

Democracy in school: Democracy in the eyes of the little ones!

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Abstract Education is a process that should prepare individuals for their future experiences as active members of the society in which they belong. Considering that the school reflects society, it is important for Democracy to be present in school communities and their dynamics, aiming to achieve equity of opportunities for all. Following this path, this article addresses developing and implementing an educational project on Education and Democracy directed towards primary school students. The project was conducted with a second-year class (23 students aged between 6 and 8 years old) at a primary school in the district of Aveiro, Portugal. The project involved the collaborative creation of a play titled "Democracy in the Eyes of the Little Ones!" Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the research question "Can artistic expressions promote democracy in the classroom?" was defined. Data were collected through a questionnaire, evaluation sheets and field notes. It can be concluded that artistic expressions serve as a motivating approach to educating students about democracy. In this approach, dramatic expressions transformed the classroom into a microcosm of society, preparing students to become active participants with decision-making abilities in the real world.

Keywords: Education; Democracy; Primary School; Artistic Expressions; Intervention project

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1. Introduction

Democracy means, in its etymological sense, the power of the people. In other words, it means the leadership of the community comes from itself. In a society, governance can be done by "a single person, or a group, and still be a democracy - provided that the power, in the final analysis, is of the people" (Ribeiro, 2008, p.6) [1]. Thus, in a democratic society, no one is born ruler or ruled but may become one or the other. For this reason, the main values of Democracy consist of the recognition of equality, the respect for human rights, and the will of the legitimately formed majority, which are important for the construction of a democratic society (Silva, 2020, p. 65) [2].

In this regard, the most common understanding of Democracy is often related to "the political regime founded on popular sovereignty and full respect for human rights" (Benevides, 1996, p.225) [3]. However, in a broader sense, Democracy can be understood as the "power arising from the human capacity to act together with others, building a common will" (Arendt, 2000, Bobbio, 2000, as cited in Souza, 2009, p.124) [4]. Considering this, a school that understands itself as democratic practices a political action that contemplates

this power as "a contract signed between the people who make up this institution, and considers that the dialogue between these subjects is a precondition for its operation" (Souza, 2009, p.125) [4]. It is from this perspective that one can understand the importance of the inclusion of Democracy in school, because, as Souza (2009) [4] claims, democratic school management is both a principle and a method. A principle because it implies a democratic process, which considers the school as an institution financed by all and that, for this reason, has the duty to respond to their interests. A method because, since Democracy is seen as an educational action, where collective practices are adequate in order to promote a political education of the subjects, it implies a democratizing process.

From this perspective, education is understood as a process that should prepare individuals for their future experiences, and it is necessary that they reconstruct and reorganize the experiences they go through daily so that they become a beneficial and understanding instrument for the future (Dewey, 1959, p. 8 as cited in Rocha, 2006, p.110) [5].

Considering that school reflects society, and it can be said that the second develops in the function of the evolution that happens in the first, it is important that pedagogical practices of Democracy are present in schools

and in the forms of teaching-learning, with the objective of achieving equity of opportunities for all the actors of the school institution. As Duque (2014, p.2) [6] states, "the conceptions of democracy and education, in a broader discourse, appear related as a way of guaranteeing everyone an equal right to education".

In democratic education, students should be involved in the planning of the school curriculum, thus being able to make democratic and collaborative decisions, making governance open to the entire school community (Appel, 2006) [7]. Still, in order to make the teaching-learning process more captivating and meaningful for students, it is necessary to take into account their personal and social interests, because "a problem-centred curriculum embodies the idea that the democratic way of life involves collaborative work on common social issues." (Beane, 2003, p.96) [8]. In this way, students can acquire new knowledge and integrate the knowledge they already have regarding the topic at hand, as an instrument for solving problems. The centrality in children's interests and choices underlies the idea of their active participation in the construction of knowledge and decision-making. They come into contact with an individualized education, which allows them "to develop the critical spirit, autonomy, the sense of cooperation, responsibility and solidarity." (Duque, 2014, p.4) [6].

With this goal in mind, teachers should promote the creation of democratic communities in the classroom, making students share the experience of solving a common concern, for example. The Class Assemblies are an excellent instrument that can be used to achieve this purpose, considering that "they have an important role, not only being a moment of sharing but of direct exercise of democratic participation in the school and motor of moral development and social and civic development." (Sebastião, 2022, p. 9) [9]. Thus, these allow students to be given a voice, being a way of dealing with conflicts, but also of making the same participants in the management of the classroom in collaboration with colleagues and the teacher. In this way, the capacity for reflection and critical thinking in the interveners is stimulated from the execution of the values of an active and participatory citizenship, as well as autonomy, and it is from these that each one recognizes their function within the school community. In the opinion of Pinho (2021) [10], the fact that students are involved in a participatory organization, where their opinion and their interests are taken into account, being even encouraged to use their freedom of expression and to develop their critical thinking, argumentation, autonomy and responsibility, allows them to feel an integral part of the class and, consequently, increase their enthusiasm for learning.

