

## **Participatory school leadership as a form of responsible citizenship education**

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### **Abstract**

Decreasing participation, especially of younger generations as active citizens in community, elections and civic life is a worldwide phenomenon. Participatory practices in schools, engaging parents, children, teachers, and others are effective for school stakeholders to experience active citizenship in a safe environment, as well as the consequences of opting out of decision-making. Both parental engagement and child participation also have a direct positive effect on the learning outcomes of the children and also support the lifelong learning of parents and teachers. In the framework of some successful European transnational projects the necessary training, mentoring, and coaching frameworks for teachers, parents, children, and other stakeholders, as well as methods for school innovation for participatory leadership were developed and piloted, and in some cases upscaled. They have been accompanied by research-based policy advocacy. This paper presents recent research supporting this as well as evidence-based solutions and their impact.

### **Introduction**

A very recent study commissioned by the European Parliament (Deželan, 2023.) highlighted again the accelerating decline in youth participation in democratic processes. It emphasizes that traditional political parties seem to be unable to provide young people with answers to their concerns. It also highlights that there are new, emerging forms of democratic and political participation that require young people to have higher skills levels in the field of democracy and citizenship than earlier generations. The study is calling for revamping civic education with a much bigger emphasis on participatory methods. The need for more appropriate citizenship education has been high on the European political agenda since the early 2000s and the European Council identified it as a main means to prevent radicalization and in general young people turning to extremist ideologies and parties.

Student and parent organisations have long advocated for participatory decision making in education at all levels – from European and national policy making to daily decisions at school or class level. This demand has only become more topical after the school closures of 2020-22 when the problems of education systems became more visible to parents and also for students. For many, the need to attend formal education became questionable. Parent organisations have long argued

for engagement and participation, and to make school a safe testing field for democratic citizenship skills.

Based on examples such as democratic schools, participatory school boards in different countries and other methods providing opportunities for children and young people to learn democracy by doing, this paper argues for changing the main trend of civic/citizenship education from learning *about* to learning *by doing*. For this to happen, we need to understand the attitudes of various stakeholders, to analyse teacher skills and teacher training from this angle, and to evaluate existing practices for impact and implementability in various contexts.

In the context of this article, the notion of school leadership is used in its current broad context that includes various leadership activities from school leading to learning leadership (Fullan, 2023.)

### **Recent research**

The world has been facing a global learning crisis (World Bank 2018.) even before the school closures that has a number of surprising, but shocking characteristics. It is not only about children with no access to school anymore, but about those who do attend formal education, even receive some kind of school leaving certification, but do not acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills, not to mention other skills necessary for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. School has little to do with real life which is a multifaceted phenomenon. First of all, school curricula are often overcrowded with skills and academic content that is outdated and without consensus on why they are necessary to teach and learn. School is also often sheltered from the outside world meaning that it provides little support and skills development in the field of everyday life situations – present and future – especially for those whose parents are less able to provide such necessary education at home struggling with aspects of everyday life themselves.

At the same time, there is a consensus that there is a need to change as quality, inclusive education is one of the keys to sustainable development worldwide. This is defined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and education has a highlighted position being given number 4 as an SDG. (United Nations 2015.) There is also a growing consensus on the changing role of school and education that necessitates a change of approach from educating obedient workers for the assembly line to educating creative, critical thinkers for a robotised world.

By now there is a full consensus about the fact that meaningful learning is not confined to schools (rather real learning often only happens outside of school), while nearly all countries are still trying to find ways to acknowledge, build on, evaluate, and certify learning happening in nonformal and informal settings. In 2015 the UNESCO published Rethinking Education calling for the world to change its approach to the organisation and governance of education based on treating it as a common good

rather than a public one. It is a major move towards not only re-thinking, but also co-thinking about education. Education as a common good implies that the state is still responsible for offering adequate financial provisions for education as all countries are obliged to do so by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but the organisation and evaluation of education are based on an active citizenship approach, understanding that quality education is the responsibility of all, but it also makes a lifelong learning mindset necessary as everybody in this framework is a learner and an educator at the same time.

