Dembra – theoretical and scientific framework

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Dembra is a programme designed to support schools in promoting democracy and preventing group-based hostility. This article describes the theoretical and scientific framework for the Dembra project, especially in relation to new research in the field both nationally and internationally.

INTRODUCTION

How can schools best prevent anti-Semitism and racism, extremism and other undemocratic attitudes? The answer to this question must be based on an analysis of what we are looking to prevent, what function these attitudes serve and how deep-seated they are. Dembra is founded on the premise that the best way to prevent prejudice and group-based hostility is through the school's broader citizenship work on promoting an inclusive school culture, democratic competence and critical thinking. Prevention programmes should therefore be integrated into the school's existing timetable and not run as separate add-ons.

The theoretical framework drawn up in 2012 describes the relationship between democracy and the prevention of prejudice and group-based hostility thus:

> *The model for the training programme is based on the fundamental assumption that there is a genuine correlation between an individual's experiences of inclusion, co-determination and critical dialogue on the one hand and resilience against marginalisation, discrimination and harassment of individuals and groups on the other.*
>
> *In other words, there is a link between the perception of the phenomena to be prevented (anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of negative prejudices and abuse) and the perception of democratic readiness as a resource that needs to be strengthened and mobilised in order to have a preventive effect. In this perspective it is necessary for any prevention programme to focus on knowledge and skills while also seeing schools as psychosocial learning environments and spaces where attitudes are formed and challenged in practice. (Theoretical framework, 2012)*

Anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of intolerance cause suffering to others. The efforts made by schools to combat these phenomena are therefore part of their duty to prevent harassment against students as described in Section 9a of the Norwegian Education Act. However, the various types of group-based hostility also involve excluding someone from full participation because of their (assumed) group affiliation.

For this reason intolerance can also be defined as undemocratic. The groupthink on which such attitudes are based undermines the inclusive and pluralist principles that are essential to a functioning democratic culture.

This article provides an update on the theoretical and scientific framework for the Dembra project, especially in relation to new research in the field both nationally and internationally.

I. PREVENTION – A LOOK AT WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE

The Dembra programme aims to prevent attitudes and ideologies that undermine and, as a final consequence, threaten the very foundations of modern democratic society: equity, mutual respect, equal treatment, freedom to participate and contribute. Such attitudes and ideologies are often met with forceful rhetoric: "battle against racism, anti-Semitism, violent extremism …", "zero tolerance", "clamp down on" (cf. e.g. NOU, 2015:2 Belonging). Orgad (2015) describes this as the paradox of "illiberal liberalism". If we seek to instil the "correct values" using threats, manipulation or indoctrination, there is a high risk that it will have the opposite effect. Mattsson et al. (2016) describe how vulnerable adolescents can be pushed further into a corner if they are confronted in a way that they feel is humiliating. "What is considered forceful and resolute action at one end of the grey area can become a counterproductive push into a corner" (ibid. p. 67).

In line with the Norwegian Education Act, Dembra is founded on a definition of prevention in which the main focus is to *build and make that which we seek to protect more robust*:

> *Section 1-1 The objectives of education and training*
> *Education and training in schools and training establishments shall, in collaboration and agreement with the home, open doors to the world and give the pupils and apprentices historical and cultural insight and anchorage. (…)*
>
> *Education and training shall help increase the knowledge and understanding of the national cultural heritage and our common international cultural traditions.*
>
> *Education and training shall provide insight into cultural diversity and show respect for the individual's convictions. They are to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking. (…)*
>
> *The pupils and apprentices shall learn to think critically and act ethically and with environmental awareness. They shall have joint responsibility and the right to participate.*

Strengthening these skills is key to preventing group-based hostility and anti-democratic attitudes from developing and gaining a foothold amongst individuals and in society at large. This is described as *primary* prevention, while addressing issues that are deemed problematic yet possible to regulate is known as *secondary* prevention.

Phenomena that turn violent and destructive require immediate intervention to stop the damaging effects. This is called *tertiary* prevention.[1]

Like the Swedish National Agency for Education's thinking around the teaching of values in Swedish schools[2], Dembra is founded on a platform which puts democracy and inclusion in schools at the heart of primary prevention. This means that knowledge and insights gained from the teaching of democracy and from the work and research taking place on the learning environment are central to the question of *how* to go about it. We will return to this topic in Chapter III.

