Chapter 21
Democratic Education and Promotion of Social Skills in Schools and Classrooms as Primary Prevention: An Overview of the Discourse in Germany

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The school shootings in Erfurt, Emsdetten, Winnenden, and Ansbach in Germany are unmistakable proof that this violent phenomenon is by no means confined to schools abroad—or specifically, as media reports often claim, to those in the United States—but that it affects German schools, too. This development touched off controversies in Germany, with unprecedentedly vehement calls for improving safety at schools. The discussions focused primarily on secondary and tertiary preventive measures, such as weapons checks at schools and the prohibition of first-person shooter games, presupposing a direct influence of such games on school shootings and suggesting the existence of cause-and-effect relationships between the two. What was not addressed was the fact that while this approach might help to combat the symptoms, it would be unable to get at the cause of the phenomenon. If, however, the objective is to achieve far-reaching changes, what is necessary is an approach on the primary preventive level that takes a holistic view of the lifeworlds of the young generation. The living conditions of young people in Germany have changed in recent decades at an unprecedented rate and to a thus far unknown degree, causing changes that present adolescents themselves, but also the institution of school, with many new challenges, opportunities, and risks. The transformation of the family; ongoing mediatization; a change in educational culture associated with significantly expanded freedoms and increasing individualism and independence in combination with prolonged financial dependence on parental income, and thus a lack of independence in some respects; increased stress through social discrimination; a change in living environment, the conversion of leisure time into

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something which resembles school and education; and the experience of different kinds of heterogeneity are just some highlights to partially and selectively describe the lives of young people today (Hurrelmann, 2008). Young people grow up in the most diverse worlds and bring their experiences, positive and negative (varied in any case), from there to school life. Thus the school, because of its strong impact as a social environment, becomes a focal point of students' lives and a powerful agent of socialization. This makes schools a significant object of study not only as a crime scene, but also as a facilitating or deterrent factor.

In the course of individualization tendencies and the related challenging of predetermined values and religious and political orientations, every young person today has the chance to go their own way early on, and to develop a highly individual lifestyle (Beck, 1986). But at the same time, demands on personal skills for shaping lifestyle and safeguarding identity are also increasing. This is where there are already development risks for many young people (Rohlfs & Palentien, 2006). Longitudinal studies on political socialization (Heitmeyer, 2002–2010) show that in situations of uncertainty young people may be inclined to develop simplified and extreme values and orientations. The attitudes which arise from this have their origin in the feeling that control over one's own values could become lost. This is all the more so when isolation looms, there is uncertainty about achieving desired educational and career goals, and helplessness about shaping one's own future. Demoralization, depression, and deprivation are the consequences of the subjective perception of not being able to shape or influence one's own living conditions. When, in addition, young people in such a situation lack sufficiently developed social, emotional, and communication skills to assess and process these psychological and social stresses (Rohlfs, Harring, & Palentien, 2008), they may resort to countermeasures which, in their final and extreme form, may ultimately be expressed as violence against persons in their social surroundings. The phenomenon of the school shooting with which we are here concerned is one of the forms such violence can take. The subjectively perceived hopelessness described here is also reflected in the self-portrayals of many perpetrators (Böckler & Seeger, 2010; Larkin, 2007; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010). At the same time, empirical studies often characterize school shooters as introverted loners with deficient social skills. These deficits can be attributed to problems in the family, the peer group, and the school. Unlike the family and the peer group, however, the school is a professional, pedagogical institution and therefore has the duty of offering adolescents a space that fosters their psycho-social development (for an overview of perpetrators' life situations, see Böckler, Seeger, & Heitmeyer, 2011).

Based on the international debate about prevention of and intervention in school shootings (for which see Bondü et al. in this volume, chapter 15), the concept outlined in the present article focuses on schools at the primary preventive level and thus diverges from the frequently discussed threat assessment procedure (see Böckler et al., 2011). We will pursue the following line of argumentation:

At a primary prevention level schools need to take on responsibility, in addition to the imparting of specialist knowledge, for developing transferable skills, in particular soft skills (Rohlfs et al., 2008). Developing a favorable social climate in

teaching groups and at school in the context of a democratic teaching concept is both a central prerequisite for successful teaching and also of great importance for the personal development of each individual pupil, and is also the primary requirement for understanding the causes of school shootings in schools (Böckler et al., 2011). Following the disintegration approach (Heitmeyer & Anhut, 2008) the causes are to be found primarily in a lack of recognition due to insufficient participation. In this regard, the school is of special (negative) significance (Fox & Harding, 2005) and concrete action is required at school level. The aim of a democratic society must be to allow children and young people to participate directly in all major decisions from an early stage. If they experience their direct social surroundings as an environment where their voice counts and their opinion is heard, then a participatory culture develops as a prerequisite for a democratic society. The following contribution starts by examining the specific relevance of democratic education, and then presents selected concepts from this specific field of pedagogic work that can and must be understood as a preventive action, also in relation to school shootings. However—and this is the flipside of the coin—such measures can only minimize the risk of potential school shootings, but not control them (Böckler et al., 2011, p. 261).

