

UNIT 8
LIBERTY
Upper secondary level

Debating in public
Why doesn't freedom (of speech)
work without strict rules?

8.1 What issues are interesting for us?

The students take part in planning the debate

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Unit 8

Liberty

Debating in public

Why doesn't freedom (of speech) work without strict rules?

Introduction for teachers

Why doesn't freedom (of speech) work without strict rules?

To some readers, this question may seem strange. After all, freedom means we can say and do what we want. Democracy is a system for open, free societies. Strict rules remind us of something very different – authoritarian rule for example. So what is the message behind this question? Put briefly, freedom and equality are twins. We all enjoy rights of freedom, but we need equal chances to exercise them – and that is what rules are there for. In this unit, the students will experience the importance of this principle for taking part in democracy.

Why this unit focuses on debating

Citizens who take part in democracy will take part in discussions and debates, and in doing so, they exercise their human rights to free opinion and expression. Arguing in public is a skill that can be learned, so students need training in school. For this reason, the students train how to carry out a debate, and this unit is linked to the key concept of freedom. Freedom of speech and expression is particularly important here.

What the students do in the debating lesson

Eleven students take part in the debate. There are two debating teams of five students each, and a chairperson. The other students listen to the debate, but they play an active part too. Three tandem teams of students write a news story on the debate and report back to the class in the last lesson of the unit. The remaining students act as an audience, and their role is to assess the arguments, decide which party has finally convinced them, and vote on which side they support. As in politics, one side wins the majority of supporters.

What will the students learn in this unit?

The debate follows strict rules that make sure that each student receives a fair, equal share of speaking time. So the chairperson will interrupt students who want to speak longer than they are allowed to. But this rule is necessary, as it protects every speaker's right to free expression – but within a strict limit. This is why freedom doesn't work without strict rules (see the subtitle of this unit). Without this principle, no democratic system would work, nor would human rights mean much in people's lives.

What the teacher's task is in this unit

In this unit, a lot of time is given to the students to work on their own in order to train their skills of debating and observation, but also to take responsibility for what they do. Lessons 2-4 all begin with student inputs. When the students work on their own, the teacher acts like a coach: he/she watches the students to find out what they can do well, and which of their competences need more attention and training. He/she supports them if they ask for help, but should not give them the solutions to their tasks.

Competence development: links to other units in this volume

What does this table show?

The title of this manual, *Taking part in democracy*, focuses on the competences of the active citizen in democracy. This matrix shows the potential for synergy effects between the units in this manual. The matrix shows what competences are developed in unit 8 (the shaded row in the table). The strongly framed column shows the competences of political decision making and action – strongly framed because of their close links to taking part in democracy. The rows below indicate links to other units in this manual: what competences are developed in these units that support the students in unit 8?

How can this table be used?

Teachers can use this matrix as a tool for planning their EDC/HRE classes in different ways.

- This matrix helps teachers who have only a few lessons to devote to EDC/HRE: a teacher can select only this unit and omit the others, as he/she knows that some key competences are also developed, to a certain extent, in this unit – for example, analysis, reflexive use of the media, and responsibility.
- The matrix helps teachers make use of the synergy effects that help the students to be trained in important competences repeatedly, in different contexts that are linked in many ways. In this case the teacher selects and combines several units.

Units	Dimensions of competence development			Attitudes and values
	Political analysis and judgment	Methods and skills	Taking part in democracy Political decision making and action	
8 Liberty	Identifying key statements Linking and ranking arguments; making a choice Analysing the selective construction of reality by the media	Debating: making brief and clear statements Playing in a team Writing a news story	Making a decision by majority vote	Ethics of mutual recognition
2 Responsibility			Responsibility is even more important than rules to make democracy work (units 2 and 7)	
7 Equality	Analysing and solving the majority/minority issue			
5 Rules and law			Neutralising the potential of permanent conflict of interests by designing a framework of laws and rules	

6 Government and politics	Studying debates on agenda setting and political decision making		Identifying where citizens can intervene in political decision-making processes	
9 The media	Analysing the selective construction of reality by the media	Writing a news story	Reflexive use of information transmitted by the media	

UNIT 8: Liberty – debating in public

Why doesn't freedom (of speech) work without strict rules?

