

UNIT 7
RESPONSIBILITY
Primary level

I go eco ... my school takes part!

7.1 Responsibility

Students discuss the basics of responsibility

7.2 School is life: living ecology?

How ecological is our school?

7.3 How can I start to be responsible?

Students take the first steps in making their school more eco

7.4 How did we do – what's the plan?

Students reflect on their activities and decide how to continue

Unit 7: Key concept – “Responsibility” (for primary level)
Background information for teachers: how do students’ values reflect their perception of the concept of human rights?

*Welcome to my morning, welcome to my day
 I’m the one responsible, I made it just this way
 To make myself some pictures, see what they might bring
 I think I made it perfectly, I wouldn’t change a thing*

From the song *Farewell Andromeda* (1973) by John Denver

Nowadays, children learn to take responsibility for their own actions from an early age. This is taken for granted in many families and societies. A democratic state can only function if citizens do not ask what the state can do for them but instead ask what they can do for the state. The quotation that is often used in this respect was one of John F. Kennedy’s: “Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country”.

There are different types and degrees of responsibility. Responsibility can be personal, collective or moral. There is responsibility of the parliament, the government or of the media. There is the responsibility for educating parents or teachers, etc. These forms of responsibility either have a legal background or represent moral values.

In this unit, students realise that there are different forms of responsibility and that they are often confused. The most important thing for us is that students start to realise that taking responsibility for their immediate surroundings is also a contribution to the community. In doing so, students not only contribute to community life but also gain power and influence. Depending on the political situation or the political tradition in the country (or depending on the school tradition or the school’s governing body), it might be easy to take responsibility and thus gain power or it might be very difficult. Being denied responsibility creates frustration in everyday life that has to be analysed and overcome.

Human beings have the capacity for moral judgment from an early age and realise when they are acting responsibly and when not. Yet it is important not to restrict oneself to only social and moral learning at primary level; rather if we decide to do this within the framework of EDC/HRE – with its underlying principles of international human rights legal instruments – the goals that have been set will expand. Reflecting on the experience gained through taking responsibility leads to a broader understanding of oneself as a citizen. Moreover, this experience leads not only to being given further responsibility, but also to an automatic taking of responsibility.

Just like in the quotation from the song by John Denver shown at the beginning: “I am the one responsible, I made it just this way”, students should learn to experience taking responsibility. They should make decisions and be responsible for the results of their decisions. Learning and living democracy in school means that school is the place in which to prepare for life, but also the place in which to live together and decide together. It is obvious to everyone that there are clear divisions of roles and that laws and rules are necessary. Nevertheless, in most schools worldwide, the potential for granting more space to students and handing over more responsibility to them is still not used. Teachers and head teachers can easily change this within the existing framework of rules and laws.

The aim of education for democratic citizenship is to support the development of competences in three areas. This unit has the following competence profile:

Competence in ...		
... political analysis and judgment	... the use of methods	... political decision making and action
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Toolbox support

In this unit the following tools from the student's toolbox will be used. The teacher must decide if some or all of the students need additional preparation in order to work with these tools.

- x Researching in libraries
- x Researching on the Internet
- x Carrying out interviews and surveys
- 0 Interpreting images
- 0 Mind maps
- 0 Creating posters
- 0 Holding exhibitions
- x Planning and giving presentations
- x Preparing overhead transparencies or a PowerPoint presentation
- x Writing newspaper articles
- 0 Putting on performances
- x Holding debates

UNIT 7: Responsibility

I go eco ... my school takes part!

How do students' values reflect their perception of the concept of human rights?

Lesson title	Learning objectives	Student tasks	Resources	Methods
Lesson 1: Responsibility	The students think about responsibility as a term that is connected with people, objects or tasks.	The students collect and analyse newspapers and magazines that are read in their communities. They create a poster on which to record their results.	Handout.	Group work.
Lesson 2: School is life: living ecology?	The students realise that their school is not only a place of learning but also a place for living. They plan to take (ecological) responsibility for this "living space".	Various possibilities for ecological behaviour are developed and planned.	Handout.	Group presentations, plenary discussion.
Lesson 3: How can I start to be responsible?	The students plan the concrete implementation of individual steps. Aspects such as realistic time management and the ability to compromise in the group, as well as general flexibility should be the students' goals.	The students use the time given for implementation of the planned activities.	Individual work depending on the action plan.	Practical application.
Lesson 4: How did we do – what's the plan?	To end this unit, the students try to switch perspectives in order to understand what taking responsibility means in other positions. This is a further step towards a deeper understanding of democratic participation.	The students transfer the experiences they have had working in small groups to other situations.	Handout.	Plenary discussion, group work.