21.1 Competence Discourse

Competences are highly valued in the German education system, which stresses output control and educational standards. The development and measurement of competences is a matter of controversy where two different discourses can be identified. One focuses on measurable and comparable specialist skills, or hard skills, and has gained remarkably in importance, particularly since the widely publicized results of the PISA studies, which were disappointing for Germany (Baumert et al., 2001)[1]; transferable skills appear here, if at all, as side categories—and in the associated research as by-products from studies in the school context with performance-related questions (Harazd & Schürer, 2006, p. 208). Meanwhile, the other discourse concentrates much more on soft and transferable skills, in particular on the demands of the labor and education market on school-leavers and graduates: teamwork, ability to compromise, cooperation, flexibility, emotional resilience (intercultural), communication skills, to name just a few of the abilities and skills cited as crucial in a changing world of work. There are currently many deficits in the media spotlight, especially concerning trainees, such as lack of conscientiousness and willingness to take on responsibility, non-existent communication skills, punctuality, lack of motivation, inadequate teamwork, etc. But here, the soft skills discourse

[1] The PISA studies are international school performance studies conducted every three years in the OECD countries to measure the general and vocational skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in different education systems.

still seems to be a discussion of secondary competences and subordinate to the discourse on specialist competences. In a constantly changing society in which even specialist skills and general knowledge are subject to constant change and "soft skills" seem to be far more constant (Franke, 2008), this seems, however, to be a risky prioritization (Rohlfs, 2008).

This applies in particular to discussions, both in the public sphere and in the specialist literature, in the aftermath of school shootings in Germany and in the course of media coverage of comparable incidents in the United States. Thus, while current studies (e.g. Hoffmann, Roshdi, & Robertz, 2009) of the profiles of perpetrators who committed targeted acts of grave violence (and, in particular, rampages) at schools indicate that these almost invariably male adolescents generally either went through at least temporary phases of self-segregation and scant contact to others in their age group or were ostracized by peers (e.g. through bullying; see, for example, Larkin, 2009 and in the present volume, chapter 7), so that their violent acts typically arose as a result of feelings of inferiority (Hoffmann et al., 2009). Nevertheless, discussion of preventive measures invariably fails to pay explicit attention to soft skills. Instead, the conclusions that are drawn from the findings on school rampages both in Germany and on the international level focus on approaches to special prevention. Most of the suggestions involve recognizing certain warning signs in students' behavior and communication in the course of a crisis (2009, p. 203). In other words, possibilities for prevention are identified only where (behavioral) anomalies and deficits in overall social behavior are already manifest and require an intervention. The concept presented here begins one step earlier, postulating fundamental improvements in soft skills as the foundation of all rampage prevention at schools—even where no immediate potential danger is yet recognizable.

Besides the strong appeal of the sobering results of German schools in international comparative studies for research and public debate, one reason for these different attributions of importance may lie in the formlessness of the much discussed but often vague "soft skills talks" (Reichenbach, 2008). So, for a more sophisticated approach to the broad field of transferable skills, Rohlfs et al. (2008) distinguish between social, emotional, and communication skills. The concept of social competence refers—and this itself seems vague enough—to a socially and individually desired positive structuring of social contacts and relationships. Socially competent behavior includes cognitive dimensions, such as knowledge of rules of conduct and conventions, as well as specific behavioral components, capabilities, and interpersonal skills, and finally touches on the emotional level of interaction (Kanning, 2005; Oerter, 2002). This includes the concept of emotional competence and materializes in a learning process within which the personal ability to deal with one's own feelings and those of others becomes more and more developed (Dreher & Dreher, 1985; Friedlmeier, 1999; Havighurst, 1972). Emotional competence thus implies "being aware of one's own feelings, expressing feelings non-verbally or verbally, and controlling them independently, as well as recognizing and understanding the emotions of others" (translated from Petermann & Wiedebusch, 2003). Communicative competence is closely linked to this and means for Ganser (2005) "verbal skills, teamwork, leadership, self-expression, personal dealings within partnerships and social relationships." This closes the circle for social competence. But the focus in

this context is on conscious and competent participation in communication and interaction processes—also of an increasingly intercultural nature (Luchtenberg, 1999)—and their possible control, also through highly developed communication skills.[2]