Since 2020, the Brookings Institution has carried out large-scale research on the expectations of parents as the responsible people for their children's education and that of teachers as well as the perception of teachers about parental expectations. While some of the research outcomes have already been published, Parents International is currently performing research in European countries that have not been studied earlier. The research measures how important the different actors – now including students themselves – consider the following four main goals of education: gaining academic/subject knowledge, preparation for the labour market, social-emotional learning, and citizenship education. Even in the most academic outcomes centred areas, all three stakeholder groups have a clear preference for the citizenship and social-emotional learning domains (at it is gaining even more momentum after the so-called Covid-period). However, there is a clear mismatch not only between these expectations and curricula, but also what teachers think about parental expectations. In nearly all countries researched teachers think parents have a preference for academic knowledge and preparation for the labour market – due to a lack of proper communication and collaboration.

Parents International has carried out global research in 2020 (Salamon, 2020.) that led to the New Education Deal – Parents First initiative. It was carried out in a period when it was proven that parents, families, and schools can share the responsibility for schooling needs – with some families in need of more external support – but they do not necessarily wish to do so, and they have every right to leave this with schools. However, this research reinforced the message that families will only opt for rather than out of school if their expectations towards schools are met. There is a major trend in some European countries, mostly by parents with lower levels of education who realised that what is happening to their children at school is not in their best interests, to opt out of the school system, but it is a trend that should be stopped or at least decreased.

The above global demands make it necessary for the teaching profession to change and for teachers to see themselves as facilitators of learning and not as sources of knowledge anymore. Teachers play a crucial role in acknowledging and curating child agency (Baraldi et al. 2023) and provide fora for

school students to exercise it. This change also means that teachers should understand and prepare for their role in supporting parenting and supporting parents in general to become better educators of their children as well as more active citizens, starting from school contexts (EEPN 2021.). This also requires a lifelong learning mindset on the teachers' side, an urge to constantly develop their professional knowledge and skills. A comparison of studies on skills levels of teachers and the general population clearly shows that teachers often lack citizenship skills as well as necessary collaborative and communication skills. The EEPN 2021. studies also show that while there is a wide offer of citizenship skills development programmes and methods, deep diving into available programmes has hardly found a handful of initiatives that are aimed at teachers' skills and competence development.

It is of crucial importance that school should open up on the one hand allowing education provisions to be linked with real-life challenges – not restricting it to immediate labour market needs, but the necessity to educate responsible 21st century citizens who understand how to navigate in current and future realities – that means inviting external players into the classroom and the school in general, especially since they are more likely to have the necessary skills and experiences than teachers. On the other hand, 'school' needs to leave the building and provide guided learning opportunities for their students as well as the community in venues like parks, community centres, businesses or even homes. A high number of inspiring practices have been collected on open school practices in the Open Schools for Open Societies Horizon2020 project, many of them citizenship activities. In the PHERECLOS Horizon project, an analysis of successful STEM initiatives was conducted and one of the most frequent common elements of success was active citizenship practices.

After implementing experiential learning methods for over four decades, a meta-analysis study of over 13 thousand scientific publications (Burch et. al, 2019.) has proven what educators have been seeing and feeling for decades: students learn far better if they can experience curricular content rather than just learning about them. Deželan (2023.) emphasises the role of school as a venue for political participation and the impact of learning democracy by doing there.

There is a need to mention two factors beyond teachers in establishing parental engagement and child participation practices and finding solutions for the need to change schools. Legislative frameworks should be in place that makes it necessary for schools to engage parents and also the students themselves in all procedures. There are countries that regulate student and parent representation in main decision-making bodies, such as school boards. Other systems oblige the school to seek the opinion of parents (and students) and in certain topics (e.g. choice of school books, time of holidays, election of school head) the school's decision is not valid without such an opinion. Some countries give parents (and students) veto rights in certain areas. This in itself will not ensure meaningful

participation. Extensive research done in 23 European countries on participation (Salamon-Haider 2015.) clearly uncovered a pattern that it only provides for structures and thus participation is often restricted to formalities. This is a dangerous trend as schools that only wish to tick the boxes will find ways to involve 'tame' parents, resulting in representation of white middle class only in decision-making structures.

This is the reason why the other important factor is the school leader / principal in implementing inclusive participatory structures at school level. Research (Salamon-Haider 2015.) shows that there is no school system in Europe that forbids school leaders to engage parents and students, so inclusive participatory practices can be implemented even in systems where there is no legislative requirement for that. An equally important task for school leaders is to change existing practices in school boards, parent committees and similar structures to provide engagement opportunities for all students and teachers. It depends on the school leader most of all if existing formal structures become meaningful or not. For a short period of time the driving force behind such changes can be a small group of committed parents, but for lasting changes the school leader needs to take a lead in this field, too. According to very recent research (Kelly 2019. and Salamon 2019.) school heads understand the importance of collaborating with parents and engaging students, but they have little professional help in doing so. Ken Robinson in his 2018 book *You, Your Child and School* provides inspiring practices, mostly from the United States, but he also makes it clear that there are no recipes, local solutions must be found understanding the context of that given school, and thus it is the task of the school leader.

