

ENGAGING STUDENTS: A GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY TEACHING METHODOLOGIES



Summary

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE	3
1. PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES: WHAT ARE THEY?.....	4
1.1 TRADITIONAL AND PARTICIPATORY TRAINING COMPARED	4
1.2 PARTICIPATORY METHODS AT SCHOOL	5
1.3 PARTICIPATORY METHODS: HOW TO CHOOSE THEM.....	5
2. METHODOLOGIES GUIDELINES	5
2.1 FLIPPED CLASSROOM.....	5
<i>Phase 1 - Initial brainstorming</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Phase 2 - Activity Planning</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Phase 3 - The operational activity</i>	<i>7</i>
2.2 PEER EDUCATION	8
<i>How to build a peer education intervention?.....</i>	<i>9</i>
2.3 CIRCLE TIME.....	10
<i>The advantages of circle time</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>In practice.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>The role of the teacher</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Evaluation</i>	<i>11</i>
2.4 ROLE PLAYING	11
<i>Role playing at school</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>The role of the teacher and the students</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>The context: the classroom as a stage</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Warm-up and briefing.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Debriefing.....</i>	<i>13</i>
2.5 COOPERATIVE LEARNING	14
<i>Founding principles</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Examples</i>	<i>14</i>
2.6 WORLD CAFÉ	14
<i>Organisation of a World Café session</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Six key points of the World Café:.....</i>	<i>16</i>
2.7 CLASSROOM ARGUMENTATIVE DEBATE	18
<i>Designing a Debate</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>The Theme.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Conducting a debate</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Search.....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Expose</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Replicate.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Evaluating a Debate</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Conclusions.....</i>	<i>29</i>
2.8 PROJECT BASED LEARNING.....	29
<i>PBL in the classroom</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Example Lesson Plan</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>Essential Vademecum</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>A practical example.....</i>	<i>31</i>
3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS	32

SOURCES AND REFERENCES.....33

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

This Guide is a practical complement to the three-step approach, providing teachers with practical tools and techniques for structuring a Global Citizen Education session on any topic.

In the contemporary educational landscape, the adoption of participatory methodologies has proven to be crucial in engaging students in an active and dynamic way, promoting meaningful and lasting learning. This guide offers to teachers an overview of the most effective and innovative participatory methodologies, providing practical tools to successfully implement them within their own teaching practice.

Each paragraph in the second chapter is dedicated to a specific methodology, elaborates on its characteristics, the educational advantages it offers and provides simple guidelines for integrating it into lessons.

The methodologies include:

- **Flipped Classroom:** this approach reverses the traditional teaching dynamic, moving the introduction of content to the home, while classroom time is devoted to discussions, exercises and clarifications.
- **Peer Education:** enhances the potential of students as co-teachers, promoting peer collaboration and mutual learning.
- **Circle Time:** a method that creates a safe and inclusive space for sharing and open discussion, allowing students to freely express their ideas and feelings.
- **Role Playing:** through the simulation of real or imaginary scenarios, this methodology stimulates empathy, creativity and problem-solving.
- **Cooperative Learning:** fosters collaboration and shared responsibility among students, encouraging active learning and knowledge sharing.
- **World Café:** an approach that facilitates deep and meaningful conversations through a structured organisation of spaces and interactions.
- **Argumentative Debate:** promotes critical thinking and the ability to argue, encouraging students to present and defend their ideas clearly and persuasively.
- **Project Based Learning:** focuses learning on complex, authentic projects that require research, problem solving and presentation of results.

Each section provides a basis for teachers to experiment and adapt these methodologies in their own educational context. We are confident that implementing these participatory methodologies will enrich your students' learning experience, preparing them for a future in a global society where the ability to collaborate, reflect and communicate effectively is becoming increasingly relevant.

1. PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES: WHAT ARE THEY?

Participatory teaching methodologies are strategies that put the learner at the centre of the learning process. They include a variety of approaches and aims that serve to gather **innovative ideas, initiate initiatives and projects, and promote change.**

The lowest common denominator of these approaches lies in the idea that change itself 'cannot be imposed from above', it is more likely to be achieved if it 'comes from below' and if those who have to actually implement it on a daily basis are the authors/protagonists.

1.1 Traditional and participatory training compared

Formazione tradizionale		Formazione partecipata
Ruolo del formatore «top - down»	→	Il ruolo del formatore è fare domande e facilitare la discussione
Il formatore ha più conoscenze ed esperienze degli allievi	→	Sia il formatore che gli allievi sono portatori di conoscenze e di esperienze
I formatori condividono le loro conoscenze con gli allievi mediante la lezione frontale	→	Ognuno deve riflettere per conto proprio e poi condividere le loro idee, esperienze e abilità
Gli allievi sono passivi, ascoltano solamente e prendono appunti	→	Gli allievi sono attivi e analitici, fanno domande ed esplorano alternative
Gli allievi imparano le risposte giuste dai formatori	→	Gli allievi sviluppano le proprie risposte. Ci potranno essere, infatti, molte risposte differenti

1.2 Participatory methods at school

Participatory methodology is a **student-centred** view that aims to empower learners **to play an influential and active role in the learning process**. Learners do not just listen, but collaborate to acquire knowledge and skills: participative learning focuses on **learner participation**.