The terms are thus closely linked, show clear overlaps and may represent subcategories of one other, depending on usage, context, and momentary importance. It is thus especially a question of perspective, of focus, whether the social, emotional, or communicative dimensions of the term soft skills are uppermost. There is consensus that transferable skills of this kind are of great importance for general life and learning in the school context, the social climate within the class and within the school, the social integration of children and young people, and, not least, for educational achievement (Blair, 2002; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1999; Raver, 2002). Numerous studies—such as those by Petermann and Wiedebusch (2003), Tillmann, Holler-Nowitzki, Holtappels, Meier, and Popp (2000), Pieper (1999), Schubarth (1996)—demonstrate that promoting transferable skills can also lead to an improvement of specialist skills. Of great relevance in this context is the attitude towards education, which can act as a mediator, i.e. it can be a mediating link between specialist and transferable skills and educational achievement (Rohlfs, 2011). But even apart from this function in the development of specialist competencies, there should be a special place for transferable skills, the promotion of a positive social climate, and education for democracy in the everyday life of the school. Last but not least, because the likely primary causes of school shootings are not to be found in a pathological psychiatric condition of the offender (McGee & DeBernardo, 1999; Meloy, Hempel, Mohandie, Shiva, & Gray, 2001; Newman, Fox, Harding, Mehta, & Roth, 2004), it can be assumed that this problem is the result of disintegration (Heitmeyer & Anhut, 2008) and failed socialization processes in the context of social relationships within the family, peer group, and school. In its role as a mediator of professional skills and a space for social communication school is particularly important. But how is this reflected in the reality of German schools?

21.2 Democracy at School?

Rohlfs's empirical study on attitudes to school and formal education among 1,689 pupils from grades 7 and 9 at nine schools in a deprived area in the German state of Bremen (Rohlfs 2011) builds on the self-determination theory of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 1993), in which there are three inherent basic human needs or "primary psychological needs" (1991, p. 243), the satisfaction of which is a key precondition for the formation of intrinsic motivation: the need for competence or efficacy, the need for

[2] Interestingly, school shooters appear to exhibit developmental difficulties in all three areas of competence (social, emotional, and communicative; see, for example, Newman et al., 2004; Robertz, 2004), so that the focus chosen here is highly relevant and forms an important counterweight to measures devoted exclusively to special prevention (risk analysis procedures, etc.).

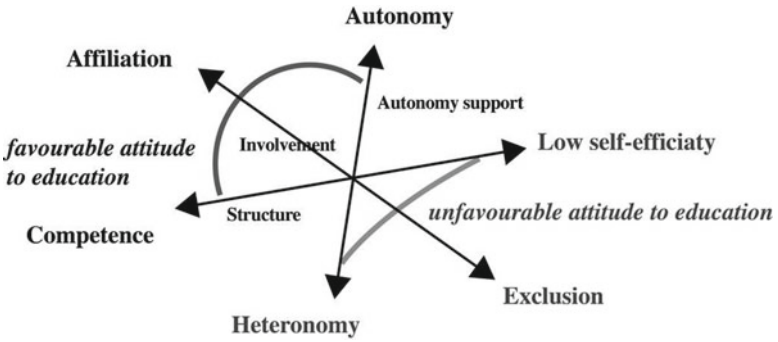

Fig. 21.1 Educational attitudes in relation to basic psychological needs. *Source*: Rohlfs (2011)

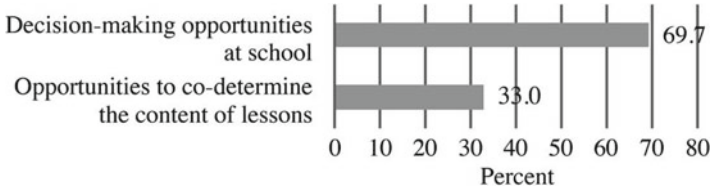

Fig. 21.2 Opportunities for participation at school and in the classroom. *Source*: Rohlfs (2011)

autonomy or self-determination, and the need for social inclusion and belonging (1993, p. 229). Rohlfs (2011) was able to show that the surveyed pupils' attitudes towards education strongly depended on the personal life of the respondent and his or her conduct in the continuum between autonomy and heteronomy, competence and self-inefficacy, and affiliation and exclusion. The stronger the individual experience of autonomy, self-efficacy, and social integration in school-related contexts, the more positive were the pupils' attitudes toward education. Thus there is an interaction between attitude and the experience of competence, autonomy, and belonging (Fig. 21.1).

The most positive attitudes correlated with the feeling of self-determination. However, the study clearly shows here that while more than two-thirds (69.7%) of the pupils surveyed were frequently involved in decision-making, only one-third (33%) had any say in the classroom—the core business of the school (Fig. 21.2).

