



What makes schools democratic?

Ideas, tools, dilemmas, and challenges



Two sides of a coin

- Association for Democratic Education (NGO, 2011)
 - Disseminating information
 - Building networks
 - Establishing schools, communities
- Kürt High School (since 1999, restarted in 2012)
 - Private institution (foundation) with a tuition fee
 - Democratization in process
 - Alternative curriculum (2014)



A school suited for you, or what makes a school democratic?

- Structure
- Pedagogy
- Methodology



Structure



- ▶ Checks and balances, guarantees
 - ▶ Roles and positions through secret ballot
 - ▶ Branches separated (model-democracy)
 - ▶ Judicial and legislative: students, parents, teachers
 - ▶ Executive: teachers
- ▶ Decentralization and subsidiarity
 - ▶ no one-person decision at all, autonomy of agents
- ▶ Freedom AND responsibility
 - ▶ Students as group representatives and other roles
 - ▶ Chance and encouragement for participation




Pedagogy

- Inclusion
 - Students with special needs welcome, heterogeneity encouraged
 - Social support system
- Providing choice
 - Choosing subjects on their own (e.g. democracy, creative writing, self-awareness, psychology)
 - New system (2017): Freedom of learning
 - Students working on their own projects with an internal mentor can opt out from lessons



How an idea can be put into practice (the proposition is born)

- Democracy Day (2016): classes asked what they want to change in the school – anything that is not against the laws and the school's pedagogical programme
- All students vote for options (secret ballot No. 1) : one "winning" proposition (minimum % of voters and majority rule)
- Should the proposition come into effect (secret ballot No. 2)?
- "Students should be allowed to opt out from attending lessons on the condition that they carry out a project beneficial for the whole school community"



How an idea can be put into practice (designing the system)

- A working group of students and teachers (cca. 2 months, 5 meetings, 12 people)
- Accepted by the teacher's community in August and come into effect in October 2017
- Run by mixed committees (2 teachers, 1 student) on a voluntary basis
- 12 students (out of 380) have joined the system, all applications accepted
- 3 milestones built in plus mentoring
- A specific result/product at the end of the project period



Pedagogy

- ▶ Raising awareness (thematic days)
 - ▶ Democracy Day, Tolerance Day, Physical and Mental Health Day, etc.
- ▶ Aiming at relationships based on equality
 - ▶ Language and attitude



Methodology



- Cooperative forms of teaching and learning
- Percentages instead of grades
- Detailed written feedback twice a year
- Point system: no negative feedback, gamification
- Evaluation of teachers by students
- Non-formal education (thematic days)



Dilemmas, challenges

- ▶ How to improve participation?
- ▶ How to handle hostile outside environment?
- ▶ How to democratize even more?
 - ▶ Move towards optional lessons
 - ▶ Move towards more participatory processes vs representative ones
 - ▶ How to address and involve the less wealthy?