Lesson 1

Responsibility

Students discuss the basics of responsibility

Learning objectives	The students think about responsibility as a term that is connected with people, objects or tasks.
Student tasks	The students collect and analyse newspapers and magazines that are read in their communities. They create a poster on which to record their results.
Resources	Handout.
Methods	Group work.

Information box

Responsibility as a concept has its roots in the political contexts of the 18th and 19th centuries, when the concern was with responsible action and the principles of representative government. In 20th-century philosophy, the emphasis was on the question of free will: was a person responsible for his or her actions or his or her character? The discussion concentrated more on the individual person.

As a result, today it is difficult to understand the concept of collective responsibility, which is an issue that has acquired a new urgency in contemporary politics. This is also because many everyday issues concerning responsibility – questions of mutual accountability, defining a person's sphere of responsibility, or judging a person to be sufficiently responsible for a particular role, for example – have to be taken into account.

Lesson description

The students sit on their chairs in a circle. The teacher puts a flipchart or large piece of paper with the heading "Taking responsibility for ..." in the middle of the circle. Around it, the teacher places pictures taken from magazines showing for example:

- pet 1;
- pet 2;
- pet 3;
- groups of people;
- a single person;
- a single child;
- a lake/a river;
- food;
- furniture;
- a heart;
- rubbish.

Next, the teacher randomly places word cards on the floor. These have the names of the items shown in the pictures written on them.

Once the students have had time to look at the pictures, the teacher asks them to match them to the word cards. When they have completed this, the teacher asks the class to think about the following problem:

- What does it mean to take responsibility for something or someone?
- Think about a difficult experience. What was difficult about it? What did you like about it?

It is important that the teacher introduces the problem first and only then forms pairs of students to work together on it. Otherwise, the students' attention will be focused on the forming of pairs and not on solving the problem.

The students discuss the problem in their pairs for a few minutes and then present their opinions to the whole class. Not all students will have an opportunity to give their opinions, but it should be possible for most to do so as long as care is taken that it is not always the same students who come to the front of the class.

After a short discussion, the students are given the task to think about different professions and how taking responsibility for a particular job or position can be organised:

- taking responsibility for oneself;
- taking responsibility for others;
- taking responsibility for things.

The teacher gives one student the task of writing the list of professions or jobs on the flipchart or blackboard.

In the last quarter of an hour of the lesson, the students are given the task to produce a short text (in the same pairs) and to finish this text for homework.

Task:

“Choose a profession or job from the list. Perhaps you already know someone who does this job. If you wish, you can also choose a job or profession that is not on the list. Write a short text about this job and about the responsibilities of the person doing the job:

- Describe the work that has to be done by the holder of this job.
- For whom or what does he or she have to take responsibility?
- If the person does not take responsibility, what consequences does it have for the country, the family, the school or the community?
- What could be difficult for the person doing this job?

The texts should be written so that they can be hung up in the classroom. It might be helpful to attach a drawing or an illustration, a collage or a photo to each text, thereby creating a ‘poster’.

Lesson 2

School is life: living ecology?

How ecological is our school?

Learning objectives	The students realise that their school is not only a place of learning but also a place for living. They plan to take (ecological) responsibility for this “living space”.
Student tasks	Various possibilities for ecological behaviour are developed and planned.
Resources	Handout.
Methods	Group presentations, plenary discussion.

Information box

Learning about ecology means living ecology. In this way, school becomes a place of active citizenship. Active citizenship is best learned by doing – individuals need to be given opportunities to explore issues of democratic citizenship and human rights for themselves, not to be told how they must think or behave.

Education for active citizenship is not just about the absorption of factual knowledge – in this case about how to save the environment and prevent further damage – but about practical understanding, skills and aptitudes, and characters and values.

The medium is the message – students can learn as much about democratic citizenship by the example they are set by teachers and schoolmates and the ways in which (ecological) life in school is organised, as they can through formal methods of instruction.

Lesson description

In the second part of this unit, the teacher should ensure that the topic will be narrowed down to the local context. Firstly, the teacher should give a short summary of the previous lesson. It should become clear that a well-functioning community requires that responsibility is divided up between many people.

School is presented as a community in which living as well as learning takes place. It can therefore be seen as a *polis*, or city state, where social as well as ecological problems, for example, have to be solved. Among other things, school also has to become a role model for ecological guidelines and processes, and consideration has to be given as to how best to do this. There are very practical aspects to taking responsibility. The students are given the task to think about the areas of school life in which ecological processes could be improved and what they themselves could contribute.

The next task is undertaken in groups of four. Each group is given a key term and writes down a list of questions about the term, such as the following (the example here is of “litter”):

- What kind of litter does our school produce?
- Where is it being taken?
- Who is responsible for doing this?
- How can the amount of school litter be reduced?
- What can I or my class contribute to this?

