

Lesson 2

Politics – how a democratic community solves its problems

The policy cycle model

This matrix sums up the information a teacher needs to plan and deliver the lesson.

Competence training refers directly to EDC/HRE.

The learning objective indicates what students know and understand.

The student task(s), together with the method, form the core element of the learning process.

The materials checklist supports lesson preparation.

The time budget gives a rough guideline for the teacher's time management.

Competence training	Analysis: working with a model.	
Learning objective	Politics serves to solve problems that affect the community.	
Student tasks	The students apply the policy cycle model to concrete examples of their choice.	
Materials and resources	Flipcharts and markers. Newspapers. ☞ Student handouts 6.1 and 6.2.	
Method	Lecture, group work.	
Time budget	1. Lecture and follow-up questions.	15 min
	2. Setting up groups for the research task.	10 min
	3. Research task.	15 min

1. Lecture and follow-up questions

The teacher introduces the policy cycle model to the students. They have an understanding of the initial phase in the cycle, the agenda setting, and are ready for the question of what happens once a problem has attracted public attention.

The teacher gives a brief lecture that fits into this context (linking instruction to constructivist learning). The students will apply the information in an extensive follow-up research task. The teacher distributes ☞ student handouts 6.1 and 6.2 before the lecture begins. Both materials should be displayed on a flipchart or overhead transparency for the teacher to refer to during the presentation.


An abstract model is easier to understand if it is linked to a concrete example. This works best if the teacher picks up an issue that the students have addressed in the lesson before. Alternatively, the teacher can use a case story, even a fictitious one, and prepare this beforehand. For the purpose of demonstration, the introductory lecture is outlined here on the issue of reducing car accidents (see lesson 1, chart of students' statements).



Before going into detail the listeners should have the complete picture in broad terms. The students look at ☞ student handout 6.1. The teacher's explanation includes the following points:

- This diagram is a model of a political decision-making process. It shows the different stages within such a process. The process begins at the top – the *debate* on what is to be considered as “the *problem*”. This is the agenda-setting debate we looked at in the previous lesson. Once a problem has made it onto the agenda, the debate on the right solution begins.
- The outcome of this debate is a *decision* – a law, for example, or some kind of action.

- This decision is then *implemented* – it is put into action. Now it takes effect. A new law is applied, for example, or a new hospital is built.
- People will soon form their *opinion*. Do they agree with this decision once they experience its impact? Does it serve their interests, for example?
- Sooner or later, there will be some *reactions*. These can be friendly or critical comments in the media, statements by politicians, or protests.
- These reactions may lead to a *new debate* on what *problems* should be put onto the political agenda. Perhaps some people think the original problem was never solved, and perhaps things have got worse. Or the measures taken have had side effects, leading to new problems. Politics takes place in cycles: some issues must be dealt with permanently, and some solutions need to be improved. So the cycle indicates that politics is a very practical business, following the principle of trial and error.
- But it is also possible that the process *comes to an end* (policy termination). Perhaps the decision worked well and the problem was solved – or a problem does not receive enough attention to warrant further political efforts.

The students may ask questions on points they had difficulty in understanding. The teacher should consider which questions are better dealt with right away, and which can be answered when introducing the example.


In a second step, the teacher gives an example to illustrate the model. There is a considerable amount of repetition, which supports clarity and understanding. The categories are linked to key questions and details.  Student handout 6.2 supports the lecture.

To give an example, a fictitious case story is used. It draws on the example given in lesson 1 – the issue of reducing car accidents (see  materials for teachers 6.1, which is based on  student handout 6.2).

The students ask further questions if necessary, and the teacher can now pass these questions on to the class. In this way, the teacher finds out whether the class has understood the message of the lecture. The students may be struck by the amount of argument and discussion, and the “egoistic” way in which the protagonists promote their particular interests. The teacher points out that this – arguing for one’s interests – is essential in democracy. Only by making one’s views heard is there a chance of them being considered in the decisions that are taken. And in some cases, a compromise is found.

2. Setting up groups for the research task

The discussion need not be taken further. There will be time for this in the last lesson. The teacher now decides with the students which issues they want to study. The material that they have collected serves as a guideline – which issues are under discussion? What decisions have been made in the more recent past?

The students form groups of two to four. They should have their presentations ready for the fourth lesson. They should present their results on  student handout 6.2, which will be copied for sharing with the class.

The students need criteria for choosing an issue:

- *Access to information*: in current processes of decision making, the students will find plenty of information in newspapers and on the Internet. On the other hand, as the cycle is incomplete, they will only be able to cover the first phases, e.g. up to the decision or implementation. A pragmatic approach is therefore to look through the last few weeks’ newspapers and pick up what hit the political agenda.
- *Personal interest*: the students choose an issue that they consider to be particularly urgent. They may refer to the “wall of silence” in the first lesson. But they should realise that access to information may prove more difficult.

3. Research task

The students spend the rest of lesson 2 and the whole of lesson 3 on their research. They plan their work independently.