

Learning and Teaching Package 2

Teacher Professional Learning

Foundations for teacher educators, primary and secondary school teachers.

Teacher Academy Project
DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION
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LTP 2 focuses on strengthening teachers' capacities as reflective practitioners emphasizing the role of deep reflection and inquiry in promoting continuous learning and improvement. Its aim is to provide methodologies and strategies for the future use of all other LTPs within teacher education systems. It builds on the principles of teachers' professional learning for inclusive and democratic school cultures.

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1. Why Teacher Professional Learning for Democratic Citizenship Education?

The improvement of any educational system relies heavily on high-quality professional learning opportunities. Teachers are important agents of educational change and continuous improvement of their knowledge, skills, approaches and tools is necessary for systematic planning, effective implementation, and evaluation of their actions.

The necessity of supporting teacher professional learning in Democratic Citizenship Education (DCE) is driven by:



- **Social Changes:** Adapting to increasingly multicultural societies and educational challenges created by social, institutional and educational changes.
- **Educational Innovations:** Implementing new curricula and managing complex, unpredictable classroom environments.
- **Professional Growth:** Addressing the evolving needs that arise throughout a teacher's career.
- **Student Impact:** Teachers' professional learning is linked to opportunities for supporting students' wellbeing, active participation and learning.

However, not all professional learning leads to meaningful change. A purely technocratic approach - focused only on acquiring new techniques - may fail to challenge existing practices or improve students lived experiences. *Transformative professional learning requires reflection, collaboration, and critical inquiry*.

For example, teachers observe that several students underachieve and they invite an expert to learn more about teaching methods and evaluation processes. They expect that after this in-service teacher education, they will apply the new knowledge in practice, hoping for better results.

The following questions can help in **reflecting upon the process of choosing this form of professional learning and its possible effectiveness:**

A. Questioning the decision of how to foster professional learning

- **Was the decision** to learn more about teaching and evaluation methods **made after an inquiry into the reasons** causing students' underachievement? Were **contextual factors** such as students' learning biographies as well as

societal challenges related to students' living conditions taken into account in shaping the content of the professional learning needed?

- Were **students' or/and parents' opinions and proposals** about school achievement purposefully sought out to consider their perspectives in this problem-solving situation?
- **Were the teachers' existing resources (knowledge, experience, prior practices etc.) considered** in a collaborative knowledge construction process of decision making?

B. Questioning the effectiveness of this form of professional learning

- **Is** professional learning simply about acquiring new knowledge? How easy is it to **put new knowledge into practice** and **align it to the specific school / classroom context**?
- How can we be sure that the new knowledge will **challenge teachers' existing knowledge, assumptions and practices** rather than reproduce them?
- How can we be sure that the new attained knowledge will lead to **meaningful changes in students' achievement and learning experiences**?

Thus, as the primary supporters of educational change, teachers must possess not only the specialized knowledge, skills, and tools required but also **a critical consciousness of what needs to be changed and *how***. Especially, regarding the relation between DCE and teachers' professional learning, it is important to assist teachers in **deciding about the focus, process and ways of teachers' professional learning related to the key dimensions in Democratic Citizenship Education** (DCE) such as participation, equity, social justice, human rights, and critical thinking.

This initially means that **professional learning**:

- ✓ has an orientation to support a democratic school culture, democratic values and practices. For example, when a school faces problems with many conflicts among students or observes the effects of social inequalities to students' underachievement, it is important to know **how to proceed collaboratively in problem solving and involve students themselves or/and parents**, as members of the school community, in finding solutions that are aligned to a democratic school culture.
- ✓ is **a participatory process** during which teachers have an active role and are not mere recipients of knowledge transmitted by experts.
- ✓ is promoted through **a social and collaborative process**. The establishment of professional learning communities (PLCs) to support learning in which all community members feel respected, share trust and solidarity, participate and

decide based on dialogue and reflective inquiry is crucial to enhance professional learning practicing the democratic values it preaches (Durrant et. al., 2000· McLaughlin &Talbert, 2006· Stoll, et. al., 2006).