In this context, it is essential to point out that, in a democratic school, the relations between teacher and students undergo changes, because the teacher places himself in a more collaborative position towards students (Beane, 2003, p. 107-108) [8]. Here, his role becomes mainly that of a mediator, considering that "the teacher, in the exercise of the art of relationship with the learner, is by nature a mediator: a mediator between knowledge and the learner, architect of bridges between knowledge and people." (Silva, 2007, p. 119) [11]. The teacher guides the

learning, clarifying them and taking into account the profile of each student. Thereby, the relationships within the classroom cease to be totally hierarchical and start to be based on dialogue and the exchange of ideas. As Pinho (2021, p.89) [10] suggests, "the action of the teacher has a very important role, because the way he manages the life of the class, greatly influences the way students face the educational process and the way they relate to each other.". In addition, democratic teaching also privileges the relations between the school and the rest of the community, both as a resource in the teaching-learning process, as well as at the level of collaborative participation in the management of the curriculum. Moreover, the school should also seek to make the community a space for study, where students can act and be active interveners. As Apple and Beane (2001, as cited in Almeida, *et al.*, 2019, p. 6) [12] argue, "Democratic schools are committed to finding ways to increase the meaningful participation of all those involved in the educational process, such as parents, the community, and especially the students themselves."

On top of that, a democratic school has as a fundamental principle the integration of students' experiences in the teaching-learning processes. It is from those experiences, and the reflections that students make about them, that they create an idea about themselves and the world that surrounds them. As an integrative experience for students, theatre can be an important tool for learning and expressing their thoughts. Therefore, "theatre should not be disassociated from this new educational proposal, functioning as an active agent for them to learn through art and processes of playfulness to form a rich repertoire of teaching and learning possibilities" (Pimentel, 2019, p.6) [13].

Moreover, the exploration of spaces within the community is an added value in the teaching-learning process, since transporting students out of the school space, where they are most of the time sitting in a classroom, raises curiosity and attention. These create a distinct dynamic to which they are accustomed, leading to an increase in the predisposition that they have to acquire certain knowledge. As Sousa and Sarmiento (2010, p.149) [14] refer related to the involvement of the community in the teaching-learning processes, "the child (student at school, child at home and citizen in the community) feels more motivated and positions himself/herself more positively in relation to the school and its learning, which enhances its success, with children at risk being the ones who can benefit most from this involvement". For this reason, the community must create educational offers external to the school, competing with it to leave its traditional parameters and reinvent its way of teaching, contributing to the adaptation of teaching that has been discussed over the years.

Furthermore, the strategies based on democratic education must be adapted to the year of schooling, based on the stipulated objectives, both in terms of knowledge, skills and values. In this way, the main objective of the proposed project was the elaboration of a play to present to the school community, in collaborative creation with the students and according to democratic principles.

Taking this into consideration, objectives were defined both for the authors of this paper who were actively

involved in the implementation of the project in the school (pre-service teachers) and for the students that were engaged in this project.

For the authors, the main objectives were: to recognize the importance of Democracy, its implementation in a school context, its action on people and how it acts in children's learning; create a democratic, captivating and active environment, both in the classroom and in the other school spaces; develop the ability to work in groups; develop capacity for observation and reflection.

Additionally, for the students, this project aimed: to understand a deeper concept of Democracy and how it is mirrored in school; identify democratic moments in everyday life; integrate families and the community in school projects; develop a critical and reflective spirit; develop the ability to work in groups and autonomously.

As the central theme of this project is "Democracy in school", we made an analysis of the curricular documents of reference, namely, the *Students' Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling* ([Despacho n.º 6605-A/2021, de 6 de julho](#)), to understand how these fit into the objectives of this project. Regarding the theme of the project, the students' profile by the end of compulsory schooling highlights Values and Areas of Competence that are important to develop in students throughout schooling. In this particular, we highlight values such as: responsibility and integrity; excellence and demand; curiosity, reflection and innovation; citizenship and participation and, finally, freedom. This document also highlights Areas of Competence, such as: information and communication; reasoning and problem-solving; critical thinking and creative thinking; interpersonal relationships; personal development and autonomy; aesthetic and artistic sensibility; and, finally, the consciousness and mastery of the body.

