

RFCDC Teacher Reflection Tool:

The self-reflected democratic practitioner –

A journey to democratic teacher ethos and a democratic culture in school

Part I. Introduction

- Do you experience challenges related to bullying, prejudice and discrimination in your school?
- Would you like to see your students cooperating more and competing less?
- Do you feel that you are not always reaching out to your students in classroom interaction?

If these questions sound familiar to you, this self-reflection tool might be the right companion for you.

If you are interested in what democracy in school is actually about and what this has to do with yourself and with your professional teacher ethos, we invite you to follow us on a journey towards the development of and reflection on your own competences for democratic culture.

The qualities we need to contribute to a democratic school culture are not something you learn once, but something which constantly needs to be developed, maintained and adjusted in new situations and contexts. Each encounter with students, colleagues or parents brings new opportunities for interaction, cooperation and learning – as well as new challenges and possible conflict. It takes a lot from a teacher to realise the potentials for learning, cooperation and personal growth and to solve the challenges in constructive and respectful ways. Often the way ahead is through trial and error, and failure is therefore a part of that process, a part of becoming and being a “good teacher” (Biesta 2015; Larivee 2000). And it is a part of what we call a democratic teacher ethos.

Democratic knowledge, democratic attitudes, democratic skills and democratic values as outlined in the model of the [Council of Europe’s Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture](#) (RF CDC) play an essential role in the development of a professional teacher ethos, which builds on the values of democracy and human rights. Teaching democracy and human rights in order to be credible and sustainable needs a teaching environment based on democratic principles, including a democratic attitude of teachers, participation of the learners in the learning process, and not least the ability to critically reflect on and adapt your own teaching activities.

So, this tool is for you if you would like to develop on a continual basis democratic professional ethos and competences, under conditions that are not always favourable. It will help you structure your work according to democratic competences, using the reflective circle of planning – doing – reflecting – adapting. While this slows you down during the reflection phase, it ultimately increases your speed for improving your teaching activities and your pedagogical practice in general.

CDC are not only relevant for the educational sector, but also democratic culture in general. The [20 competence elements in the CDC model](#) and the related [descriptors](#) can help us to reflect on our how we do things, how we interact with people, how we cooperate and how we solve conflict. Developing CDC is a personal development.

However, CDC is most relevant in the context of education. Teachers and other educators have a massive impact on learners as significant others, role models and facilitators of learning processes and are far more than transmitters of knowledge. Educators can support learners in becoming

independent thinkers, good co-operators, and self-confident participants in dialogue, discussion and decision-making. They can support learners in becoming active citizens.

As a “democratic teacher” you are required to be much more than just “good” in your subject. It requires a lot of what CDC is about: the ability to listen to learners, colleagues and parents; openness to the cultural affiliations and practices they bring into the educational process; empathy and a sense of responsibility for the well-being and empowerment of all learners, to name but a few.

A teacher’s way of teaching and interacting has an important impact on the classroom climate and the individual’s learner’s well-being and achievements. These aspects of the professional practice can be learned and systematically developed.

Pedagogical professionalism is a matter of constant development and, thus, depends on the ability and willingness for self-observation and self-reflection (Schoen 1983, Bailey 2001). This is even more evident when it comes to the development of democratic and inclusive learning environments. Carr and Kemnis (Carr, Kemnis 1986, 2005) underline, that democratic change can only be reached through continuous and collaborative reflection on practice. In this context, the teacher’s professional development is at the same time a personal development: a democratic teacher wants to examine their own democratic attitudes; they want to question their own methods and learn from their interactions with the learners. The mental step back and the changing of perspectives enables us to analyse and change our own strengths and weaknesses and to further develop our professional democratic competences. From this perspective, self-reflection can be understood as the intensive examination of one's own learning and teaching processes with regard to CDC. This directly links to the [Council of Europe’s EDC/HRE Charter](#), which states, that “teaching and learning practices and activities should follow and promote democratic and human rights values and principles” (section 5.e) ([see also RFCDC, vol. 1, p. 17](#)).

Purpose of this tool

The purpose of this tool is to accompany teachers and multipliers in this process and in their work with the Council of Europe’s Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)¹. It can be used as a starter to get acquainted with the RFCDC but can also be seen as a very general companion to self-reflection on teaching and democratic competences. This tool can guide you and structure your journey of exploring and developing your role and practice as a teacher, while allowing you to decide how much time and effort you wish to spend on it.

The teacher reflection tool addresses all practitioners at all levels (in-service and pre-service; acquainted or not acquainted with RFCDC) and can be used on an individual basis, as well as a basis for group or peer reflection.

Education for democracy and inclusive education need both reflective practitioners and a reflective school culture. This tool aims at giving teachers the impulses for self-reflection, which in turn form the basis for a reflective school culture.

