

Let every voice be heard

“To educate is to believe in change.”

Paulo Freire

Themes	Education, Citizenship, Children
Complexity	Level 3
Group size	8-50
Time	115 minutes
Overview	<p>This is a discussion exercise in small groups and plenary, working with the issues of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What education is and how it meets, or does not meet, people’s needs ▪ Participation in decision-making processes.
Related rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The right to education ▪ Freedom of opinion and expression ▪ The right to take part in the government of one’s country
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To reflect on the education system and how it meets people’s needs ▪ To develop skills of co-operation and participation in democratic decision-making at school and club level ▪ To promote justice and inclusion
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 4 large sheets of paper or flipchart paper and pens per small group of four people ▪ Extra paper, sufficient for people to make notes on if they wish to

Instructions

This activity is in two parts: part 1 (35 minutes) is a discussion about what sort of education people want, and part 2 (60 minutes) is a discussion about how to develop democratic systems to ensure that people can have their say about the education that they get.

Part 1. What sort of education do we want? (35 minutes)

1. Start with a short general discussion about what people understand by the term “education”. They should know that to receive an education is a human right.
2. Now brainstorm all the positive and negative sides of education and note the keywords on flipchart paper.
3. Ask people to get into pairs. Give them fifteen minutes to assess the value of the right to education in the context of who makes the decisions about what people are to learn and how.
4. Come back into plenary and ask people to give feedback.

THEMES



EDUCATION



CITIZENSHIP



CHILDREN

COMPLEXITY



LEVEL 3

GROUP SIZE



8-50

TIME



115 MINUTES

Part 2. Developing democratic systems to ensure that people can have their say about the education that they get. (60 minutes)

1. Ask people to go back into their pairs and to review how decisions are made in their school, college or club. For instance, who decides what is taught or what activities will be arranged? How is the school, college or club administrated? How are budgetary and spending decisions made? How are policies developed and agreed? How much say do young people have?
2. Now ask the pairs to combine to make small groups of four people. Tell them to bear in mind that they have a human right to education, and also that they have a right to be involved in the decision-making processes in matters which concern them.
3. Ask each group to consider the positive and negative aspects of having a democratically elected body to make decisions about their education at the local level. Such a body might be a Student Council in a school or college, or a board in a youth club or youth organisation.
4. Now ask the groups to consider what would be the best form of council or board that would meet their needs to have a say in the education that they receive.
5. The next stage depends on the circumstances of the group. If there is no council in your school or club, then the groups should work to decide what sort of council they would like and how to go about establishing one. If your group already has a council or a board, then they should review how it works and develop plans for how to make it work better. Explain how to do a SWOT analysis and tell the groups that they have thirty minutes to develop an action plan written up on a large sheet of flipchart paper.
6. Come back into plenary and ask the groups to report their results.

Debriefing and evaluation

Many points will already have been made at the various stages of the previous discussions. However, take time to review the activity as a whole, to reflect on the general learning points and to plan what to do next.

- Did people enjoy the activity? Was it useful? Why? Why not?
- Why are the existing decision-making structures as they are? What are the historical precedents? Did the structures fulfil their functions in the past? Why are they not appropriate now?
- Why do decision-making structures and procedures need to be reviewed regularly?
- How did the different action plans compare?
- What did they cost in terms of time, effort and money?
- How realistic were they? (Note: it is good to have big visions, but you need to take one step at a time towards the goal!)

Tips for facilitators

Depending on the group, you will have to decide what is the best way to introduce the activity with regard to the human rights aspects, that is, the right to education and the right to take part in decision-making processes. You can do this either by asking people to share their existing knowledge or by giving some initial input yourself.

The SWOT analysis is described and explained in the “Taking action” (chapter 3)

Suggestions for follow-up

Let the group work further on the ideas generated in this activity and, taking tips from the “Taking action” chapter, on page 269, strive for more say in the decision-making in their school, college or club.

If the group enjoyed thinking about the sort of education they would like to have, they may enjoy the board game “A tale of two cities”, on page 71, which raises issues about what sort of city people would like to live in.

Ideas for action

The participants might consider linking and exchanging information with other student councils in their area, at the national level, or internationally.

Further information

Why have a school council?

A Student Council is intended to give students a voice in the school issues that directly affect them. There are many good reasons for establishing school councils and ensuring that they work effectively.

Pupil-centred benefits

Participation in a school council promotes the educational or personal development of pupils because:

- councils promote citizenship learning, political efficacy and democratic attitudes
- councils promote social confidence and personal values
- students are empowered to challenge authority
- students learn how to make decisions in a fair and accountable way
- students learn about the realities of life, for instance, how to work within limited budgets or with unresponsive authorities.

Pragmatic benefits

- democratic management styles work better than autocratic ones because they are ultimately more effective as they encourage pupils’ responsibility
- councils encourage co-operation, harness energy and reduce alienation
- councils can improve the atmosphere of the school: teachers are trusted more, rules are shown to be more fairly based
- whatever the limitations because of outside social and political pressures, a student council is a practical way of demonstrating to students the good faith of the staff and commitment to certain values.

Key dates

5 October

World Teachers’ Day