We also analyzed the Essential Learnings of the 2nd year of Primary School document ([Despacho n.º 6944-A/2018, de 19 de julho](#)), and taking into account the nature of the implemented project, we focused on disciplines of Portuguese and Artistic Education – Dramatic Expression/Theatre¹. In these disciplines, the project was more clearly framed in the domains Reading-Writing and Literary Education regarding the discipline of Portuguese; and in the domains of Appropriation and Reflection, Interpretation and Communication and Experimentation and Creation regarding the discipline of Art Education – Dramatic Expression/Theatre.

Based on these objectives and curricular framework, the project activities were planned and implemented. Thus, these documents served as a guide to the elaboration of the implemented activities, both with regard to their adequacy to the school year and to the achievement of the expected learning goals by the students.

2. Materials and Methods

The authors opted for an active learning approach, where students are the main actors in the teaching-learning process since the theme of our project is developed around the concept of Democracy and, as Rebelo (2010, p.59) [15] argues, "the participation of students is understood as an unavoidable factor of development and learning".

Since the project took place weekly over a semester, it was considered important to plan each of the sessions on the basis of a reflection to devise strategies and appropriate approaches to each intervention, always using the students' feedback from the previous session as a starting point.

It was decided to use a democratic and participatory strategy when it comes to classroom decisions, using Class Assemblies. In the perspective of Garcia and Hofstatter (2016, p.230) [16], "class assemblies would be important spaces for conflict resolution, in which it is possible to make students reflect on values and thus form their ethical and moral identity". This strategy allowed to give voice to the students and provide moments of auscultation and reflection, in which the authors were mere mediators.

In a democratic perspective of empowering students to share their opinions, a "Suggestion Box", was used. There, students' suggestions could be shared anonymously. In Students' suggestion ended up being used throughout the project, and their use varied depending on the content of the suggestion.

For the elaboration of the scenario and the props of the play, the authors decided to privilege group work as a central methodology throughout the intervention sessions. This approach was intended to be democratic as it is crucial that students develop the ability to work with others, as well as respect and listen to the opinion of their colleagues, even if it differs from theirs. "Democracy in the classroom reduces the hierarchy of the teacher-student relationship, with an increasingly significant appreciation of the central role of the student in the learning process and in the concept of group work." (Torres & Irala, 2014, p. 71) [17].

The strategy used to mediate behaviour in the classroom was based on the elaboration of the "Pot of Respect", whose purpose was to fill it with small stones. Each stone was placed in the pot whenever, at the end of each session, the authors jointly with the students, reflected on their attitudes and considered that they were appropriate to the activities to be carried out. Here, it was considered, essentially, the respect for both the intervening teachers and the colleagues, as well as the commitment shown during the activities. The goal was to add stones to the pot, and by doing so, they had to meet certain requirements. This way, every time two stones accumulated in the pot, they would be given a prize or a useful reward, for example, school material or a class photo. This strategy is supported by the Gamification principles: the use of a reward, in this case, was thought to stimulate the path to travel and not to reward the goal achieved. the idea was to make the students understand that the fact of respecting others was part of their journey according to that scope, as Werbach (2012) argues [18].

Another strategy adopted was the creation of a *Padlet* with photos and videos of the activities carried out, as well as their explanation, always safeguarding the ethical

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https://www.dge.mec.pt/sites/default/files/Curriculo/Aprendizagens_Essenciais/1_ciclo/1c_teatro.pdf

concerns of students' image rights. Thus, a statement of Informed Consent was prepared, intended for children and parents, to acquire authorization to photograph and record some moments of the implementations. As so, the *Padlet* emerged with the intention of serving as a bridge between the activities of the project carried out in the school and the students' parents/legal guardians, in an attempt to establish contact with them, even if indirect, and, consequently, make them participatory elements in the school community.

At last, it should be noted that the intervention project culminates in the staging of a play, ensuring that the entire development process was carried out in a democratic way, making the students active actors in this procedure. As Pedrosa *et al.* (2011, p. 219) [19] state, the "application of active methodologies leads students to reflect on their work process and to transform their reality, benefiting it, considering that it awakens in them the critical sense and the search for changes in their relationship with themselves and with the general community".