But first we will look at *what* we are hoping to prevent. Insights from research into prevention and intolerance do in fact show that it is not possible to draw a clear line between acceptable and unacceptable attitudes and that there is a lot to be done in terms of reflection, relationship-building and inclusion, i.e. primary prevention. An understanding of the different types of negative attitudes towards groups of people and the mechanisms behind these attitudes along with knowledge of how to counter them in schools are essential to the entire spectrum of prevention. Insights into extreme forms of group-based hostility (linked to radicalisation and violent extremism) are also part of the Dembra concept, albeit primarily as "outliers" to shed light on the phenomena, mechanisms and negative consequences that prejudice and intolerance can have. It is important to note that a different kind of skills set is needed (and available) to counter specific threats of violent extremism or hate crime (tertiary prevention).

II. WHAT DO WE WANT TO PREVENT?

We will first highlight some of the mechanisms that different forms of prejudice and intolerance have in common and then look at specific and often historically founded aspects of some of them.

Prejudice and intolerance

The concept of group-based hostility has been central to the development of Dembra (see theoretical framework from 2012). It is based on the German term *Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit*, coined by a group of researchers at the University of Bielefeld led by Wilhelm Heitmeyer as an umbrella term for racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and other phenomena (Zick et al. 2008). The term was applied in a comparative survey conducted in a number of EU countries and published in *Intolerance, prejudice and discrimination. A European Report* (Zick et al. 2011). The report uncovers correlations between six different forms of group-based hostility:

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[1] The three categories were introduced by Caplan (1964) in relation to disease prevention. One can always question this analogy between social issues and disease, but the three categories have been modified and reworked for the purpose of preventing racism and violent extremism, including by describing the different stages as "preventive", "pre-emptive" and "interventional" (Danish action plan against extremism, p. 5) or, as the Swedish National Agency for Education has done, by placing even greater emphasis on incorporating prevention in the teaching of democracy generally: "Promote, prevent, detect and act" (Swedish National Agency for Education 2014).

[2] See http://skolverket.se/skolutveckling/vardegrund.

homophobia, Islamophobia, racism (biological), anti-Semitism, hostility towards immigrants and misogyny. People who score highly in one prejudice also score highly in the other categories. The report describes this as a syndrome of *Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit.*

The study also found that highly negative attitudes towards certain groups are often based on the general belief that different people and groups of people are of different value (hierarchisation). The feeling of belonging to a superior "we" group also plays a part in this complex, as does the inclination to support strong leaders and authoritarian government. Such an attitude complex is accompanied by a longing for the incontrovertible, pure and absolute. In other words, group-based hostility stands in stark contrast to democratic values such as equity, equal treatment and equal rights. Political ideologies and movements that mobilise group-based hostility are also united by their contempt for democracy.

Behind the different types of prejudice and group-based hostility lie various shared mechanisms and forces. Gordon Allport was the first to point out that prejudice is based on both cognitive and affective mechanisms which are common to all of us. One the one hand prejudices are generalisations that can make reality less complex and help the individual find their place in the world. On the other they offer a sense of belonging and unity by separating the "we" group from the others (Allport, 1954; Dovidio et al. 2005). Negative prejudices and stereotypes are founded on useful generalisations and categorisations, but they become obstacles to interpersonal contact and interaction. When prejudice becomes a cultural norm, it results in systematic unequal treatment and institutionalised discrimination. It is not possible to shed our prejudices when we both inherit them through cultural practice and when inequality is reproduced in our civic institutions. However, this insight makes it even more important to process and dismantle negative attitudes towards groups of people in order to reduce the negative impact at an individual and collective level. It comes down to "who we want to be" as a society.

The function of prejudice
Prejudice and intolerance are linked to static ideas about identity and to polarisation and hierarchisation of "us" and "the others". Such views reflect historically embedded stereotypes and enemy images (Lenz, 2011) but become relevant to the notion of the superiority of the "we" group (Moe et al. 2016).

This notion of the "we" group's superiority is central in the research being carried out into group-based hostility and provides an important pointer for primary and secondary prevention by telling us something about the *function* of these attitudes: on the one hand they help boost confidence in individuals and create a sense of "we" amongst those who share the prejudices. On the other they can offer simple explanations of a complex reality (complexity reduction). In several European countries we are seeing how the feeling or fear of being left behind or losing control of one's life can be a mobilising factor for group-based hostility. Especially during times of economic crisis or rapid social change, prejudiced attitudes emerge towards groups deemed to be inferior, and the longing for authoritarian government creates a kind of protective shield. In terms of prevention, it is important to gain an insight into this yearning for direction, belonging

and identity by drawing clear lines between "us" and "them" and creating a rigid and organised social order.

This means that prevention efforts must offer inclusive and safe environments while also reinforcing the ability of the individual to stand firm when faced with complexity and chaos, to remain constructive in situations of diversity, and to actively help identify and create solutions to challenges in society.