1.3 Participatory methods: how to choose them

In order to choose the method most appropriate to the topic at hand and suitable for the students, it is useful to ask oneself these questions:

- How can we start from prerequisites to new learning?
- What evidence to observe in order to evaluate?
- How to correlate products to be realised with transversal competences to be developed?
- In which contingent/learning situation can we work?

2. METHODOLOGIES GUIDELINES

2.1 Flipped classroom

The *flipped classroom* allows the teacher a certain freedom in managing time in the classroom, precisely because the pupils have had an initial approach to the content through studying the introductory materials at home. This approach, however, imposes a not inconsiderable effort of organisation on the teacher in order to make the time in the classroom truly profitable, in order to delve deeper into the subject without necessarily setting up the lesson in a frontal manner, but activating in the pupils the competence of autonomy in their work.

It is therefore advisable to set up a well-structured lesson, e.g. in a 60-minute lesson we recommend the following time slot:

1. Initial brainstorming: 10 min
2. Activity planning 5 min
3. Operation: 30 min
4. Sharing/metacognition: 15 min

Phase 1 – Initial brainstorming

The start of the lesson takes its cue from the analysis of the activities proposed as homework with an initial brainstorming session that allows the pupils to reconstruct, together with the teacher, the topic being studied and that, at the same time, allows the teacher to check what has actually been understood by the pupils and what needs further clarification or clarification. This activity also provides the teacher with the opportunity to check whether the pupils have actually viewed the proposed materials carefully or superficially. In these first ten minutes, an alternative activity to brainstorming, which has the same purpose of verifying any difficulties encountered at home, can be that of **discussion in pairs, with** the aim of finding the **unclear points** to submit with questions to the teacher, who can then intervene to answer the pupils' questions as they formulate them.

It often happens, especially at the beginning, to have pupils who have not viewed the material, citing problems of various kinds, the veracity of which must be investigated beforehand, such as the lack of a device or the absence of an adequate connection. It is necessary to discourage such episodes, reiterating the importance of doing one's homework in order to work productively right from the start in class.

Phase 2 – Activity Planning

After recapitulating together the key points of the lesson, the teacher prepares the class for the activity to be carried out on the day, **organises the groups** and **arranges the desks** as needed, in **islands, groups** or sometimes **pairs**. It is possible to work in **stable groups** for longer or shorter periods of time, or to create **random groups**, depending on the activities that we propose to our pupils, although it is certainly preferable to work in small **heterogeneous groups** (three pupils) or in pairs in **peer-to-peer** mode, i.e. with one of the two pupils playing the role of more experienced tutor.

In this phase, **the teacher explains to the class the activity to be carried out**, providing as much guidance as he or she deems appropriate.

Since this phase should last a maximum of five minutes, we must get the children used to organising the spaces quickly and independently on the

basis of the teacher's instructions, who, for his part, must arrive in the classroom with a clear idea of the groups and activities.

Phase 3 – The operational activity

When the lesson gets into full swing, the pupils are called upon first-hand to deal with the subject content. This activity, which in the traditional lesson takes place at home, where pupils have to work on the text, struggling with any difficulties encountered, now takes place in the classroom with the support of classmates and the teacher, ready to support pupils precisely when they may need it most. Moreover, working in class with a well-defined objective and in a limited amount of time, following structured instructions and in cooperative mode is also useful because it exercises the pupils in activating those skills that they will be called upon to deploy in order to accomplish the **reality task** with which the learning unit generally ends. In the half-hour allotted to them, in fact, the pupils will have to **organise their work, divide their tasks and carry out an activity that**, however simple and quick, will have to be accomplished. In the meantime, the teacher moves between the islands and groups to observe how the pupils are getting active and to check that they are approaching the activities in the right way. To this end, it will be useful to have a **grid for systematic observations**, which can help to monitor certain aspects considered particularly important in the conduct of the activity and which need not necessarily result in a grade. It may also be useful to check the individual pupil's progress in the acquisition of certain key competences such as, for example, the ability to collaborate and cooperate and, therefore, civic and social competences; the ability to plan, therefore the spirit of initiative, in addition to the "learning to learn" competence that will be required in the autonomous approach to the textbook; all competences included under the single **competence of personal, social and learning to learn**, according to the *Council of Europe's New Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* of 22/05/2018.

So what are the characteristics of the activities we can propose in the classroom?

- Have pupils work in **small groups** (two or three pupils maximum), preferably heterogeneous, where the more experienced ones can act as tutors for the weaker ones. **Co-operative learning** and **peer-to-peer**

are recommended because in this way pupils become accustomed to co-operating with each other, finding solutions within the group and positive interdependence within the class group is promoted.

- The activities must have the character of **reinforcing** and **deepening what has been learnt at home**, in order to sediment the contents, verify their effective acquisition and give the teacher the possibility of grasping the pupils' difficulties, correcting and supporting them precisely in the application phase, which is the most critical moment in the learning process.
- **A systematic use of the handbook/reference text** to help the students in the acquisition of disciplinary vocabulary and operational autonomy.
- **The activities should be of a practical and concrete nature** to enable pupils to test and experiment with the transferability of their knowledge; they will therefore not end with classroom reading of the contents of the text.
- Finally, a very important feature is the duration: these must always be **short activities**, to be carried out in the allotted 30 minutes, to allow for the final sharing of the results achieved.
- The natural conclusion of the Flipped course is the **reality task** or **authentic task**.