2.1. Participants

The described project took place during the second semester of the 2022/2023 school year and included 23 students from a second-year class at a primary school in the district of Aveiro, Portugal. The classroom to intervene was composed of twenty-three students, aged between six and eight years, one of them covered by the support measures of Special Education. The students were, in general, accompanied by a titular teacher and an assistant teacher, who helped them in daily school activities and was in charge of these when the titular teacher could not be present. There was also a Special Education teacher, who accompanies the student who needs this additional help.

The project was developed within the scope of a Curricular Unit from the 1st cycle degree in Basic Education, of the University of Aveiro.

Throughout the project, several contacts were initiated in an attempt to establish partnerships that could enrich it, helping to involve the local community with the school community. Initially, the goal was to prepare with the students a theatre to present to the entire school and university community. Accordingly, we tried to contact the Teatro Aveirense and GretUA [two theater companies from Aveiro, Portugal], requesting the provision of a place where students could present the theatre and also help improve it through the experience of its members.

Professors of Artistic Expressions of the University of Aveiro were also contacted, so that they could give an opinion on how our ideas could be realized. They contributed to the construction of the script for the theatre play, making some improvements in it so that it was suitable for students of the 2nd year of schooling.

However, it was not possible to achieve a partnership that would enable the play to be held in a designated venue, since there was no longer availability due to other commitments. Considering that the planning of the project began in February, it was not possible to initiate contacts with possible partners in advance.

2.2. Project Implementation

The implementation of this project arose from the degree in Basic Education at the University of Aveiro, Portugal. Here, it was proposed to develop a project on the theme of Democracy and Education where, more specifically, we chose to explore Democracy from the students' point of view.

The project interventions took place from February to May, on Thursdays, that is, from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm. These sessions, therefore, had a duration of 3 hours each day, divided in half by an interval of 30 minutes.

The authors decided to initially plan all the sessions to be held in a general way, in order to determine the intended purposes of each intervention, but also to ensure that it was possible to achieve the proposed objectives for the project. In spite of this, throughout the intervention, and in order to adapt the activities thought to the context, the plans have undergone some changes.

In this sense, weekly meetings were held in order to plan the intervention to follow, taking into account the results obtained in the previous intervention and stipulating a duration for each activity, since it was considered that it was important that all were interconnected by a guiding thread. Still, in those, the authors discussed what happened in each intervention, recording and describing the moments performed, as well as making a reflection on each of them and on the students' assessment of the interventions.

Regarding to the implemented project activities, it can be said that these were organized according to three distinct moments (Table 1). A first, corresponding to the first session, which consisted of the exploration, together with the students, of Democracy-related contents and practices, in order to contextualize and awaken the students to this topic, both in real life and in school situations. Thus, it was intended to involve students in some practical/real-life situations where democratic principles were present, as well as to discuss the advantages of their use. A second, corresponding to the following eight sessions, which consisted in the elaboration and preparation of a play according to democratic principles, where the students developed their concept of the ideal school. Ultimately, a third moment, corresponds to the last session, which consisted of the presentation of the play to the school community.

After the presentation of Table 1, we will describe some of the activities carried out during the interventions.

In order to understand the students' prior knowledge on the topic of Democracy, we asked them to fill out a questionnaire on some democratic practices, "School Democracy". The questionnaire consisted of a total of seven open-ended questions. In this introductory questionnaire, we tried to understand whether students used democratic practices in their daily lives, how important they think their opinions were for school development, what changes they would make in school and whether some of these were in line with what is understood as a democratic school. During the course of the questionnaire, we found that the students' greatest difficulty was in understanding the questions, which was an indicator to the authors that the questions might not be appropriate for the year of schooling.

There was also an expressive reading of the book "A eleição dos Bichos [The President of the Jungle]", by

André Rodrigues. After that, we proceeded with a small post-reading moment, questioning the students about words that they had not understood and some key concepts related to Democracy that were suggested by the book. From this moment, a proficuous debate was generated in the classroom among the students. This reinforced the understanding of Democracy by relating these concepts to both practical everyday examples and examples from the book itself.

