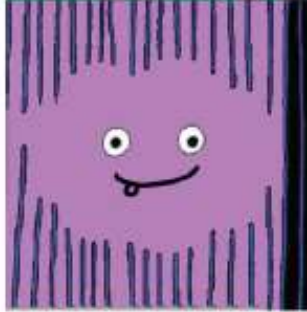# SCHOOL DEMOCRACY IN QUARANTINE

## "FAR AWAY, SO CLOSE"

SHORT GUIDE FOR ONLINE ASSEMBLIES / DISCUSSIONS

FOR TEACHERS
AND STUDENTS
OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS
AND HIGHER GRADES
OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS

12 STEPS

in ART 12
ΠΡΩΤΑ.12
Πρωτοβουλία για το Άρθρο 12

Initiative
for Article 12
www.inart12.org

*(Translation from the Greek text)*

Ideas for organising assemblies and discussions in your classrooms, when schools or some classrooms are closed due to a pandemic, giving children the opportunity to express their views, discuss and, when necessary, make decisions.

The guide is brief and includes 12 steps. Of course, you can adapt your own assemblies / discussions to your group and the way you have learned to communicate. When the schools are open, we meet in person and discuss sitting in a circle. InArt12 has published a more detailed guide to organising students' assemblies (in Greek), which can be found here. Good luck!
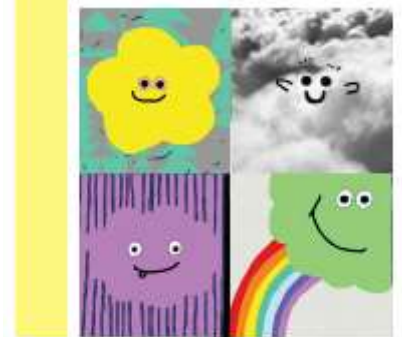
November 2020

# 1st STEP: PURPOSE

First of all, we discuss, students and teachers, the reasons why we seek to function democratically in our classroom, even in times when schools are closed due to a pandemic. Such a discussion can lead to a small text prepared by a group of children in the class, emphasizing in their own way the importance of organising assemblies and discussions and in particular that through these processes we learn: to exercise our right to express our opinion freely, to form groups and to participate in decision-making on issues that concern us; to listen and to respect others, to undertake responsibilities, to resolve our conflicts peacefully and to take a stand in public, even in hard times. **In short, we are trained in dialogue, democracy and the role of active citizens.**

# 2ND STEP: PREPARATION

We make special arrangements to ensure that students can work in groups (in breakout rooms) in the electronic platform that we use. We identify an available programme to conduct polls/voting. Prior to the meeting, the class teacher communicates with the students' council (in secondary schools) or with the students' coordination group (if designated, in primary schools) or with the whole class, and agree on topics, making sure they are concise and simple. They plan the time of the assembly / discussion together (it is recommended to last 60 to 90 minutes) and all the students of the class are informed. In order to have a more successful meeting, it is important to disseminate information and promote dialogue about the content and the process of the meeting, through e-mail, google forms or other ways, prior to the event.
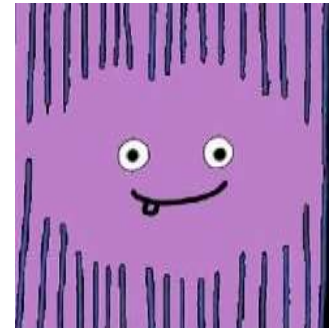
*Suggested topics in quarantine times:* The organisation of the lessons, the response and involvement of students; possible problems connected with internet access and technical equipment; ideas for activities or events from a distance or in person (when we are back at school); ideas for reading or creative activities at home; exchange of views on social phenomena and children's situation in times of pandemic; online games or competitions; awareness raising on fake news and misinformation, etc.

# 3<sup>RD</sup> STEP:
# INFORMATION ABOUT THE RULES
# AND THE WAY THE ASSEMBLY WILL TAKE PLACE

The teacher informs all student that it is better to turn on their camera during the discussions, while they may have it turned off only for special reasons. However, they need to commit themselves that they do not attend the meeting together with other people who are not their classmates, unless there is a third party invited, for a specific purpose, and this is known to all. We all pledge that we do not record the meetings and we keep confidential what is being said in it (it's important to stress that when we say "we commit ourselves", we mean it!). We express our views freely and discuss, respecting the opinion and the personalities of others, without any kind of racist or abusive language. When there are children in the class who do not speak well Greek or children with disabilities who find it difficult to communicate, we make sure that they are informed and they participate in the best way (e.g. with the help of an interpreter or with other classmates supporting their participation).

# 4<sup>TH</sup> STEP:
# PARENTS

The teacher informs the students' parents about the scheduled assembly / discussion, explaining that apart from the class teacher and students, other persons cannot attend (we say it politely, but clearly!).

# 5<sup>TH</sup> STEP:
# START – INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the assembly / discussion, the teacher announces the start of the process and the attendances. At this point a short "warm-up" game can be organized between the children (e.g. everyone says a phrase on a topic and gives a "pass" to someone else to continue or we do a word game in "chat").

