

## CHAPTER 3

# Survey on Democracy in the Classroom – a didactic Approach

*By Odd R. Hunnes*

Didactics is about practical and theoretical planning, carrying out, assessing and critical analysis of teaching and learning. In short didactics is often described as the *what, why and how* of learning. In this chapter performing a survey on democracy in the classroom will be presented in the light of this understanding of didactics.

### What?

Civic Education Study (CES) is an international survey intended to give a picture of students' knowledge of democratic institutions and practices. In addition the young people's preparedness and will to participate in democratic processes in own socie-



FIGURE 1: A teacher's dream for a successful process of didactics? At first s/he detects some uncertainty (what?), afterwards there is a growing expectation (why?) which develops into enthusiasm (how?).

---

ty is focused. The democratic preparedness is mapped as knowledge, skills, views and attitudes. The will to involvement is mapped as the students' interest for politics and their present and probable future participation. The study offers a comparison between the 27 participating countries<sup>8</sup>.

From the vast number of questions in the CES, a selection is made with the intention to compose a questionnaire suitable for use in the classroom in secondary school (both lower and upper secondary)<sup>9</sup>. The questions have been tested in secondary schools in Malawi and Norway both. The selection of questions has been made on the following grounds:

- focus on important aspects of democracy
- focus on aspects where students answer differently, indicating that there is divergence in opinion or attitude

The selected questions are listed at the end of this chapter<sup>10</sup>.

## **Why?**

### ***What do students know?***

Teachers know that when working in the classroom with this theme or the other, the students' existing competence on the actual theme usually is a good starting point. From this point we should further develop the students' competence to new heights. This is as clear in theory as it is difficult in practice. A main problem is that the teacher often does not know a whole lot about the students' existing competence. From the curriculum, text books and experience the teacher of course may know quite well what the school expects students to have learnt in school, but this may be something quite different from what the students actually know. Of course, different students also learn different things in the same classroom. Then students learn a lot outside school. On many topics, including important ones, they learn more outside school than inside.

### ***Students know differently***

For reasons like these, teachers in civics / social sciences are familiar with the situation that there are marked differences in existing competence between the stu-

---

<sup>8</sup> You may read more about the study on <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/cived/faq.asp?FAQType=2>.

<sup>9</sup> The presented selection is mainly done in cooperation with Leif Sletvold.

<sup>10</sup> You will find an English version as well as a Norwegian one. Questions may of course be added or taken away to fit the actual situation.

dents in any classroom. This is the case for many themes and topics, including 'democracy'. Therefore it is quite challenging for the teacher to know what to focus on and how to go about it when democracy is on the agenda. This chapter suggests that running a survey on knowledge about and attitudes to democracy among the students in the class may be a viable approach.

### ***Students find out what they know***

Interestingly enough, often the students do also not know their own competence very well. Through participating in the survey they will become more consciously aware of their existing level of competence. This level may appear to be lower than anticipated for some and higher for others. To know what you know and what you do not know is important knowledge. So already during answering the questionnaire the students gain important knowledge about democracy and themselves.

### ***An approach for participation***

This approach is student centred in at least two ways. In addition to the focus on the students' competence comes the participation of the students in the activity through responding to the questionnaire. This participation is continued if the students are involved in registering the data from the survey. Surely they are further involved as the results from the survey are presented to them. On this basis they may also be invited to voice their opinion on what topics within the theme of democracy the class should focus on in the time to come and what approaches and learning methods they want to use. To involve the students when we plan learning processes is of course a good idea for a wide range of themes. Student participation and practising democratic procedures are general goals in our schools. When 'democracy' is the theme, democratic learning methods should be self evident.

### ***A bonus profit***

Running a survey like this also offers a bonus profit. Students and teachers alike often meet with statistics of different sorts and it is an important competence for students of civics / social sciences to know how to interpret them. A common approach is in class to read and discuss tables and figures. Through this work the students will gain knowledge about the topic and at the same time their ability to interpret statistics will improve. Being respondents may open their eyes for some new aspects of surveys. They will probably find that for some questions none of the programmed answers actually fit their opinions on the matter. Depending on the distance, they may end up ticking off the option which is least far away from their

own view or take their rescue in the option of 'do not know,' even though they actually may have an opinion. This may be of some help to them when they later interpret statistics in general, since they know from own experience that the options presented in the survey most probably do not portray accurately the opinions of the respondents. This leaves a little room for uncertainty connected with the results, which probably is quite healthy as a shield against an attitude that could be called the 'absolutism of statistics.'