Learning Objectives: By the end of this foundational package, participants will be able to:

- ✓ **define** key terms and core dimensions of Teachers' Professional Learning in relation to Democratic Citizenship Education (DCE).
- ✓ **critically understand, design, and implement** pedagogical approaches and practices that promote participatory teachers' professional learning *about, through* and *for* democracy.
- ✓ **use and adapt a variety of inquiry and reflective tools** that support both professional learning as well as the school as a democratic community fostering knowledge, collaboration, inquiry, experimentation, reflection and continuous improvement.

2. How do we define teacher professional learning in TAP-DCE?

Teacher's Professional Learning is a continuous, context embedded process where teachers develop knowledge, skills, and practices to improve student learning (King, 2014). It is a process in which learning occurs in **collaboration with others** (Timperley et al., 2007), based on teachers' systematic, intentional investigation into the school context and their own practice by asking questions and testing new approaches - to make informed improvements.

Teacher professional learning is a complex process (Opfer & Pedder, 2011) involving the cognitive and emotional engagement of teachers in learning and transforming their knowledge into practice, in collaboration with the other members of the school community. It requires inquiry and reflection on beliefs and practices (Kennedy, 2014) and can occur through various formal and informal structures depending on the educational context and specific needs.

School as a professional learning community (PLC)

The professional learning community is defined as a form of **school culture** that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, authentic, continuous, and focused on the critical examination of educational context and practices, aiming at improving school life and learning outcomes (Seashore, Anderson & Riedel, 2003).

PLCs are expected to promote fundamental systemic changes and serve as a mechanism for change and transformation of school culture (Stoll et al., 2006).

The core components of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model center on a shared dedication to students' social, emotional, and academic growth. To achieve this, team members foster a highly collaborative culture focused on continuous reflection, data-driven instructional updates, and professional development.

Thus, PLC is based on:



- Shared goals focused on students' well-being and learning
- Continuous inquiry and reflection
- Collective responsibility
- Supportive collaboration

Teacher Inquiry

Teacher inquiry refers to the systematic, intentional investigation by teachers into the school context and their own practice, aimed at understanding and improving teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

For example, teachers as members of a PLC can inquire into the needs that arise from institutional and educational factors affecting their school context, explore the reasons for the problems / issues they face at school and how to solve them and evaluate the effectiveness of their implemented design. Additionally, individual teachers can inquire into their own teaching, for example by collecting evidence, asking questions, and testing new approaches—to make informed improvements.

Thus, inquiry involves:



- ✓ Asking questions about teaching as well as school practices
- ✓ Collecting evidence
- ✓ Testing new approaches
- ✓ Reflecting on results

Teacher Reflection

Reflection is a deliberate, critical process of examining experiences, beliefs and practices to gain deeper understanding. It involves an 'act of critically exploring what you are doing, why you decided to do it, and what its effects have been' (Mertler 2014).

Reflection is closely linked to **the inquiry of practice**. This means that reflection is about using the results of inquiry to rethink previous assumptions and practices and be critically conscious of what needs to be improved and why. To support the transformative role of reflection (Zeichner & Liston, 2014), teachers need support to bring the unconscious aspects of their experience to conscious awareness, thereby making them available for conscious choice.

Reflection involves:



- ✓ Questioning assumptions and practices
- ✓ Understanding reasons for problems
- ✓ Evaluating outcomes
- ✓ Improving future actions

3. Frameworks for Teacher Professional Learning in TAP-DCE

This package utilizes three core frameworks to guide democratic practice. All frameworks are based on similar main positions and methodologies that can be presented as follows:

- Teachers act **as researchers and reflective practitioners**, become active members of the school community and agents of change.
- **A methodology of acquiring information and evidence** regarding a problem/situation that puzzles the teachers to understand what needs to change and why, or to evaluate their practice is common in all approaches.
- **Collaborative reflection** is crucial for a critical and conscious understanding of the current situations and design of practice.