Lesson topic	Competence training/learning objectives	Student tasks	Materials and resources	Method
Lesson 1 What issues are interesting for us? <i>(3 weeks in advance)</i>	Taking responsibility. Criteria for selecting issues for a debate in class: political relevance, students' interests, links to student's understanding and experience.	The students brainstorm ideas and collect information on issues for the debate.	✍ Student handout 8.1. Information through the media. Records of personal experience and findings. Flipchart.	Work in tandem teams.
Lesson 2 Preparing for the debate	Participation: the students make a choice by vote. Methods and skills: team work.	The students prepare their roles for the debate.	✍ Student handouts 8.2–8.5, 9.1. Media information. A tabloid and quality paper, a youth magazine.	Group work, co-operative learning.
Lesson 3 We debate – we decide – we report	Speaking freely; arguing with an opponent; co-operating in a team. Observing and assessing an exchange of arguments.	The students take part in, or watch and listen to a debate. Follow-up tasks for the groups to prepare for the reflection lesson.	✍ Student handouts 8.2–8.5, 9.1.	Debate. Group work (vote). Debriefing.
Lesson 4 One debate – different perspectives	Analysing and judging a shared experience. Media construct our perception of reality. Rules secure equal opportunities to exercise rights of freedom.	The students compare news stories on the debate. The students reflect on their debating experience.	News stories written by students. 📄 Materials for teachers 9.1.	Presentations. Discussion.

Lesson 1

What issues are interesting for us?

The students take part in planning the debate

Please note: this lesson takes place three weeks in advance of the others

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	Taking responsibility; selecting items and materials by applying a set of criteria.
Learning objective	Criteria for selecting issues for a debate in class: political relevance, students' interests, links to students' understanding and experience.
Student tasks	The students brainstorm ideas and collect information on issues for the debate.
Materials and resources	Information through the media. Records of personal experience and findings. Flipchart on the wall to display the students' suggestions, with checklist (names of students with a tick box). ✍ Student handout 8.1.
Method	Work in tandem teams.
Time budget	Getting the students involved. 15 min
	Introduction of the task. 10 min
	Work in tandem teams. 15 min
	Interval between lessons 1 and 2. 3 weeks

Information for the teacher: why this lesson takes place three weeks in advance

This lesson takes place three weeks in advance of the others to enable the students to prepare an input for the second lesson and to take part in planning the debate in lesson 3. This lesson serves as an **advance organiser**: the students acquire the information that they need for a task beforehand.

Taking part in planning lessons corresponds to taking part in the community. In all cases the active citizen is the informed citizen. Viewed from this perspective, the advance organiser in this unit demonstrates a general principle of participation in democracy.

The advance organiser requires a time span of approximately three weeks between the first and second lessons. (The teacher must therefore decide how to use the lessons within this interval.) The advance organiser consists of two phases:

Phase 1 (two weeks): the students work in tandem teams. At the end of phase 1, each team has worked out a suggestion for a debating issue that they think is interesting and suitable. They provide information material for the class (one page).

A deadline defines the date when phase 1 ends and phase 2 begins.

Phase 2 (one week): reading time. At the end of phase 2, every student knows all the suggested issues and has read all the materials. Each student has chosen an issue for the debate.

Time structure for the advance organiser

Lessons	Lesson 1		Lesson 2	
Student activities	Phase 1 The students work out their suggestion for a debating issue.		Phase 2 The students read the proposals.	
Time line	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	
Deadline →				

Lesson description

Preparations before the lesson

For step 1, line of debating: if necessary, the teacher has cleared the classroom for the debating exercise.

For step 2.3, instructions on the task: the teacher has attached two flipchart sheets to the wall in the classroom.

1. Getting the students involved

Preparation: the teacher marks a line on the floor with a piece of string, about five metres long. The students will need enough space to be able to stand on either side of this line, facing each other. If the classroom is too small or too crowded, this exercise can be done in the corridor.