## **How?**

### ***In good time***

We envisage a situation where 'democracy' is on the agenda for the class for a certain period of time, may be a couple of weeks. The survey should be performed a few weeks before this period starts, leaving some time to follow up the survey through planning. This is especially important if the teacher plans to sum up the students' answers on his or her own. If the students are involved in the handling of the data, the need for a time span between the survey and the rest of the learning process is not quite as urgent.

### ***15 minutes in the classroom***

The students should be informed about the teacher's reasons for going through with the survey and how the survey will be used as part of the learning process about democracy. After this phase of information and motivation the students usually will need about 15 minutes to fill out their questionnaires.

### ***Register and summarize results***

After the students have completed their questionnaires, their markings have to be recorded and added up. Here a simple counting program on a computer may be used or the summarizing may be done manually. This work may be done by the teacher or students. If the students are participating, it is important that the teacher organizes and keeps a tight control. The teacher may chose to assign a selected group of students or all the students may be divided into groups in order to register answers from the questionnaires. In the latter situation each group will be given just a few questionnaires from which they will enter the data into a prepared form. Afterwards the results from each group will be entered into one final form where all the entries are summed up. The possible gain of engaging the students in the work

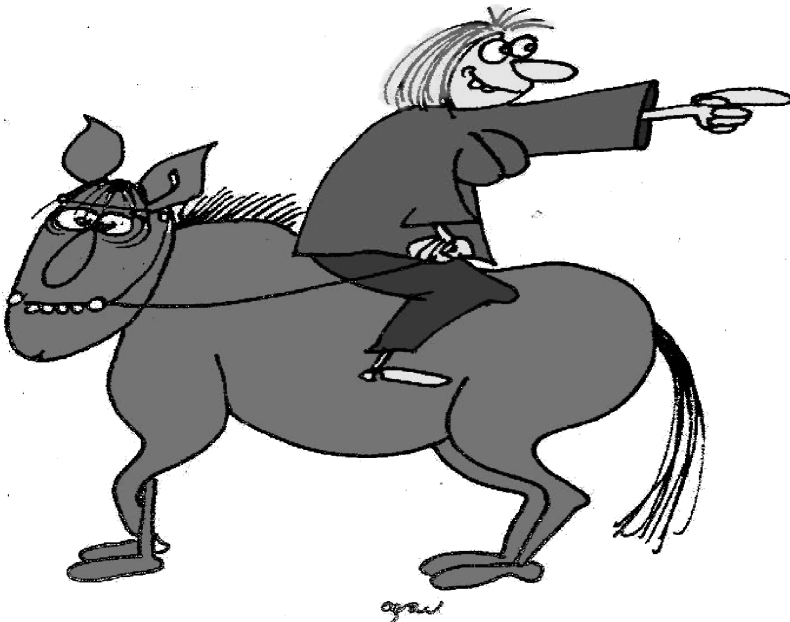
of registering the data is that they may see how difficult it sometimes is to interpret an answer even on a multiple choice question. In addition the summing up may take shorter time if the students are involved in this task. If students are participating in this work, it is very important that the anonymity of the respondents is observed.

### *Present results in class*

The results from the survey must be presented for the class. This offers a good opportunity not just to describe or refer the respondents' answers but also to discuss them. To some questions there are correct answers, to others there are more or less probable answers. Then there are some questions where the attitudes and opinions of the respondents are asked for and in these cases there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer. However, the questions without correct answers are often the ones best suited for discussions and the teacher is encouraged to take the opportunity to do so.

### *A foundation for planning*

The knowledge basis that is presented in the class is also a suitable basis for discussing which topics that should be focused during the rest of the time devoted to the theme 'democracy' in the class. Here the students' opinion should be taken into account. They may be invited not only to voice their opinion on the content, but also on learning methods to be used. Logically they should also be encouraged to take actively part in decision making and carrying out the plans agreed upon.



**FIGURE 2:** The survey may be a foundation for participation in the planning.

## **Assessment**

At the end of the theme period, the learning process about democracy should be assessed. This should be done with the students as participants and the method presented below may be used.

### ***Record positive and negative experiences***

The students start by taking a sheet of paper and divide it into two parts. On the left hand side they put a minus (-) and on the right hand side a plus (+). On the left hand side they write everything they think negatively of in connection with the process and on the right hand side they write everything that they think positively of. The students have five minutes for this part. Then the blackboard is divided in two, the left hand side with a (-) and the right hand side a (+). On the blackboard the students now take turns to write all the points that they have taken down on their paper, but in such a way that no point has more than one entry.