2.2 Peer Education

It is a methodology that actively involves children directly in the school context, with aim of developing life skills, i.e. those everyday life skills necessary for each of us to be mentally well.

In this educational methodology, peers would be models for the acquisition of knowledge and skills of various kinds and for the modification of behaviour and attitudes, generally related to 'being well'.

The peer is not a professor, he is not an expert in precise scientific knowledge, but he knows how to manage relationships: his role is one of mediation and that is why he is perceived as part of the group.

The peer educator is an ordinary child with a heightened awareness of the communication processes that occur in the peer group. One of the strengths of peer education is the **reactivation of socialisation** within the class group.

The peer alone does not transform anything, but is the very stimulus of participation: the class, during the interventions, is involved and encouraged to elaborate on their experiences.

Peer education gives teenagers the opportunity to find a space where they can talk about themselves and compare their experiences 'as equals'. It slowly brings life into the school: it is the peers who convey and share experiences, doubts and uncertainties with peers. The young people involved have the perception that they are experiencing an informal moment of life within the normal course of school teaching.

How to build a peer education intervention?

Design comprises a series of stages:

- target audience needs analysis
- analysis of available resources
- aims and objectives to meet the needs of the target group
- definition of the working group
- identification of peer educators (according to criteria set on the basis of the objectives
- established)
- training of peer educators
- design and implementation of planned interventions
- implementation of peer interventions
- evaluation

Once the peer educators have been selected, the resulting group is formed, using interactive methods such as brainstorming, role-playing, cooperative games that help the peer educators both to better understand group behaviour and dynamics and to increase affective, relational skills in order to communicate more effectively with their peers. **In the peer group the adolescent feels understood and safe and can experience self-efficacy, share experiences and emotions.**

On the basis of their training experience, the knowledge and skills they have acquired, and the specific characteristics of the target groups, the peer educators design and implement initiatives related to the themes and topics to be dealt with, using the communication tools they consider most suitable for their peers. In this phase, the peer educators may, for example, produce a video on the chosen topic, organise animation workshops or a series of meetings, etc.

The evaluation consists of checking whether the children have become protagonists and personally responsible for their own education.

2.3 Circle Time

Circle time is considered one of the most effective methodologies in **social-affective education**. It is a simple and effective way of working in groups and fostering communication, sharing and knowledge among participants. Circle time has its origins in the educational approach based on learning through experience and attention to the social and affective dynamics of individuals. This method has recently been introduced in schools, but was already tried out in the 1970s when it became popular in the context of primary and pre-school education.

The advantages of circle time

It helps to improve listening skills, especially in a group or a new class, helps shy students to share their opinion and bring out what everyone is good at. Circle time facilitates and develops circular communication, fosters self-knowledge, promotes the free and active expression of ideas, opinions, feelings and personal experiences and, finally, creates a climate of serenity and sharing that facilitates the establishment of any new group or preliminary to any subsequent activity.

In practice

The male and female students sit in a circle with the teacher and start talking. **The teacher plays the role of coordinator and facilitator in the group**, proposing topics for discussion and allowing everyone to express their opinions. To make this 'meeting' work well, there are certain rules that everyone must follow. For example:

- The place where one sits must always be the same
- The meeting must take place regularly
- The duration is decided beforehand and must always be the same
- Everyone sits in a circle, teacher and students, so everyone can see eye to eye and no one is in the centre
- Do not interrupt the speaker
- Don't mock those who have the floor
- Waiting for one's turn to speak

- Propose new topics
- When discussing a topic, try not to go off topic.

The role of the teacher

The teacher has the task of guiding the discussion in a gentle manner and giving everyone the opportunity to speak. There are also topics that are decided beforehand, either by the teacher or by the students. If there are issues to be discussed, everyone is invited to speak in turn and must raise their hand before taking the floor. For example, there could be a small ritual such as passing an object or wearing a hat. Whoever has the object or hat can speak. Besides leading the discussion, the teacher has the task of making sure that everyone has enough time and opportunity to speak. He has to motivate the more timid students and help calm down those who are too energetic. If someone says something in a confusing way, the teacher should explain it better and summarise what has been said by everyone. At the end of the meeting, the teacher should congratulate the group on how it went and observe how everyone behaved during the discussion.

Evaluation

After the circle time, the teacher can use a card to note down what he/she saw and noticed, for example

- what the students say (who spoke or who was silent, and how many times they spoke)
- what they do without speaking (such as yawning, not paying much attention, being too aggressive or interrupting others)
- who actively participates, who does not, or if someone had difficulty speaking clearly.

Writing a worksheet is very important because it helps the teacher to monitor any changes and improvements. In time, it can be proposed to the students to start using the board on their own. Thus, each one at his or her own pace will feel part of the group and play an active role within it.

2.4 Role Playing

Educational role playing originates from the improvised theatre of Jacob L. Moreno (1889 – 1974), a Romanian psychiatrist naturalised as an Austrian, who introduced role playing into psychodrama.