The teacher asks the students to stand up and form a circle around the line. Then the teacher announces: “Every child should spend an additional year at school.”

The teacher asks the students to move to one side of the line – to the left, if they support the statement, to the right if they disagree. They spend a few minutes sharing their reasons and ideas.

Then the teacher asks the groups to exchange their arguments. There are a few rules to be observed:

1. The two sides take turns in presenting an argument.
2. The speakers must not be interrupted.
3. The speakers have 30 seconds to make their points.

The students then engage in an exchange of arguments that resembles a debate. After five minutes, or earlier if one side has run out of ideas, the teacher stops the debate and asks the students to return to their seats – ideally arranged in an open square to support communication.

2. Introduction of the task

2.1 Why debating is important for taking part in democracy

The teacher refers to the previous activity – it was a debate. Within a short time, many ideas and arguments were exchanged. The students may comment on their experience.

The teacher explains that the students should develop their debating skills, as many discussions in democratic settings are conducted in this way. Citizens enjoy the human rights to free opinion and expression, but they need debating skills to exercise them.

The teacher makes sure that the students understand and accept this definition of their training task.

2.2 Clarification: what makes a good issue for a debate?

The teacher refers to the topic – it was a good issue for a debate, as the students showed. What makes a good issue for a debate?

The teacher listens to the students’ ideas and suggestions, and sums them up in keywords on the blackboard or flipchart. It may be expected that they will largely correspond to the five criteria (3a-3e) on *≈* student handout 8.1.

The teacher explains that the forthcoming debate will be more interesting, and the students will be more successful if they carry out the debate on an issue of their choice. They therefore have the opportunity to choose an issue in the next lesson in three weeks time. Until then, they should develop suggestions for the issue the debate is to be held on. The class will make a choice in the second lesson.

The teacher distributes *see* student handout 8.1 and refers to the criteria the students have suggested and asks them to compare them with the criteria under 3a-3e on the handout. If the students and teacher agree to modify the list of criteria, they do so.

2.3 Task instructions: collecting the ideas on the flipchart

The teacher goes to the flipcharts on the wall and asks the students to read *see* student handout 8.1 while he/she draws the following layout:

What is a good issue for a debate?			
Everyday or school life	Social or cultural issues	Political issues	Other issues

After the students have read the handout, the teacher refers to the flipchart. The issue the students discussed at the beginning of the lesson was a political issue – how education should be organised in our country. But other issues are interesting too:

- Political issues;
- Social issues;
- Issues in school or everyday life;
- Other issues – for all other ideas.

The students can either draw on their personal experience or what they know about the current political agenda, or they can search for information.

At this point, the students should have some examples. The teacher encourages the students to come forward with their ideas. If this proves too difficult, the teacher can help with these examples:

- *Everyday or school life*: “Cars do more harm than good.”
- *Social or cultural issues*: “Television plays a positive role in society.”
(Or: the Internet, mobile phones, etc.)
- *Political issues*: “Women should be treated the same as men.”

2.4 Task instructions: observing the deadline

Finally the teacher explains why there is a deadline. To give everyone the chance to read the materials, a deadline is given – five school days before the first lesson is due. The students must understand that they will select the issue, but they must have read the materials beforehand. Otherwise a democratic vote cannot take place, as this has to be organised efficiently within the time available during the lesson. There will be no time during the lesson to read the materials.

The teacher tells the students where to deposit their note sheet and materials.

Finally he/she points out that it is important for the students to make up their minds which issue they would like hold the debate on.

3. Work in tandem teams

The students form tandem teams and work on their own, following the instructions given on the handout and during the lesson. They set their own homework.

Lesson 2

Preparing for the debate

Key statements and debating strategies

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	Participation: the students make a choice by vote. Methods and skills: team work.	
Learning objective		
Student tasks	The students prepare their roles for the debate.	
Materials and resources	<p>☞ Student handouts 8.2-8.5, 9.1.</p> <p>Media information.</p> <p>A tabloid and quality paper, a youth magazine.</p>	
Method	Group work, co-operative learning.	
Time budget	1. The students choose an issue.	10 min
	2. Forming groups for the debate.	10 min
	3. Group work.	20 min

Information box

The unit consists of two student activities: 1. the students choose their debating issue and 2. the students form groups and prepare for the debate in their different roles: the two debating teams (the “affirmative”, or pro side, and the “negative”, or con side).