### ***Balance conclusions***

Next, the students are divided into groups of two or three. From the entries on the blackboard each group prioritizes the five most important negative points and the most positive points, one list for each. The teacher collects, summarises and presents the two lists on a transparency film or on the blackboard. On the basis of these lists, the class discusses the way 'democracy' has been worked with. Two important questions are:

1. Which parts of the whole exercise have been so successful that we surely would like to repeat them another time?
2. Which parts of the whole exercise have failed so much that we sure would like to do it differently another time?

More questions may of course be added.

### ***Store for future use***

The smart teacher makes sure that notes are taken during this discussion and stored for future use.

## A survey about knowledge and attitudes on democracy

1. In a democratic country (society) having many organisations for people to join is important because this provides ...

- A  a group to defend members who are arrested
- B  many sources of taxes for the government
- C  opportunities to express different points of view
- D  a way for the government to tell people about new laws

2. What is the main purpose of labour (trade) unions? Their purpose is to ...

- A  improve the quality of products produced
- B  increase the amount that factories produce
- C  improve conditions and pay for workers
- D  establish a fairer tax system

3. Which of the following is the clearest violation of civil liberties in a democratic political system?

- A  An armed policeman in uniform enters a religious shrine.
- B  A policeman breaks up a private meeting where people are criticising political leaders.
- C  A policeman arrests members of a group who were plotting to blow up a government building.
- D  A person carrying an unregistered gun is fined.

4. In a democracy the most important function of periodic (regular) elections is to ...

- A  increase citizens' interest in government
- B  make possible non-violent change in leadership
- C  maintain current laws in the country
- D  give more power to the poor

5. A dictator agrees to restore democracy in his country. Which of the following actions would be the most convincing evidence to support the claim that he is promoting democracy?

- A  He makes statements supporting other leaders in his party.
- B  He holds a Parade for Democracy in the largest city.
- C  He agrees to a date for national elections including several parties' candidates.
- D  He speaks to a newspaper reporter about the need for democracy.

6. Which of the following is most likely to cause a government to be called non democratic?

- A  People are prevented from criticising (not allowed to criticise) the government.
- B  The political parties criticise each other often.
- C  People must pay very high taxes.
- D  Every citizen has the right to a job.

7. Which of the following is necessary in democratic countries?

- A  There are laws protecting the environment.
- B  Many companies are owned by the government.
- C  Citizens can influence public debate and decisions.
- D  Political leaders are rarely criticised.

8. A country's constitution contains ...

- A  statements about current relations with neighbouring countries
- B  statements made by the President (Prime Minister) to the national legislature
- C  statements made by the political parties to their supporters
- D  statements of principle establishing the system of government and laws



9. Three of these statements are facts and one is an opinion. Which of the following is an OPINION?

- A  Actions by individual countries are the best way to solve environmental problems.
- B  Many countries contribute to the pollution of the environment.
- C  Some countries offer to cooperate in order to diminish acid rain.
- D  Water pollution often comes from several different sources.

10. Three of these statements are opinions and one is a fact. Which is a FACT (the factual statement)?

- A  People with very low incomes should not pay any taxes.
- B  In many countries rich people pay higher taxes than poor people.
- C  It is fair that some citizens pay higher taxes than others.
- D  Donations to charity are the best way to reduce differences between rich and poor.

11. In a democratic political system, which of the following ought to govern the country?

- A  Moral or religious leaders.
- B  A small group of well educated people.
- C  Popularly elected representatives.
- D  Experts on government and political affairs.

12. What is good and what is bad for democracy? Please tick the box in the column which best fits your opinion. If you think that the statement does not apply, put a tick in the last column.

	Very bad for democracy	Somewhat bad for democracy	Somewhat good for democracy	Very good for democracy	Do not know/ does not apply
a. When newspapers are free of all government (state, political) control, that is ...					
b. When courts and judges are influenced by politicians, that is ..					
c. When many different organisations (associations) are available (exist) for people who wish to belong to them, that is ...					
d. When political parties have different opinions (positions) on important issues, that is ...					
e. When laws that women claim are unfair to them are changed, that is ...					
f. When people refuse to obey a law which violates human rights, that is ...					
g. When newspapers are forbidden to publish stories that might offend ethnic groups (immigrant groups, racial groups, national groups), that is ...					
h. When government leaders are trusted without question, that is ...					

13. Please read each statement and select the box in the column which corresponds to the way you feel about the statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Do not know
a. Members of anti-democratic groups (groups that are against democracy) should be prohibited from organising peaceful (non-violent) demonstrations or rallies.					
b. Members of anti-democratic groups (groups that are against democracy) should be prohibited from running in an election.					
c. Immigrants who live in a country for several years should have the opportunity to vote in elections.					
d. The politicians quickly forget the needs of the voters who elected them.					
e. I am able to understand most political issues easily.					