Framework 1. The Whole School Approach (RFCDC)

This framework focuses on **five stages for integrating democracy into school life** (Council of Europe, 2018). These are:

1. **Analysis of the current situation:** Identification – with the participation of all stakeholders – of how the principles of democracy and human rights are integrated into school life.

2. **Designing a plan for change:** Identifying potential areas where change is possible and developing an action plan with concrete activities needed to be undertaken to achieve these changes.

3. **Implementation of the action plan:** Implementation of the plan involving the school community

4. **Evaluating** the progress and assessing the impact of the implemented plan.

5. **Reflection and evaluation:** Sharing the results with all stakeholders and possibly with other schools and planning further actions.

The benefits of a **whole school approach to teachers' professional learning** are that democracy is not taught only in lessons but **embedded in the entire school culture as a collaborative process of knowledge creation and problem solving**.

The diagram below represents the stages:

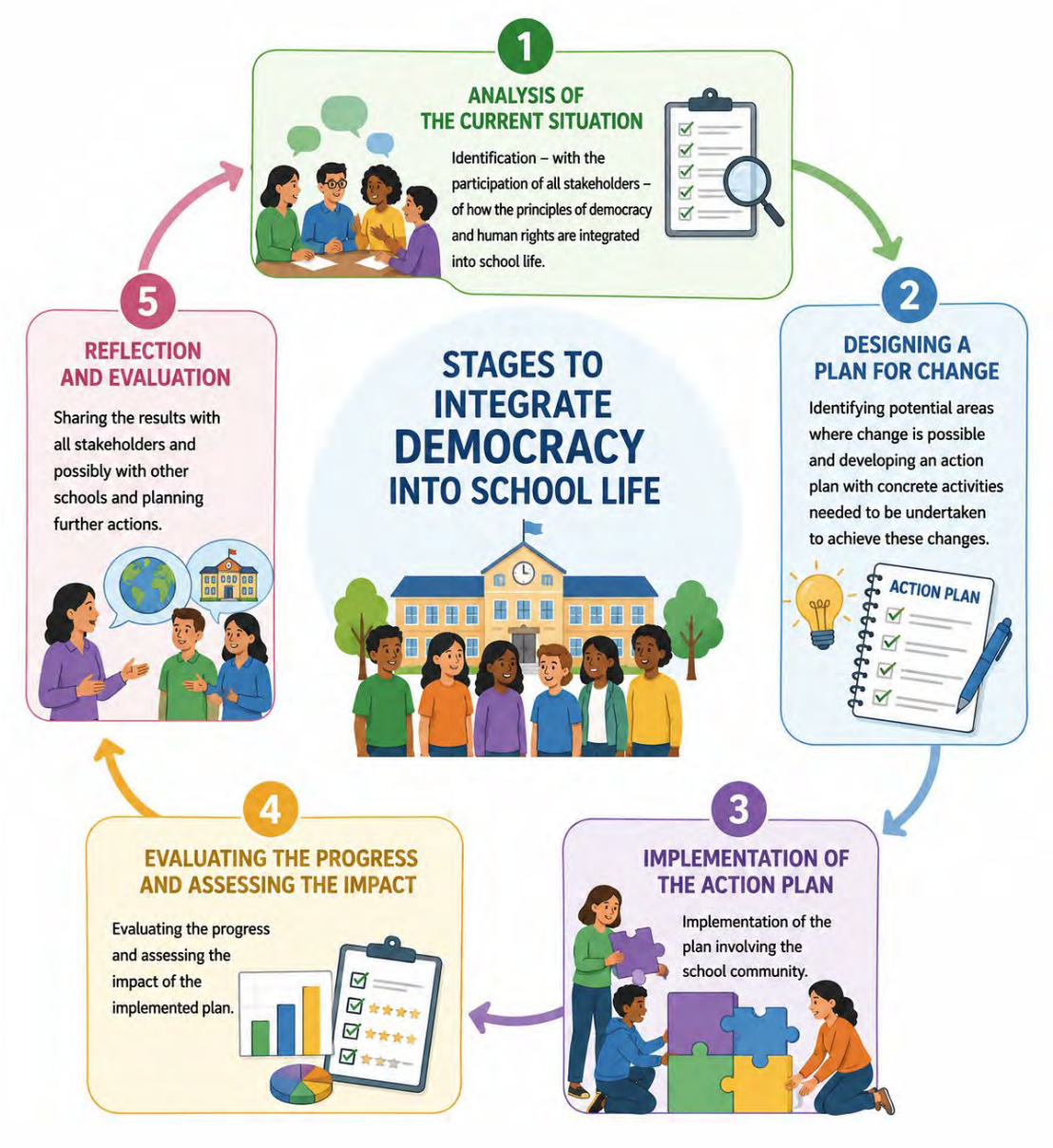


Figure 1: Stages to Implement Democracy into School Life, created with ChatGPT

Framework 2: Action research as continuous cycles of inquiry and reflection

Action research is **a structured way for teachers to learn from their own practice** by identifying a problem and its reasons, trying out a change, collecting evidence, and reflecting on the results to improve teaching (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Mc Niff, 2013).

Therefore, in action research teachers systematically study their own practice to improve it through cycles of inquiry, planning, acting, observing, reflecting, replanning and so on as follows (Avgitidou, 2020):

Inquiry → Reflect → Plan → Act → Observe → Reflect → Replan and so on.

The benefits of action research are that it is:

- Ongoing and embedded in practice (not separate training)
- Driven by teachers' own questions
- Based on evidence from the school or/and classroom
- Focused on improvement and reflection

It empowers teachers to become producers of knowledge, not just users of external expertise.

Framework 3: Professional learning community

This framework views professional learning as a democratic practice itself. Teachers act as researchers, active members of their school, local or/and European communities, and agents of change who co-construct knowledge in collaboration with each other rather than merely consuming it (DuFour, 2005· Hadar & Brody, 2017).