Role playing at school

Role playing is based on the interpretation of characters and situations related to the topic taught, guided by the teacher similar to a theatrical performance. This technique actively involves the students and fosters **the development of their emotional skills** and identification with situations that may be part of their everyday experience. Educational role-playing goes beyond the simple teaching and processing of content, actively involving students and creating a more balanced relationship between them and teachers. It is also a powerful tool for promoting **emotional education**: helps students explore and understand themselves through role playing, harnessing the therapeutic power of drama and performance. Furthermore, formative role playing can positively influence **creative thinking** and soft skills such as **problem solving, listening skills** and **sensitivity to non-verbal language**. It is a methodology full of opportunities and benefits for students, but also for teachers, who can discover new ways of interacting with students and improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

The role of the teacher and the students

The teacher must engage the students, stimulating their ability to empathise, critical thinking and attention to others. He or she has the task of **guiding them to discover a new and stimulating experience** based on staging.

The group of students is divided into 'actors' who play the characters and 'auditors' who observe and actively participate in the performance of their fellow students.

The context: the classroom as a stage

Training role playing can be carried out in different ways depending on the teacher's preference and the objectives of the activity. A simplified approach is proposed in this guide.

Although the classroom is not a stage, space plays an essential role, but if a classroom activity cannot benefit from a theatrical setting, a simple set design can still be used to help students immerse themselves in the role and achieve positive results.

The presence of a script depends on the type of role play chosen by the teacher. Here are some examples:

- **Spontaneous:** the student improvises an interpretation based on the assigned role, without prior preparation.
- **Structured:** the role is assigned in advance to the students, who must follow a more or less detailed script.
- **Role-centred or theme-centred:** in the first case, a theme is established in the preparatory phase and roles are assigned during the activity. In the second case, roles are defined at the beginning and the situation develops later.
- **Self-represented:** starting from an experience lived (or proposed) by one of the students, and the classmates participate in the scene, even taking on the role of the protagonist and influencing the situation through group collaboration.

Role playing can also incorporate theatrical techniques such as mirroring (exchange of roles between actor and observer) or soliloquy, which help to express the feelings of the subject involved.

Warm-up and briefing

Before the performance begins, the teacher leads an introductory phase consisting of two parts:

- **Warm-up:** helps student actors get into character through short interviews and insights.
- **Briefing:** the lecturer explains the dynamics of the performance, provides guidance on the interpretation of roles and the development of the scene.

Debriefing

After this stage, the teacher leaves the students room for their own interpretation. However, their work does not end with the end of the performance. All participants are involved in a final phase called 'cooling off'.

During this phase, the actors evaluate themselves and share any difficulties encountered during the activity. From the cooling down phase, they then

move on to the actual debriefing, during which they analyse the strengths of the scene, identify any obstacles and provide feedback – both from the teacher and from the students themselves – to improve future work.

2.5 Cooperative Learning

An excellent inclusive methodology is cooperative learning, which allows a **common construction** of 'objects', procedures, concepts. It is not just 'working in groups': it is not enough to organise the class into groups for the conditions for effective collaboration and good learning to take place. It addresses the class as a set of people collaborating, with a view to a common result, working in small groups.

Founding principles

Its founding principles are:

- positive interdependence in the group (attitude to think of the group as a team in which the fate of each member is interconnected and the success of one is linked to the success of the others)
- personal responsibility
- face-to-face promotional interaction (making the companions with whom you work comfortable)
- importance of social skills
- control or review (reflection) of the work done together
- individual and group evaluation

Examples

Examples of informal cooperative are: discussion in pairs before the lesson, preparation for the lesson in pairs, brainstorming in groups and then collectively, note-taking and/or schematisation in pairs and self-/self-evaluation in pairs.

Informal Cooperative Learning is linked to activities of short duration, which can be adapted to traditional lessons.

2.6 World Café

The World Café is an effective method for sparking **lively, concrete and constructive informal conversations** on issues that normally concern work,

the life of an organisation or community, but it can also be used successfully with students to address current issues and for planning. [The World Café](#) vast majority of World Cafés are based on the principles and format developed by . It is a format that allows large numbers of people to **dialogue** together, **develop a shared understanding** of the situations being addressed, and **converge on initiatives that unite**.

It is a dialogue practice that encourages the transmission and evolution of the ideas of the participants who influence each other, feeling part of a whole. It brings together a diversity of viewpoints, encourages their expression and promotes the understanding and acceptance of what cannot be changed and the concentration of energies towards what can be changed for the better.

Organisation of a World Café session

- Step 1 - choice of theme and objectives
 - Choose a theme: identify a topic or issue on which you want to promote discussion and sharing of ideas.
 - Set goals: define what you want to achieve from the session, e.g. generate new ideas, share knowledge or make collective decisions.
- Step 2 - setting selection:
 - Find an informal and welcoming environment that encourages conversation and collaboration.
- Step 3 - preparation of material
 - Tables and chairs: arrange circular or oval tables or put the tables in 3/4 groups, each with at least four chairs.
 - Paper and pens: make sure you have paper and pens available on each table for taking notes.
 - Tables with white sheets: prepare tables or panels with white sheets where participants can write or draw.
- Step 4 - creation of guiding questions
 - Develop key questions: prepare a series of open questions to guide the discussion. These should stimulate reflection and the sharing of ideas.
- Step 5 - rotation of participants