Parental engagement and student participation are practical examples of active citizenship, and a perfect training field for present and future active national or global citizens, where they can experience and experiment at a low-risk environment. Teachers also need to look at engagement as an active citizenship practice and support their students and their parents in it. Often, teachers need to approach their own active citizenship as a field where they need more conscious approaches and even training. In short, teachers also need to be active citizens of their own school. Parent-teacher-student collaboration is also a good opportunity to experience the impact of non-participation opting out, but also to learn that active citizenship includes active bystandership. Thus, parent engagement and student participation are very closely linked with citizenship education – and this link needs to be made clearly for all.

Citizenship education is one of the areas identified as important by all critiques of current education systems. However, there is no consensus on how provisions are to be organised and how to identify learners and educators in this domain. Recent developments in the world clearly show that even in

countries with a long-standing democratic tradition have serious knowledge and competence benefits in this field in the general population (Harari 2018., Snyder 2018.) So far, the prevalent approach to citizenship education has been the inclusion of the domain in the curriculum, and thus creating the framework for learning ABOUT citizenship and democracy.

Parents organisations in Europe have demanded a learning-by-doing approach (EPA 2015.), to make it part of school culture. In an ideal case, citizenship education starts at a very early age, at home, but given the general levels of democratic practices schools need to play an important role here. As it is not only students who need to embrace this culture of democracy; school has a responsibility to educate parents and teachers in this field (Robinson 2018.). Meaningful engagement in decision making is an important tool for this. Becoming responsible citizens can be a natural process that can be systemised and structured as a knowledge and skills set later in school life for all students. Israel has a well-established tradition of democratic schools, but in most cases these schools only engage students themselves in school decision-making. While it is a major achievement, the engagement of parents is also an imperative.

For definition's sake, let us identify the most important features of democracy. Contrary to general belief and colloquial discussions about it, democracy is primarily not about freedom, but trust and responsibility (Harari 2018.) The general discourse usually focuses on active citizenship, and when it comes to day-to-day practices it discourages many that they do not wish to become candidates in elections, they don't generally take action in most situations. In citizenship education we have two major tasks that need to be highlighted as often neglected areas, but ones that schools can easily offer experience in for students, but also for teachers and parents. One is that school is a safe environment to experience citizenship, including experiencing the consequences of opting out of decision-making. Another field is the education towards and appreciation of active bystandership. Active bystanders are aware of news, trends, event, their active citizenship may not exceed exercising the right to vote, but they are conscious that there might be instances when they need to become active, eg. by participating in a demonstration or boycotting a product.

In an ideal case both parents and teachers act as trainers, counsel for students in becoming active citizens. The key is to trust in children from an early age, but not overburdening them with decisions and helping them making informed choices the consequences of which they have to live with. My personal favourite example of early citizenship education is when your 2-year-old insists on having lemon ice cream. You know he does not like it; you advise him to opt for chocolate, his favourite, but if he insists on lemon, you buy it and – this is the key for citizenship education – make him eat it regardless the tantrum thrown.

In the past decade or so citizenship education started to focus on citizenship in the digital age or active digital citizenship. It is the Council of Europe that has done substantial work in the field with recommendation for promoting the development of digital citizenship education and the role of collaboration among various stakeholders, including the for-profit sector was developed by a working group that one of the authors is a member of. It was adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2021.

