencies in schools. Finally, we will outline major challenges that
Education for Democracy in Europe has been facing in the past and likely will face in the
future.

EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY—THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOLS

At the beginning of this chapter major initiatives of the Council of Europe and the
European Commission regarding EDC/HRE were described. Starting in the late 1990s,
these political and administrative initiatives were paralleled by increasing efforts to gain
empirically based knowledge on civic education in European countries. An important
milestone in this development was the IEA Civic Education Study (CIVED99)—a two-
phase, cross-national study that involved 90,000 14-year-olds from 28 countries, 24 of
which were European. This study, on different levels and by various indicators, docu-
mented the particular importance of schools for the process of democracy education.
It demonstrated that civic knowledge was the strongest predictor of students’ intention
to vote as adults. Schools have an important role in democracy education by teaching
about political institutions and the processes of democratic decision-making. Tradition-
ally, this has been the prevailing form of citizenship education in the past (Torney-Purta,
Lehmann, Oswalk, & Schulz, 2001). Although civic knowledge is necessary for demo-
cratic citizenship it is far from being sufficient. In the CIVED99 Study only one out of
five students indicated that they intend to participate in conventional political activities.
Democracy Education in Europe • 389

(such as writing a letter to a newspaper) apart from voting. In most countries, young people appeared to be only moderately interested in political issues. Thus, active citizenship turned out to be a rare outcome of traditional citizenship education. Those schools that modeled democratic values and practices through encouraging students to discuss issues in the classroom and to take an active role in the school life were more successful in this regard. An open classroom climate and participatory school culture was found to be a positive predictor of students’ civic knowledge and political engagement in almost all countries (cf. Torney-Purta et al., 2001). However, for many students this experience was not the norm. Only about one third of the participants in the CIVED99 study agreed that they were often encouraged in their schools to make up their own minds or encouraged to express opinions that differ from those of other students and of the teacher. Thus, even though a democratic school culture was found to be a positive predictor of two main pillars of democratic citizenship (civic knowledge and engagement) only a minority of students were able to benefit from this experience. From this perspective, the CIVED99 study pointed at an enormous untapped potential of schools for contributing to democracy education.

Schools need to teach students civic knowledge and critical thinking abilities. They often do so, more or less effectively (cf. Torney-Purta et al., 2001). However, their potential contribution to democracy education is far greater. Schools are typically the first public institution children enter in their lives. It is in the school that students experience first-hand what it means to live and work in a public institution that has a certain mandate and that is governed by formal rules and role obligations. Second, schools provide a common denominator in children's and adolescents lives. Even if students may have little in common because of increasingly diverse ethnic, cultural, and family backgrounds, they share their school experience. This experience provides a common ground for meaningful cooperation and conflict resolution. Finally, schools are always part of a larger community, as they bring together children and their parents, teachers and school staff, administrators and community members. Schools are not isolated from society. Any initiative that starts on the level of schools has the potential to reach out to the community and to impact society.

As schools are public institutions that are designed for the sake of students' learning, they are in the privileged position of teaching democracy in three different yet interconnected ways. In schools students are able to (a) learn about democracy in order to become a knowing and conscious democratic actor in (future) situations of social and political choice and decision (Rawls, 1971); they can (b) learn through democracy by the experience of participation in a democratic school community, and thus, through experience, to acquire sustainable democratic habits (Dewey, 1963, 2004); and they can (c) learn for democracy by developing democratic forms of life that reach out to local, national, or even transnational contexts (Himmelmann, 2007). Evidently, learning through and for democracy cannot be achieved simply by adding another school subject to the curriculum. It is the serious business of learning for a life of social solidarity (called social cohesion in the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education). What it aims for is a habitus of peaceful cohabitation, of diversity and participation, in a co-constructive model of social regulation. This is not an isolated skill that can be trained in a time-limited program. It is a cognitive, affective, and behavioral disposition that involves the person as a whole. Thus, learning for democracy requires fostering competencies that are key for participating in democratic forms of life. What are these competencies?
KEY COMPETENCIES FOR PARTICIPATING IN DEMOCRATIC FORMS OF SOCIAL LIFE