This also hints at the second "column" in the Dembra concept: inclusion and learning environment. To prevent ideas based on a clear distinction between "us" and "them" from winning approval for their offers of kinship, it is important that young people have *experienced* kinship and recognition based on respect for the individual regardless of background and personal characteristics. Schools can be crucial arenas for these types of experiences.

The hallmarks of different forms of group-based hostility

So far, we have looked at the mechanisms that are common to different types of group-based hostility. Anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of prejudice and intolerance are linked to a long and sometimes bloody history (Eidsvåg, 2011; Lenz, 2011). Dembra stands out from other programmes aimed at bullying and harassment generally by taking a broader perspective and raising awareness around these specific phenomena. To be able to acknowledge that the harassment a student suffers is about something more than just bullying aimed at an individual – that is to say, the student's (assumed) group affiliation – teachers need concrete knowledge of the specific form of group-based hostility being practised, both knowledge of topical social discourse and of the history of the prejudice. Døving and Moe (2014) have demonstrated that harassment where anti-Semitic stereotypes are a key aspect of the motivation and of the nature of the harassment can go "under the radar" if the teacher does not understand the anti-Semitic references.

Knowledge of historical canards, but also of how different forms of intolerance can come to have different effects as society changes, is essential to *teachers' and students'* ability to recognise and counter these phenomena. Next we will give a few examples of the kind of knowledge that is required.

Anti-Semitism

Modern anti-Semitism is founded on more than a thousand-year-long European history of prejudice against Jews. One particular feature of anti-Semitism is the conspiracy myths, the ideas of Jews being crafty and slippery enemies of non-Jews. These ideas differ from classic racism and its notion of other races being inferior. There is a host of different types of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in which Jews feature as either capitalists or communists/Bolsheviks. In modern times traces of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories can be detected in certain forms of anti-capitalism as well as the idea that the terror attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 (9/11) was planned by Jews in order to trigger a confrontation between the West and Islam.

The Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities' 2012 attitude survey "Anti-Semitism in Norway?" (Hoffmann et al.) found that up to 25% of respondents in the representative selection agreed with certain statements about Jews that were

downright anti-Semitic. This does not mean that 25% of Norwegians are rabid *anti-Semites*, but it does mean that negative attitudes towards Jews exist as a latent phenomenon in Norwegian society.

Such insights provided by recent research into similarities and differences between anti-Semitism, racism and other forms of group-based hostility can be highly significant to teachers when deciding on a response to the word *Jew* being used as an insult in class, say.

Racism

Classic racism is linked to 19th-century ideas about biological differences between peoples. Racism research has since established that it was not the biological basis of the concept of race that allowed it to be used for discrimination and oppression but the fact that biology itself was seen as absolute and immutable. Terms such as neo-racism and cultural racism have been used to highlight the evolution of the ideas about essential differences in the late 20th century that saw a shift in focus away from biology towards ethnic, cultural and religious differences (Bangstad and Døving, 2015). The process whereby perceived differences are declared immutable and essentialised is often referred to as racialising. The term defines racism as a social structure and discourse, as ideas about differences that permeate society, and places less emphasis on racism as an ideology held by individuals. The term also shows how the rationale behind oppressive structures changes and develops, how racism manifests itself differently at different times.

Research on racism in Norway today has identified disparities with regard to the probability of getting a job interview depending on your name (Birkelund et al. 2014). Surveys of textbooks used in the Norwegian education system suggest that such forms of structural racism are barely addressed. The books mostly address classic racism but also some neo-racism, albeit with examples that primarily depict the most extreme versions rather than "moderate" racism (Røthing, 2015). Teachers and students may also use the term racism differently. Classroom observations have demonstrated that some teachers primarily think of classic racism in its most extreme form and are therefore unable to accommodate the students' experiences and the use of the term racism that tends more towards racialising (Svendsen, 2014).

Islamophobia

Prejudice and hostility towards Islam and Muslims is widespread both in Norway and other Western countries (Pew, 2008; Hoffmann et al. 2012). Such prejudices range from basic forms of xenophobia to ideological Islamophobia. Islamophobia can be defined as "... a systematised and ideological kind of prejudice formation and practices that sustain fears, hatred and discrimination of Muslims" (Bangstad and Døving, 2015).

Conspiracy theories surrounding the so-called Eurabia play a key role in Islamophobia, nowhere more so than in Bat Ye'or's book *Eurabia: The Euro-Arabia Axis*. She believes that pacts entered into by Arab and European states in the 1970s laid the foundations for Muslim immigration to Europe with the long-term goal of subjugating Europe to Islam. The Eurabia theory gained widespread attention after the terror attacks on 22 July 2011, when Breivik used it as justification for attacking Norway's government quarter and labour party youth at Utøya.