For this task, one lesson and the following week should be counted as the timeframe for research and homework. If the teacher wants make it shorter, he or she will need to do the research and obtain the information him or herself. The students produce a checklist of their own which will be presented to their classmates on the “eco-wall”.

List of possible key terms for the groups:

- litter;
- waste reduction;
- energy and power;
- water;
- transport;
- health;
- school grounds;
- biodiversity;
- sustaining our world;
- general ecological measures.

Lesson 3

How can I start to be responsible?

Students take the first steps in making their school more eco

Learning objectives	The students plan the concrete implementation of individual steps. Aspects such as realistic time management and the ability to compromise in the group, as well as general flexibility should be the students' goals.
Student tasks	The students use the time given for implementation of the planned activities.
Resources	Individual work depending on the action plan.
Methods	Practical application.

Lesson description

The groups of students should make short presentations of their checklists. For the first time in this lesson, the teacher should lead a conversation about the types of responsibility or power students really have:

- What can we change?
- What doesn't have to be changed?
- What kind of resistance will there be?

After this plenary discussion, certain decisions should be taken:

- What first steps do we want to take?
- How much time do we want to invest?
- Shall we form an "eco-group" for this?
- Do we want to concentrate on one area (e.g. water, litter or electricity) or do we want to try to take general measures in all ecological areas?

It is important to choose tasks that the students can actually accomplish. This may mean that information needs to be collected or that an awareness campaign needs to be started throughout the school.

Under the leadership of a group of students (the "eco-group") a short action plan should be designed and tasks should be divided up (on a flipchart or on a big sheet of paper on the blackboard).

Depending on the level of the class, the teacher should steer the process of decision making. It is important that the students remain realistic and that they do not plan or design something that cannot be achieved using the existing materials or resources. It is possible that additional financial resources will be necessary or that external organisations will need to be consulted. These decisions should be taken by the class.

Depending on the decision, small improvements should be agreed upon, for example, the regular switching off of lights, the separation of organic and non-organic waste in the school playground, etc.

These tasks should be fulfilled before the next lesson, either individually or in small groups. Experience has shown that documenting these processes with pictures, drawings, etc., can prove motivating for students.

Lesson 4

How did we do – what's the plan?

Students reflect on their activities and decide how to continue

Learning objectives	To end this unit, the students try to switch perspectives in order to understand what taking responsibility means in other positions. This is a further step towards a deeper understanding of democratic participation.
Student tasks	The students transfer the experiences they have had working in small groups to other situations.
Resources	Handout.
Methods	Plenary discussion, group work.

Lesson description

This fourth teaching sequence can be used to conclude Unit 4, but teachers can also decide to begin practical work at this stage. As already mentioned, the practical work can involve the students working together in small groups or as a class, or it can take the form of a school project.

The lesson should begin in the same way as lesson 1. The students should sit in a circle and think about what they have learned from all the previous lessons.

They should start by presenting the results of their research:

- What was achieved?
- What didn't work?
- What was improved or changed?
- What does it mean to take responsibility for ecological projects?
- Am I ready to take responsibility for something that "is not my fault"?
- How do I see myself?
- What disappointed me? What made me happy?

To help the students reflect on what they have achieved, experience has shown that it is helpful to use the "eco-wall", which was developed and expanded on during the course of the unit.

As part of this discussion, it should become clear how important the topic "taking responsibility" is for a well-functioning community. The following questions could be used to stimulate the discussion:

- What kind of communities are there?
- Who takes on what kind of role?
- How does this work in a state?
- What do we know about democracy and how does a democracy function?
- What do you understand by the following quote from John F. Kennedy: "Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country"?

Even though analogies can sometimes be problematic, it may be an interesting step to use them to encourage the students to use more complex thinking processes at this stage. They do not have to

arrive at any definite conclusions. It is more important to encourage them to think in more complex ways and this process will continue in later units.

Students (working in small groups) should be given a handout on which to write their own experiences:

Taking responsibility, sharing responsibility		
Example: ecology		
Place/situation	What kind of responsibility does this person have?	
Class	Teacher	Student
School	Head teacher:	Teacher/student
State	Head of state	People
?		

The students should think about when responsibility should be taken in each situation.

After a set timeframe, one group member should present the results of the group's thinking. During the final discussion, the teacher should ensure that the parallels between the experiences in class and the situations described are evident. It is also his or her task to show that there are possible limitations to this.

Finally, a "flashlight" (where every student says one sentence) can show what the students have learned from this unit, for example:

"Explain in one sentence what you think the most important thing in this unit on 'taking responsibility' was."

The students should have a few minutes to think about what they want to say and should make their statement even if others have already said the same thing or something similar. The teacher should also participate in the flashlight exercise. He or she should thank the students for their active participation but should not comment on their statements.