At this point it is useful to direct our attention to another voice claiming education for democracy in Europe and beyond, the OECD. Parallel to the Lisbon process and the Council of Europe’s policy generating the EDC/HRE program, the OECD’s group of educational experts developed their concept of key competencies for a successful life and a well-functioning society (Rychen & Salganik, 2003), to become the basic orientation for the OECD’s educational policies and performance evaluations (known as the Program of Student Assessment or PISA) across the OECD’s member states. These key competencies enable individuals to respond to complex situations and challenges, to navigate in a heterogeneous social space, to deal with differences and contradictions, and to take responsibility for themselves as well as others (Rychen & Salganik, 2001, 2003; Weinert, 2001). Thus they represent promising tools or instrumental capabilities that enable individuals to act according to the norms, and in view of the goals defined by the Council of Europe’s Charter: the norms of democracy and human rights. The OECD defined three key competencies that are taken to be instrumental for these goals:

1. The ability to interact in socially heterogeneous groups—with integration, networking, partnerships, solidarity, and cooperation the operational constructs most frequently used to define the concrete meaning attached to the process. The ability to interact in socially heterogeneous groups implies the ability to relate to others, to cooperate, and to manage and resolve conflict. It is thus a basic operational capability for action and interaction in a democratic process and for a democratically structured social world.

2. The second key competence for a successful life and a well-functioning society defined by the OECD working group is the ability to act autonomously. This implies that individuals are empowered to navigate in the social space and to manage their lives in meaningful and responsible ways to experience self-efficacy and exercise control over their living and working conditions (Rychen & Salganik, 2003, p. 91). It calls for the ability “to play an active, reflective and responsible part in any given context” (p. 91). It implies the individual’s ability to act within the big picture, that is: to think globally and act locally (p. 92), to understand the role one plays as well as the roles played by others. And this again means understanding “the rules of the game,” the social norms and moral rules that relate to the context of action.

3. The third key competence is the ability to use tools interactively—the more conventional identification of abilities and skills acquired in the course of education-for-competence processes, yet stressing their interactive use beyond the tradition: using language, symbols, and texts; information and information technologies interactively and cooperatively.

It is important to note that the three key competences described by the OECD, the ability to interact in socially heterogeneous groups, the ability to act autonomously, and the ability to use tools interactively were not initially defined as democratic competencies but as competencies individuals need for leading a successful life in a well-functioning society. At the center of these competencies is the ability of individuals
to think independently as an expression of moral and intellectual maturity and to take responsibility for their own learning and their actions. However, as these competencies stress the cooperative and interactive nature of problem-solving they can be easily translated into key competencies for democratic citizenship. The three competences that are key for leading a successful life are equally important for engaging in core democratic activities of deliberation, cooperation, and participation. Students need to learn to deliberate about different viewpoints, norms, ideas, and goals by listening to their counterparts in discussions. They need to deal constructively with diversity and difference and need to be able to solve conflicts in a cooperative and fair way. Finally, they need to be motivated to contribute to processes of democratic decision-making and to seek out meaningful opportunities of political participation. All this requires conceptual, interpretative, and procedural knowledge tools for acting democratically, that is a profound understanding of the various requirements of democratic problem-solving in different social contexts and situations.

The overall message of the OECD definition and selection of key competencies, thus, appears to be a call for a psychologically grounded and socially validated competence orientation towards achieving the goal of democracy. These competencies provide the foundation for cognitive-affective dispositions and skills that are necessary for engaging in democratic forms of life. Without these social competencies there will be no deliberation, no cooperation, and no participation as core democratic activities. The question therefore must be: How can schools organize the learning processes required to develop these competencies?

In a variety of ways all relevant skills, practices, and learning processes are experientially linked in learning communities that are embedded in a participatory school culture. Piaget described these processes as early as 1934 in his dissertation on “self-government” of children in the schools (Piaget 1934/1998). In his footsteps, Lawrence Kohlberg developed his concept of schools as Just Communities. Here, in a “scaffolding environment” (Vygotski), under “responsive conditions” (“entgegenkommende Verhältnisse,” Habermas), children will encounter “the existential and social experience” that according to John Dewey (1963) grounds a democratic form of life. First of all, this existential experience is the recognition and appreciation experienced by children and adolescents in participation processes. Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) follows logically and psychologically from the experience of being accepted, recognized, and appreciated. Responsibility (for tasks as well as for persons) follows from shared social action towards a common goal. The triple quality: recognition by others, self-efficacy, and responsibility thus is grounded in the participatory processes on which a democratic school culture is based. But none of these capabilities (Amartya Sen’s term for the competencies unfolding in social action and interaction; Sen, 1993) will develop, unless the school community provides concrete organizational arrangements for the activation of democratic citizenship practices and the social competencies that an activating school environment will typically both rely on and bring about. These include taking the perspective of the other (Selman, 1980) and engaging in discursive practices (Habermas, 1983; Piaget, 1932, 1934/1998). In order to achieve this goal, schools must work towards turning formal membership in the institution into active and motivated participation in a community. A collectively shared sense of recognition and responsibility arising from the experience of belonging to a community of purpose will transform the closely regulated life of an educational institution into a democratic school culture characterized by reciprocal
recognition, by the self-efficacy of motivated actors, and by the shared responsibility of cooperating members—the principles guiding participation in school as a moral community (Althof & Stadelmann, 2009; Kohlberg, 1986).