Anti-Gypsyism

A debate about travelling Roma and begging pervaded the Norwegian media in the year that the first schools began implementing the Dembra programme. The media coverage also had an impact on which issues the schools wanted to cover, and many of them, including the teachers, wanted to highlight prejudice against Roma.

The main reasons why particularly Romanian Roma travel to Europe to beg have to do with unemployment, poverty and partially discriminatory structures in their home country (Djuve et al. 2015). The discussions about the travellers uncovered prejudices about Roma culture in relation to begging, crime and the exploitation of children for begging. These prejudices are linked to a long-standing historical tradition of prejudice against Roma, which in its most extreme form is a type of racism that can be described as anti-Gypsyism. Anti-Gypsyism, too, reached its most extreme manifestation with the Roma genocide during World War II which also affected Norwegian Roma (Rosvoll et al. 2015).

Other forms of group-based hostility

Research on group-based hostility (Zick et al. 2008) suggests that prevention should not be limited to a narrowly defined set of prejudices but must seek to build resilience against all forms of group-based hostility that exist in schools and in society. For instance, it is important to look at how students' use of the words "whore" and "gay" is linked to the construction of gender and heteronormativity in society at large. To counter discrimination of disabled people, it is important to consider the particular significance of architecture and physical building design to people with reduced mobility. Be it negative attitudes towards disabled people, homophobia, hostility towards Sami, towards other national minorities, Eastern European labour immigrants or any new groups, it is important to recognise the general mechanisms while at the same time being able to spot the specific contemporary and historical context of the particular form of intolerance.

III. HOW TO PREVENT?

Democratic preparedness – democratic competence

A core concept in Dembra's theoretical framework from 2012 is democratic preparedness, taken from Dag Fjeldstad and Rolf Mikkelsen's work on two international studies on democratic competence amongst lower secondary pupils: the Civic Education Study (CIVED/CIVIC)[3] from 2001 and the International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS) from 2009 (Mikkelsen et al. 2001; Mikkelsen et al. 2011). Democratic preparedness is used to operationalise democratic competence and refers to our capability and desire for democratic participation.

Mikkelsen and Fjeldstad's competence model is one of a number of different models for democratic competence, and the Council of Europe has recently completed a process to

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[3] The Norwegian report (Mikkelsen et al. 2001) uses the acronym CIVIC, while the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) – the organisation behind the study itself – uses the acronym CIVED. Data collection was scheduled for 1999, but Norway joined too late and therefore uses data from spring 2000.

merge and systematise the different models into a broad and comprehensive model.[4] The different models all reject the idea of "we" and "the others" along with ideologies that preach purity and present simple answers to complex challenges.

The Council of Europe's competence model "Competences for Democratic Culture" (2016) (next page) covers 20 competences which "need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies" (Council of Europe, 2016a:5).

Some of the competences can be considered particularly relevant in the context of prevention:

- ❖ Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- ❖ Tolerance of ambiguity
- ❖ Analytical and critical thinking skills
- ❖ Empathy
- ❖ Knowledge and critical understanding of the self