This observation aptly describes the current democratic culture in many German schools. Although the OECD's TALIS 2007/2008 study (Teaching and Learning International Survey) found that modern teaching approaches had increasingly reached teachers in the 23 countries studied (DIPF, 2009), instructional decisions are still mainly made by the educators (Bosenius & Wedekind, 2004, p. 300).[3] So if the majority of teachers surveyed in TALIS also believe their responsibility lies in supporting pupils in the self-guided construction of knowledge, rather than directly teaching them (DIPF, 2009), and thus the paradigm shift "from teaching to learning" (Fauser, Prenzel,

[3] Germany did not take part in this study, but a similar study by the GEW teaching union paints a similar picture (GEW, 2009).

& Schratz, 2008) increasingly shapes professional activity in the classroom, adolescents' freedom to make decisions is indeed primarily restricted to school life, school trips, seating arrangements, classroom rules, organizing school events, etc. But in the classroom, just as in the organization of most of the afternoon free-time programs at all-day schools (Harring, 2011, pp. 333–334), pupils rarely feel involved autonomously and decisively—raising the question of the extent to which they can really feel responsible for their own learning (Bosenius & Wedekind, 2004, p. 300).

For the social climate in the learning group, the basic need for belonging and social integration mentioned by Deci and Ryan (1991, 1993) is still of crucial importance. Here, 87.1% of the students surveyed in Rohlfs' study (2011) describe their school as a place where they feel they belong, and about nine out of ten connote learning at school with being together with friends (89.1%). 82.5% say that it is easy to make friends at school and only 8.8% describe their school as a place where they feel lonely; 7.8% feel like outsiders. The proportion of the lonely and excluded is low overall, although sight should not be lost of what this hardship means for these young people who are not able to feel they belong at school. Not only for these pupils, a trustful relationship with teachers is of great importance. This is also significant because, especially in the case of American school shooters, there are empirical indications suggesting that the adolescents felt excluded, bullied, and lonely in the period before their crime (Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000; Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002; an overview is also provided by Böckler & Seeger, 2010, pp. 276–277). The same is true in principle of rampage perpetrators in Germany. There is copious evidence of how severe the psycho-emotional consequences of social exclusion and disintegration in the school context can be. Sebastian Bosse, for example, who committed a rampage at a secondary school in Emsdetten in 2006 and subsequently killed himself, described such experiences at school as sources of extreme trauma and threat to identity (Böckler & Seeger, 2010, pp. 115ff.).

41.4% of respondents reported such a relationship and 45.3% indicated that their teachers had an understanding of their personal problems. Empathy between teachers and students cannot substitute for peer contact, but it could contribute to a positive classroom climate and establish an atmosphere of safety and security, which is of great relevance from a primary prevention perspective, along with the opening up of spaces for participation (Rohlfs, 2011). However, the school is, as a certificate-issuing institution, a special field of interaction and participation, and the classroom community a special type of social group; Ulich (2001) even doubts that this is a group in the social-psychological sense.

21.3 The Classroom Community as a Realm of Social Experience

For Ulich (2001), the school learning group is a particularly heterogeneous forced grouping, which, unlike peer group and dyadic friendship, is not freely chosen: "The school class arises primarily as a result of formal differentiation based on age and performance…The fact that school classes are not 'natural' groups implies the need to

come to an arrangement with others and get along with them" (Ulich, 2001, p. 50, translated). Forms of relationships and interaction in the "forced community" of the classroom are often characterized more by conflict than cooperation. Teachers clearly promote this social environment through their teaching methods. And here—according to Ulich—there is usually no real interaction between the children. They either adopt a passive role or they form groups. "Genuine two-way and interrelated behavior" (Ulich, 2001, p. 50, translated) is still the exception. And at the latest when test time comes round everyone is on their own. However, the class community as a social realm of experience is of great importance—especially at the beginning of school, when the children get the opportunity to form relationships with peers, to experience belonging, to compare themselves with others, to work together, to play and to gain new experiences with norms, values, demands, and being different.

Krappmann and Oswald examine forms of relationship and group affiliation in the classroom and distinguish between groups, social networks, and fields of interaction. A group is contoured by a clear border, within which dynamic dyadic friendships can be formed. The members of the group know who belongs to it and who does not. A network of relationships is less clearly delineated; while its members belong together, there is no stable internal structure or unifying topic. Krappmann and Oswald observed children, who, although connected to each other, could identify neither borders nor internal structures nor specific topics. These are particularly children who were excluded from existing groups (Krappmann & Oswald, 1995, pp. 49ff.). Interestingly, Krappmann and Oswald cannot connect these types of classroom relationships and groups with specific patterns of interaction, such as helping or annoying, or with obvious mechanisms of social control. This clearly shows the unique character of the interaction field of the school: "In the school system, children are constantly in situations in which they interact, regardless of group boundaries, and in which other behavior guidelines overlap group orientation" (Krappmann & Oswald, 1995, p. 64, translated).