IDEAS INTO ACTION—SCHOOL PRACTICES FOR PROMOTING DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCIES

There is a broad range of practices that can contribute to the development of the socio-moral resources and capabilities required for the growth of a democratic school culture. Such practices, to be effective, will combine efforts and methodologies conducive to learning about democracy, to learning through democracy, and to learning for democracy. They will construct, in the classroom and across classrooms, the framework for Dewey’s “existential and social experience” that is basic to developing democratic skills and habits. Following Frank and Huddleston (2009), the opportunities for active experience of democracy in schools can be grouped into three broad categories according to the communal experience they provide. There is (a) the community of the classroom, (b) the community of the school as a whole, and (c) the wider community of which the school is a part. These three communal spaces define the “social ecology” of democracy learning in schools, similar to what Bronfenbrenner (1979) described as the ecology of human development. That is, the developing person is embedded in several overlapping environmental systems that range from the immediate setting of the classroom to the more remote context of the political culture in a given society. Each system interacts with all others and with the individual to influence the development of democratic competencies. Thus, what happens on the level of classrooms has ramifications for the school community. Creating a democratic school culture, in turn, impacts the culture in the classroom as well as the wider community. Correspondingly, practices designed to foster democratic citizenship in schools can be located on three different levels. They may focus (a) on classroom activities, (b) cut across classrooms and involve the school community as a whole, or they may (c) reach out to the wider community of which the school is a part. Ideally, democratic practices on these various levels do not occur in isolation but are meaningfully orchestrated to promote learning for democracy. Thus, students should be able to benefit from their learning on the level of classroom activities when engaging in school-wide practices, which, in turn, should enable them to participate in democratic forms of social life in their communities.

As mentioned above, a number of successful practices have been identified and described by Frank and Huddleston (2009) in a handbook with the title “Schools for Society: Learning Democracy in Europe.” This handbook was fostered by the Initiative for Learning Democracy in Europe (ILDE) of the Network of European Foundations. Support for this initiative came from the Freudenberg Foundation in Germany and the Citizenship Foundation in London within the context of the Council of Europe’s program of Democratic Citizenship Education. The handbook consists of 23 case studies that were drawn from 11 different European countries with quite diverse political and cultural histories (Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden, Turkey). The projects were arranged in five different topical sections that cut across the three categories of communal experience described above (fostering tolerance and awareness of diversity, developing civic skills and attitudes, involving the whole school community, creating a democratic school culture, engaging schools in their
Democracy Education in Europe

On the level of classroom-based activities, projects included promotion of students’ critical thinking abilities and debating skills, improving political literacy as well as cultivating *Classrooms of Difference* that aim at raising self-esteem of students from culturally diverse and socially disadvantaged backgrounds by affirming their sense of identity. On the level of schools, projects ranged from Citizenship Manifestos (crafting a short, public document that sets out a school’s vision for citizenship education), through establishing systems of peer mediation, to organizing schools as a democratic republic. In the latter case, students of a school generate a constitution, establish democratic institutions, such as a parliament government and independent courts, and hold elections regularly. Community-wide activities included projects aimed at increasing and strengthening the participatory opportunities of students in their communities, such as integrating service to the community in the school curriculum via service learning or engaging schools with their wider communities through collaborative student projects. In these community-based projects students were encouraged to identify a local problem, research potential remedies, and propose a solution presented to local authorities with the power to implement it (modeled after the US program Project Citizen). These different approaches and projects clearly vary in scope and breadth. Some of them are rather circumscribed; others are far-reaching and require fundamental changes in the administration of schools. Regardless of scope and breadth, the successful implementation of these programs requires careful consideration of the many social, cultural, and historical particularities that serve as the backdrop of any effort to promote democracy learning. Learning for democracy is not cut and dried.