The remainder of this text sets out the theoretical background of the choice and design of principles as part of a set of comprehensive democratic competences.
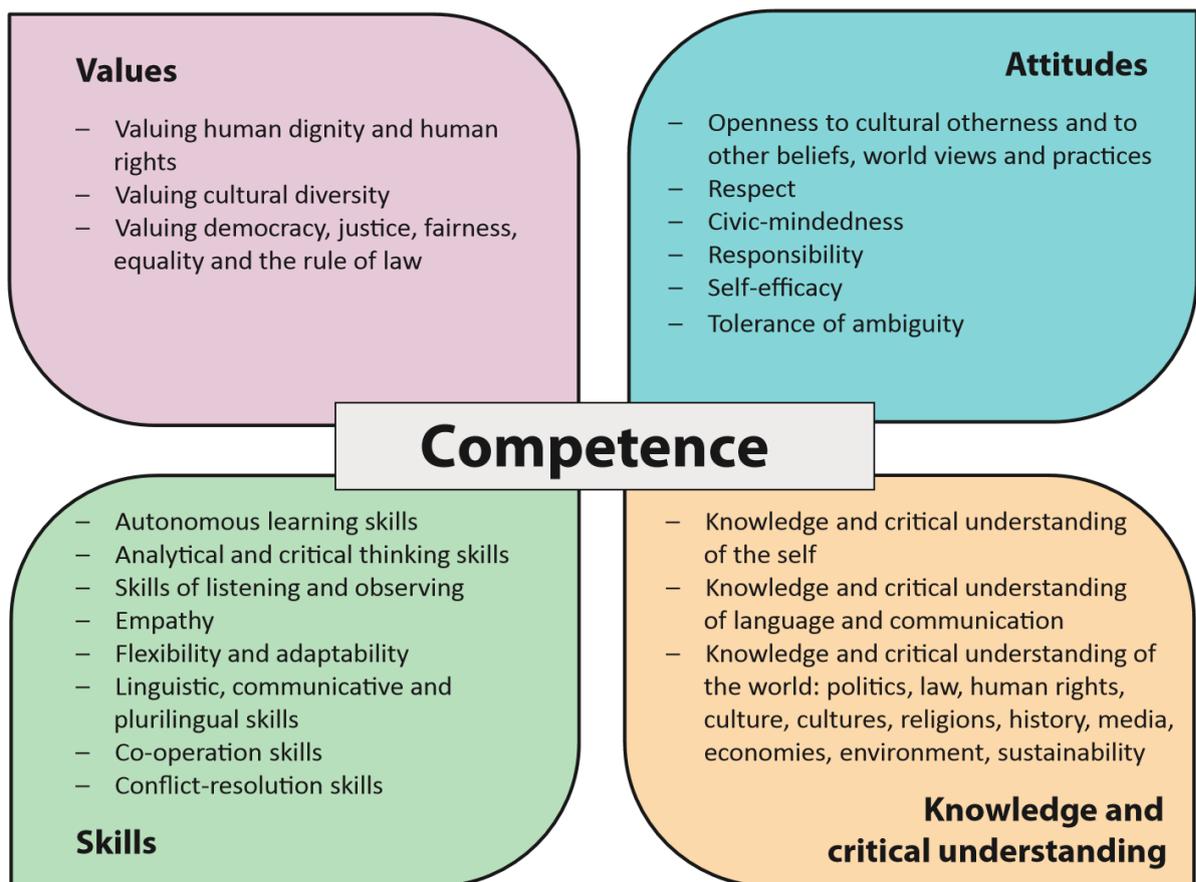

Democracy education as a process: about, through and for

Mikkelsen et al. (2001) distinguish between representative and participatory perspectives on democracy education. The representative perspective emphasises the knowledge and understanding of the organisational structures and social institutions required for students to participate in democracy at the ballot box and by using various democratic institutions. In this perspective, teaching *about* the structures of democracy is the main component.

The participatory perspective stresses the participation by individuals in processes leading to political decisions in addition to voting during elections. This approach "means both that participation is a condition of life, i.e. a condition for a good life, and that participation in political activity in a broad sense will find better conditions in an equitable society" (Mikkelsen et al. 2001, p. 27). In this perspective, the teaching of democracy must not only provide knowledge *about* the functions of democracy but also skills for participation in a broader sense, i.e. learning *for* democracy.

A similar model has been developed in the field of human rights education. The UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (United Nations, 2010) describes learning *about* and *for* human rights but also includes a third category: learning *through* human rights. Article 2 defines learning "about, for and through" human rights as key dimensions of such empowering learning.

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[4] See Council of Europe 2016 for a summary of different models.

Values

- Valuing human dignity and human rights
- Valuing cultural diversity
- Valuing democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law

Attitudes

- Openness to cultural otherness and to other beliefs, world views and practices
- Respect
- Civic-mindedness
- Responsibility
- Self-efficacy
- Tolerance of ambiguity

Competence

Skills

- Autonomous learning skills
- Analytical and critical thinking skills
- Skills of listening and observing
- Empathy
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills
- Co-operation skills
- Conflict-resolution skills

Knowledge and critical understanding

- Knowledge and critical understanding of the self
- Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication
- Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability

Human Rights Education and Training encompasses:

(a) Education about human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection;

(b) Education through human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners;

(c) Education for human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others.

Learning through in this context refers to the *processual dimension* of the learning. The methodology being used, the communication taking place and the relationships being built must be consistent with the principles and core values of what is being communicated. It is this dimension of a learning process that determines the emotional dimension.

This approach can be directly transferred to the field of democracy education: democracy cannot be learnt theoretically but by *experiencing*, *practising* and *internalising* it in a specific context and as a specific practice. This point is also made by Mikkelsen et al. (2001), who include the processual dimension in the *for* category. *Learning for* points to the empowerment and the action-driven dimension of learning: the learning process should equip the student for concrete action or, to quote the Council of Europe's competence framework, for "participat[ing] effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies (Council of Europe, 2016).