For interactions in the school classroom, the actual situation and reasons for actions appear to be more important than specific group affiliations. A clear exception here is belonging to a group of girls or boys; even in first grade, children start to establish the gender divide, to the point where it becomes an interaction barrier. If, at first, it can still easily be bypassed for common activities, it becomes more difficult to overcome during the course of elementary school. This is where same-sex relationships are mainly found, but there are bridges between the school worlds of girls and boys—specific patterns of interaction where they cross the boundaries. Krappmann, Oswald, Chowdhuri, and Salisch (1986) observed four patterns:

- *Mutual help*: The children help each other on matters such as passing an important examination, lending a utensil, or solving a difficult task. These interactions are sometimes used to demonstrate superiority, especially in the context of support for school work. But frequently offers of help are simply motivated by friendship.
- *Teasing*: Fooling around (spraying water, throwing erasers, chasing) increasingly serves a function of flirting, although initially quite rough and always with awareness of the associated risk. Boys gain protection by forming coalitions which support a boy who approaches a girl, and are ready to support him and be of immediate

assistance should the approach fail, in order to redefine the whole thing as a joke or tease. The ultimate goal is to protect the self-esteem of the boy who crosses the gender boundary. Accordingly, girls form coalitions to mock advances from boys, or to explain their own response as a misunderstanding should the boy go too far. The gender-homogeneous group thus provides security on the way over the border.

- *Annoying and reprimanding*: In the field of annoyances, boys of all age groups are more active than girls. Girls tend to use reprimands—often all too understandable—when they have to react to the annoyances of the boys. But there are also often calls for order, criticisms of the boys' performance, complaints about mistakes, or reproaches for breaking rules. The girls keep order, sometimes in a disparaging manner. During the course of the elementary school years, these annoyances and reprimands decrease noticeably. What remains is a quiet giggle when a boy makes a mistake in the eyes of the girl.
- *Touching*: The repertoire of physical contact between boys and girls is broad, from light brushing in passing to bitter fighting, from cuddling to pushing away, whereby the boys allow themselves far greater freedom than the girls. How children interpret a touch depends significantly on the context. If the accompanying verbal framework, for example, is friendly, the contact is also usually considered positive.

Gender-specific boundaries and their bridging clearly characterize the social climate of a learning group and contribute to the formation of identity. Examining interactions as a whole (not only between girls and boys), Krappmann and Oswald (1995) found that, contrary to expectations, mutual help at elementary school is observed only rarely and has hardly any impact on learning success. Cooperation between children in the context of partner or group work is rarely task-oriented or free of major stress. It is mostly marked by very uneven involvement by group members, which is often the cause of disputes. Cooperation is possible especially when close friends form a team. The work is then done under conditions of mutual appreciation, the views of the partner are taken seriously, errors are explained, suggestions taken into account, and uneven distribution of tasks forgiven. It is thus, again, the friendships which structure the realm of social experience and have a great effect on the classroom community (1995). However, the predominantly negative evaluation of peer interactions in the classroom should not close our eyes to the fact that, especially at primary level, concepts, methods, and forms are designed to promote real mutual relationships between the children. But how can social competences in the heterogeneous "forced community" of the school classroom be promoted? How can opportunities for participation be created when the development of democratic school quality is a core responsibility of school pedagogy?

21.4 Promotion of Social Skills

The "promotion of social skills" has a nice ring to it. But there is first a basic question whose answer is less easy. What goals are even desirable here?

> In the question of desirable forms of social interaction, one comes up against a subject which is particularly characterized by uncertainty and inconsistency. Summarizing the discussion, the overarching criterion of reciprocity as a "basic model" of social interaction seems to be particularly suitable for determining desirable forms of social action. Reciprocity is expressed in social relationships as "fair exchange" in the sense of give and take: e.g. speaking and listening, helping and getting help, feeling responsible for others and accepting care, experiencing and showing openness. (Petillon, 2005, p. 173)

The ability and willingness

- to make contact with others;
- to show solidarity, act together in groups and thus develop a feeling of togetherness;
- to solve conflicts constructively;
- to develop self-identity, integrate own needs and others' expectations into self-determined role behavior;
- to develop social awareness and empathy;
- to be able to give and take criticism; and
- to develop and follow rules, and change them if necessaryare crucial to substantiating the principle of reciprocity and the construct of social competence.