It is beyond the scope of the present chapter to provide a detailed description of the many different approaches that can be taken to promote children’s and adolescents’ learning for democracy. To further illustrate important principles of democracy learning a few examples will have to suffice. These examples refer to the various communal spaces and levels of democratic activities described above (classroom, school as a whole, the wider community). On the level of classroom activities, we will describe the *Classroom Council* as a prototype of democratic self-governance; on the level of schools we describe *peer mediation* as a vehicle to improve the school culture, on the level of the wider community we will refer to *service learning* and volunteering as an effective way to engage schools in their communities.

**Classroom Council.** The classroom council (*Klassenrat*) can be considered a prototype of democratic self-governance. It originated as a discursive device developed by the French school reformer Celestin Freinet in the early years of the twentieth century with the purpose of discussing issues of instruction with the class and organizing classroom practice in the homeroom (Freinet, 1946/1979). It can be defined as a particularly effective variety of cooperative self-government as described by Piaget. In a number of schools intent on reform of instruction and pedagogy in Germany, it has since developed into a major example of democratic self-regulation within the classroom (Edelstein, Frank, & Sliwka, 2009; Friedrichs, 2009; Kiper, 1997). The classroom council is the site of collective responsibility for the life of the group. The teacher acts as a coach, rather than as a teacher monitoring the class, while the group practices self-determination regarding life in the classroom and the goals of common action.

Students meet regularly once a week at a fixed time slot to discuss issues that have been collected over the previous week. All students in the class are encouraged to suggest topics for the council meeting. However, students who want to have a particular issue...
discussed in the group typically need to find seconders. Topics may range from praising classmates for doing an excellent job, to voicing criticism and expressing a desire for changing established rules or practices. One student chairs the classroom council meeting, while other students assist the chair, for instance, by taking minutes or by managing the time. All students in the class are encouraged to take these formal roles for a predefined period of time. In the council meeting students are asked to discuss the issue at hand and to find an appropriate procedure for solving the problem. The classroom council defines rules and regulations for the class, confers about classroom projects, defines the duties of its members, their tasks, and their obligations. Votes are cast, decisions are taken, conflicts are adjudicated, and projects are planned on the basis of discussions. Various roles and tasks are carried out by elected officers or by commissions that report to the plenary assembly about their activities and efforts. Where a school assembly exists, the classroom council elects one or several delegates to represent the class in that assembly. In schools organized along participatory lines, the conference of teachers, the headmaster, and the teacher/parents council will invite student representatives elected by the classroom councils to participate and to share both discussions and responsibilities. The councils thus operate as institutions of self-government and representational bodies that train their members for participation and social responsibility, as well as for collective conflict resolution and representative government. The foundational process for all these functions is the discursive practice of the regular classroom council with all members of the class attending as voting members. The council trains participants from early on to speak and to listen; to take the perspective of the other and to assess the power of arguments; to seek and to maintain agreement and to resolve conflict fairly where agreement fails; to negotiate rules and to evaluate these in the light of experience; to plan, and to participate in collective actions and common projects. In schools that are geared to participatory schoolroom practice, the classroom council is the space of choice for instructional and institutional feedback that is likely to enhance both understanding and performance.

The practices of serving learning and social entrepreneurship in social projects can also be organized and carried out under the supervision and with the commitment of the Classroom Council. The same holds true for school-wide practices of peer mediation whose organization may be linked to the classroom councils as the responsible agency within school.

The classroom council was one of the democracy-enhancing methods adopted by the semi-federal German program “Learning and Living Democracy” (BLK-Programm “Demokratie lernen und leben”) active in 13 German states between 2002 and 2007. Although, no specific evaluation of this method was implemented to gauge its effectiveness (cf. Abs, Roczen, & Klieme, 2007), a number of publications, narrative accounts, and films have focused on it as a particularly effective device to train for democratic forms of interaction and decision-making in student groups beginning with early grade levels. Few institutional settings could be better suited than schools to develop the socio-moral competencies and individual capabilities for cooperation and reciprocity on which the development of the basic democratic virtues depend (Edelstein, Frank, & Sliwka, 2009; Eikel & de Haan, 2007; Friedrichs, 2009).