14. For each of these activities, tick the box to show how often you do it.

	Never	More seldom than once a week	About once a week	Daily	Do not know
a. How often do you have discussions of what is happening in your national (your country's) politics (government)?					
b. How often do you have discussions of what is happening in international politics?					
c. How often do you read articles (stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in this country?					
d. How often do you read articles (stories) in the newspaper about what is happening in other countries?.					
e. How often do you listen to news broadcasts on television?					
f. How often do you listen to news broadcasts on the radio?					

15. Tick one box in each row for each action to show how likely you would be to do it.

	I will certainly not do this	I will probably not do this	I will probably do this	I will certainly do this	Do not know
a. Vote in national elections.					
b. Get information about candidates before voting in an election.					
c. Join a political party.					
d. Write letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns.					
e. Be a candidate for a local or city office.					
f. Participate in a non-violent (peaceful) protest march or rally.					
g. Block traffic as a form of protest.					

16. To do a good job as an active participant in our democracy I need to know more about

.....

.....

.....

.....

## En undersøkelse om kunnskaper og holdninger knyttet til demokrati

1. Organisasjoner er viktige i demokratiske land fordi de sørger for ...

- A  at det er noen til å forsvare medlemmer som er arrestert
- B  at myndighetene har flere muligheter til å kreve inn skatt
- C  at forskjellige synspunkter kan diskuteres
- D  at myndighetene når folk med opplysninger om nye lover

2. Hva er hovedformålet med fagforeninger? Hovedformålet er å...

- A  forbedre kvaliteten på produktene
- B  øke fabrikkens produksjon
- C  forbedre lønn og arbeidsforhold for arbeideren
- D  lage et mer rettferdig skattesystem

3. Hvilket av punktene nedenfor er det klareste bruddet på folks rettigheter i et demokratisk land?

- A  En væpnet politimann går inn i en kirke eller moské.
- B  En politimann stanser et privat møte hvor folk kritiserer de politiske lederne.
- C  En politimann arresterer medlemmer av en gruppe som planlegger å sprengte en regjeringsbygning.
- D  En person som blir tatt med ulovlig våpen, får en bot.

4. Hensikten med regelmessige valg er å ...

- A  øke innbyggernes interesse for politikk
- B  gjøre det mulig å skifte ut politikere med ikke-voldelige midler
- C  sikre at lovene i landet ikke blir forandret
- D  gi mer makt til de fattige

5. En diktator ønsker å innføre demokrati i landet sitt. Hvilken av følgende handlinger vil være mest overbevisende for å vise at han virkelig ønsker demokrati?

- A  Han gir støtte til andre ledere i sitt eget parti.
- B  Han avholder en parade for demokratiet.
- C  Han bestemmer en dato for nasjonale valg med kandidater fra flere partier.
- D  Han snakker med en avisjournalist om behovet for demokrati.

6. Hva er en koalisjonsregjering? En regjering som ...

- A  består av medlemmer fra ett stort politisk parti
- B  består av medlemmer fra to eller flere politiske partier
- C  er dannet uten deltagelse fra noe politisk parti
- D  er dannet med støtte fra ledere i næringslivet

7. Den viktigste grunnen til å ha mer enn ett politisk parti i et demokrati er ...

- A  å sørge for at velgerne har flere alternativer
- B  å sørge for arbeid til partimedlemmer
- C  å informere folk om regjeringens beslutninger
- D  å hindre korrupsjon og uærlighet i regjeringen

8. Hva vil være det beste eksempelet på 'direkte demokrati'?

- A  Å la statistiske data bestemme.
- B  Å fatte beslutninger etter en folkeavstemning.
- C  Å beslutte på grunnlag av meningsytring fra seerne etter TV-debatter.
- D  Å la statsministeren bestemme.

9. Nyhetsoppslag:

REGJERINGSMEDLEM BLIR BEDT OM Å GÅ AV

Samferdselsministeren valgte A/S Asfalt til å bygge en vei til tross for at firmaets tilbud var høyere enn andre firmaers. Det ble senere avslørt av ministerens bror

har en større aksjepost i A/S Asphalt. Flere stortingsrepresentanter krever ministerens avgang.

Hvorfor vil stortingsrepresentantene at ministeren skal gå av?

- A  Ministeren bør ikke bestemme hvem som skal bygge veier.
- B  Ministerens familie bør ikke eie aksjer i noe firma.
- C  Ministeren mottok penger fra firmaet som skal bygge veien.
- D  Ministerens beslutning ble påvirket av hans private interesser.