Table 1. Session planning and description

Intervention Day	Session Planning
Session nº1	Presentation of the intervening teachers and the students. Project Explanation. Realization of the questionnaire on some democratic practices. Reading of the book "A eleição dos Bichos [The President of the Jungle]", by André Rodrigues. Presentation of <i>Padlet</i> . Building a mental map. Game "Recreates the scene from the movie".
Session nº2	Activity "Topics under discussion". Votes on the themes for the theatre. Presentation of the Suggestion Box.
Session nº3	Presentation of the "Pot of Respect". Games "Do you know your colleague?", "Mirror", "Statues of the Alphabet", "Imagine" and "Mime".
Session nº4	Delivery of the theatre script. Presentation of <i>Prezi</i> . Staging of the theatre.
Session nº5	Staging of the Theatre and making of props for the theatre.
Session nº6	Rehearsal of the theatre and realization of props for the theatre.
Session nº7	Construction of props for the theatre.
Session nº8	Rehearsal of the theatre and realization of the last prop for the theatre. Drawings on Democracy.
Session nº9	General Rehearsal.
Session nº10	Presentation of the theatre to the school community.

Still, it was built a mind map with the students, which consisted of linking the concepts recently learned with Democracy, which was the central word for this map.

In order to create a playful-pedagogical moment, students were also involved in a game that consisted of recreating one scene of a movie chosen by them.

In the activity "Topics under Discussion" we asked the students to identify some problems in their school. In groups, we defined solutions to the most common problems and it was decided that these would integrate the theatre.

We presented the students with the "Suggestion Box", clarifying that we were going to leave it in the classroom so they could leave comments on the interventions, ideas to carry out during them and proposals for the theatre. And the "Pot of Respect" was also suggested, where we explained to the students that we would observe their behavior during the sessions, checking if they comply with the rules and if they interact in the classroom with respect.

In order to start the process of deciding some aspects of the theatre, an activity was carried out to define the characters of each student in it. To facilitate this choice, we planned the game "Do you know your classmate?", which consisted of students voting for classmates for a list of previously selected characteristics, where each of these corresponded to a character in the theatre. Several other games ("Mirror", "Statues of the Alphabet", "Imagine" and "Mime") were also carried out to prepare for the

theatre. These were important for the students to start creating a notion of body expression and space, but also to train memorization and attention for the other. These are essential characteristics in the staging of a theatre and can be obtained through these common training exercises that we have chosen for the students.

The authors showed the script of the theatre for the first recognition of it by the students. In this moment, we gave opportunity to the students to make some adjustments in the characters and in their lines if they were not comfortable with them. After that, we explain the elements that are present in a dramatic text, namely the acts, the scenes and the didascalias, and what information they give us in the representation of the theatre. For this, we used a multimedia presentation previously produced in *Prezi* platform.

The preparation the props and the invitations for the theatre was done with the students, since it follows the democratic principles, integrates the students in the project and in its presentation. In relation to the props, we asked students to make a drawing on Democracy, so they could be used in the end of the teather as a way to demonstrate the impact of this theme in their school life.

The students rehearsed the theatre during various sessions so that in the end they could present it clearly and without difficulties. These rehearsals were done gradually, with a script and depending on the evolution of the students. The last moment corresponded to the presentation of the theatre to the school community, being present both the teachers who accompanied us throughout the project and the students' families.

2.3. Material and Financial Resources

Throughout the project, various types of material and digital resources were used that enabled the development of the activities and helped, in our opinion, to promote the motivation of the students for the theme explored.

One of the digital resources used was *Padlet* since this tool gives the possibility to create a dynamic and interactive wall to record various documents, photos and links shared by the editor, which can be viewed by those who have the link to access the wall. It aimed to establish a bridge between the project and the family, involving them in the process of teaching and learning of the students. This instrument also served students and parents to have records of the interventions.

During the interventions, *Prezi* (a tool that allows you to create non-linear presentations) was used as an interactive way to make a presentation to explain to students some concepts of a play, such as didascalia, scene and act.

The Google timer was also used, as a way to inform the student about the time they could take in some of the planned activities.

Regarding material resources, it was tried to make them sustainable, in order to promote the principles of education for sustainability, as it was one of the students' suggestions. In this way, they were asked to bring recyclable materials for the elaboration of the scenery and props of the theatre. Despite this effort, it was also necessary to use several printd throughout the interventions, because it was essential to have the script of

the play for the students, the satisfaction evaluation sheets of the same, the certificates for an activity, among others.

3. Results and Discussion

The assessment of the project was carried out systematically throughout the interventions in two different ways: one directed to the evaluation of the degree of satisfaction of the students and another related to the learning performed by the students. The first was elaborated from a table where the students, individually, identified the day corresponding to the intervention and then painted the number of stars that reflected their appreciation for the intervention in general. For this, a five-point Likert-like scale was used, where one painted star corresponded to "Disliked", two to "Liked Little", three to "Liked More or Less", four to "Liked" and five to "Liked Much". This moment was always held at the end of each intervention, so that the students could assess all the activities carried out throughout the session. As for the second mode of evaluation mentioned, it was elaborated through field notes, with topics previously stipulated on what was intended to be observed, centered on the main objectives of the intervention performed.