PLCs can provide social and structural conditions for professional learning if they are supported by facilitators who foster good relations, trust, communication and collaboration as well as inquiry and reflective processes in knowledge construction (Kansteiner, et al., 2024).

PLCs support:

Collaboration

Dialogue

Shared problem-solving

Continuous improvement

PLCs are essential for sustaining democratic practices and transforming school culture.

4. TAP-DCE Methodological Roadmap for Teacher Professional Learning

A five-step cyclical framework is proposed to enhance Democratic Citizenship Education through **continuous participatory professional learning.**
The process begins with *critical awareness and consciousness*, where educators assess their school environment and integrate student perspectives to align with democratic values. Next, teachers engage *in participatory design to create collaborative action plans* followed by *an observant implementation phase* that remains flexible to immediate feedback. The model emphasizes an evaluation of progress to identify successes and refine strategies before sharing results with the broader community. Ultimately, this infinite learning loop illustrates that professional growth is an ongoing journey of reflection and redesign rather than a singular event. **This spiral structure** ensures that each completed cycle informs a new stage of higher consciousness and improved educational practice.

The 5-step model is shortly presented as following:

Step 1: **Critical Awareness & Consciousness:** Conduct a needs assessment to understand your local context and explore priorities or beliefs. Align these with democratic values and amplify student voices by collecting their opinions. Discuss the external and internal factors that influence the current school situation and detect possibilities of change.

Step 2: **Design Based on Inquiry:** Decide what needs to change and why. Describe the specific goals of your new practice. Collaboratively plan the "what, when, and by whom" (Participatory Design) and establish evaluation indicators to track progress.

Step 3: **Implementation:** Move from design to action. Be observant and maintain flexibility to modify the plan based on real-time classroom interactions.

Step 4: **Evaluation of Progress:** Use pre-designed tools (e.g. surveys, observations) to analyze what worked and what needs improvement. Share these findings with the community for further feedback.

Step 5: **Continuity of the Spiral:** Feed the results back into a new stage of critical awareness and consciousness. This "Infinite Learning Loop" ensures sustained professional growth.

The following infographic visualises this five-step cyclical framework designed to enhance Democratic Citizenship Education.