A school culture based on self-reflection can use many methods and tools, including observation, peer feedback, group reflection in the team of teachers, communities of practice etc. This tool can be

¹ You can download the three RFCDC volumes from the relevant [website](#). For the purpose of the self-reflection tool, [Volume 1](#) “Context, concepts and model”, and [Volume 3](#) “Guidance for implementation” (Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment, Teacher education, Whole-school approach, Building resilience to radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism) are especially important.

combined with all of these methods and can easily be integrated in larger school development processes.

This material is published as one of the tools that support implementation of the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) in schools. It also supports the Council of Europe's efforts to build a European network of democratic schools; by focusing on the teachers' competences and on their professional ethos, it acknowledges the importance of teachers for the whole-school system. In order to enable the best possible synergies between the different Council of Europe initiatives, the tool was aligned with the six major themes of the Council of Europe's "Free to Speak, Safe to Learn – Democratic Schools for All" project. These themes represent both central preconditions for democratic culture in education as well as challenges which need to be solved in democratic ways. You can select the topics which seem to be closest to your own interest or most relevant in your own context, or you can discover new aspects of democratic education while working through all the modules.

Before beginning the modules in part IV, we recommend you try one or all of the steps in part III for familiarising yourself with observation and self-observation, but these activities can be done at any point.

Structure of the tool

Part II: Discovering the model of competences for democratic culture

This section provides you with an introduction to the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). For readers who are not yet familiar with RFCDC we strongly recommend you begin with this section and then proceed to Part three in order to familiarise yourself with observation and self-observation under the CDC.

Part III: Warming up –familiarising yourself with observation, reflection and self-reflection on CDC

This section makes you more familiar with the exercise of observation and self-observation and how the CDC descriptors can support your personal and professional development. The section will start with exploring everyday situations in which you may use your competences for democratic culture. It continues with reflection on your strengths as a democratic teacher and how to develop them as an ongoing process. In a last step, the section turns to the "hot moments" in a teacher's life; situations you find challenging and in which you do not feel that you live up to your own standards as a pedagogue and person. With the help of CDC and the descriptors, the section will guide you through a reflection on how to solve such "hot moments" in more appropriate ways.

Part IV: The modules

This chapter provides you with six reflective modules following the focus themes of the Council of Europe's project "Free to Speak, Safe to Learn – Democratic Schools for All". The modules can be done in any order; each module is a separate, independent unit.

1. Making children's and students' voices heard
2. Addressing controversial issues
3. Preventing violence and bullying
4. Dealing with propaganda, misinformation and fake news
5. Tackling discrimination
6. Improving well-being at school

Each module follows the same structure, which allows you to get familiar with the specific topic and come to conclusions how to improve your respective competences.

- A brief introductory section to each topic shows the relevance of the issue in the school context, links to the field of CDC and opens the floor with some guiding questions for reflection.
- A ready-made scenario that allows for analysis and comparison with your own teaching practices can be used as a warm up and for becoming acquainted with the specific topic.
- In a next step, you will be guided through a reflection process on your own teaching activities and projects.

The tool can be used on an individual or peer-to-peer basis. It also enables collective reflexion processes of the entire staff of a school. It can support and empower you in any condition regardless of your experience or of how far you have come on your journey to create a democratic school.

Further reading and links:

Bailey, K. M., Curtis A., & Nunan D. (2001). Pursuing professional development: the self as source. Toronto: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

Biesta, G. J. J. (2015). How does a competent teacher become a good teacher? On judgement, wisdom and virtuosity in teaching and teacher education. In R. Heilbronn & L. Foreman-Peck (Eds.), *Philosophical perspectives on the future of teacher education* (pp. 3–22). Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

Larrivee, B. (2000) Transforming Teaching Practice: Becoming the critically reflective teacher, *Reflective Practice*, 1:3, 293-307, DOI: 10.1080/713693162

Schoen, D. (1983): *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*, Basic Books, New York.

Zembylas, M. (2003). Interrogating “Teacher Identity”: Emotion, Resistance, and Self-Formation. *Educational theory*, 53(1), 107-127.

Resources:

Council of Europe (2017) *Reference Framework Competences for Democratic Culture (Vol. 1.–3.)*. Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture/home>

The Coaching and Self-Reflection Tool for Competency in Teaching English Learners

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Publications/el/Coaching_Tool_for_Competency_in_Teaching_English_Learners.pdf?la=en

Making Teacher Reflection Meaningful

<https://www.educationworld.com/making-teacher-reflection-meaningful>

Reflection Tools in Teacher Education Classes: An Analysis of Implementation in Online, Hybrid, and Traditional Environments

www.tojet.net/articles/v14i2/14217.pdf

Ontario College of Teachers: A Self-Reflective Professional Learning Tool.

<https://www.oct.ca/-/media/PDF/A%20Self%20Reflective%20Professional%20Learning%20Tool/EN/SPE%20Self-Reflection%20Brochure%20EN%20ACCESSIBLE%20WEB.pdf>

Teacher Self-Assessment Tools (ref RFCDC Vol III/pedagogy)

<https://www.tesol.org/docs/default-source/new-resource-library/symposium-on-student-empowerment-4.pdf>

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