It builds on the work of academic experts such as Janice Richardson, Sonia Livingstone and Brian O'Neill and tackles the need for education in 10 digital citizenship domains. The 10 domains are grouped into 3 areas: Being online (related domains: access and inclusion, learning and creativity, and media and information literacy), Well-being online (related domains: ethics and empathy, health and well-being, and e-presence and communication) and Rights online (related domains: active participation, rights and responsibilities, privacy and security, and consumer awareness) Our Council of Europe expert group also defined the necessary competences for democratic culture in order to safely navigate the 10 domains. This is represented in the butterfly below. It should be obvious for the reader that on the one hand these competences need to be developed in and outside of school, but also that the overwhelming majority of both parents and teachers need competence development for becoming active digital citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is also clear from literature that in the context of the school and the teachers-parents-students triangle, professional educators have a crucial role in empowering both parents – primarily as educators - and students. For this, it is crucial to investigate the role of parents and their engagement with schooling. The role parents in developed countries are expected to play in their children's schooling has changed significantly over the past 20-30 years expecting parents to be engaged acting as "...quasi-consumer and chooser in educational 'marketplaces'" and "monitor and guarantor of their children's engagement with schooling" (Selwyn 2011). Research evidence (Harris and Goodall, 2008, Desforges & Abouchar, 2003) also shows it clearly that parental involvement results in better learning outcomes and school achievements for young people. This makes it imperative to involve parents in schooling and this approach has gained widespread political traction in many European countries.

However, defining what is meant by parental involvement/engagement in schooling, the kind of interactions and methods most likely to benefit children, the role and responsibility of players, especially that of parents, teachers, and school leaders, remain somewhat complicated. Politicians, researchers, schools, teachers and parents' groups and children are yet to settle on shared definitions or priorities that sometimes lead to confusion. Although often presented as a "unified concept" parental involvement/engagement "has a range of interpretations, which are variously acceptable or unacceptable by different constituents" (Crozier, 1999). Different stakeholders often use this fact in a

way that leads to power struggles and tensions between different stakeholders, and sometimes also lead to some kind of a 'blame game'. As Harris and Goodall's 2008 study of parental interaction in schools illustrates, whilst parents were more likely to understand their involvement as support for their children and children, in turn, saw their parents as 'moral support', teachers viewed it as a "means to 'improved behaviour and support for the school'" (Harris and Goodall 2008). This may lead to a void between expectations of schools towards parents and vice versa.

Epstein's (2002) classification has been widely used in establishing a typography for parental involvement with school. It is important to take note of the fact that Epstein goes beyond the notion of involvement or engagement in learning of the individual child, but rather introduces the notion of partnership schools that are governed based on a mutual, balanced appreciation of home and school that has a major impact on establishing participatory leadership structures. This definition is the fully in line with our approach to tackle parental engagement as active citizenship. Epstein's Framework defines six types of involvement, *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community*. It is important to state that these types have no hierarchy whatsoever, although they are often seen by some schools and teachers as levels of different value and formulating unfounded expectations towards parents whose need for engagement is different (Hamilton 2011.)

Goodall and Montgomery (2013) have argued for an approach that moves interest away from parents' interactions with school generally and back to a more specific focus on children's learning. They make a key distinction between involvement and engagement suggesting that the latter invokes a "feeling of ownership of that activity which is greater than is present with simple involvement" and propose a continuum that moves from parental involvement with schooling to parental engagement with children's learning. This approach includes the recognition that learning is not confined to school and the importance of supporting the learning of children inside and outside school. This approach can be particularly important in the case of parents (and of course children) from ethnic minorities, with low levels of education (and bad experiences with their own schooling) or those facing economic difficulty who, research has shown, are more likely to find involvement in school difficult but who nevertheless have strong commitments to their children's learning.

Goodall (2017) urges for a paradigm shift towards a partnership that is based on the following principles formulated on the basis of reimagining Freire's banking model of education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century's reality:

1. School staff and parents participate in supporting the learning of the child



2. School staff and parents value the knowledge that each brings to the partnership.
3. School staff and parents engage in dialogue around and with the learning of the child
4. School staff and parents act in partnership to support the learning of the child and each other
5. School staff and parents respect the legitimate authority of each other's roles and contributions to supporting learning"

This approach is also in line with the distinction made between involvement and engagement with regards to school in general, especially with regard to ownership. In the classification traditionally used by parents' association (Salamon 2017), based on Epstein, parental involvement in school means that the school and teachers initiate that parents join certain activities that are mostly aiming at the better working of current structures of school, while engagement is based on the partnership principles and implies that the school leader, teachers, parents, students and, if necessary, other stakeholders jointly take action for establishing practices and procedures based on the initiative of any of them. In this framework of definition parental involvement in school corresponds to the tokenism levels (informing, consultation and maximum placation) while parental engagement with school corresponds to citizen power levels (partnership, delegated power or citizen control) on the Ladder of Participation (Arnstein, 1969).