## 10. Hva er bra og hva er dårlig for demokratiet?

	Svært dårlig for demokrati	Ikke så bra for demokratie	Ganske bra for demokratiet	Svært bra for demokratiet	Vet ikke
a. Hvis staten ikke kontrollerer avisene, er det ...					
b. Hvis politikere har innflytelse på dommere og rettsvesen, er det					
c. Når det finnes mange organisasjoner som folk kan melde seg inn i, er det ...					
d. Når politiske partier har forskjellige meninger om politiske saker, er det ...					
e. Hvis det finnes lover som blir forandret fordi kvinner mener de er urettferdige mot dem, er det ...					
f. Når folk nekter å følge en lov som krenker menneskerettigheter, er det ...					
g. Hvis det er forbud mot å trykke artikler som kan komme til å henge ut bestemte folkegrupper, er det ...					
h. Hvis man uten forbehold stoler på politiske ledere, er det ...					

11. Les hver påstand og kryss av i boksen som passer best med hva du mener.

	Svært uenig	Uenig	Enig	Svært enig	Vet ikke
a. Medlemmer av grupper som er mot demokratiet bør ikke få gjennomføre fredelige demonstrasjoner eller møter.					
b. Medlemmer av grupper som er mot demokratiet, bør ikke få stille til valg.					
c. Innvandrere som har levd i et land i flere år, bør ha rett til å stemme ved valgene.					
d. Politikerne glemmer fortønskenene til velgerne som valgte dem.					
e. Jeg forstår lett de fleste politiske spørsmål.					

12. Kryss av den boksen som viser hvor ofte du gjør dette.

	Aldri	Sjeldnere enn én gang i uka	Omtrent én gang i uka	Daglig	Vet ikke
a. Hvor ofte er du med på diskusjoner om det som skjer i norsk politikk?					
b. Hvor ofte er du med på diskusjoner om det som skjer i internasjonal politikk?					
c. Hvor ofte leser du artikler i avisene om det som skjer i Norge?					
d. Hvor ofte leser du artikler i avisene om det som skjer i andre land?					
e. Hvor ofte ser du på nyheter i fjernsynet?					
f. Hvor ofte hører du på nyheter i radio?					

13. Sett kryss ved hver linje som viser hvor sannsynlig det er at du kommer til å gjøre akkurat det.

	Jeg kommer helt sikkert ikke til å gjøre dette	Jeg kommer sannsynligvis ikke til å gjøre dette	Jeg kommer sannsynligvis til å gjøre dette	Jeg kommer helt sikkert til å gjøre dette	Vet ikke
a. Stemme ved Stortingsvalg.					
b. Skaffe meg informasjon om partiene før jeg stemmer.					
c. Forbli medlem eller melde meg inn i et politisk parti.					
d. Skrive brev til en avis om sosiale eller politiske saker jeg er opptatt av.					
e. Stille opp som kandidat ved kommunevalg.					
f. Delta i en fredelig protestmarsj eller møte.					
g. Blokkere trafikken for å protestere mot noe.					

14. Hvordan bør uenigheter løses i et demokrati?

- A  I et demokrati bør vi ende opp med den løsning som flertallet ser seg tjent med.
- B  Holdningen bør være at mindretallet har alltid rett.
- C  Hvis saken er av meget stor betydning for de som er i mindretall, bør flertallet ta hensyn til dette.
- D  En bør finne løsninger som alle kan gi sin tilslutning.

15. Stortinget står overfor et lovforslag som hvis det blir vedtatt vil få store konsekvenser for landet. For at forslaget skal kunne vedtas må det kreves ...

- A  alminnelig flertall (d.v.s. mer enn 50 prosent av stemmene)
- B  et høyt krav til valgdeltagelse og alminnelig flertall
- C  kvalifisert flertall (d.v.s. minst 2/3 av stemmene)
- D  slike forslag bør avvises

16. Hvem har den lovgivende makten?

- A  Høyesterett.
- B  Politiet.
- C  Stortinget.
- D  Menneskerettighetsorganisasjoner.

17. Hva innebærer *parlamentarisme*?

- A  At nasjonalforsamlingen (i Norge Stortinget) har den lovgivende makt.
- B  At de som styrer er valgt av folket.
- C  At regjeringen må ha nasjonalforsamlingens (i Norge Stortingets) tillit.
- D  At nasjonalforsamlingen (i Norge Stortinget) er landets øverste myndighet.

18. Det store flertall av de som arbeider i departementene er

- A  valgt
- B  ansatt
- C  utnevnt av den sittende regjering
- D  statsrådenes nære politiske medarbeidere

19. For å kunne fungere godt i vårt demokratiske system, trengte jeg å kjenne bedre til

---

---

---

---