We shall now proceed to describe more closely the practices of peer mediation and projects of service learning that can either be parts of the activities of the classroom councils or take place in schools without or beyond such councils.
Peer Mediation. Peer mediation is a process of conflict resolution in which a neutral peer who is uninvolved in the conflict helps the disputing parties to reach a mutually acceptable settlement (see Rademacher, 2009). Peer mediation, as a particular form of peer support (similar to peer counseling and peer tutoring), was established in the US in the 1970s and has extended into many different parts of the world since then. As peer mediation has been widely publicized, the basic setup of this process does not need to be described here (note, however, that there are many different forms of organizing the process of peer mediation in schools; for an overview see Lupton-Smith, 2004). Peer mediation has been mostly discussed as an effective way to reduce aggression, violence, and bullying in schools. It is less known as a means for democracy education. However, conflicts are inevitable in any socially heterogeneous group. The ability to deal with these conflicts cooperatively and constructively is essential for developing and maintaining democratic forms of social life. While classroom and school councils empower students to make decisions about many school-related affairs they do not necessarily transform the power structure between individual students on the level of their everyday interaction. This can be achieved by peer mediation. As pointed out by Cremin (2007), peer mediation in schools enables students to engage in “cooperative conflicts” (Coleman, 2000). In situations of cooperative conflict, the dispute is framed as a mutual problem to be solved by both parties. This leads to minimized power differences between the disputants, and to enhanced willingness to work together effectively to achieve shared goals. Peer mediation is a way to let students take responsibility for conflict resolution. By introducing a cooperative and power-sharing approach to conflicts young people learn to engage in the vital practice of effective dispute resolution, thus improving the quality of life in school, and preparing them for life beyond the school gates (Cremin, 2007). Peer mediation can be combined with other forms of self-governance, for instance, by establishing democratic recruitment procedures for mediators, which in turn increases students’ sense of responsibility in school.

It has been often documented that peer mediation programs, if properly supported and resourced, can effectively improve the overall school climate and create an atmosphere of mutual trust (cf. Haft & Weiss, 1998). At the same time, it has been stressed that sustained positive effects of peer mediation require a “whole-school approach,” where the goal of cooperative conflict resolution is shared by the whole school community, i.e., by students, teachers, headteachers, and parents. Thus, establishing and maintaining a program of peer mediation can provide important incentives for creating a democratic school culture.

Service Learning. We shall now proceed to the third type of educational projects to serve the development of democratic competencies among children and adolescents in school. This form of project is identified by its traditional American name as service learning, in spite of the fact that it has undergone noticeable development towards a tool for democratic action in the transfer process, especially to Germany (Sliwka, 2008; Sliwka & Frank, 2004). (Also see chapter by Hart, Matsuba, and Atkins in this volume.) In service learning projects students take responsibility for the common good by addressing a social problem, working on a solution, and responding to a challenge in the community. Generally the focus is upon local problems, but students may also choose to engage in a school project in the third world or join a cooperative network designed to respond to a general environmental need. In the traditional model, service learning projects work on two fronts. On the level of practice they attempt to solve a “social problem,” e.g., helping senior citizens to cope with computers, run a soup kitchen for a poor neighborhood,
or plant trees in a living quarter while informing citizens about climate change. Simultaneously, the problem will become a topic of instruction, so that the projects combine responsibility in the communal context with social learning in school, and social action with a rational discussion of the aim and the context of action. The cooperation of a teacher (or several teachers) is, of course, essential. When this model of service learning is placed in a classroom with a classroom council, the council is recognized as the collective actor pursuing the practice of social entrepreneurship in a community context. Successful action of this kind will likely initiate strong reciprocity between the school and the community—certainly both a case of learning through experience, and of developing the socio-moral resources of democracy. The projects call for shared action, negotiation, and agreement on a common goal, rationally planning and conducting action together, a meaningful evaluation and documentation of results, and a subsequent public presentation. In sum, these activities entail participation and cooperation of the entire group. In its developed form, the project productively confronts the group with social reality. The teachers must engage in exchange with the students, by confronting a social problem with the requirements of instruction. This process requires coordination of the flow of project time with the regulated school timetable. Finally, the school is invested in working with the community. When implemented successfully, all of these elements come together as a context for democracy and individual development.