The two approaches, engagement with children's learning and engagement with school has the common feature of ownership, and with time parents' active citizens should become active bystanders even if only focusing on children's learning, having enough insight to act as active citizens if a situation making intervention necessary arises.

According to Kendall et al. (2018) these frameworks acknowledge the complex, dynamic nature of relationships between parents, school and children and offer open meaningful opportunities for dialogue and re-negotiation of roles and responsibilities, but they may not go beyond questioning traditional paradigm of home-school relations. Re-imagining home-school relations need to be based on reflection on the purpose of learning, of school and going beyond the immediate and often narrow priorities based on testing and other policy accountabilities (Grant, 2009). Grant goes on to suggest, many parents may choose, quite reasonably, to invest in insulating the boundaries between school and home life seeing "part of their role as protecting children from school's incursions into the home and ensuring that children socialise, play and relax as well as learn", and this is the underlying thinking in home-schooling and unschooling movements gaining momentum (Robinson 2018). This also gives us reasons to explore reasons of non-involvement or low levels of involvement with schooling when

designing any intervention on parental empowerment and reimagining parental engagement as active citizenship. This is a result of the above-mentioned phenomena in the global learning crisis (World Bank 2018) that requires a paradigm shift engaging parents in the rethinking process. The only way to ensure equity and inclusion in school is to co-create an offer that answers correspond to and reflect on the needs of each individual child.

Several reports and studies (eg. OECD 2012, MEMA 2017) confirm that significant obstacles still exist in the educational pathways of children with a disadvantaged background in the educational systems of the EU Member States. This is accompanied by an increase of intolerance and xenophobia in most EU Member States.

At the same time successful, mostly local, or municipality-level initiatives show that there are effective solutions for these issues that are best tackled together. Some countries have implemented effective national policies for inclusion in education (eg. Austria, Germany, Ireland), but none have introduced a systemic approach to vulnerable parents' inclusion.

The research carried out in 23 European countries (22 EU members and Norway) by the authors in 2015 and again in 2019 was originally aiming at finding correlations between the direct costs of education (costs not covered from taxpayer sources, but burdening family budgets directly) and the legislative provisions related to the participation of parents in decision making related to school activities and processes with some focus on decisions that have a direct impact on family budgets. While the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union reinforces the UNCRC regulations by obliging EU member states to offer education free, there is no country among those we worked in that has these provisions in place.

The first part of our research focused on school practices and school cost realities, so they do not reflect on legislative provisions. In the second part of the research, we also examined legislative frameworks and their implementation on decision-making levels. This may mean the level of government or the level of a region or municipality, respondents were asked to refer to the level where decisions are made in their countries. As this greatly varies in countries in Europe, this was the most meaningful way of asking our research questions. Respondents were experienced parent representatives and policy makers with a solid understanding of the situation in their school and country.

The research was done using two separate questionnaires, one on school costs and one on parental engagement/involvement in decision making. These were sent to national parent organisations in the target countries, and they were invited to provide answers based on their national realities. All

questionnaires were followed up, thus we managed to receive answers for all countries we wanted to include. The subjects were asked to detail their answer so that we could differentiate between school levels and types. We also collected as much legislation text translated to languages we speak (English, German, Hungarian) as possible, and during the analysis phase we also double-checked answers whenever it was possible with legislative texts.

For the school costs research, we worked together with the European School Student Union, OBESSU and some experienced parent leaders to cover all costs that are school-related. By this we meant such costs that do not normally occur if a child does not go to school but compulsory/absolutely necessary if they do. This includes school material (books, stationery, etc.), special clothing (for sport, for hands-on activities, uniforms), parental financial contribution to school activities (eg. entrance tickets, room rent), costs of school activities that fall on parents (eg. photocopying), necessary extra tuition and getting to the school. Putting together this questionnaire happened with the participation of parents with experience at different school levels and countries.

For parental involvement, we were interested in the first place in how the voice of parents is delivered in all aspects of school life given that parents are the ones schools are accountable to and whose needs should be taken into consideration. At the same time, we were also exploring how parents are involved in decisions about schooling and schools, at legislative and budgetary levels. While most of the questions were objective, and were verified through analysing legislation, we were also interested to have the opinion of parents whether a legally regulated involvement form is a meaningful one (meaning that decision makers actively seek and rely on parent opinions) or if it is a formality (meaning representatives, often chosen by the school leader from among the “tamest” parents tick the box by having a representative present, but do not actively encourage meaningful input)

In the analysis phase, we cross-referenced the two questionnaires, making separate analyses for different school levels and types (pre-primary/primary/lower and upper secondary; state/church/private). We also took it into consideration if schooling at the given level is compulsory in the country or a choice of parents how they educate their children. We were also interested to see cultural patterns, similarities and differences depending on schooling traditions, and our assumption that this is a factor was verified by the research.