- Contact person/spokesperson: assign a contact person to each table to guide the conversation who will remain fixed at that table.
- Rotation of participants: organises a series of rounds (usually 2-3) of conversations. During each round, the participants move between different tables and the contact person remains at his or her table.
- Step 6 - discussion and sharing
 - Conversation starter: the teacher initiates the conversation by presenting the guiding question and encouraging participants to share their ideas.
 - Rotation: after a set period of time (usually 20-30 minutes), participants move to the next tables.
 - Preservation of ideas: the referees document the salient points of the discussion on paper or blackboard.
- Step 7 - Synergy and Synthesis
 - Plenary session: at the end of the rounds, bring all participants together for a plenary session. Each table shares the salient points that emerged from their discussion.
 - Collective discussion: encourages collective reflection and synthesis of key ideas.
- Step 8 - Identification of Actions
 - Gather ideas: collect all the ideas and recommendations that emerged during the session.
 - Definition of actions: identifies concrete actions that can be taken as a result of the session.
- Step 9 - Follow-up and monitoring
 - Documentation and sharing: collect and document all the information and decisions made during the session and share them with the participants.
 - Monitoring of actions: ensure that the defined actions are implemented and monitor progress over time.

Six key points of the World Café:

1. **Clarify the purpose:** consider from the outset why you are bringing people together. Knowing the purpose of the meeting helps you

consider which participants need to be involved and which elements are important to realise the purpose.

2. **Create a welcoming space:** create a space that gives security and encouragement. When people are comfortable, they think, listen and speak in the most creative way. Consider very carefully how your invitation, and the physical space (environment, furniture) help to create a welcoming atmosphere.
3. **Dealing with important issues:** discovering and designing questions that are important to participants is an area where your depth and attention can produce significant results. Your Café can develop around a single question, or around several questions in a logical progression through various shifts in dialogue. World Cafés are an exploration and discovery of important issues, and a search for effective solutions.
4. **Encourage everyone's contribution:** most people do not just want to be there, they want to contribute actively and leave a trace. It is important to encourage everyone to share their ideas, perspectives and proposals; at the same time, freedom should be given to those who want to participate simply by listening.
5. **Connect different perspectives:** the opportunity to move between tables, meet different people, actively contribute one's thoughts, and connect the essence of one's discoveries to ever-expanding circles of ideas is one of the Café's distinguishing features. Participants bring ideas and topics to the different tables, exchange perspectives, and significantly increase the possibilities for discovery and surprising new insights.
6. **Listen to insights and share discoveries:** through the practice of shared listening, attention to themes, recurring patterns and insights, we begin to feel a sense of connection to the larger whole. After several rounds of conversations, a conversation involving the group as a whole must be initiated. This provides an opportunity to connect the general themes and questions that are now present.

2.7 Classroom Argumentative Debate

Argumentative Debate is a teaching device specifically oriented towards the development of many of the competences and **life skills** identified by the World Health Organisation.

The argumentative debate aims to:

- researching and analysing information;
- critical thinking;
- argue coherently;
- building cases;
- communicate orally;
- actively listen;
- taking and organising notes;
- making decisions.

An analysis of how Argumentative Debate can be activated in the classroom, its specific characteristics, its different formats and objectives, and the ways in which it can be designed, conducted and evaluated, allows one to understand its effectiveness in developing these competences and provides the indispensable elements for experimenting with this methodology in the classroom.

Designing a Debate

Argumentative debate has its roots in the universities and monasteries of our Middle Ages under the name *Disputatio*. In everyday language, a dispute occurs when two parties confront each other defending opposing positions and both aiming to be right. We use the term 'dispute' instead when the two parties try to convince a judging third party of their respective reasons (D'Agostini, 2010). The latter is the pattern we refer to when we decide to adopt the practice we call Debate here at school.

It is a **highly structured didactic device**, which is why it cannot be likened to the confrontation that can occur spontaneously in the classroom between two students, nor to an event that a teacher improvises on the needs of the moment. In order for it to express its real educational potential, it must be planned carefully and in good time, defining the multiple elements that characterise it, and it must then be conducted with equal rigour. Only in this way is it possible to ensure that two opposing

sides confront each other on an equal footing, upholding positions that are both well-founded and authoritative.

It is therefore necessary to **define an issue that admits two opposing positions of equal dignity**, precise rules that establish equal rights in supporting the different positions, and the most rigorous possible way of evaluating the debate in order to arrive at a 'winner', who will not be the one who 'is right' but **the one who has best argued his position**.

The Theme

The first element that needs to be defined in the design of the Debate is the Theme, or *Topic*. Choosing a good topic is a crucial step for the success of the Debate. The best strategy is to choose a controversy that is long-lasting, **an issue that pits two distinct positions that are not easy to reconcile**. A typical example of a suitable topic for a secondary school class debate is: 'Vivisection should be abolished'. We know that many people have opposing views on this topic, each of which is supported by valid reasons that can then be adequately argued during the Debate. As we shall see, excellent debates can also be conducted on less controversial topics, but choosing a topic that divides minds is certainly a good start.

Another essential aspect in the choice of topic is how much it involves and provokes the students. The greater their degree of interest in the topic, the greater their commitment to supporting the various positions, and consequently the greater the level of depth of their arguments, with the development of ideas and reflections on the content. A topic, even a very **controversial** one, that does not excite the class is unlikely to be successful. It is therefore necessary for **the chosen theme to create curiosity and interest**, perhaps trying to relate, through it, the disciplinary content to be explored to the everyday life and cultural contexts of the younger generations. One strategy that can lead to the identification of good themes is to involve the students in their formulation. You can conduct a *brainstorming* session in class or ask each of them to formulate a proposal as an activity to be carried out at home: you will then decide which one to deal with on the basis of the class's appreciation, perhaps through a vote.

