



“Let’s get started”

**Guide to Democratic Empowerment
Module 1**



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or OeAD-GmbH. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Content Table

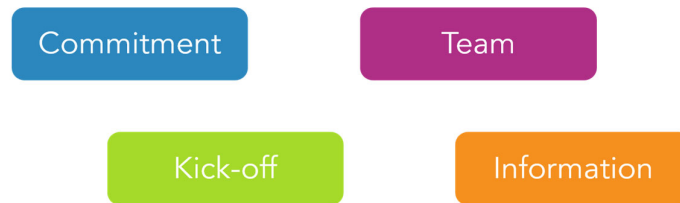
Laying the Foundation: Getting Started with Democratic School Development.....	3
<i>Commitment</i>	3
Step 1: Committing to the Project	3
<i>Team</i>	3
Step 2: Appointing the coACTION Project Manager	3
Step 3: Invitation to Join the coACTION Project Team	4
Step 4: Forming the coACTION Project Team	4
<i>Kick-off</i>	5
Step 5: Project Kick-off and Scope Definition	5
Establishing Working Group Ground Rules	5
Step 6: Aligning coACTION with School Vision and Goals	5
Step 7: Integrating coACTION into Quality Management	6
<i>Information</i>	6
Step 8: Information Sessions with the Whole School Community	6
Informing the School Team	6
Informing Parents	6
Informing Pupils.....	7
<i>Conclusion</i>	7

Laying the Foundation: Getting Started with Democratic School Development

Welcome to the first module of the Guide to Democratic Empowerment! In this module, we'll guide you through the essential initial steps your school needs to take when embarking on the journey to become a more democratic learning environment. Establishing a strong foundation is key to the success and sustainability of this transformative process.

Let us start with the key focus areas to be considered in this first phase of the coACTION project.

Four Key Focus Areas



Commitment

Step 1: Committing to the Project

The very first step is a clear and collective decision of the school leadership and a core group of stakeholders (school team, parents' representatives, etc.) to participate in the project.

This isn't just a formality; it's about genuine commitment.

This decision signifies the school's readiness to embrace change and foster a more democratic culture. It should be a conscious and well-considered choice, understanding the implications and benefits.

Team

Step 2: Appointing the coACTION Project Manager

Before inviting the wider school community to join the Project Management Team, it's essential to designate a Project Manager. This individual will serve as the central coordinator and driving force for the entire democratic school development initiative.

Their early appointment ensures clear leadership and accountability from the very beginning.

The Project Manager will be responsible for:

- ◇ Guiding the initial alignment of the project with the school's vision and quality management system.
- ◇ Crafting the compelling invitation to join the Project Management Team.
- ◇ Overseeing the selection process for team members.
- ◇ Facilitating the initial kick-off and helping to define the project's scope.
- ◇ Ensuring smooth communication and coordination throughout the project's early phases.

This dedicated role provides the necessary structure and momentum to successfully launch and steer your journey towards a more democratic school environment.

Step 3: Invitation to Join the coACTION Project Team

Now that your school has made the commitment to embark on this exciting journey towards a more democratic environment, it's time to seek passionate and dedicated team members to help lead the way.

The School Management together with the Project Manager invites all members of the school community to consider applying to join the Project Team.

This is an excellent opportunity to actively shape the future of the school, contribute ideas, and demonstrate commitment to fostering a truly collaborative and democratic culture.

So the invitation goes:

"Your involvement is key to the success of this project. Be a part of the change!"

Step 4: Forming the coACTION Project Team

Once the decision is made, it's time to form a dedicated Project Team. This team will be the driving force behind the entire initiative. Please keep the following guidelines in mind:

- ◇ **Composition:** Aim for a diverse group representing various facets of the school community. This could include school leadership, teachers from different grade levels or subjects, administrative staff, and potentially even pupils' and parents representatives (depending on the age group and context).
- ◇ **Size:** Keep the group manageable, typically 5-9 members, to ensure efficient decision-making and collaboration.
- ◇ **Key Qualities:** Look for individuals who are enthusiastic, open-minded, good communicators, and committed to democratic principles.

Kick-off

Step 5: Project Kick-off and Scope Definition

With your team in place, the next crucial step is to hold a Kick-off Meeting for the project. This meeting sets the tone and lays out the initial roadmap. A critical component of this kick-off is the definition of the project scope.