There are a variety of concepts for the realization of these kinds of learning objectives at the elementary and primary levels, mainly from the 1970s, that still point the way for the promotion of social learning, but have not yet been systematically evaluated (Petillon, 2005, p. 174). The aspect of conflict resolution is often highlighted in the context of social learning. By way of example, a concept for the promotion of social skills elaborated by the National Institute for School and Media, Berlin-Brandenburg, for prevention work in schools in the state of Brandenburg is worth mentioning:

> Prerequisites…for the process of acquiring social skills in the sense of continuous prevention work are:
>
> - the participation of all school stakeholders,
> - a participative relationship culture in the school,
> - new spatial concepts to promote the creation of learning, meeting, and activity rooms in the sense of "learning environments" and thus take into account the plurality of learning forms and paths,
> - opening up the school,
> - the development of an internal curriculum of social learning with designated focal points in
>   - self-competence,
>   - culture of conflict,
>   - participation,
>   - taking responsibility.
>
> These can be practically configured in two blocks for conflict culture and conflict training, for a school-based focus on the systematic development of a conflict culture. (LISUM, 2007)

The explicitly holistic program culminated in two components for conflict resolution—and indeed a variety of concepts for social learning could be characterized

in these terms. A number of different violence prevention programs were subsequently developed (Cloud, 2006; Olweus, 2006), and forms of mediation were implemented in schools (Behn, Kügler, & Lernbeck, 2006). In fact, the Lions Quest "Growing Up" program, which was developed in the 1970s in the United States, is currently used in over 50 countries, and was adapted for Germany in the 1980s by Hurrelmann and colleagues at the University of Bielefeld, is designed holistically. The focus of this concept is:

> carefully planned promotion of pupils' social skills. They are helped over the long term to strengthen their self-confidence and communication skills, to build and maintain contacts and positive relationships, to appropriately address conflict and risk situations in their everyday lives, and to find constructive solutions to problems which are often associated with puberty. At the same time, this programme, seeks to offer young people in the classroom orientation in building their own socially integrated value system. In this way, the Lions Quest "Growing Up" concept comes under life skills education, which, according to current research, has the greatest chance of success in the prevention of destructive and self-destructive behavior (addiction and drug dependence, violence, suicide) through the programme, parents are actively involved in the work of their children in many different ways. (Lions Quest, 2012)

Here the promotion of transferable skills is a responsibility shared by all those involved in school and formal education, and not limited solely to the practice of conflict resolution strategies. Perhaps for that very reason is a suitable instrument for primary prevention work in schools with a view to prevent violence.

There is another opportunity to support social learning at school via the concept of mentoring. Since the mid-1990s, a large number projects, mainly initiated outside school, have been established in the Germany, to bring together pupils (mentees) with mainly students (mentors) in pairs. Within the framework of intensive one-to-one care, these projects focus on the support, guidance, and care of individual children with their individual technical and transferable strengths and weaknesses (Rohlfs, 2008, 2012). Particularly for the promotion of social, emotional, and communication skills (2008), the principle of mentoring (sponsorships) has proven very useful. This is mainly because successful mentoring is based on the remarkable commitment of the mentors to their mentees.

The children experience a positive role model in many respects. They experience the enrichment of everyday life through someone who pays real attention to them, takes them seriously, cares about them, supports them, is interested in them, trusts them, and whom they can trust. For many adolescents, this experience is of particular value and a precondition for collaborative work and also the first success, a first and significant step on the path of personal development.

It should not be overlooked, however, that in this relationship the connection between mentors and mentees has a special character: that of a time-limited sponsorship. This must be made clear to all involved and always reflected upon. The educational actor must "limit" themselves and yet—or perhaps precisely because of this—enable an appropriate closeness in the relationship. For the schools, mentoring opens up additional and effective support, particularly driven by the commitment of the involved students. The positive portrayal of these opportunities and potential benefits of mentoring programs initiated outside of school should not obscure the fact

that schools are often forced to use these and similar tools out of sheer necessity in order to afford individual support—including social skills—at all, and that there is a clear need for reform in schools and teaching. Paradoxically enough—to put it very bluntly—it would be preferable if there were less need for elaborated student assistance projects of this kind. This is not to deny their quality and usefulness. On the contrary, cause for concern arises when it is the potential cost-neutrality of such projects that counts as the decisive quality criterion and when (as can be seen from the project reports) mentoring initiatives by the schools are deployed as short-term emergency programs when the scholastic achievement of a learning group is too poor or when the social climate is disrupted by individual students.