When defining the topic, attention must also be paid to the form. For example: 'Right to privacy and freedom of information: what relationship do they have?' is certainly a good title for a research paper, but it is not a topic on which a debate can be generated, because it does not allow two opposing positions to be defined. A debate on these topics could be generated by the theme: 'The right to privacy must prevail over the right to information'. Remaining in terms of form, one should try to define the topic as simply and directly as possible. Since each word can take on multiple meanings and interpretations, the use of ambiguous or overly abstract terms should be avoided, as should the use of non-neutral terms that can steer the debate in one direction. In general, the fewer words one uses, the clearer, more direct and straightforward the topic becomes.

Care must also be taken to **delimit the scope of the topic** to be explored. For example, proposing the topic: 'Torture is the worst evil in the world' could lead the class not so much to explore the topic of torture as to compare different crimes and brutalities and debate their degree of inhumanity (Snider & Schnurer, 2006). The breadth of the research field should also be carefully considered. The arguments, evidence, examples, cases that pupils and students will argue during the Debate will arise from their own research. A topic that is too broad might prevent an adequate in-depth study of the subject matter, while a topic that is too specific might make it impossible to find elements to debate. This aspect must be evaluated for both opposing positions. This last point is related to another relevant element in debate design: preparation time, i.e. the time given to the class to prepare arguments in support of their position. This will be returned to later.

Finally, it should be pointed out that debate topics are usually divided into three categories (Snider & Schnurer, 2006):

- **Fact:** it is debated whether a statement is true or not. An example: 'Nuclear energy is more harmful than useful for mankind'.
- **Values:** there is a discussion on the validity or value of a position or behaviour. An example: "Murder is never justifiable."
- **Action plans (Policy):** an attempt is made to establish whether and how good a decision is. An example: "The former industrial area should become a park for the neighbourhood."

The Protocol

The protocol is the set of rules by which a debate is conducted. Numerous protocols have been developed that differ in their characteristics to meet the different training objectives:

- the number of students involved, which can vary from a minimum of 2 to the whole class, assigning specific roles;
- the number of teams confronting each other, which is normally two, but some protocols provide for two separate teams to support the same position or even the confrontation between three different positions;
- the preparation time, which can last from a whole school year to 10 minutes;
- the time allowed for each intervention, ranging from a minimum of one minute to a maximum of 10;
- the phases of the Debate, which can be more or less articulated.

The adoption of one or other of the options provided in these approaches is intended to favour the achievement of distinct educational objectives. For example, **very long preparation times** presuppose in-depth research work and thus aim at the development of critical thinking and analytical skills; conversely, making the topic known only a few minutes before the Debate is intended to solicit inventive and improvisational skills, originality and quick thinking. Debates organised with large teams foster the development of social-relational skills, whereas individual debates test personal skills.

Shorter intervention periods stimulate skills of synthesis and stringent argumentation, whereas longer periods require greater capacity for logical concatenation and planning (De Conti, 2013).

For an analysis of the various formats, we refer to the text 'Many Sides: Debate Across the Curriculum' by Snider and Schnurer, cited in the bibliography.

Standard Debate Format

We exemplify the essential stages of debate using one of the most widely used protocols in higher education contexts, the Standard Debate Format.

Order of interventions:

1	Prima argomentazione	Pro	8 minuti
2	Prima argomentazione	Contro	8 minuti
3	Seconda argomentazione	Pro	8 minuti
4	Seconda argomentazione	Contro	8 minuti
5	Prima replica	Contro	4 minuti
6	Prima replica	Pro	4 minuti
7	Seconda replica	Contro	4 minuti
8	Seconda replica	Pro	4 minuti

Some elements can be noted:

- each intervention has a specific purpose. With the first four interventions, the main arguments for and against the thesis of the topic are compared. With the replies, an attempt is made to refute the arguments of the opposing team. Speakers are not allowed to digress, on pain of loss of effectiveness: once the arguments have been put into play, the rebuttals must stick to their refutation;
- the order of the replies is reversed from the order of the arguments to allow the teams the same preparation time;
- each team member is only assigned to carry out one intervention, so the minimum number of members per team in this format is 4.
- **the timing of speeches must be strictly adhered to** in order to ensure equality of opportunity between the teams. For the same reason, **no interruptions are allowed** in this protocol, neither from members of the opposing team nor from the audience. The total time for the Debate is 48 minutes, which allows it to take place in one lesson hour.

The significant duration of the interventions in this protocol presupposes debates that require a substantial period of preparation and analytical and communicative skills of a certain level. For this reason, the Standard Debate Format lends itself to use in university settings or in inter-class or inter-school tournaments.