The main part of the lesson should be spent on preparing the debate. Therefore it is important to conduct the vote smoothly and efficiently.

For the news reporter groups, it is an exciting experience to see their story published by a real newspaper. The teacher may suggest this idea to the news reporter teams. If the students agree, the teacher decides with them how to approach a newspaper.

1. The students choose an issue

The teacher performs as chairperson in this first lesson sequence. First he/she thanks the students for producing so many interesting ideas. Then the teacher explains the procedure.

The students are expected to have read the ideas and materials produced by their fellow students, and to have made up their minds which issue they would like the debate to be held on. The voting procedure can be conducted by two students. One asks each student for their choice. The second notes the topics on a list on the board, marking those that have been named several times. Then the

topics are ranked, and by majority vote, the class makes a choice between the first three at the top of the ranking list. The topic chosen then becomes the issue for the debate.

2. Forming groups for the debate

The teacher announces that the students will now prepare for the debate. A debate follows certain rules, and the students form groups and teams that perform in different roles.

The students are given *☞* student handout 8.2 and read it in silence. They ask questions to clarify whatever needs further explanation, and (preferably) other students or the teacher provide the answers. The students should understand what role the different teams perform.

The students join one of the following teams. This table shows what groups take part in the debate and what handouts they need. The debating teams should have one additional member in reserve in case one team member is sick on the debating day.

The two chairpersons divide the tasks of conducting the debate and the audience's vote between them. If one chairperson is sick, the other takes over both parts.

Group	Number of members (+ reserve members)	<i>☞</i> Student handout No.
Debating team No. 1 ("affirmative")	5 (+1)	8.3
Debating team No. 2 ("negative")	5 (+1)	8.3
First and second chairperson	2	8.2, 8.4, 8.5
Reporter teams (quality paper, tabloid paper, youth magazine)	3 x 2	8.6, 9.1
Audience	All remaining students	8.5

This can be done conveniently by creating columns on the blackboard or a couple of flipcharts. The students then enter their names under the group of their choice. If a group is overbooked, the teacher and the class decide jointly how to solve their problem. It is *theirs*, not the teacher's. Experience has shown that students are willing to co-operate, and the groups are formed quickly, with a satisfactory result for the students.

3. Preparations for the debate

The groups receive a copy of *☞* student handout 8.3 (debating teams), 8.4 (audience) or 8.5 (press teams). The groups spend the second half of the lesson planning their activity and can assign themselves a piece of homework if necessary. The teacher acts as observer and coach. As a coach, the teacher does not approach the groups, read their papers, or even participate in producing results. If the groups need any support, they approach the teacher. If not, they have the liberty and responsibility to work as they think right. Experience has shown that students appreciate the confidence that is placed in them, which works as a strong incentive and gives encouragement.

The teacher provides news reporters with a copy of their type of paper – tabloid paper, quality paper, or youth magazine. This will help them to imagine what kind of profile and reading audience their paper has, and what their news story should look like.

If at all possible, the teacher asks the students to arrange the tables and chairs for the debate as indicated in *☞* student handout 8.2 before the next lesson begins.

Lesson 3

We debate – we decide – we report

Debating and decision making in public

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	Speaking freely; arguing with an opponent; co-operating in a team. Observing and assessing an exchange of arguments.
Learning objective	Related to the topic under discussion.
Student tasks	The students take part in, or watch and listen to a debate. Follow-up tasks for the groups to prepare for the reflection lesson.
Materials and resources	☞ Student handouts 8.2-8.5, 9.1.
Method	Debate, group work (vote), debriefing.
Time budget	1. The debate. 25 min
	2. The audience's vote. 10 min
	3. Homework: inputs for the reflection. 5 min

Information box

This lesson includes the key task of the whole unit, the debate. The extensive preparation in the previous lesson was intended to give the students the confidence to act out their roles.