The current pupil assistance projects accomplish a balancing act between educational, school-based cognitive and psychotherapeutic support of vulnerable children in particular, with notable successes. In their characteristic way, the projects open up spaces for action, experiences, and development for pupils, students, universities, and schools, and provide a suitable framing for promoting real, reciprocal, cooperative interactions, and positive relationships between pupils—for this should always be the goal (Rohlfs, 2008, 2011).

21.5 Developing a Democratic School as an Educational Responsibility

The aim of national and international educational initiatives is to strengthen civic and democratic competencies in pupils. The term "civic mission of schools" has evolved from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The alternative "reinventing citizenship education" places particular emphasis on the associated educational of schools and seeks to implement it in the spectrum of subjects that are particularly relevant for democratic education, such as history, social studies, civic education, politics, and work-related subjects. Individual subjects aside, there are, on other hand, programs and concepts such as "Teaching, Learning, and Living Democracy in Schools," "Learning and Living Democracy," "Democracy at School," "School of Democracy," "Service Learning," and the "Promotional Program Democratic Action" (Beutel & Fauser, 2001; Council of Europe, 2003; Edelstein, 2005; Edelstein & Fauser, 2001; Eurydice European Unit, 2005; Himmelmann, 2001, 2006; Schirp, 2005). These initiatives focus on the social and moral foundations of democracy such as ability to empathize and adopt other perspectives, perception and exercise of responsibility, solidarity, fairness, and justice, and links these to a dedicated learning of community responsibilities (Samu & Rohlfs, 2009).

Here it is central that opening up spaces pupil autonomy, a classroom climate that promotes self-determination, and teachers taking the perspectives, interests, and realities of the pupils seriously creates a situation where children and young people show curiosity more often, are more independent in problem-solving, and have more positive self-esteem than in a more controlled learning environment (Deci & Ryan, 1993, p. 232). Participation seems to be key to a social climate within the learning

group and the school in which the individual pupils do not feel powerless and ineffective, but rather recognized and appreciated for their values and interests. Against this background, Rohlfs's findings (2011; presented above; Fig. 21.2) that while more than two-thirds of pupils are frequently involved in decision-making, they have little say in the classroom indicates a clear need for action. And this raises the question of whether teaching in the traditional form which is still widely used at German schools, in which decisions are reserved for teachers and meaningful content is imparted only to a limited extent from the pupils' perspective, is suitable for achieving democratic education and shaping democracy as something that can be experienced and lived. Rohlfs (2011) demonstrates that a lack of opportunities to participate in the classroom is often linked with a failure to find personal meaning in the content of lessons. For a clear majority of respondents, school is a compulsory affair which, although of great importance, appears to be of little practical use beyond the issuing of certificates. And this has implications for the social climate in the "forced community" of school.

There is already a large number of concepts for democratic teaching in schools, which open up remarkable perspectives for the design of lessons and schools and essentially delineate the contours of "democratic school quality" (Edelstein, 2009, p. 10) in the context of meaningful and self-directed learning. For the "concept of education for democracy seeks an accurate perception of the opportunities that exist in institutional educational contexts to promote knowledge, attitude, and ability to act in and for democracy" (Berkessel et al., 2011, p. 229) and thus defines a key basis for the development of a positive inner relationship both with the school and also toward oneself.

A democratic educational grounding in the school curriculum and a closely related focus on the interests of the pupils (Beutel & Fauser, 2007) can therefore be described as in many ways formative for attitudes and is one of the central educational responsibilities if the "new German educational catastrophe" triggered by the PISA study (Baumert et al., 2001) is to be taken as an opportunity for constructive school development at different levels. Rohlfs's empirical finding (2011) that the feeling of exclusion from the social group is less relevant for the development of a favorable attitude toward school than the experience of limited autonomy and lack of opportunities for participation underscores the urgency of this responsibility, which, even in the hectic post-PISA discourse, deserves enhanced awareness and can be seen as an important interdisciplinary constant.

It also seems necessary to bring schools, as social and political learning spaces, back into the focus of public debate. Democratic involvement grows when children see that they are respected as persons, and when they can have a responsible say in their lives and learning at school. The school is an everyday living environment, where power is exerted and interests are negotiated. It is therefore a fundamental requirement to respect the human rights of children and young people and to promote the willingness and ability of pupils for democratic coexistence within the framework of a non-violent culture. Schools also have to be accountable for how they implement this requirement—and not only for the promotion of specialist achievements (Brügelmann & Rohlfs, 2007).

