

Open up for Democracy

The intention

On May 7th 2005, the then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education in Malawi, Simeon Hau, was referred in the newspaper *The Daily Times* saying: 'When democracy was introduced in the country in 1994, students became unruly with newly acquired rights, among them freedom of expression and dressing.' The Education PS further observed that democracy and free primary education also contributed a lot towards high failure rates in both secondary and primary schools. Two days later we met with Dr. Hau and he confirmed the quotes in the newspaper but pointed out that he was not against democracy in Malawi. On the contrary, he wants democracy but has noted that the concept is often misunderstood by many people, students and pupils not excluded. Many seem to believe that democracy means freedom to do as they wish without considering how this affects other people. This has so far lead to a lot of problems. Dr. Hau therefore strongly supported the intention of this book, which is to promote a better and deeper understanding of the concept of democracy, acquire values and attitudes on which democracy

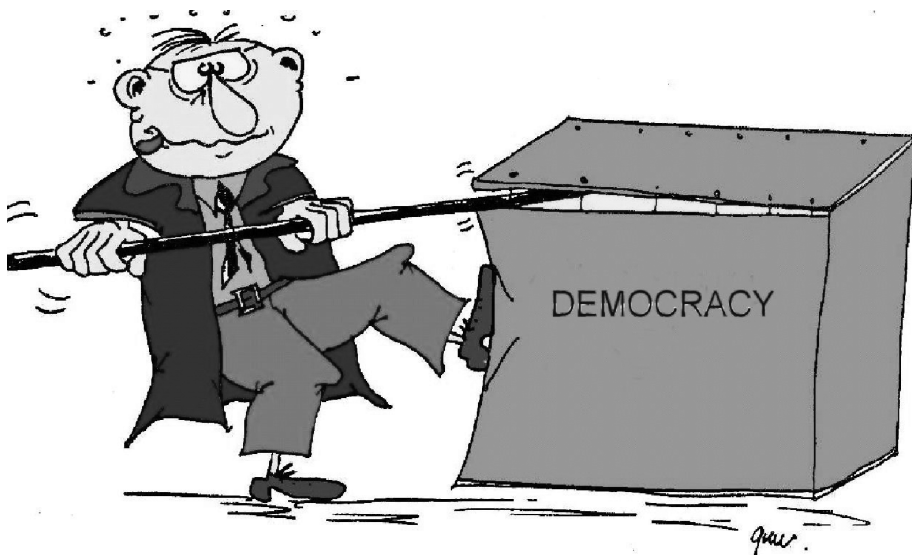


FIGURE 1: The paramount goal of this book is to open up for democracy!

builds and learn to implement a wider scale of democratic practices. Excluding nobody, this book is written especially with teacher trainers, teachers and students in mind, hoping to be a help in their work in conducting and participating in learning processes on democracy. The paramount goal is to open up for democracy.

A resource book

A resource book is not a book you necessarily read from start to end. It may be more beneficial to look for special topics to read and use these as a resource in your work as teacher or student. A resource book is a book to work with. Our goal has been to write a book which does not only present the subject matter as such. Included are also reflections on teaching and learning combined with a variety of methods for working with this material.

At the end of each chapter you will find a list of questions for reminding, reflection and discussion on the content of the chapter. In several instances suggestions for learning activities are also included. The main exceptions to this rule are the chapters in part two. The reason for this is obvious since these chapters are all about method, indicating step by step how the teacher and the students may work with two topics within the theme of democracy.

The lay out of the book leaves a relatively broad margin for personal comments because we hope that this will be your personal work book. We have also included short marginal texts along the main text of each chapter. The exception is once more the chapters in part two since they are of a quite different nature than the rest of the book. The marginal texts are included for three purposes:

1. They serve as pointers into the main text. This should make it easier to recover special elements that you know is 'somewhere' in the main text, but you do not know exactly where.
2. They may be helpful when you need to revisit the chapter before a test or for some other reason.
3. They may be used as texts for transparencies or computer projections by the teacher who is giving a presentation of a chapter (of course with wanted personal adjustments). We think that it may enhance the students' learning when they in this pointed out manner will recognize the connection between the teaching and the literature on the reading list.

The structure of the book

This book is organized in five parts. The first focuses on the fundamentals in learning democracy. Here come a view of learning and school's role in society along with a relatively short presentation of the concept of democracy. The idea is that the reading of this section will catalyze your benefit from the other chapters in the book.

The second part contains two chapters where activity based approaches to learning democracy are suggested. The first is about performing a survey on democracy in the classroom and the use of this exercise as tool both for planning and learning. The other is about inviting the students to go searching for practices and values in their own culture that may be connected with democracy somehow. If this can be done, the students will better understand what is meant by the phrase that democracy is government of the people.

The third part tells the history of democracy in Malawi and Norway where differences and similarities are pointed out. A special focus is set on the role of the Christian church in the development of democracy in both countries. This part offers ample opportunities to compare and contrast the two, and this is a much cherished approach in studies of societies.

Part four offers a variety of topics within the scope of democracy: Christian values, language, gender, participation, entrepreneurship and measuring democracy. The topics reflect to a large degree the special interests and subject areas of the participants in the project from which this book is an outcome: education, language, social sciences and theology. Acknowledging that the choice of topics in this way may seem to be a bit haphazard, we will claim that they are all both important and relevant. But different people would most probably have chosen somewhat differently.

The fifth part focuses on school, starting with a reflection on if and how religion may contribute in building democracy. Another challenge for school to face is reconciling the freedom and the responsibility that are so fundamental for a democracy to function well. The last chapter reflects on the possibilities and challenges in initiating democratic practices in schools in Malawi.

An outcome of a project

The book is an outcome of a partnership project 2005-2007 between Chancellor College, University of Malawi and Volda University College of Norway. The name of the project is **Capacity Building for Democracy in Teacher Training – Malawi and Norway**. The project was established within the 'Teacher Education

Programme South–North, which is funded by the Norwegian government (NORAD) and coordinated by the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Higher Education (SIU). The main goal of this project is to heighten the awareness of democracy among students and teachers in teacher training since these are important groups for positive spread effects. The material result of the project is the present book, papers on democracy published in relevant journals and curriculum development on democracy in the teacher training within the participating institutions. All the chapters in the present book are written by participants in the project. Even though the authors have received feedback from their colleagues in the writing process, each chapter is the responsibility of the author.

Our common challenge

The UN claims that the world is more democratic today than ever before, using the appearance of multiparty elections as indicator. Optimistic as this may sound, multiparty elections only reflect a minor part of the story. There is more to tell. Our common challenge is to be a part of this story: to deepen and strengthen the knowledge of and the commitment to the values and practices of democracy. Hopefully this book may be a help in this respect.

Zomba / Volda, November 2007

Matthew N. Chilambo / Odd Ragnar Hunnes