In Norway, Janicke Heldal Stray (2011) has operationalised the three dimensions "about, for and through" for the field of democracy education by linking *learning for* to the development of values and attitudes fundamental to democratic participation and *learning through* to active participation at school. There are nuances of interpretation, but there is consensus as to the fundamental principle that democratic education has a process-based and an action-driven dimension. Stray and Sætra (2016) state that this approach:

> *includes fundamental skills and competencies, values, attitudes and agency. This way, every aspect of the learning is reflected and conceptualised, including in democracy education.*

When it comes to prejudice and group-based hostility, the learning about/through/for concept means that such attitudes can only be effectively prevented through reflective and empowering approaches, both in subject teaching and in other types of interaction in schools. This ties in with the reflections made in the previous chapters and demonstrates how problematic attitudes and statements should, insofar as possible, be countered by encouraging awareness and reflection rather than rejection.

These dimensions also encompass *all activities across the school*. One key insight that Dembra has gained from research on school-based skills development is that it is no contradiction to think about subjects/teaching in a school-wide perspective, neither in terms of literacy nor when drawing up a prevention programme for the school (Postholm et al. 2014).

Knowledge of prejudice and skills such as critical thinking and reflection can be practised in every subject. *Learning through* goes further than just the teaching situation and extends to any situation that may arise in a school in which prejudices are expressed and violations take place.

Biseth (2014) highlights the correlation between democracy and inclusion, both in terms of the type of skills needed to participate in democracy and those required to live together harmoniously in a culturally diverse society. The same point is made in the Council of Europe's competence framework "Competences for Democratic Culture". Again, the focus is on a comprehensive approach whereby the entire school serves as an arena for democratic learning and interaction that unites learning about, through and for.

Inclusion and participation – a school-wide perspective

As we have seen, prejudice and negative perceptions of "the others" can meet humankind's basic need for identity and belonging. One logical consequence of this is that prevention efforts need to offer something that can meet this need but without the negative ramifications. Offering inclusive and open environments, spaces in which everyone can feel safe and respected, is the very foundation of all further prevention initiatives.

We can also infer that it is especially people who struggle with their identity and feel left out who are the most likely to be attracted to intolerant attitudes. This has been confirmed in a number of surveys, including *Intolerance, prejudice and discrimination. A European Report* from 2011, which found that those who hold very hostile views of certain groups often feel excluded or that they are going to end up as losers in society (Zick et al. 2011, see also Zick et al. 2008). They do not identify with our democratic, pluralistic society because they feel that this social order does not offer them a sense of belonging, identity and recognition.

Eriksen and Lyng (2015) point to the potential that lies in strengthening the feeling of community within the classroom. As institutions, schools must enable each student to *experience* belonging and participation, the very foundations of loyalty and involvement. And conversely: if the school contributes to making students feel excluded because of their religious, cultural or ethnic background, they are less like to identify with the values and norms that the school represents. This is true for exclusion as a result of ethnic, religious or cultural background but also for students who feel they are being excluded because of attitudes that their teachers deem to be problematic. The challenge is to include everyone, even those whose attitudes are considered to be exclusionary by the teachers.

This view is based on educational theory and theories about socialisation. Good relationships between teachers and students are crucial to the students' learning (Sabol and Pianta, 2012; Wentzel, 2012). This is especially true for the profound development of attitudes and relationships: the student must feel confident that there is room for him or her.

Knowledge and critical thinking

The importance of inclusion and participation as significant aspects of democracy does not mean an absence of conflict. On the contrary, the ability to live with conflict and compromise is an important democratic competence. The authors of the report on the CIVIC survey stress how this affects our competence in what they call *deliberation*:

> *The reflection occurs through deliberation, i.e. actively debating and processing values, norms and rules of significance to decisions and decision-makers. It expresses a perspective on knowledge where the knowledge only becomes valid to the student if and when it is internalised through action, experience and reflection (Mikkelsen et al. 2001).*

This viewpoint is taken further in the report on the ICCS survey in which Mikkelsen, Fjeldstad and Lauglo state that critical thinking, value definition and cognitive practice are fundamental operations that can be learnt and practised in classroom subjects

(Mikkelsen et al. 2011). This does not just extend to subjects where topics relating to democracy and citizenship are part of the attainment targets. Source criticism, weighing up arguments, reflecting on risks or dilemmas can be practised in all subjects.