On this point, the German body responsible for coordinating education policy nationally determined:

> The Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs has expressed its commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the child's right to education stipulated therein, on which the future of the individual and of society significantly depends…The Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs agrees that the status of the child and their right to all-round development in all school grades and types of school are to be respected, and that measures to promote diversity of talent and the prevention of social exclusion need to be strengthened. The Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs agrees that age-appropriate consideration of the child's right to protection, care, and participation is essential for the school culture (KMK, 2006).

The pessimistic assessment of opportunities for participation in German schools which we outlined above should not obscure the fact that an increasing number of teachers recognizes that learning democracy is a school responsibility, that they take this responsibility seriously, and that they have already developed sustainable approaches that enable actual involvement in decision-making: from open spaces for independent work to class councils and school assemblies (for a summary for the elementary school see Burk, 2003; Drews & Wallrabenstein, 2002).

> These approaches deserve respect and appreciation and require support and dissemination. And here, with their decision from 2006, the members of the Conference of State Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs have special responsibility for:

- Removing barriers to the implementation of children's rights and accordingly revising school regulations;
- Creating an environment in which schools can implement the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in daily life, particularly the abolishment of early selection and performance assessment, which disregards the different requirements of children;
- Following the 'Learning and living democracy' program of the Federal Government and the Federal States' Commission for Educational Planning and the Promotion of Research to establish networks of schools in which the different forms of self-determination and co-determination are tested at all levels of school life and in the classroom;
- Supporting reform efforts through evaluation and research projects investigating and assessing the potential and difficulties of a democratic school so that schools can be given specific support for their development (Brügelmann & Rohlfs, 2007).

21.6 Conclusion

Due to changing and culturally diverse ways of living together, a lack of emotional security, an incorrectly understood culture of recognition, lack of self-esteem, demotivation, neglect, and the dearth of social experience opportunities in the family

for a growing number of young people, the socialization base of school must perform more educational functions than in the past. Strengthening of personality and the practice of socially appropriate, non-violent behavior are key elements. Here we come full circle: Taking seriously the theoretical and empirical findings on school shootings (Daniels & Bradley, 2011; Fox & Harding, 2005) means a real rethinking—especially at school level. Schools must increase awareness of creative and constructive approaches to conflict situations, as well as imparting consensual values and enabling orientation on democratic principles. This is precisely where education for democracy is required, understood not only as a response to global and societal risks, orientation crises, and uncertainty, but seen as an active contribution to a respectful positive acquisition of the characteristics of democratic ways of life. This does not mean a harmonization of conflict or the development of conformism, but implies the promotion of critical inquiry, intercultural dialogue, and a culture of communication and debate, which represent a desirable goal and an important aspect of democratic competence (Edelstein, 2005). Pupils can only internalize democracy as a form of society and life through their own active and responsible participation in the shaping of their school and extracurricular learning and living environments, as well as through subjective and collective experience of autonomy, belonging, and recognition within the social community of which they are members (Samu & Rohlfs, 2009).

If young people learn and experience what real equality is in practice in their social environment (family, school, peer group, etc.), if they can orient themselves on social models for constructive and solution-oriented confrontation with difference and dissent, if they see this exemplified in various life contexts, and if they can experience for themselves what recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity mean in practice, then they will recognize the value of a democratic way of life. Against this background, education to democracy is a task of increasing social urgency. The state and civil society must support these educational efforts, orchestrate them with adequate resources, and strengthen their public role (Samu & Rohlfs, 2009).

> Democratically composed societies depend on the ability and willingness of their citizens to publicly debate matters related to collective coexistence and to decide on conflicting goals in accordance with general, constitutionally protected legal principles. Consequently, it is the duty of schools to empower the adolescents for democratic approaches in a climate of mutual respect and appreciation, and through education and training. Pupils should learn to make rational and ethically responsible and justifiable decisions on the basis of enlightened knowledge of political contexts. At the same time, they will develop skills that will enable them to independently participate in democratic processes. In this sense, in the debate on political education, the question is one of 'democratic competence' rather than 'maturity.' Promoting the development of 'democratic competence'—as the argument goes—depends on giving children and young people opportunities to take practical responsibility, both in school and in extracurricular educational activities (Edelstein & Fauser, 2001). In the everyday conduct of democratic practices, the complex sense of democracy reveals itself as a form of society and life beyond the political regime (Himmelmann, 2007), and thus as a cultural practice and experience of quality of life and learning. The school in particular as an organized socialization instance offers many opportunities for community participation (Berkessel et al., 2011).

Only in a school climate characterized by avoidance and rejection of punitive control, personal humiliation, powerlessness, and the sole decision-making authority of teachers can all participants succeed together in opening up space for student co-determination (which has grown in recent decades) and in designing participation as a useful, necessary, and attractive task—and thus make a decisive contribution to primary preventive work to prevent school violence and its extreme form of school shootings.

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