

Part 3

Participation

Unit 7

A class newspaper

Understanding media by producing media

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All over the world, the presence and impact of media has increased over the last few years. The more complex and interdependent our lives become, the more we all rely on information to understand the influences and developments that affect us. For any piece of information on matters beyond our range of personal experience and immediate perception, we must rely on a medium of information.

However, individual access to different media varies widely. This affects a person's level of information and his potential to exercise influence and power. A further important aspect is the issue of censorship and the problem of misinformation by parties, governments and powerful lobbies. Conflict, including social change or warfare, gives rise to monopolised and distorted information.

Although these interrelationships, to name but a few, will not be explicitly addressed in this unit on media, the students will discover elements of them when they compare the print media of their country or their region and judge them by specific criteria.

The approach to media education in this unit is different. By producing their own wall newspaper, the students will gain some insight into newspaper production and thus learn something about the reality of media "from within". Teaching experience has shown that this approach gives students a form of direct access to print media that is more remote from their daily lives. The students will view this type of media critically and will also evaluate electronic media, and their own use of these different kinds of media, from a new perspective. They will develop media literacy.

Finally, one practical hint: this unit, in particular, demands and offers potential for cross-curricular teaching and co-operation. Writing and revising texts could take place as part of language teaching, while designing the layout might be a task in art class. In some cases, a class may have to start on its own, with an additional input by an editing team of students who are particularly interested.

The wall newspaper may have to be present in school life for some time before other teachers will be sufficiently convinced of its worth to join in.

Learning for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights

Media literacy is one of the keys to an overall objective in human rights and civic education – the active, participating citizen. Here is a summary of the most important aspects of media literacy:

1. Competence of communication refers to the general manner in which human beings interact with each other. Social reality does not exist as such. Rather, it is jointly defined by humans through social interaction, which means it is created by acts of communication. This general communicative competence begins with learning our mother tongue and is developed further by using this competence in public.
2. Every human being has this communicative competence from birth. We are endowed with this competence by nature, but it needs to be educated, practised and refined.
3. Media literacy is included in the overarching concept of communicative competence. It refers to the complex multitude of media, the use of which needs to be learned and practised through, for example, being set as a task for students. Print media, including the wall newspaper, are important means of everyday communication, which students should be familiar with. However, they are no more than one element within the overall goal of media literacy.

UNIT 7: A class newspaper

Understanding media by producing media

Lesson title	Objectives	Student tasks	Resources	Method
Lesson 1: The newspapers around us	The students are introduced to a variety of print media. They understand the differences in content structure.	The students collect and analyse newspapers and magazines that are commonly read in their communities. They create a poster to record their results.	Newspapers, scissors, glue, large sheets of paper.	Group work.
Lesson 2: Our newspaper is the best... don't you agree?	The students clarify the criteria for a good newspaper or magazine. They become aware of their own outlook, values and interests.	The students assess the presentations by the other groups and agree on compromises.	Presentations prepared in the previous lesson. Matrix on blackboard or flip chart.	Group presentations, plenary discussion and assessment.
Lesson 3: We produce our wall newspaper	In groups, the students agree on a range of topics and objectives. They cooperate in the group, sharing their own ideas and competences with the team.	The students decide on the structure of their jointly produced newspaper. They identify topics that are relevant for their school and write an article for their section of the wall newspaper.	Depending on the material resources available, the results will range from handwritten texts to computer printouts with digital photographs.	Making joint decisions, group work.
Lesson 4: Our first issue!	In an open discussion, the students understand what is involved in continuing the wall newspaper project. They are able to make a decision and to take responsibility for it.	The students must form opinions and decide about their future involvement in a follow-up project.	Blackboard or flip chart.	Plenary discussion.

Lesson 1

The newspapers around us

Who they inform. How they inform. What they communicate.

Learning objective	The students are introduced to a variety of print media. They understand the differences in content structure.
Student tasks	The students collect and analyse newspapers and magazines that are commonly read in their communities. They create a poster to record their results.
Resources	Newspapers, scissors, glue, large sheets of paper.
Method	Group work.

Conceptual learning

The term “print media” refers to printed sources of information – the so-called classic media – including newspapers, magazines, books, catalogues, prospectuses, flyers, maps, diagrams, postcards, calendars and posters.

Print media are usually printed on paper. The printing technologies are undergoing rapid change, and digital printing is becoming increasingly common.