Based on what we know about the prejudices described above, reflecting on our own prejudices and those of others and considering how they are linked to culture and society become an important area in which critical thinking is applied. Such a (self-)regulatory approach avoids some of the unfortunate consequences of "mechanical" sanctioning of undesirable attitudes and statements (Lyng and Eriksen, 2016).

In such a perspective a light must be shone on the *institutionalised* ideas of identity that exist in schools. Osler and Lybæk (2014) describe how the Norwegian education system is built on underlying ideas of homogeneous cultural traditions and values as a platform for a national "we", something which is at odds with an increasingly multicultural reality. Vesterdal (2016) describes how teachers construct a positive image of Norwegian identity by focusing on human rights breaches as a problem in "other countries", not as something that can also involve Norway and Norwegians. The way schools paint a picture of Norwegian identity demonstrates how important it is for teachers to also make room for critical reflection on issues surrounding "us" and "the others" and to permit criticism of how identity and affiliation are constructed. Midtbøen et al. (2014) describe an incomplete and partially distorted picture when it comes to the portrayal of national minorities in the curriculum. This indicates that teaching resources, too, must be subjected to critical analysis in order to develop the students' ability to question the assumed "normal" in the context of generalisations and prejudices.

Intercultural competence and diversity awareness

Our understanding of what intercultural competence is depends on how we define the term culture. In a broad sense, culture can be understood as a shared system of meaning (Geertz, 1973) or as "… thought patterns, habits and experiences that humans hold in common and which mean that we understand each other" (Eriksen, 1997). There is a wide span between static and essentialist interpretations of culture on the one hand and dynamic and open interpretations on the other. The terms tend to be used rather statically in everyday speech: we might talk about someone belonging to this culture or that culture, as if different cultures are finite quantities. Such an interpretation loses sight of the networks of meaning that people from different groups have in common. Every person is also a member of several different groups, which means that each and every one of us participates in various (sub)cultures.

The Council of Europe bases its understanding of intercultural competence on a definition of culture as "a network of material, social and subjective resources" (Council of Europe, 2016: 20). This dynamic concept of culture is incorporated in the interpretation of interculturality as not being limited to situations where we encounter representatives of "alien groups" but where "every interpersonal situation is potentially an intercultural situation" (ibid.).

Based on that premise, intercultural competence includes:

- ❖ knowledge, skill and transparency in order to understand and reflect on the significance of cultural symbols and practices
- ❖ the ability to explore and evaluate phenomena from different perspectives
- ❖ the ability to reflect on our own perspectives and ideas
- ❖ the ability to question norms in relation to symbolic and structural factors that produce and reproduce privilege and power, including in a classroom and school context

(Røthing, 2015; Svendsen, 2014)

One important preventive aspect of intercultural competence is the ability to recognise that differentness is a fundamental part of being human. Intercultural competence therefore covers both cognitive and emotional aspects that make an individual less inclined to perceive specific forms of differentness as threatening, thus making them more resilient to interpreting reality as an existential war between the "we" group and the hostile "others". This skill is crucial to be able to challenge the one-dimensionality of groupthink, otherisation and ideologies built on ideas about purity and incontrovertible truths. This makes critical thinking an aspect of intercultural competence. Coined by Iversen (2015), the Norwegian term *uenighetsfellesskap* (community of disagreement) unites the pluralism of democracy education with the focus on living with differences in intercultural learning.

School-based work on the learning environment

Ever since the 1970s, vast resources have been poured into interpreting and preventing bullying in Norwegian and Nordic schools. Research into bullying as a phenomenon has been followed up with various anti-bullying programmes, often developed by the same institutions that conducted the research. One the one hand this has resulted in comprehensive and theory-based programmes. Yet the results of the surveys charting the outcomes of the programmes are divergent (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009; Lødding and Vibe, 2010). NOVA carried out a study of the four largest school environment programmes in 2014 and found documented effects in schools that had put in place anti-bullying programmes (Eriksen et al. 2014). However, the researchers were unable to determine whether the effects were caused by the programmes or by other circumstances in the schools in question. Criticism has been levelled at the programmes because they divert resources away from curriculum learning and because it is not always clear how much effort the school needs to put into them. One key aspect of the development of Dembra is that it is intended to support the existing work being done by schools, not serve as a separate programme.

Both Swedish and Norwegian schools have shifted somewhat away from programmes and towards a comprehensive, systematic approach to the learning environment. Increasing focus on the learning environment as part of the schools' other activities is highlighted in the guidance to Section 9a of the Education Act (Norwegian Directorate

for Education and Training, 2010) and in the initiative "A Better Learning Environment" 2009–2014, for instance. There are also more stringent requirements for learning environment programmes, including the key criterion of taking a comprehensive approach as well as making a clear link to the general work taking place on the learning environment (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2012b).

