

Performing an Assembly - Theoretical Background

School is a place of democratic education. The motto “Living at school together” refers to participation by means of talking together, being actively involved in school development, and taking part in decision-making. Cooperation and being there for each other are fundamental aspects of the school community whereby the strengthening of the individual is focused on as well. The necessary basic democratic competences such as moral awareness, judgement and opinion-forming are gradually initiated and trained with the pupils.

In terms of content, teachers in Austria are given a particularly broad legal framework (RIS 2021a). Here, the legal positioning of democratic education in the school context becomes particularly apparent. The curriculum shows that not only the content of the lessons should be characterized by values of democratic education, but that the students should also be enabled to participate in the lessons and their preparation as well as in the organization of everyday school life in an age-appropriate way. The students should not only be "educated" to democracy, democracy should be "exemplified" in everyday school life. In the sense of social learning, the goal is "joint responsibility of all for all". This applies in the classroom when helping to create a lively school community and serves to understand other large social structures, such as the community, the federal state and Austria as a state in Europe. The curriculum contains, for example, the following topics related to democratic education: "Finding, recognizing and adhering to rules for living together", "Understanding the need for rules and regulations in larger communities", "Recognizing and assuming tasks within the class or school community, taking advantage of opportunities for co-determination" and "Participating in democratic decisions in the classroom (in school life)" (RIS 2022e).

Since 1978 democratic education in Austria in the form of a teaching principle has been made compulsory for all types of schools, grade levels and subjects by a fundamental decree. All teaching principles have in common that they cannot "... be assigned to one subject or a few subjects but can only be mastered in an interdisciplinary way." Democratic education content is not only reserved for the teaching principle of political education; it also plays a role, for example, in the context of media education, intercultural learning and education for reflexive gender education and equality (RIS 2022e; BMBWF 2022).

In didactic terms, Krammer's competence structure model of civic education is a prerequisite for the enactment of civic education as a teaching principle in Austrian schools (Krammer 2008). Empirical studies like the ones conducted in van Deth's project "Demokratie Leben Lernen" show that the development of political awareness and political socialization already begins in the early years of childhood (van Deth 2007).

Performing an Assembly can be classified under the following didactic principles.

- *Action orientation in the lifeworld of students (inductive approach):* Starting with a concrete example from the life reality of the students and moving to the general abstract.
- *Honest participation instead of faked or simulated participation:* True participation implies being able to exert real influence and to take on responsibility.
- *Transfer of power from teachers to students:* The transfer of responsibility and relinquishment of personal influence is associated with a loss of power on the part of the teacher. Teachers must become aware of this loss of power, accept it, but at the same time establish clear boundaries and emphasize to the students the increase in power that this entails on their end.
- *Comprehension of meaning and maturity instead of subject knowledge and imitation:* As a superordinate goal, the political autonomy and maturity of the students must be taken into account in the planning and implementation of lessons. The focus does not lie on retrievable factual knowledge, but rather on providing students with working knowledge for developing their competencies (Dewey, J. & Oelkers, J. 2011; Krammer 2008).

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With the support of the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

The creation of these resources has been (partially) funded by the ERASMUS+ grant program of the European Union under grant no. 2019-1-DE01-KA203-005003.

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