It is interesting to note that while 58% consider school to be free in their countries, and in-depth analysis has shown that in reality the case is very far from it. While it is school budget that parents have the highest percentage of say in with 56% having consultative and 16% decisive role, when it comes to the choice of teaching material (books, tools, etc.) only 32% is consulted and 8% has an impact on decisions. At the same time 75% of parents pay directly for compulsory stationery, 42% pay

for workbooks and 17% for coursebooks. 29% of parents must pay directly for material for practical activities such as special paper, wood, metal, 67% are obliged to buy necessary IT equipment from family budgets that also needs investment in 63% of the cases on software. There is no country where compulsory sport equipment is not paid from family budgets and 2/3 of parents also pay directly for other kinds of working and protective clothes. These percentages show the total of parents that surely pay themselves, for others there are local provisions to a certain extent, so school costs largely depend in many countries on where you live. These high numbers should indicate that parents are involved in decision making, but practice does not prove this requirement.

When it comes to active participation in decision-making, the other area where parents are mostly involved is creating school rules with 28% having decision-making powers and another 52% are consulted. It seems that parents are considered to be competent with regards to school meals in most countries, so 60% are consulted and another 8% also has decision-making powers. However, while parents are mostly involved in this field, only 50% of parents pay for meals.

The picture is less bright when it comes to professional matters in education. Only 8% of parents have decisive power over curriculum and 4% over teaching programme contents with 40% and 36% respectively are consulted. In only 20% of the cases parents are even consulted in the recruitment, evaluation, and dismissal of teachers, while 8% have decision-making powers and 32% are consulted when recruiting or dismissing the school leader. Our research was conducted in 2015 in 23 countries, but the same trends were reported in the research on careers of teachers and school leaders in the European Education Policy Network (Kelly 2019. and Salamon 2019.)

When it comes to school student representation, it is present to a certain extent in 19 of the 23 countries and only in secondary schools in the other 4 (Netherlands, Spain, Liechtenstein, Slovenia), but our research did not go into detail about their extent and form. Student representation is only present in 3 countries up to national level and a total of 7 countries up to municipality level. In only 28% of respondents reported proportionate representation of key stakeholders (parents, teachers and students) in decision making related to school in general (Hungary, Austria, Germany, Norway, Netherlands, Lithuania, Estonia) .

On the level of government in 60% of the cases there is no parental representation on government level, and even if there is, it is not equal and proportionate. This was reported in only 32% of cases. In 56% percent of the cases the government is not obliged to involve parents and other stakeholders in decision-making, and in 52% of the cases parents are not consulted about the financing of education. Only 8% of countries offer decision-making powers to parents in relation to national curricula and another 50% is consulted in some form. When it comes to the organisation of the school year and

defining school holiday times, 52% of countries do not even consult parents, while 12% of countries offer parents decisive power in this with 4% of them giving parents the right to veto. Overall, 48% of governments are obliged to involve parents in decision making in some areas, but only 24% of respondents reported meaningful participation, the other 24% is just a formality.

Looking at the full picture it is not only clear that schools and governments don't find it important to consult parents in issues that directly concern them, but it is also clear they do not understand the importance of parental involvement and engagement as a form of active citizenship.

### **Selected research-based practices**

All successful projects and initiatives in the field of parental involvement include an element that helps to overcome language/vocabulary barriers and also support the inclusion of the parents themselves in society. However, successful, long-term engagement programs often build on the acceptance of differences in languages and culture made visible in school settings.

Another type of program that is in place in many local contexts is aiming at raising cultural awareness and create mutual understanding by that. Inviting parents into school settings to introduce their home cultures create more trust in school. This is especially important in the case of parents who have low levels of education themselves. It is often necessary for school staff to leave their comfort zone and the school premises for successful outreach to parents with migrant background.

The most successful and sustainable programmes (e.g. SEAs or Schools as Community Learning Centres) tackle the whole community as one, consider language and cultural differences, but offer a holistic solution.