Figure 2: Spiral Model of Professional Learning for DCE, created with ChatGPT

Specific Actions and Relevant Inquiry and Reflection Tools for each Step

Step 1. Critical Awareness & Consciousness

The **Critical Awareness & Consciousness** step (Step 1) is vital because it establishes the foundational understanding and ethical alignment necessary for the entire **Spiral of Professional Learning**. Its importance can be broken down into three key functions:

1.1.Understanding the Local Context

It requires educators to conduct a needs assessment to explore the specific issues, priorities, and existing practices within their own classroom or school environment. This ensures that any subsequent professional learning or intervention is relevant and grounded in real-world needs. Initially, all teachers and other school professional (such as psychologists or social workers) complete an inquiry tool (for example, though a google form). The questions can be open-ended for a more in-depth understanding of teachers' concerns or close-ended for an easy description of the different needs / concerns teachers may have. After completion, some of the teachers may undertake the analysis of this information to find commonalities or differences that will lead to the identification of school priorities or/and clarify the problems that need to be solved. The following tools can be adapted by schools and teachers to fit their needs.

Inquiry tools:

Needs analysis based on open-ended questions

- What do you find the biggest difficulties / challenges in your classroom?
- Why do you think these exist?
- What do you find the biggest difficulties / challenges in your school?
- Why do you think these exist?
- What would you like to change?
- What do you propose for this change to happen?
- What kind of support do you need to make these changes happen?

Needs analysis based on a rating scale

This is an indicative tool with close-ended statements that teachers can choose to rate on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much) what concerns them most and think it needs attention in their classroom/school. Teachers circle the number that represents the intensity of their concerns (from 1 to 5).

I am concerned with:

- Staff relationships 1 2 3 4 5
- Relationships with school management 1 2 3 4 5
- Relationship among teachers and students 1 2 3 4 5
- Relationships among students 1 2 3 4 5
- Relationships with parents 1 2 3 4 5
- Students' misconduct 1 2 3 4 5
- Students' low attainment (if you wish you can add specific school subjects at the end of this sentence) 1 2 3 4 5
- Teaching (you can add specific subjects or what concerns you at the end of this sentence) 1 2 3 4 5
- Teacher burnout 1 2 3 4 5

In some cases, initially **identified problems may show only the tip of the iceberg**. It is therefore important to *support a further inquiry into the specific school context to understand better what is going on, why and what needs to change /improve*. The following reflection questions can enhance such a critical awareness of the need for further inquiry.

Reflection tool:

- ✓ How sure are we about the problems /challenges we face and their reasons?

- ✓ Who will we need information from to better understand the reasons for these problems?
- ✓ What will we ask them and why?

1.2 Alignment with Democratic Principles

This step uses democratic values as a lens to evaluate inquiry results. By utilizing tools like the proposed "Democratic Values in Action" reflective tool, educators ensure their goals are explicitly aligned with **Democratic Citizenship Education (DCE)** principles from the very beginning. The statements of the "Democratic Values in Action" reflective tool has been constructed based on the Booth & Ainscow (2002) Index for Inclusion and the RFCDC values and whole-school approach (Council of Europe, 2018).

Inquiry tool for teachers: Democratic values in action

Statement	**Existing actions/practices that make this statement true**	**Further actions needed**
Our school tries to eliminate any kind of discrimination across all school operations and school life.		
Everybody in our school feels welcome.		
Our students learn how to respect people that are different from them.		
Teachers co-operate in the design, implementation and evaluation of teaching and learning.		
Our school's priority is to do the best to overcome the barriers for learning by all.		

Students' evaluation contributes to improving students' performance.		
We purposefully seek for students' and parents' participation in decisions about school matters.		
Discipline is based on a consensus on democratic values, participatory decision making, mutual respect and commitment by all.		
School problems such as school violence are dealt with immediately. Solutions are designed based on dialogue and consultation by all.		



In essence, this step is important because it transforms passive observation into an active, value-driven inquiry that informs the design and implementation of all future steps in the cycle.