The lesson

Several weeks before this lesson is to begin, the teacher asks the students to collect all the newspapers and magazines they can lay their hands on and bring them to school. To support the students in their work, it is recommended to set aside a table in the classroom that can be used for presentations. With luck, a student may be able to obtain an old newspaper rack from a newsagent, which provides an ideal means to present the newspapers and magazines. The teacher should ensure that all the main daily newspapers are included.

The teacher begins the first lesson by informing the students about the objectives and tasks of this unit. The teacher should emphasise that this unit is the beginning of a project that can and should be continued for at least half a school year. The students should also realise that this project offers them the opportunity to gather practical experience of journalism. Experience has shown that future journalists have often taken their first steps in projects of this type.

The students form small groups, preferably of three or a maximum of four students. Each group is to analyse a different newspaper or magazine. The students are guided by the following questions:

- What sections are included in the newspaper or magazine?
- In what order do the sections appear?
- Which target groups do the sections address? Which members of the family are particularly interested in reading a certain section?
- Which topics are covered in the sections of the issue that the group is examining?
- Choose one typical article from each section. Cut out these articles and stick them on a sheet of paper to make a poster.

The poster should carry the name of the newspaper or magazine, ideally with an original heading, and the questions shown above should be answered. The students should be reminded of the importance of a clear and orderly layout.

At this stage, it is important for the students to have understood the basic structure of their newspaper, thus enabling them to present and explain it clearly in class.

The groups prepare their presentations for the next lesson as though they are advertising their newspaper or magazine, emphasising all its advantages and strengths. After having heard all the presentations, the class should decide which newspaper they consider to be the most interesting and informative. The purpose of this step is to obtain free delivery of this newspaper for a few weeks, a service that many newspaper publishers are willing to provide to schools.

In this phase, the teacher has an advisory role. He/she will support the groups in exploring the inner structure of the newspaper, as not all papers are equally easy to analyse. The teacher should also monitor the students during their group work to ensure that each group is able to make a good presentation and finish their work by the end of the lesson. Trying to be too perfect will disrupt the time budget for this activity.

Lesson 2

Our newspaper is the best... don't you agree?

What makes a newspaper a good newspaper?

Learning objective	The students clarify the criteria for identifying a good newspaper or magazine. In doing so, they become aware of their own outlooks, values and interests.
Student tasks	The students assess the presentations by the other groups and agree on compromises.
Resources	Presentations prepared during the last lesson. Blackboard or flip chart.
Method	Group presentations, plenary discussion and assessment.

Conceptual learning

The term “freedom of the press” refers to the right of the press to go about their business freely, along with the right to uncensored publishing of information and opinions. Freedom of the press takes concrete form in the specific rights of journalists to refuse to give evidence and restrictions on monitoring journalists with audio equipment (“bugging”), in order to protect the sources of information that journalists need for their work. Access to the profession of journalism is not subject to state regulation and training of journalists is organised privately and free of state influence.

The lesson

The second lesson starts with presentations. The groups have prepared their posters and selected their newspaper or magazine clippings. It may be advisable to give the groups five minutes at the beginning of the lesson to run through their presentations.

The students assess the presentations by using defined criteria. The teacher may introduce these criteria and prepare a matrix such as the following.

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Points
Name of the newspaper or magazine						
Poster						
Formal aspects of presentation						
Content of presentation						
Formal aspects of newspaper or magazine						
Content of newspaper or magazine						

The assessment should not be given overdue importance, but should rather, through the element of competition, motivate the students to deliver a good presentation.

After the presentations, the students should evaluate the print media that they have seen (critical thinking), focusing on the following questions:

- What makes a newspaper/magazine a “good” newspaper/magazine?
- What purpose does it serve?
- What do we think of the newspapers/magazines that have been presented to us?
- What could be improved?

Experience has shown that the teacher will support and give structure to the discussion by noting the students’ ideas on a flip chart that has been prepared before the lesson. Alternatively the blackboard may be used, but this has the disadvantage that the information will not be available in the following lesson.

At the end of the lesson the teacher suggests that the students should produce and publicly present a school “wall newspaper”. The students should be asked to think about the task and to think about which sections should be included in order to give a comprehensive view of school life, and which section they would be keen on producing themselves. They should also suggest a name for their newspaper.