The chairpersons are responsible for managing the debate and the audience's vote.

The teacher opens and concludes the lesson, and primarily acts as an observer.

The ☞ student handouts give the groups rules and instructions on how they are to perform their roles. This setting is typical for task-based learning: the lesson is highly structured through different tasks and strictly framed by the rules and schedule, while the teacher almost never takes the floor. But nevertheless, the learning objectives that the teacher has in mind are present throughout the lesson – even more so than in frontal instruction, as now the students have taken ownership.

Lesson description

✍ Student handout 8.4 (The role of the chairpersons) gives a detailed description of how the debate and the audience's vote take place. Therefore the description of these stages can be very brief.

1. The debate

The teacher announces the agenda of the lesson: the debate, followed by the audience's vote and a debriefing. If necessary, the teacher asks the students to arrange the tables and chairs in the seating order as indicated in ✍ student handout 8.2.

Then the first chairperson takes over. The students take their seats, as debating teams, chairperson, audience and press reporters. The teacher takes a seat in the audience, preferably in a back row. The students should not seek and establish eye contact with the teacher, but instead with each other. They perform in their roles, and the teacher listens.

2. The audience's vote

The second chairperson conducts the audience's discussion and the vote. The teacher leaves the audience here, and observes the students from a distance. While the students in the audience are discussing their vote, the debating teams and the news reporters listen.

After five minutes, the chairperson ends the discussion and conducts the vote. After the chairperson has concluded the vote, the teacher takes over.

3. Homework: inputs for the follow-up lesson (lesson 4)

The teacher thanks the chairpersons for managing the lion's share of the lesson. Then he/she thanks the students and the audience, and praises as he/she thinks appropriate. No critical comments should be made at this point. The fourth lesson gives an opportunity to give feedback and to reflect on the debating and voting lesson, and this is what the teacher tells the students.

He/she asks all the students with the exception of the news reporters to think about their feelings, impressions and views on the debating session and the follow-up discussion and vote, and to prepare a brief statement as input for the next lesson, addressing the following key questions:

1. State your opinion on the issue under debate. Explain what argument convinced you most in forming your opinion.
2. From your point of view, describe what effect the rules, in particular the one minute time limit, had on the debate.

The press reporter teams should not be given this task in addition to having to produce their news story. The teacher calls the six students to decide how the stories are to be disseminated – by displaying two or three copies on the wall, or by giving a handout to each student.

Lesson 4

One debate – different perspectives

The students reflect on the debate

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 and judging a shared experience.	
Learning objectives	Media construct our perception of reality. Rules secure equal opportunities to exercise rights of freedom.	
Student tasks	The students compare news stories on the debate. The students reflect on their debating experience.	
Materials and resources	News stories written by students. 📄 Materials for teachers 9.1	
Method	Presentations. Discussion.	
Time budget	1. Three news reports with discussion.	15 min
	2. Reflection: how did the rules affect the debate?	15 min
	3. Debriefing.	10 min

Information box

The students reflect on the lesson from two perspectives, that of contents and that of the framework of rules. The students may be more interested in one aspect than the other, and the focus can be shifted accordingly, giving more time to one topic.

The debriefing gives the students the opportunity for some general feedback on the unit.

The students have prepared inputs that allow everyone to make a contribution during the lesson. Therefore the teacher can, and should, give a large share of speaking time to the students. The student inputs may be expected to last for the whole lesson (see the key questions for the student inputs). The teacher chairs the lesson, and gives brief inputs to sum up and structure the discussions.

Lesson description

Clarifying the agenda for the lesson

The teacher presents the agenda of the lesson, and points out that it corresponds to the key questions of the students' homework. If the students agree and make no suggestions to focus on one point in particular, the teacher introduces the first phase of the lesson.