In addition, there was another moment that allowed us to ascertain the students' previous knowledge, namely the completion by the students of a questionnaire on some democratic practices, called "School Democracy".

Furthermore, the elaboration of the *Padlet* consisted of an instrument for collecting indicators on the participation of the family in the students' school life, through their appreciation of the activities carried out in intervention and the comments and suggestions made on this platform.

At last, the drawings on Democracy made by the students served to verify what understanding they have about this theme at the end of the interventions, making a parallelism with the results obtained in the questionnaires.

Firstly, the data related to the degree of satisfaction of the students are presented, filled by them in a table elaborated for this purpose and collected, as previously mentioned, throughout all the interventions (Table 2).

Table 2. Degree of student satisfaction with project interventions

Intervention Day		Degree of student satisfaction				
		Rating given by students				
		Liked Much	Liked	Liked more or less	Liked little	Disliked
Session n°1	Questionnaire "School Democracy"	18	2		2	
	Book "The Election of Animals"	19	1	1		1
	Mind Map	19	2			1
	Game "Recreate the scene!"	21	1			1
Session n°2		21			1	1
Session n°3		18	2			2
Session n°4		22	1			
Session n°5		19	2			
Session n°6		20		1		
Session n°7		21	2			
Session n°8		22		1		
Session n°9		21		2		

Taking into account the results from Table 2, it can be concluded that the students, in their majority, appreciated the activities performed throughout the intervention sessions. However, we found that there is a smaller discrepancy in the results of the sessions aimed mainly at the construction of the props, from session 2 to 8, with a clear demonstration of interest in the area of Artistic Expressions. Based on this, with regard to the sessions for the rehearsal of the play, of the 5, 6 and 8, it is understood that the students began to consider the interventions more fruitful when this activity began, because, although the degree of satisfaction differed, there were no students who did not appreciate these moments. Moreover, throughout the interventions some games were held in order to experience Democracy in its practical sense and also to involve students in activities related to the area of Drama, more specifically. Thus, it was concluded that this is a type of activity that has the ability to arouse the interest of many students, but also to create a greater division between the degree of satisfaction of the same. This is because, since the students are very different, with characteristics and desires that are also divergent, it is normal that they feel more willing to perform activities in certain areas, something that can also be verified in the first intervention, with the appreciations that the students made of each activity. For this reason, we understand that Artistic Expressions, in general, can captivate students in a more comprehensive way.

With regard to the "School Democracy" questionnaire, where data were collected on the students' previous knowledge and practices in relation to the theme of Democracy, these were answered by twenty-two students of the class in question. The student covered by the covered by the support measures of Special Education did not answer the questionnaire because he was having a support class with the Special Education teacher. Next, we will present the results regarding the students' answers in the questionnaires:

Question 1: Have you ever heard of Democracy? Can you explain in your own words?

Answers: Approximately 91% of the students answered that they had never heard of Democracy and that, for this reason, they could not explain it in their own words. The remaining 9% of students responded that they thought Democracy meant problems and conflicts. In this way, we could verify that the students projected the idea of Democracy that has been formed and presented by society and how it works. Therefore, it is not so much that the students do not have a formed idea about what Democracy is, but that they reflect - like a mirror - the society we have regarding its democratic functioning.

Question 2: Do you think the school should listen more often to your opinion? Why? Give examples.

Answers: Approximately 27% of the students answered "No", but the justifications presented diverged from each other. It is possible that 14% did not understand the question that was being asked, since they could not justify the answer they gave. This can be an indicator that the questions asked may not be fully age-appropriate. The remaining students who answered "No" to this question, justified their answer by saying that it did not make sense for them to give their opinion on the affairs of the school, because the professionals of the school are not their

friends or because they did not mind not having a say in the decisions of the school. On the other hand, approximately 73% of the students answered "Yes" to this question. However, as before, the justifications and examples given differed considerably. Regarding the examples, it should be noted that the students mention the possibility of having free classes, of these being able to be held in an outdoor space, of having a different duration, but also mention the possibility of having more recess time playing with other years of schooling and using the computer more often, such as having online classes from home. From the answers given by the students, we found that the majority consider that their opinions can be an asset to the school and, consequently, to the community around it. Additionally, it can be concluded that from the answers given, the remaining students still have very much rooted in the idea that this is not their role and that, even though they are the most affected by the decisions made and that these are the exclusive function of the adults who are responsible for them. This contributes to demonstrating the added relevance of talking about Democracy from a perspective that is close to their everyday experiences.