Lesson 3

We produce our wall newspaper

All the "do's" and a few "don'ts"

Learning objective	In groups, the students agree on a range of topics and objectives. They co-operate in the group, sharing their own ideas and competences with the team.
Student tasks	The students decide on the structure their jointly produced newspaper will have. They identify topics that are relevant for their school and write an article for their section of the wall newspaper.
Resources	Depending on the material resources available, the results will range from handwritten texts to computer printouts with digital photographs.
Methods	Making joint decisions. Group work.

The lesson

In groups of three or four, the students share their ideas about which sections of a newspaper provide relevant information on life in the school.

The teacher has prepared a small wall newspaper for every group by sticking three A4 sheets of paper together. The groups are then given the task of designing the general structure of the newspaper, including the name of the newspaper, the possible layout and the sections which the students have chosen. Their result might look like this:

The Students' Chronicle					
<u>The latest news</u>	<u>Sports</u>	<u>Top level news</u>	<u>Events</u>	<u>The parents</u>	<u>Our concerns</u>

Suggestions made by the groups are displayed on the wall in the classroom and the students are given time to read the posters and form their opinions. Then an “editors’ conference” makes the following important decisions:

- The name of the newspaper (exchange of views, discussion and final vote);
- Selection of the sections which are most important and meaningful for the school and the students.

The students now form small teams, with the number of teams corresponding to the number of sections that are to be produced, with an additional team that is put in charge of production.

In the beginning, the production team deals with practical matters such as the layout and presentation of the wall newspaper. Beforehand, the teacher has informed the head teacher about the newspaper project and has obtained his/her permission to display the school newspaper in the school building.

While the teams of editors are planning the first articles for the different sections, the teacher discusses technical aspects with the production team.

The students are given tasks that are to be completed by the following week. Each editing team submits an article and the production team produces the wall newspaper, complete with the heading design showing the logo and name of the paper, and the sections that have been chosen.

This task allows the students to experience their first success, but also immediately confronts them with the difficulties involved. The objective of this approach is to set up a standing team of editors who will regularly publish school news. The teams will be made up of particularly active and interested students, who are able to continue with the wall newspaper project over a longer period of time.

Lesson 4

Our first issue!

Where do we go from here?

Learning objective	The students are able to conduct an open discussion and they become aware of the implications and consequences of continuing the newspaper project. They are able to make a decision and to take responsibility for it.
Student tasks	The students must form opinions and decide about their future involvement in a follow-up project.
Resources	Blackboard or flip chart.
Method	Plenary discussion.

Conceptual learning

A discussion (an exchange of arguments, derived from the Latin, *discussio*) is a specific form of verbal communication between two or more persons in which one or several issues are addressed, with each side presenting their arguments. A discussion should be held in a spirit of mutual respect. A good discussion style requires the speakers to allow and even encourage the expression of views and opinions other than their own, considering them carefully instead of rejecting them out of hand. Personal qualities such as serenity, composure and politeness will be advantageous to both sides. The best type of discussion will lead to the solution of a problem or a compromise that everyone involved can accept.

In modern societies, discussions are a civilised, that is, non-violent means of handling controversy and dealing with conflicts of interests and objectives. Conflicts are not suppressed, but solved. By practising their discussion skills, students learn a basic tool for working towards and maintaining peace in society.

The lesson

After the teams of editors have posted their articles on the wall and reported briefly on their working experience, the next focus will be on the question of whether to continue the wall newspaper project. Now that all students have some idea of the time they would need to spend on it and the organisational problems that need to be solved, they can have a realistic discussion on the question of continuation.

The teacher may help to give clarity and structure to the student discussion by providing the following on a flip chart or on the blackboard.

Organisation	Personal aspects	Co-operation	Time management
If we continue: – What must we take into account? – Will time be a problem? – What technical means do we have? – How can we prevent our newspaper from being vandalised? – What financial means will we need? How can the funds be raised?	Who is interested? – Editor-in-chief? – Committee of editors? – What is the role and position of the teacher? – Names: – – – –	– How can we attract the interest of other students? – Which other teachers would we like to join our project? – Can we arrange visits to local editorial offices (print media, broadcasting or electronic media)? – Can we interview a journalist as an expert?	

As soon as teachers begin a project such as this they will realise that not everything can be planned. It requires a process of continual reflection by all participants. It is a lively, fascinating, but also a difficult and sometimes even frustrating process.

Teachers who already have experience of project work with classes will know the sequence of steps that will be needed and they also know that strong leadership is necessary. Unless care is taken, however, an over-strong leadership can, of course, also destroy the students' motivation and initiative. Participation in projects such as this benefits students by giving them important experience in civic and human rights education.