Patavina Libertas

In the teaching practice of a classroom, it is more appropriate to adopt protocols that allow for easier interventions and perhaps even the

formation of larger teams. One protocol that lends itself well to this is the Patavina Libertas¹, which provides for this development:

Squadra Pro	Squadra Contro	Minuti
Prologo		2
	Prologo	2
Prima argomentazione		3
	Prima argomentazione	3
Seconda argomentazione		3
	Seconda argomentazione	3
Dialogo socratico fra le squadre		5
Pausa		10
Replica		2
	Difesa	2
	Replica	2
Difesa		2
Epilogo		2
	Epilogo	2

The various stages fulfil specific functions:

- **Prologue:** presentation of the problem and its relevance, statement of the position taken, definition of key terms and anticipation of the arguments that the team will develop during the Debate;
- **First argument:** presentation of evidence (reasons, causes, grounds, data and examples) in support of one's position;
- **Second argument:** presentation of further arguments in support of one's position;
- **Socratic dialogue:** aimed at deepening the interlocutor's position, engaging him to make useful concessions to his own position, making him contradict himself by asking 'Socrates-like' questions;

¹ A protocol devised by Adelino Cattani, professor of Argumentation Theory at the University of Padua, and adopted in the national debate tournaments '[Gymnasium of Argumentation](#)'.

- **Pause:** designed to prepare rebuttals to the arguments, selecting the objections one considers strongest and preparing the defence against (possible or already made) opposing objections;
- **Rebuttal:** presentation of rebuttals to the position held by opponents. Aimed at identifying and challenging any flaws, fallacies, contradictions, unsubstantiated premises, unsubstantiated conclusions, questionable interpretations; alternative definitions, undesirable consequences... with emphasis on the truth of the premises, relevance and pertinence of the argument, completeness of the data;
- **Defence:** one responds to the objections made by the other party and justifies one's arguments, seeking to restore their contested validity and consistency;
- **Epilogue:** You summarise the salient points of the debate and show that your position is preferable to the opposing one. Logical conclusion and rhetorical closure.

It will be noted how this protocol envisages more succinct interventions requiring synthesis and organisation skills, but also how it lends itself to being implemented with shorter preparation times, which are better suited to daily teaching requirements. In addition, the subdivision into phases allows for the formation of larger teams, in which each student plays his or her own role, for a debate that still lasts 43 minutes.

Conducting a debate

Skills for conducting a good debate are acquired mainly through practice. It is unrealistic to expect the class to learn theoretically and overnight how to debate effectively, but one can nevertheless share tips and strategies that can improve their performance right from the start.

Search

Considerable time should be given to the preparation of the debate, if possible even during class time, thereby also implicitly giving relevance to the teaching activity on which we are asking the class to engage. The first action to be performed by them is the search for sources. In this area, we know that today there is a tool that cannot be ignored. In the context of secondary schooling, there is nothing more essential than access to the Internet, which makes it possible to become acquainted not only with everything published on the Web, but also with more traditional

bibliographic sources, such as scientific texts and articles. In the case of the lower school grades, targeted searches can be arranged, the scope of the search can be limited or even the sources can be provided directly, but if the age of the pupils allows it, it is appropriate to enable them to freely search the Net. Searching for sources when preparing a debate is significantly different from the research one normally conducts to document a subject matter. Researching a controversial topic leads to finding sources that deal with it from different and often opposing perspectives. It induces students to broaden their horizon around the topic and to have a more critical approach when evaluating sources, which are often contradictory. It will therefore be spontaneous to question the reliability of what is examined, the independence or objectivity of the relevant authors, rather than accepting as authoritative the first ones proposed by the search engine.

After this phase, the members of each team must organise a plan to develop their arguments, taking care that they are supported by a linear and non-contradictory logic. This phase is characterised by brainstorming, close dialogues between team members where each one tries to challenge the elements and assumptions produced, such as facts, statistics, metaphors, key concepts and examples to support their thesis. Students will be prompted to interpret the data found, examine significant cases within the topic and propose clarifying examples to come to a decision on what is relevant to support their thesis and what can be left out.

For this purpose, a very effective strategy is to assume not only the point of view of one's own side, but also that of the opposing side. In short, put yourself on the side of your opponents by hypothesising their objections and possible rebuttals, not only to prepare for them, but also to be able to avoid them by refining your own arguments.

Finally, time must be devoted to the preparation of the speeches. In Debate, reading the text is not allowed, but notes can be used to remind the speaker of the sequence of points, and this too develops a specific skill. Multimedia presentations can also be used, which, in addition to guiding the speaker, are effective communication tools.

Expose

The exposure phase also poses a considerable challenge for students. Not infrequently, some of them tend to shy away from this activity, claiming

that it is too complex and that they do not have the skills. Support is therefore needed to introduce them to the rudiments of debate. We sketch here some points on which interventions can be thought of to be conducted in the classroom:

- try to get them **to overcome their fear of public speaking**, reminding them that it is a skill that is acquired with experience and that they will not be evaluated negatively for it;
- reflect on the **distinction between opinions and facts**, knowing how to use both profitably;
- highlight the **relevance of the arguments** produced before presenting the evidence to support their validity. It is necessary to convince before proving;
- **deepen their understanding of the subject matter**, in order to gain an overview and learn about the relationships between the various aspects involved;
- **make use of textual notes or multimedia presentation tools** to support their speech, avoiding both the reading of a text and total improvisation;
- engaging the audience by addressing them directly and seeking eye contact;
- use the weapons of rhetoric and persuasion whenever possible;
- **set out clearly**, if possible dividing the intervention into logically consequential points;
- **exhibit dynamically**, with enthusiasm and commitment.

The acquisition of all these skills is certainly not immediate, but the motivational drive triggered by the challenge and the gratification produced by their possession are elements that enable students to make considerable progress in acquiring these skills.