1.3. Inclusion of Stakeholder Perspectives

It **prioritizes amplifying students' and parents' voices** by collecting their opinions and proposals. This allows teachers to reflect on the commonalities or differences between their own perspectives and those of the community, ensuring the educational process is inclusive and collaborative rather than top-down.

Before asking students' opinions and proposals, it is important to look inward and reflect if the teachers are ready to share power with the students (or/and parents) in decision – making. This reflection is an important part of DCE and teachers' professional learning since DCE in practice requires dismantling traditional power hierarchies, moving the school community away from passive student listening toward genuine, transformative power-sharing.

Reflection tool: Inclusivity and the Mechanics of Power

- **Inclusivity:** How do we ensure participation is not a privilege of the "high achievers"? What specific adjustments allow students of all backgrounds and abilities to express their opinions and proposals?
- **Power Sharing:** In which specific matters do student voices change a final decision? Are we truly willing to share the power to decide collectively?
- **The Master Reflective Prompt: What holds us back?** Teachers should explicitly document staff disagreements or fears regarding the loss of traditional control.

Student participation is one of the main democratic features of school operation. After teachers' reflection, student inquiry prompts can be used to assist in understanding the students' lived experience and their proposals for improvement.

To understand the school governance and culture through the eyes of the students, we must *move beyond satisfaction surveys toward inquiries into justice and agency*. The following are indicative inquiry tools that can be adjusted by teachers.

Inquiry tool - Student Interview/Survey Prompts

- What do you like best in our school?
- What do you want to change, and why?
- What do you propose for this change to happen?
- Describe one or more situations in which you felt injustice or discrimination.
- What needs to change in order to remove feelings of injustice or/and discrimination?
- What do you propose for this change to take place?

In addition, the Democratic values in action for teachers' inquiry tool can be shaped accordingly for students based again on the Booth & Ainscow (2002) Index for Inclusion and the RFCDC values and whole-school approach (Council of Europe, 2018).

Inquiry tool for students: Democratic values in action		
Statement	**Existing actions/practices that make this statement true**	**Further actions needed**
In my school I feel welcome - It does not depend on who I am to feel accepted and included in the school.		
My school is an inclusive and justful environment.		
In our school we learn how to respect people that are different from us.		
Our teachers encourage us to help one another and co-operate.		
The teachers do all that they can to support our learning and progress.		
Our teachers frequently ask for our opinions/proposals and take them into account in school decisions.		
Our school makes every effort possible to solve problems such as school violence.		

Accordingly, parents' perspectives can be sought out to collect information from all school community's members.

Inquiry tool for parents: Democratic values in action		
Statement	**Existing actions/practices that make this statement true**	**Further actions needed**
I feel welcome at school - It does not depend on who I am to feel		

accepted and included in the school.		
The students learn how to respect people that are different from them.		
The teachers help all students to learn.		
Our school's priority is to do the best to overcome the barriers for learning by all.		
My opinions and proposals for school matters are considered.		
The school does every effort possible to solve problems such as school violence.		

Step 2. Design Based on Inquiry

Teachers', students' and parents' voices influence the design phase (Step 2) by providing the initial data and perspectives that shape the intervention's goals and structure. This influence requires firstly **a reflective analysis** and **synthesis of different perspectives** and proposals and, secondly, **a collaborative process of participatory planning** of the "what, when, by whom, and in which context" specific actions will be designed.

The following tool can assist in this process **related to informing goals with student proposals.**

Reflective tool: Teacher Analysis & Synthesis Section

Instructions: Once data is gathered, compare student proposals against teachers' ideas and proposals as well as against existing school policy to identify immediate changes needed versus long-term structural changes.

- **Agreement and Consensus:** Do we all agree on what we like or dislike? Do we all agree about what we believe should change and how? What does this tell us about the different "realities" existing within the same school?

- **Specificity of Change:** How specific is the proposed change? Is it a vague complaint or a concrete proposal for action?

- **Effectiveness and Democratic Alignment:** Can we be sure that these proposals for action will be effective? Is the proposed change in accordance with democratic values, **and why?** (Define the democratic principle - e.g., equity, liberty, or solidarity - that justifies the change).