1. Three news reports with discussion


The teacher announces that the three reporter teams will now present their news stories. The students have the task to listen and to compare, as the reporters' work for different types of newspapers. To compare the news stories, the students should be ready to take notes. The teacher clarifies the task by drawing a simple matrix on the board or flipchart:

News story	No. 1	No. 2	No. 3
Language			
...			
...			
...			
Judgment			

The teacher refers to the papers only by number, leaving it to the students to introduce their paper. Language is a possible feature by which to compare the stories, and the students are free to take note of what they notice. If they prefer one type of paper and news story, they should give reasons.

The teacher makes sure that the students have no more questions on their task and then gives the floor to the three press reporter teams. The press reporter teams read their stories in turn, without any discussion or comment between the stories.

Then the students give feedback. The teacher listens, and encourages the students to explain what criteria they used for comparing and judging the stories.

The teacher sums up the discussion by pointing out one key aspect: the three teams of press reporters attended the same debate, and yet the images they created for their reading audiences differ considerably. This shows that media transmit reality for all those who were not present at the event. But by transmitting reality, they construct it – selecting and highlighting some elements, omitting or paying less attention to others. The teacher can refer to selected details of the news stories or student inputs to support this point (see  materials for teachers 9.1).

2. Reflection: how did the rules affect the debate?

The teacher again asks for student inputs. The teacher listens, and so do the students. Some comments may be expected to be quite critical (the time limit is “undemocratic”, it does not allow free expression), and some students may support the rules.

During the discussion, the teacher can ask the critics among the students to consider what would happen if the time limit was lifted. They will realise that the debate would need longer, and the time budget of the lesson sets an absolute time limit, and therefore the rules have taken reality into account and distributed the available time fairly, admittedly in very small slices. The speakers should comment on how they coped with the time limit: did they manage to focus on key points?

3. Debriefing

Here the students give some general feedback.

The teacher should not attempt to justify his/her work in the face of criticism, nor to argue critical remarks away. As the students have had a very large share of activity and responsibility, both success and failure are theirs as much as the teacher's. The teacher should point this out if the students are not aware of it.

If the students enjoyed the debate, the teacher might suggest an extension in the form of a debating club. Here, some of the issues suggested by the students could be debated. Debating clubs are very common in English-speaking countries around the world, and also among teachers of English as a foreign language. The Internet offers a rich variety of excellent material for teachers and students interested in debating.

Materials for teachers 8.1

Why freedom depends on framing by rules and laws

Learning opportunities in this unit

Interdependence through scarcity of time

The most precious resource of teaching and learning, and in our lives generally, is time. As professionals, teachers must constantly answer the question on how the available time in class may best be used – and in interactive learning, the students take responsibility for this. The advance organiser in this unit will only work if the students accept their responsibility to use the time for reading each other's materials when it is there – before the first lesson. In the first lesson, no more than 10 minutes can be given to the four groups to choose an issue for the debate. If they have failed to read the materials in advance, the class will have one good idea less to choose from – this is an example of how we depend on each other (interdependence).

Strict rules protect liberty of speech

A debate must take place within a fixed amount of time. All speakers enjoy the same rights of free thought and free expression. The available speaking time must therefore be distributed fairly – which means equally, one minute per statement. It seems paradoxical that strict rules are necessary and useful to protect our liberty. The time limit works in two ways: our share of speaking time is guaranteed, and it is fair. On the other hand, it confines every speaker to a short time slot, and speakers must think carefully about what they want to say. They must focus on key arguments, leave out everything of minor importance, and make their point clearly and briefly.

Freedom and framing

The students' liberty of action and speech is framed, or limited and defined, in two ways. First, by the available learning time – the lessons are over after 40 minutes or so, and the debate must fit into one lesson and take no more than 20 minutes, as other things need to be done in that lesson as well. Second, the debating rules give each speaker a fair, but strictly limited time slot of one minute per statement. Framing has a structural dimension – time is scarce throughout our lives – and a political, man-made dimension: rules set frames without which we could not enjoy our liberties without violating the rights of others. Scarcity of time is not negotiable, but framing by rules is.

School is life

The dialectics of freedom and framing, rooted in the universal scarcity of time, occurs in school as it does in public life. Here, in a very literal sense indeed, school is life.