Question 3: What do you do when a colleague is giving their opinion and you don't agree with it?

Answers: Approximately 18% of the students stated that they would take a vote to solve the problem, 5% answered that they would not play with the colleague who showed to have a different opinion, 23% stated that they would answer that the opinion of the colleague is wrong, 18% answered that they would first listen to the opinion of the colleague and then realize if they agree or not, 14% stated that they would listen to their colleague, but that their opinion prevails, 5% answered that they would put their finger in the air to refute the opinion of the colleague, 5% say that they would continue to play with the colleague even though he had a different opinion, 9% said that they would agree with the opinion of the colleague and 5% of the answers had to be annulled because the authors did not understand what was written by the students. In this sense, it is understood that some students, despite not having theoretical knowledge about the concept of democracy, act according to it, because they have the ability to perceive that a contrary opinion can contribute to enriching their own point of view and if this does not happen, that a decision by votes is the fairest way to solve a problem. However, it turns out that most students understand that their opinion is the most correct, not being open to new opinions and, in some cases, see this difference as an impossibility of establishing relationships with the other person.

Question 4: Do you think your opinion is more important than that of your colleagues? Why?

Answers: Approximately 9% of students answered "I don't know"; 32% answered "Yes", and within these, 14% could not explain why they considered their opinion more important; 9% of students stated that the opinion of colleagues is more important than theirs; and 50% say that their opinion is no longer important, and within these, 36% justified that they consider all opinions equally important, 5% did not give any explanation, 5% say that this is due to the fact that colleagues are their friends and 5% say they like the opinions of colleagues.

Question 5: If you could change anything in school, what would it be?

Answers: Approximately 18% of students said they would not change anything, 18% answered that they would have animals in school, 9% answered that they would change the space of the school and 9% answered that they would change the duration of the class. The remaining students all answered different things, highlighting the behaviour of their classmates so that they do not have to write as punishment the classroom rules in the notebook, the possibility of having more recess time at school and using the interactive board more often. Thus, it is verified that some students believe that the school provides the best learning space, not finding any inconvenience in the way their time in school was managed. On the other hand, the vast majority identify some improvements, both in the context of the classroom and in the outdoor space and in the teaching-learning process, considering that these would allow them to make better use of the school space as a whole.

Question 6: Would you like to do activities outside of school? Can you give examples?

Answers: Approximately 18% of students answered that they liked to do activities in nature, 14% answered that they liked to go to the Fábrica da Ciência Viva [a Science Center in Aveiro, Portugal] or do activities related to science, 9% stated that they liked to make study visits with the school, 9% answered that they liked to take a bus trip, 14% stated that they liked to do varied physical activities outside of school, 9% stated that they liked to go to a theatre or do activities related to expressions, 5% answered that they liked to develop a project on democracy, 5% said that they liked to ride a bicycle, 5% that they liked to play with their colleagues outside the school space, 5% that they liked to go to the pool, 5% answered that they would not like to do activities outside of school and 5% answered "I do not know". After analyzing the students' responses, it was found that most would like to do more activities outside of school because, although they refer to different areas they would like to work, they see the community as a space that can contribute to their participatory learning, which is where Democracy is built.

Question 7: Would you like your family to participate more in the activities you do at school? In what way?

Answers: Approximately 9% of students did not answer the question, 18% stated that they would not like to have their parents participate in the activities; 9% answered "I do not know", 36% answered "Yes", but did not justify in what way; 14% stated that they would like to be able to have the help of their parents in the works and 14% answered that they would like their parents to be present at school to perform games or other activities. In this way, it is perceived that the presence of parents in school activities is not consensual, because they are not used to having this experience and, for this reason, even when they believe that it would be beneficial, they cannot explain how they would like this sharing to happen.

The questionnaire served to understand the starting point of the students' knowledge in relation to Democracy, explored throughout the project, and it was from the answers obtained that the implemented activities were developed.

Relating these results with the drawings elaborated by the students in the eighth session, in order to understand if they understood the concept of Democracy, it was observed that some students were able to highlight some reference elements, namely from the representation of assemblies, votes, the ballot box and manifestations. In addition, some students also mentioned phrases or words linked to this concept, such as "Share ideas, make choices.". In this context, it was found that most students were able to capture the essence of the subject in question, acquiring elementary knowledge and practices adjacent to them. Moreover, taking into account the results obtained in the questionnaires, it was understood that there was a deeper understanding of the concept of Democracy and its advantages, since it was situated and contextualized in their students' lives.