- **Collective Accountability:** What do we need to decide for cases where someone breaks the agreements we have made together?

By including especially students' voices, the design phase moves beyond teacher-led planning to a collaborative effort aimed at fostering democracy in the classroom and school.



Democratic inquiry must result in tangible shifts in school life. Use this framework to move from **"voice" to "action**," using high-stakes issues - such as **school conflicts** - as a catalyst for change.

Strategic Planning Steps

1. **Identify Effective Proposals:** Review the inquiry data to select proposals that address root causes. (e.g., If students identify school conflicts as an issue, look for proposals that address the "why" of the conflict, not just the "what").

2. **Establish Democratic Agreements:** Draft clear, co-signed agreements regarding school function and conduct. These are not "rules handed down," but "contracts made together."

3. **Implement Collective Accountability:** When agreements (e.g., those regarding school conflicts or bullying) are broken, move away from arbitrary punishment. Decide on responses rooted in **restorative justice**, focusing on

how the broken agreement can be repaired and how the community can maintain its democratic integrity.

In the **Design Based on Inquiry** phase (Step 2**), evaluation indicators** are established through a structured process intended to measure the success of the new practices / action plan. This process involves:

Designing Specific Criteria: Educators create clear benchmarks or standards that will be used to judge the progress and impact of the action plan.

Selecting Tools: This involves determining the specific methods or instruments—such as surveys, observation logs, or reflection tools—that will be used to gather data.

Identifying Participants: Educators decide which stakeholders (such as students, parents, or colleagues) will be involved in providing the information necessary to measure progress.

These indicators are designed to collect information both **during and after implementation**, ensuring that the teacher can track real-time impact as well as final outcomes. This groundwork allows for the structured analysis that occurs later **in Step 4**, where pre-designed tools are used to determine what worked and what needs further improvement.

Step 3. Implementation of the Action Plan

During the **Implementation of the Action Plan**, educators move from design into practice, focusing on real-time observation and adaptation. According to the sources, this phase involves three core activities:

Continuous Reflection: Educators are encouraged to be **observant and reflective**, maintaining a high level of awareness while they act. This allows them to reflect on their practice in the moment to better understand its immediate impact on the classroom.

Operational Flexibility: It is crucial to **maintain flexibility** during this stage. This means remaining open to modifying the original action plan based on immediate observations and the unique, sometimes unpredictable, interactions that occur within the school context.

Active Feedback Seeking: Implementation is not a solitary process; educators should **seek immediate feedback** by actively receiving suggestions from both students and colleagues. This collaborative input is used to refining the approach as it is being carried out.

Step 4 Evaluation of progress

Using the evaluation indicators and processes decided in Step 2, teachers collect information and reflect using indicatively the following areas to determine progress:

Reflection tool:

- **Alignment with Democratic Values:** Progress is measured against **democratic values and practices** within a whole-school approach (please see **"Democratic values in action"** reflective tool proposed in Step 1).
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** A key indicator of progress is the **feedback and suggestions** received from **students and colleagues** during the implementation of action plans.
- **Voice and Participation:** Evaluation involves analyzing **commonalities or differences** in the opinions and proposals of **teachers, students, and parents**. The inclusion of **students' voices** is particularly emphasized as a critical data point.
- **Contextual Improvements:** Progress is gauged by identifying what has been successfully **changed or improved** in relation to the initial goals of intervention and the needs assessment conducted in the school or class context.
- **Effectiveness of Actions:** Evaluation tools are used to analyze **what worked well** and identify specific areas that still **need to change or improve**, which then informs the redesign of the action plan.
- **Reflection on Practice:** Progress is also tracked through continuous **observation and reflection on practice** during the implementation phase, allowing for flexibility and adjustments based on real-time interactions.

Based on the above areas, teachers reconsider their aims or/and practices and re-plan them, if needed, according to the progress made.