In 2012 the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training produced the *Framework for School-based Skills Development in Lower Secondary Education 2013–2017* as part of the national *Developing Secondary Schools* initiative. The framework sets out important principles for local development projects in schools in relation to classroom management, numeracy and literacy. The principles can also be applied to other types of development work, and they provided the basis for some of the tools offered to school leaders on the Directorate's website for school environment development.[5]

Work on the learning environment is hampered by the same issues as other development work in schools: it is difficult. The local school culture is a relatively stable quantity and provides frameworks both for the work of the teachers and for the students' well-being and learning (Blossing et al. 2010). For that reason, the theoretical framework for Dembra from 2012 emphasised that the horizon for the work should incorporate the entire social system within the school while at the same time motivating teachers, leaders and students by offering ownership and relevance.

Both of these are also important principles in the Directorate's work on school-based skills development. It is also important to sustain the work over time. The same applies to development work in relation to attitudes and prevention: it requires patience and a long-term effort. Dembra was conceived as an eight-month project but has now been extended to a full academic year. Schools also need two to three years to create genuine change (Postholm, 2014). It is important, therefore, that an initiative such as Dembra is seen by the school as a help in the start-up or transitional phase before continuing the process with less external support.

A fourth principle of school-based skills development is the need for easily accessible material that teachers find relevant and easy to use. This goal may conflict somewhat with the idea of local adaptation and the role of the teacher as a professional educator. Nor are there any specific tailor-made exercises that students should do as part of Dembra above and beyond those included in the initial survey. However, the dialogue with teachers has confirmed the Directorate's principle: well designed and easily accessible exercises and teaching modules motivate teachers to delve into the material and to reflect and make up their own minds in response to what they find.

The levels of school-wide development work
The argument so far indicates that the prevention of prejudice and group-based hostility must be incorporated into the ongoing work on the learning environment and inclusion in all aspects of the school's activities.

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[5] The Directorate for Education and Training has reorganised its website, and the new pages are structured slightly differently.

There are numerous ways in which to operationalise the different stages, but all of them place the teaching in a broader context which includes the learning environment, school leadership and local context. The Directorate's learning environment initiative plays an important role (see also Nordahl et al. 2009).

The Council of Europe's Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education (Council of Europe, 2010) recommends instituting a process that involves all levels of an educational institution:

- ❖ Individual skills and awareness
- ❖ Classroom (teaching/subjects and co-operation)
- ❖ The school as an institution (plans, procedures, school culture)
- ❖ Co-operation between school and local community

A number of international works have demonstrated the effects of school-wide approaches to reduce violence (both physical and emotional) in schools (Manitoba, 2005; Tibbitts, 2015). It has been stressed that only a concerted effort based on skills development (cognitive and affective dimensions), trust, the learning environment and rules and procedures will have a lasting effect.

CONCLUSION

In this document we have given an account of the research, theoretical positions and theory development on which Dembra is based. As we have shown, key elements linked to participation and a critical approach to knowledge, identity and own practices have for a long time played a central role when it comes to developing skills for active participation in complex, pluralistic and multicultural societies. These elements merge with the knowledge that prejudice and group-based intolerance are indicative of a longing for the incontrovertible and pure and an inability to cope with the inconclusive and complex. It is possible to trace the traditions back even further, to Theodor Adorno, for example, whose texts "Education after Auschwitz" (1966) and "Education for Maturity and Responsibility" (1970) have shown how educating mature and responsible citizens is the only way to prevent catastrophes such as Nazism and the Holocaust. New education research is constantly added to the corpus which highlights the learning and co-operative processes taking place in Norway's diverse classrooms in terms of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and physical ability.

Theory and research can be inspiring and help us take a broader approach to certain matters of principle. The challenge is to bridge theory and scientific literature with our own practices in an era when there is a shortage of time and resources allocated to systematic research and development. In the five years we have spent working with schools, the vast majority of them have expressed a desire for support to help them make theory and scientific insights more practice-based.

In response, Dembra has summarised its insights into prevention and school development in a set of fundamental principles that teachers, school leaders and others can use as a tool to analyse and improve their practices at all levels. The five principles are:[6]

1. Participation and democracy to combat discrimination
2. Knowledge, critical thinking and curiosity
3. Intercultural competence (diversity competence)
4. Ownership and institutionalisation
5. The school as a whole

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[6] See also a description of the principles at https://dembra.no/en/utema/skolens-forebyggende-arbeid/?trekk=2&fane=learn-more

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