- **In the secondary school** the teacher hands over the coordination to the students and informs them that he / she will just attend the discussion. In the "gymnasium" (first 3 classes of secondary school) the teacher intervenes only if he / she deems that there is a need to help the process, while in the lyceum (higher secondary school), only if asked. In lyceum, according to the law in Greece, the students' assembly is held without the presence and intervention of a teacher, so we try find a way to organise the assembly online, without the involvement of the teachers, unless there is a specific demand by students. The coordination is done by the members of the students' council or (preferably) by a three-member coordination group of volunteer students who are appointed on the spot and take on the roles of moderator of the discussion, timekeeper and secretary. If there are more than three volunteers, students vote or find another way to agree on that.

- **In the primary school** the teacher invites the coordination group of students to undertake monitoring the process of the meeting / discussion. If there is no such group, it is defined on the spot, after explaining the duties of its members and selecting them in a way that is agreed (e.g. in lot or in alphabetical order and with planning so that all the children take turns passing through these responsibilities during the year). Then, the teacher gradually gives his place to children and participates in the discussion on the same terms as the students (e.g. he/she raises his/her hand to speak, does not speak constantly or without permission, etc.).

# 6TH STEP:
# PRESENTATION OF TOPICS - PLANNING



The moderator, with the assistance of the other members of the coordination group, presents the agenda of the meeting (can use a shared screen) and asks if there is any other topic for discussion. Then, the children are divided into 4 or 5-member groups where the first processing of the topics will take place. Before the separation, the students who have proposed the topics of the meeting may explain what and why they proposed. Group discussion time is set (approximately 15-20 minutes*, depending on the topics). The teacher, who handles the platform, randomly divides the children into groups of equal size in breakout rooms.

# 7ᵀᴴ STEP: WORKING IN GROUPS

Each small group appoints a facilitator and a rapporteur who keeps notes of what is being said, to present them later in plenary. The facilitator gives the floor to the members of the group, making sure that everyone speaks equally. Shortly before the end of the group discussion time, the rapporteur informs what he / she has noted and listens to any comments from the other members. We should make sure to make best use of the available time, and get ready to present in a few words all the views that were heard!!!

# 8ᵀᴴ STEP: PLENARY DEBATE

The coordination group now take action! They give the floor to the rapporteurs of the groups, one by one. The secretary notes any proposals. If another group had a similar thought-suggestion, its rapporteur asks to take the floor, mentioning that "we have a similar idea" and there is an attempt to possibly merge the two proposals. Once each presentation is completed, whoever wants can ask for the floor for some clarification or comment on what had been heard, saying if he agrees or disagrees. The timekeeper monitors compliance with the agreed time (approximately 5 minutes* in each group for the presentation and discussion that follows). The proposals should be specific with a clear explanation of how they can be implemented. In the discussion, it is important to listen to others and not monopolize the speech!

> \* The reported times are only indicative and each group, depending on its characteristics, can make its own schedule.

# 9ᵀᴴ STEP: VOTING

Once the dialogue and arguments are over, votes can be cast on proposals that need further action. Before voting, it is important that every proposal is understood. The secretary of the assembly (if necessary, with the help of the teacher) incorporates the proposals in the electronic voting form and the students vote on the proposals one by one. Alternatively, voting can be by show of hands (YES, NO, I DON'T KNOW). The coordination team ensures the correct counting of votes. Voting is done to see what most students in the class think. For issues that bind all children, it is good to have unanimous decisions, or at least, those who disagree to give their consent for the implementation of the proposal. Otherwise, we leave the proposal for a next discussion.

# 10ᵀᴴ STEP: RESPONSIBILITIES

When the discussions and the voting are over, we discuss who will undertake responsibilities, in order to have the decisions implemented. It is important that the students' council (in the secondary) or the coordination group (in the primary) present their opinion. If we do not determine which students will take responsibilities, we run the risk of staying only in theory! A shared file can be created with the final minutes of the meeting, mentioning the tasks of different students and the progress that is being made for their fulfilment, so that the whole class can be informed.

# 11ᵀᴴ STEP: EVALUATION

At the end of each meeting / discussion, it is good to dedicate a few minutes to its evaluation and the impressions of the participants. One way this could happen is by suggesting that every student says or writes a word or a phrase in the "chat" space. Another way is by communicated code - messages with our hands. A third could be by conducting a quick vote / poll with 3-4 options (e.g. I am excited - satisfied - thoughtful - frustrated). A question with open answers, like "*what do you think can be done better next time*?" could also be helpful. The results should be recorded and entered in the minutes of the meeting by the secretary. Evaluation can help us to recognize our successes, but also our difficulties and challenges, in order to always try to improve as a class team!

# 12ᵀᴴ STEP: SCHEDULING THE NEXT MEETING

Before saying goodbye, we exchange a few words about our next meeting. It will start with reference to the decisions of last time and comments on their implementation, as well as with a brief reminder of the previous evaluation, in order to improve each time, as much as we can...