As for the evaluation we made of the students from the field notes collected, it was verified that there was a gradual progress of the students with regard to some of the points selected as fundamental to observe to respond to the established problem, and not all of them presented results with favourable development. That said, in relation to the first intervention, where we observed the students' understanding of Democracy, this knowledge was very reduced and was gradually improved throughout the various interventions, which requested their participation. Although, in the end, we verified that most students were aware of this concept and its practices. However, we found that, despite some students showed this ability, the majority had great difficulty in using Democracy as a strategy for their lives. Despite the fact that this process was often facilitated by the authors, with more favorable results, individually, this difficulty manifested itself until the end of the interventions. Another subject important to observe was the critical sense of the students. They demonstrated critical sense on the subjects addressed, most of the time, being that they showed interest in giving their opinions and discussing them with their colleagues. It was also important to observe what knowledge the students were using for the construction of the theatre. It was noticeable that the students managed to use some of these during the interventions, considering that they found solutions for the problems that have arisen. However, in some situations, where they were expected to have increased autonomy in performing tasks, we found that this knowledge could not be applied. Another of the relevant observations for the intervention was the precession of how a theatre works, since it was noticeable that initially they had no previous knowledge in relation to this subject. After the multimedia presentation made in Prezi and the various rehearsals carried out throughout the interventions, it was noticed that they understood how it worked. However, with the change of space for the place where they would present the theatre to the community, we understand that this was a clear confusion for the students. Although there was a space for the classroom scene and another for the playground scene, the students did not understand which space was intended for each scene. Nevertheless, they easily acquired this perception, as was seen in the final presentation. Also, regarding respect for rules and colleagues, we found that there is a predisposition to interrupt colleagues and not respect each other's time to speak. In spite of this, it was also observed,

in some activities, that they help each other in some tasks and are concerned about the well-being of their peers, alerting to destabilizing situations. As for the remaining rules, it was found that they are mostly complied with, the one mentioned above being the one that stood out as most disrespected. Finally, one of the most relevant observations is related to the students' interest in the planned activities, we observed that this interest was maintained throughout all sessions by most students, having always been very participative.

In reference to *Padlet*, despite the two attempts made in order to encourage parents to know the project to be developed with their students, it was observed that they did not use this platform recurrently, since there were few reactions to the publications. That is, only one or two likes on the posts, only one comment regarding our presentation to the family and no suggestions. Despite this, when there was a need to ask the families for help in terms of reusable materials and to sign informed consents and the presence papers, they were very participative and concerned about bringing what was requested. Besides, regarding the attendance at the play of the students, all families showed interest in attending it, with no student without at least one family member present.

4. Conclusions

Throughout the implementation of the project, we (the authors who are teachers in training) were able to achieve personal and professional growth within the context of the classroom. This was developed through the use of democratic practices in conflict resolution, but also as a pedagogy to be applied in the teaching and learning process. In this way, a democratic environment was created, which captivated the students and placed them as the centre of their learning. On top of that, strong and consistent links were created with the context, which facilitated our adaptation allowing us to carry out this project in an impactful way for students, institution and community.

Regarding the objectives set for the students, the authors consider that these have been mostly met. In this sense, the project allowed them to develop a concept of Democracy, although in a more elementary way, and relate it to school practices. Based on this, it was necessary for the students to develop their critical and reflective spirit about the environment that surrounds them and the strategies they could devise to solve the problems identified adjacent to it. With these objectives in mind, we promote group work, as we consider that this is a means to understand and adapt the social relations that will be present during the students' lives, but also autonomous work, which will also be a fundamental factor in their insertion into society. Although, the goal we have outlined in order to integrate families and the community in school projects has not achieved the expected success. In relation to the families, they did not contribute with opinions and suggestions to the project. The community, on the other hand, showed interest in the project but, due to the organization of the curricular unit itself, it was not possible to carry out external partnerships.

Having said that, and highlighting the problem on which this whole project was elaborated, evaluating it both from the perspective of the students and from that of the authors, it is possible to conclude that Artistic Expressions constitute, for most students, as a method of motivating for the learning of varied themes. As a way to present Democracy, this area can be allied with a joint decision-making process, where there is a space for debate and reflection for students to decide on the best options to achieve a favourable outcome for all. Thus, the classroom becomes a small society that mirrors the world in which they live, where they are later intended to exercise their role as active participants with decision-making power.

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Statement of Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests.

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