Teachers should exercise their leadership skills to ensure that, by the end of this lesson, clear decisions have been made and an appropriate time frame has been set for the follow-up steps.

Background material for teachers

Three dimensions of developing media literacy

1. The first dimension: judgment of media

Judgment of media may be summed up in the ancient Greek verb κρίνειν (krinein), which originally meant “to distinguish” and referred to the permanent acquisition and reflexivity of knowledge and experience.

Media judgment is media analysis. This analytic sub-dimension refers to the competence to perceive and understand developments in society, such as the process of concentration within the media business that may jeopardise the function of media in a democratic society. In this example, it is important to know who owns which newspaper and how many types of media are owned by the same company. However, we should not forget that media are run as commercial enterprises that must yield a profit. And whether we like it or not, the more interdependent and globalised our lives become, the more we need to rely on media. Media analysis enables us to judge media developments critically – to make distinctions – so that we can adequately make use of media literacy.

The (self-) reflexive sub-dimension means that we should be able to link and apply our analytical potential and knowledge to ourselves and our personal sphere of action. Particularly when dealing with media, we have a strong tendency to talk about “the others” and to ignore our personal involvement.

The capability to analyse and reflect includes a third sub-dimension, ethical concern for others, that balances and defines analytical thinking and self-reflexiveness in terms of social responsibility.

2. The second dimension: knowledge about media

Here we refer to the “pure” knowledge about media and media systems. This can be divided into two sub-dimensions.

The sub-dimension of information includes basic knowledge such as how journalists go about their work, the types of programmes that are broadcast by TV and radio, the reasons for a viewer’s preferences when watching TV and how a computer can be used so that it effectively serves the user’s needs.

The sub-dimension of skills adds to media knowledge the ability to use new equipment without having to read the instruction manuals. This includes the process of “learning by doing” – how to handle a computer, how to access the Internet, how to use a video camera, etc.

3. The third dimension: use of the media

Use of the media may also be divided into two sub-dimensions:

1. Competence in using media products, that is, in receiving and consuming what the media have produced. Watching TV is an example of this. It is an activity during which we need to process what we have seen, and to integrate it into our cognitive structures and our repertoire of imagery. Today, we can enhance our receptive competence not only through reading texts, but also through watching films.
2. Active use of media equipment. This sub-dimension refers to media use in social interaction. Examples are telebanking, teleshopping, video and telephone conferences, traditional and digital photography and video production. The enormous variety of media available gives us the potential to perceive the world not only by receiving information, but also by producing it.

The unit on media focuses on precisely this active use of the media, but includes links to the other two dimensions of media education mentioned above.

Student handout 7.1

How to write an article

Basic structure of an article

1. Headline

Every article needs a headline. It fulfils an important function: it should not overwhelm the reader, but should catch his or her attention and arouse his interest to read on.

Newspaper readers skim the pages quickly to select the articles that interest them and therefore headlines need to catch the reader's eye. Keep headlines short, use large and bold print and separate headlines from the following text.

2. Introductory lines

The introductory lines will usually be the first paragraph of your article (newspaper producers call this the "lead"). As a rule, it is marked in bold print.

The lead gives the reader the most important information. In an informative lead text, the reader finds answers to the key questions.

In features and other texts that are emotional rather than factual, the first lines will often vividly describe a scene. Here, the reader's interest in reading on is not aroused by factual information, but by stylistic means.

3. Use of language and style

Careful and elaborate use of language is perhaps even more important for a good article than the correct use of journalistic form or style. If we view a newspaper as a house, then the different forms of journalistic writing and presentation might be the furniture, but words would be the bricks with which the house has been built.

While we can somehow get along without furniture, we could not live in a house without bricks. Emotionally written articles, with the "human touch", are very popular in newspapers. But be careful, too much salt will spoil the soup (one can have too much of a good thing)!

That brings us to the sentence. Keep your sentences short and simple. Readers will have difficulty understanding sentences with more than 14 words. And sentences with 25 words or more are simply incomprehensible. Under all circumstances, avoid a complex sentence structure containing lots of commas and separate clauses. Make it a habit to read every sentence immediately after you have written it. Is it clear and easy to understand? Are there any unnecessary words?

Spelling mistakes do not only make a bad impression, but also annoy the reader, because they distract his or her attention from the message. Before you deliver your article, revise it – and this means check it for correctness and completeness of information (this amounts to checking the truth and accuracy of the information), language mistakes, style and comprehensibility.