

Lesson 1

The majority always rules?

A model case story

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	Analysing a problem.	
Learning objective	The problem of the “persistent majority”: the majority decides in a democratic system. The minority is expected to accept both this principle and the decisions produced by majority vote. But what happens when a minority is permanently outvoted?	
Student tasks	The students identify the problem of the “persistent majority” and suggest solutions.	
Materials and resources	✍ Student handout 7.1: model case story (one copy per student), markers, flipchart.	
Method	Individual work, group work, plenary discussion.	
Time budget	1. Introduction: stating the problem.	15 min
	2. Setting the task.	20 min
	3. Group work.	10 min

Information box

This lesson introduces the students to the majority/minority issue. In a fictional case story, the problem is stated in the simplest possible way. A sports club is conceived as a micro-community, consisting of just two groups – one large, one small. The problem to be solved – how to balance the rights of the majority and the minority – is the same as that in society and in the political community.

Lesson description

1. Introduction: stating the problem

The teacher explains that the lesson will begin with a case story. He/she distributes a student hand-out 7.1, and a student reads the story aloud. At the beginning of a lesson, this mode of presentation brings the class together more than letting the students read in silence.

The teacher asks one question:

“What is the problem?”

He/she asks the students to think about this question for a few moments and write down the answer. This task gives the “slow thinkers” (who are often careful thinkers) or more introvert students a chance to contribute to the discussion.

In the plenary round, the students give their inputs, drawing on their notes. The teacher listens, and encourages the students to explain their ideas accurately (“active listening”). After about 10 students have spoken, the teacher records the key statements that have emerged on the board. It is to be expected that the students refer to the key principle of democracy, which seems to work to the advantage of the larger group, while the smaller group can refer to the principle of non-discrimination (equality). The teacher links the students’ ideas to these categories, which then give structure and clarity to the discussion:

A small community: the sports club	
The problem	Suggested solutions
Violation of equal rights Feeling of discrimination (violation of equal rights)	Minority interests must also be respected (compromise)
Permanent winners and losers (“persistent majority”)	Chess players leave the club (scenario of failure)
Democracy questioned Majority decides – losers disagree	Change definition of majority

The students should be aware that this kind of conflict requires some kind of settlement. The exodus of the chess players would harm the interests of everyone. For example, each club would have to cope with additional expenses. So it is worth the effort to find a solution that meets both the principles of democracy and equality.

2. Setting the task

a. The problem

The students will probably have realised that the case story is a model that shows the problems of society, and the majority/minority issue therefore has a political dimension. By studying a model instead of reality, the problem becomes clearer and the task somewhat easier. The results of this model case study can then be applied – compared – to reality. The teacher points out this link between the case story and reality, as this explains the purpose of the task.

Two principles must be observed: **fairness and democracy**.

On the one hand, the majority/minority issue needs to be solved fairly – the minority will not accept being permanently outvoted and seeing its interests and needs ignored. On the other hand, democracy means that the majority rightly insists on taking the decision into its hands. So the students must draft a statute that brings these two principles together.

The teacher distributes ↯ student handouts 7.2 and 7.3 to the students and gives them time to read handout 7.2 in silence. In a brief plenary round the students link the basic approaches outlined in ↯ student handout 7.2 to their ideas on the blackboard.

b. The expected solution

The students need to know what they are to deliver. In small groups, the students will work out a draft statute that provides rules to overcome the scenario of a “persistent minority” that is permanently being outvoted. They can include rules on decision making and perhaps also rules on distributing funds. The students should be aware of the fact that the sports club is a micro-community and their statute resembles the constitution of the state. Teacher and students refer to ↯ student handout 7.3 to clarify further questions on the task if necessary.

c. The procedure

Finally the teacher explains the technical aspects of the task. The students form groups. Their resource managers are called to collect the markers and flipcharts, and the teacher briefs the time managers to take care that the groups are ready by the end of the second lesson.

The teacher has copied the list of key questions on ↯ student handout 7.3 onto a flipchart (see lesson 3 below). He/she explains to the students that these key questions will be the checklist against which to judge and compare the students’ ideas.

3. Group work

The students form groups of four to six. They use the remaining time in the first lesson and continue with the second lesson.

The teacher can ask the team managers to meet him/her at the end of the lesson for a briefing on the groups’ progress.