Once service learning goes beyond a specific project it is transformed into what can be called civic engagement or civic commitment, and in English may be approximately rendered by volunteering or community service. Volunteering may, indeed, be understood to transfer responsibility taken within the school to an arena outside and beyond the school. It clearly has a positive impact on many skills and capabilities that are required for democratic citizenship, in particular when students are encouraged to reflect upon their volunteering experiences (Hart et al., this volume; Krettenauer, 2006; Yates & Youniss, 1999). Obviously, the development of the capability to volunteer in the service of the community is a worthy goal of education in the schools, and training young people for thoughtful commitment to issues of public welfare is a contribution to education for democracy, where action is paired with understanding. When a classroom council engages in this kind of action, it may organize some kind of public deliberation about an issue of common concern (Sliwka, 2008). Public deliberation is a hotbed of democracy development, both individual and social. When schools engage systematically in such initiatives of civic engagement they can be seen as educating for active citizenship in the communitarian sense of the term.

We have now described three types of democracy-enhancing activities in schools: (a) the classroom council as an instrument of democratic self-regulation; (b) peer mediation as a means for improving the school culture; and (c) service learning and volunteering as a basis for developing and cultivating the competence required for community organizing and democratic action in the local community. All require, and provide in practice, the socio-cognitive and socio-moral competencies on which democratic forms of social life thrive. In the context of a democratic school culture there is an obvious advantage in granting the classroom council a privileged position as a center of action. This entails organizing and planning the social projects and volunteering initiatives of the class as an exercise in social entrepreneurship where students are trained to cooperatively and discursively practice and develop their social-cognitive and socio-moral competencies in the service of the socially desirable aims of citizenship and democratic empowerment.
CHALLENGES FOR DEMOCRACY EDUCATION

As described at the beginning of this chapter, the need for democracy education has been recognized by many European organizations and institutions. Charters have been adopted, agendas formulated, and many projects were initiated to jump-start democracy education all over Europe. There is no shortage of excellent ideas to be put into action. At this point, the question almost imposes itself: How far has Europe gone in establishing education for democracy in schools as a cornerstone of educational practice? An answer to this question is certainly not straightforward as the educational landscape of Europe is far too diverse for applying a common benchmark to all countries. Moreover, for many European countries the idea of schools as agents of democracy is still relatively new and therefore faces challenges on many different fronts. Traditionally, the school system has been organized in a hierarchical way, where students and parents have little say in running schools, and teachers are told what to teach. As a consequence, adults tend to be suspicious of attempts to develop democratic schools and teachers are reluctant to grant their students the degree of autonomy they have been denied by their school administration. Even if teachers are supportive of democracy education in their school, the existing school curricula impose considerable restrictions on them. In many European countries, the content of the school curriculum and sometimes even the teaching methods are prescribed at a provincial or national level. Training in reading and writing, math, science, computers, etc. takes up most of the time and leaves little room for any cross-curricular activities. Because of the enormous pressure to succeed in nation-wide tests, many principals and teachers feel that democratic education is a luxury they cannot afford. From this perspective, it is not surprising that a systematic study of the implementation of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) policies published in 2004 along with five regional studies (Bîrzéa et al., 2004), stated a massive “compliance or implementation gap” between EDC declarations and the practice in schools. The main support for EDC in many countries was found to be limited to formal school curricula providing a structured framework for teaching civic knowledge. This consists mostly of frontal dissemination and memory directed acquisition of information about formal procedures and the institutional setup of government in a more or less marginal time slot of the timetable in middle classrooms, usually between the ages of 12 and 16. Democracy education through participatory action on the level of classrooms, schools, and in the wider community was the exception, not the rule.

Since the publication of this report in 2004 things have improved as evidenced by the second report on Citizenship Education in Europe published by the Eurydice Network in May 2012 (Eurydice, 2012). This report captures how polities and measures relating to citizenship education in Europe have evolved since 2005, when the first Eurydice study was published (Eurydice, 2005). The study demonstrates that the majority of national curricula of European countries now emphasize citizenship education as a cross-curricular dimension of the curriculum that aims at fostering key competencies for engaging in democratic forms of life. All 31 countries that are part of the Eurydice network (EU Member states plus Iceland, Croatia, Norway, and Turkey) have introduced measures to promote the involvement of students in school governance, and half of these countries have established regulations and official recommendations for the creation of councils at the class level. However, a closer look reveals that students in these councils are mostly confined to taking a consultative or informative role. Thus, students are allowed to voice their opinions on school matters and to inform other students of decisions that are made by the school management, but...
they do not participate in actual decision-making. In around a third of European countries the involvement of students in citizenship-related activities outside the school is explicitly promoted by national curricula or other recommendations and regulations. When school principals were directly asked about civic engagement of their students in the community, responses suggest that 66.2% of Grade 8 students in European countries had an opportunity to participate in an awareness-raising campaign, and 55% took part in activities related to an environmental issue at the local level. Moreover, almost half of the students had been given the opportunity to be involved in activities related to human rights projects (47.5%) and to help under-privileged people or groups (46.6%). Activities related to improving facilities in the local community were least common in European countries (22%).