Step 5 Continuity of the Spiral

Ultimately, this step is part of an **"Infinite Learning Loop"** where inquiry, reflection, design, and action are constantly feeding back into each other to support sustained professional growth.

In the **Continuity of the Spiral** (Step 5), the focus shifts from a single project toward **sustained professional growth**. This phase ensures that the learning process does not end with a single evaluation but instead evolves into an **"Infinite Learning Loop"**.

During this phase, the following occurs:

Feeding Back into Critical Awareness: The results from the previous steps—specifically the inquiry, reflection, design, action, and re-design—are fed back into a **new stage of critical awareness**. This means the cycle begins again, but at a higher level of understanding, informed by the practical experience gained in the first iteration.

Establishing a Continuous Cycle: Professional learning is framed as a **continuous cycle** rather than a one-time event. It involves a constant sequence of inquiry, reflection, design, action, and re-design that allows educators to adapt to changing classroom needs over time.

Commitment to Ongoing Improvement: This phase emphasizes that Democratic Citizenship Education (DCE) is an **ongoing journey of improvement**. By institutionalizing this spiral approach, educators ensure that democratic practices remain dynamic and responsive to the community

5. Challenges and Prerequisites for Supporting Teacher Professional Learning for DCE

There are several challenges that can be presented in the following categories. You can use this list to reflect on the specific challenges valid in your school.

1. **Structural Barriers**

   - Available time for collaboration and reflection
   - Rigid and overloaded curricula
   - Bureaucracy in school administration and educational processes
   - Heavy workload
   - Material conditions (lack of infrastructure) (Carr-Hill et al., 2018· Veugelers et al., 2017).

2. **School Culture**

   - Competitive culture due to teacher evaluation or lack of good staff relationships
   - Detachment / lack of commitment due to burnout or disappointment
   - Lack of democratic leadership

3. **Pedagogical Barriers**

   - Traditional teaching approaches (Sanal-Erginel & Kuter, 2023).
   - Focus on transmission rather than participation.
   - Resistance to change.

4. **Knowledge Gaps**

   - Lack of knowledge and skills for inquiry and reflective based practices or limited experience with inquiry and reflection.
   - Lack of knowledgeable and experienced facilitators of professional learning communities.

5. **Beliefs and Mindsets**
   - ➢ Dominant beliefs about the role of school, teachers and students emphasizing transmission and compliance.
   - ➢ Viewing students as passive.
   - ➢ Emphasis on control rather than participation.

Reflecting upon the previous challenges can assist teacher to shift from:

- ✓ Individual blame to **Relational and systemic understanding.** Moving from blaming individuals to understanding the socio-economic and institutional causes of school problems is an example of a systemic understanding.
- ✓ Deficits to **Strengths and participation.** Creating trusting environments where decisions are based on inquiry, evidence and shared decision-making in problem solving is an important shift from feeling unable to make a difference.
- ✓ Passivity to **Agency and responsibility.** Setting priorities using the "Whole-School Approach" and taking small, sustainable steps empowers teachers to proceed to small, achievable changes.

Possible Supportive Mechanisms

Effective support includes:

- ✓ **Collaboration with colleagues and the development of a professional learning community** (Sancar et al., 2021· Tuerah, 2025)
- ✓ **Use of methods and tools that enhance inquiry and reflection** (van Vijfeijken et al., 2024)
- ✓ **Adequate time for reflection and dialogue** (van Vijfeijken et al., 2024).
- ✓ **Continuous, systematic and long-term action plans/professional development programs** (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).
- ✓ **Supportive school leadership** (Tuerah, 2025).

✓ **Continuous support, guidance and feedback from facilitators and experts** (Sancar et al., 2021).

The following practical strategies can assist you in your professional learning journey:



- Start from **real problems** in context.
- Focus on **small, achievable steps.**
- Build **trust and shared responsibility among all school members.**
- Use **guided reflection.**
- Involve **students as partners in problem-solving.**
- Strengthen the desire and trust that **you can make a difference / a change with others.**
- **Promote awareness** of contextual barriers but also ask to **detect margins / spaces for taking action.**

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