- ◇ Who participates? Clearly define which parts of the school community will be actively involved in the democratic processes. Will it initially focus on a specific grade level, a department, or the entire school?
- ◇ What are the initial focus areas? Identify 1-2 specific areas where democratic practices will first be introduced or strengthened (e.g., decision-making processes for school rules, curriculum design input, extracurricular activities).
- ◇ Project Timeline: Establish a realistic timeline for the initial phases of the project. This includes setting milestones for information sharing, initial workshops, and the implementation of early democratic practices.

Establishing Working Group Ground Rules

To ensure your Project Team operates effectively and democratically, it's vital to establish clear ground rules. These rules will guide your collaboration and decision-making.

- ◇ Meeting Frequency: How often will the team meet? (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly)
- ◇ Roles and Responsibilities: Clearly define the tasks and responsibilities of each team member (e.g., facilitator, note-taker, communication lead).
- ◇ Decision-Making Process: How will decisions be made within the group (e.g., consensus, majority vote) ?
- ◇ Communication Protocols: How will internal communication within the team occur?
- ◇ Conflict Resolution: How will disagreements or conflicts be addressed?

Step 6: Aligning coACTION with School Vision and Goals

Before embarking on any new initiative, especially one as transformative as fostering a more democratic school environment, it's vital to revisit and explicitly connect with your school's existing vision, mission, and strategic goals. This foundational step ensures that the democratic development project is not seen as an isolated effort but as an integral part of the school's overarching direction. By clearly articulating how a more democratic school contributes to achieving educational excellence, pupil's well-being, or community engagement - all often enshrined in a School's Vision - you build a stronger case for the project, garner greater buy-in, and provide a clear compass for the Project Team from day one.

Step 7: Integrating coACTION into Quality Management

Crucially, for long-term sustainability and to firmly embed these democratic practices, this initiative should be actively integrated into your School Quality Management System. By making it a formal component of your school's development plan, you ensure that the project is not just a temporary endeavour but a sustainable process, regularly reviewed, evaluated, and continuously improved. This integration underscores the school's commitment to democratic principles as a core element of its ongoing quality development.

Information

Step 8: Information Sessions with the Whole School Community

Before involving the wider school community, your Project Team needs to prepare for comprehensive information sessions. This involves crafting clear, concise, and engaging materials.

- ◇ Key Messages: What are the core messages you want to convey about the project? Emphasize the benefits of a more democratic school environment.
- ◇ Presentation Materials: Develop presentations, handouts, and FAQs.
- ◇ Q&A Preparation: Anticipate potential questions and prepare thoughtful answers.
- ◇ Logistics: Plan the dates, times, and locations for all information sessions.

Informing the School Team

The entire school team (teachers, administrators, support staff) must be fully informed and ideally engaged early in the process.

- ◇ Dedicated Team Meeting: Schedule a specific team meeting to present the project. This allows for direct interaction, questions, and initial feedback.
- ◇ Emphasize Benefits: Highlight how democratic processes can empower staff, improve job satisfaction, and lead to better educational outcomes.
- ◇ Address Concerns: Be prepared to address any concerns or scepticism.

Informing Parents

Parental involvement and understanding are crucial for the success of any school-wide initiative.

- ◇ Parent Information Evening: Organize a dedicated parent information evening.
- ◇ Joint Presentation: The Project Team should present alongside class teachers to demonstrate a united front and provide direct contact points.
- ◇ Highlight Benefits for Pupils: Explain how a more democratic school environment benefits their children's development, critical thinking, and civic engagement.

Informing Pupils

Ultimately, pupils are at the heart of this transformation, and their understanding and engagement are paramount.

- ◇ Special Learning Unit: Class teachers should dedicate a special learning unit or lesson to introduce the project.
- ◇ Age-Appropriate Language: Adapt the information to be age-appropriate and engaging for pupils.
- ◇ Emphasize their Role: Highlight how their voices will be heard and how they can contribute to shaping their school. Encourage questions and foster curiosity.

Conclusion

By meticulously following these steps, your school will create a solid foundation for successfully introducing and embedding democratic practices. This initial phase is about building understanding, trust, and commitment across the entire school community.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or OeAD-GmbH. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.