Although these numbers suggest that some progress has been made with regard to education for democratic citizenship in European countries, challenges continue to thwart the project. Both Eurydice reports from 2005 and 2012 emphasize the enormous difficulties in assessing, evaluating, and monitoring educational performance with regard to democracy education. The development of assessment methods for students’ democratic competencies that go beyond measuring the acquisition of theoretical knowledge has been identified as one of the major challenges in the field of citizenship education (Eurydice, 2005, 2012). A second major challenge is related to preparation, professional development, and support for teachers and school heads. While European countries have reformed their citizenship education curricula in response to the initiatives of the Council of Europe described at the beginning of this chapter, the introduction of related reforms in teacher education and professional development remains the exception. This failure is reflected by another sobering finding reported in the Eurydice study (Eurydice, 2012). When Grade 8 teachers of ordinary school subjects (who were, thus, not specialized on civic education) were asked about the most important aims for civic and citizenship education only 4.4% considered “future political engagement” to be an important goal. In fact, out of a list of 10 goals “future political engagement” ranked last, whereas the more traditional role of “promoting knowledge of citizens’ rights and responsibilities” was the front-runner (63% endorsement). Knowledge about rights and responsibilities is a necessary condition for democratic participation. However, as should have become evident throughout this chapter it is far from being sufficient.

CONCLUSION

The school-based institutions and processes described in this chapter appear to be potentially powerful strategies for the construction, among the young, of the socio-moral resources needed to develop and maintain democracy as a normative value and as a functional way of life. By sharing exercises of democratic participation and deliberation young people are enabled to acquire the social competencies needed to engage in democratic and social practice and to develop initiatives of their own—without expecting private profits in return. Social competencies and democratic habits thus are matched with the ability to engage in socially productive practices and commitments which help participants preserve their identities and their self-respect even when faced with the social challenges of poverty and precarious positions on the labor market. Social competencies and democratic habits are the social capital of tomorrow. And they may even contribute importantly to economic capital—as some exceptional economists like George Soros, Mohammed Junus, or Amartya Sen would believe, whose capability approach has been
important for the present argument (see Otto & Ziegler, 2010; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007), whose roots, however, derive from concepts of social cognitive development formulated by Piaget, Selman, and Kohlberg.

Democratic self-regulation and democratic projects in schools serve the development of social competencies—the socio-moral resources required for processes of democratic deliberation and decision-making, of conflict resolution, of responsible cooperation and participation. On the other hand, these competencies are essential for maintaining democratic forms of life. Democratic school cultures generate democratic habits among their members, enabling them to participate responsibly in democratic institutions as adults. The classroom council is a central device for the development of a democratic school culture. But besides its aims of preparing a democratic form of future life, the practices that characterize democratic schools improve the present atmosphere of these institutions so as to enhance pupils’ motivation and performance, and to generate a sense of belonging and empowerment. It turns out that—almost unintended—these are milestones on the path to more efficient schools.

Democratic schools are inclusive schools that foster social cohesion and successfully integrate poor children into the school community. Inclusive schools work towards integrating children of migrant origin into both the school and the social communities. Democratic schools are the best defense against the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next.

Democratic convictions thrive on experience. Nothing will contribute more to the stability of democratic ways of life and institutions than the commitment of the young generation rooted in the experience of active participation and empowerment (cf. Dewey, 1963). Whereas democratic schools are called for on normative grounds as both a consequence and a prerequisite of children’s rights, on empirical grounds and based on reliable evidence they also promise to be the better schools. All prize-winning schools selected for the Robert Bosch Foundation’s German School Award 2007 turned out to be democratic schools. However, the jury was not awarding a prize for democracy in schools. They were giving a prize for good practices, to the best schools and these happened to be democratic schools (Beutel & Fauser, 2009).

REFERENCES