There are two main aims of parental involvement/engagement that were explored in inspiring practices and related literature. One is the engagement of parents in the learning of their own children for better learning outcomes, the other is engagement in school life as a form of active citizenship. The second, broader approach necessarily includes the first one, parents engaged in school life also understand the importance of learning and support their own children more. At the same time, it must be mentioned that deeper engagement in your own children's learning can be successful without more engagement in school, especially if the intervention is aiming at parents' understanding of learning processes, their role as primary educators and the fact that school plays only a minor role in the learning of children.

Inspiring practices in some cases focus on a certain narrow target group, for example parents of a certain nationality or level of education, while others have a more holistic approach, targeting all

migrants or all parents that are generally difficult to reach and engage. Inspiring practices collected during the needs analysis period show that successful models are transferable from one target group to the other, e.g. Roma programmes and migrant-centred ones often use very similar methodologies.

Recommendations and methods developed in Includ-ED as well as FamilyEduNet, building on methodology developed in the Include-ED project and partnership school's methodology offer a useful universal source that OSD can build on. It supports an approach, where all interested parties participate in designing and implementing inclusion activities. It tackles both sides of parental engagement – in learning and in school life.

Parent Involvement 3.0 is a useful general handbook to help teachers and school heads understand the importance and possible tools of parental involvement. The methods suggested can be implemented by school leadership even in systems, where school autonomy is on a low level.

Schools as Community Learning Centres is an initiative that is very much in line with current polity trends, but implementing it needs full school autonomy and a school leader committed to it. However, even individual teachers may be able to implement certain aspects building on local community.

A simple assessment tool on parental involvement developed by NPC-p, Ireland can be used for awareness-raising as well as monitoring development in practice.

ParentHelp trainings show that its activities are equally useful for parent leaders, teachers and school heads to understand parental involvement/engagement, embrace diversity and be able to manage challenges.

ELICIT-PLUS, involving a network of 12 member states, has developed different training modules and training manuals for teachers, students, parents and non-teaching school staff in EU literacy and citizenship skills. Covering topics like EU literacy, media literacy, intercultural approach, citizenship and democracy in a collaborative learning methodology and with a possibility to be integrated in a whole school approach, this project is a valuable resource and inspirational practice. It addresses the contextual and informational levels of Digital Citizenship development, focusing on digital literacy skills, knowledge of rights and reliable information sources.

A child-friendly city is an approach that implements the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the local level. Jyväskylä (Finland) has been a child-friendly municipality since 2018 developing different projects involving schools, teachers, school leaders, parents, and students as well as other community members. Teachers and school leaders are responsible for the implementation of the

participation plan within their schools. It is an inspirational practice in the involvement of the whole community, providing opportunity for citizens to actively participate in the development of city infrastructure giving voice to their interests, needs and creativity.

### **Conclusions**

The role of school has long been established in educating active and responsible citizens, and citizenship and/or civic education is part of school curricula. However, the long decline in later political participation clearly shows that the learning outcomes of these studies are not sufficient for preparing students for this aspect of adult life. Part of this challenge is that most school systems emphasise citizenship knowledge and skills as a subject matter rather than a shift in school culture and making active citizenship a transversal, experiential learning opportunity for students. At the same time, teachers underestimate the importance of citizenship education when assessing the expectations of the primarily responsible educators of children, their parents. By the nature of traditional schools and teacher training curricula, teachers are also not the most active citizens. School and its collaborative environment in a whole school approach can and should provide a safe and experiential learning space for future adults as well as the current ones linked to the school, especially parents and teachers.

While there is no country in Europe that limits school leaders' opportunities for sharing leadership and engaging all three main stakeholder groups – students, teachers and parents – most countries have little policy incentives in place for this and even fewer countries have legislative obligation for engaging students and parents (while most at least have structures for teacher representation as long as teachers are members of trade unions in the form of social dialogue).

Thus, there is a need for policy changes to ensure that curricula makes a clear preference for citizenship education in a transversal and experiential way rather than as a subject matter, that teacher and school leader training and mentoring/coaching programmes are in place to enable professionals for their role of learning leaders in the field of citizenship, that schools and higher decision-making levels are obliged to engage stakeholders in shared leadership and decision-making, and that schools are incentivized to collaborate with other – non-formal and informal – learning providers implementing a whole school approach to ensure inclusive participation.

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