Replicate

Debate requires not only the development of the ability to organise and present one's own position, but also the ability to refute the opposing team's arguments and even to defend one's own. Improvisation, quick thinking, and organisational skills emerge here above all, starting with a meaningful activity such as note-taking. Attentively following the rapid exposition that characterises the speeches in a debate is an activity that challenges the cognitive abilities of the students. When an argument from

the opposing team reveals a weakness, an aspect that can be attacked, it should be noted down quickly and clearly. Developing this skill prevents forgetting it and allows one to quickly resume the argument in progress. This is also a relevant skill that Debate urges one to develop.

There are also other aspects related to this phase that students should acquire and that contribute to the proper conduct of a debate. For example, it is important to maintain respectful behaviour towards one's opponents and the audience, often classmates. In particular, it is necessary to observe the time allocated for speeches, not interrupt the opposing team's presentation, show consideration for their arguments and willingly accept the debater's assessments.

Evaluating a Debate

The evaluation of a Debate fulfils many functions involving and affecting the entire class. Firstly, the evaluation of the Debate leads to decreeing the winning team. However, it should be made clear that this does not mean deciding who is right and who is wrong, an operation that is meaningless given the controversial and essentially undecidable nature of the subject matter. The winning team will be the one that has best argued, that has been most convincing, that has best motivated, that has best succeeded in having its position accepted by the rest of the class (Cattani, 2011). This is a point that must be made clear: in this, Debate differs, for example, from Socratic dialogue, which instead aims at the attainment of knowledge.

The ways in which this greater appreciation emerges can be varied, but it is the classmates who determine the winning team. One tried and tested way is to provide students with a rubric like the one below:

Indicatori	Descrittori	Punteggio (1/5)	
		Squadra Pro	Squadra contro
Organizzazione e chiarezza complessive	Gli interventi sono stati condotti in modo chiaro ed efficace.		
Argomentazione	Gli argomenti sono stati sostenuti con ragioni, prove ed esempi.		
Replica	Le repliche sono state pertinenti ed efficaci.		
Difesa	Le difese sono state pertinenti ed efficaci.		
Presentazione	Tono della voce, gestualità, trasporto sono stati convincenti		
Rispetto	I membri si sono comportati correttamente nei confronti della squadra avversaria		

After each student has completed their rubric, the team with the highest overall score wins the Debate. For a more formal evaluation of the students who participated in the Debate, the teacher can fill in a similar rubric for each of them.

Students who did not participate directly in the debate should also be assessed. For example, they can be asked to fill in a questionnaire with questions such as the following:

- Which of the two teams made the best showing and why?
- What was the most significant topic and why?
- What was the strongest test and why?
- Has any relevant topic been left out? Which one?
- What did you learn from this debate that impressed you?
- Have you changed your previous position and why?

Students will therefore be assessed on the basis of the appropriateness and depth of their answers to the questionnaire.

In this way, the conduct of a Debate leads to an overall formal evaluation of the whole class. This aspect, besides fulfilling a specific need, contributes to making the Debate itself more participative and productive. All students are led to actively follow the Debate not only because their peers are at play, knowing that it is up to them to decide the winning team, but also because they themselves will be evaluated. By sharing the rubric and the evaluation questionnaire with them, we induce them to

listen attentively, where again their ability to note down any aspect that strikes them will prove decisive.

At the end of the debate it is also appropriate to initiate a free discussion where students can ask questions for clarification, introduce new ideas and express their considerations. In doing so, the teacher must ensure that any negative judgements are not experienced with undue weight by the participants and must possibly try to counterbalance them by highlighting positive aspects.

Conclusions

Debate pushes students to abandon superficial knowledge and to develop critical thinking and the ability to communicate their ideas (Snider & Schnurer, 2006), skills that are known to be increasingly strategic in the globalisation of knowledge. Debate involves the students in an experience in which they test the strength of their own ideas and thus enhance their reflective skills. The experience will be all the more meaningful when the Debate is conducted with care and respect for its rules, and this is only possible with competent and accurate planning, conduct and evaluation.

2.8 Project based learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is an educational approach that engages students in active learning through the implementation of hands-on projects. PBL is flexible and can be adapted according to the specific needs of the students and the subject matter. The aim is to promote student activity, authentic learning and the practical application of acquired knowledge.

PBL in the classroom

Below is a brief outline of how to use this technique in the classroom:

- **Choose a topic or problem:** identify a topic or problem that is relevant and engaging for students.
- **Define learning objectives:** clearly establish the learning objectives to be achieved by the students through the project.
- **Form working groups:** organise students into groups so that they can collaborate effectively on the project.

- **Provide resources and materials:** offer students the necessary resources, such as books, teaching materials, Internet access, etc.
- **Planning and designing:** helps students to develop a detailed plan for their project, including milestones and deadlines.
- **Research and analysis:** students conduct research, collect data and analyse information relevant to the project.
- **Developing the project:** students start to create the product or output of their project. This can be a report, a presentation, a model, an experiment, etc.
- **Provide support and feedback:** provide support to groups when needed and offer regular feedback to guide their progress.
- **Presenting and sharing:** students present their projects to the class or to a wider audience. This can be done through presentations, exhibitions, demonstrations, etc.
- **Reflection and evaluation:** students reflect on the experience and evaluate their learning, considering what they have achieved and how they could improve.
- **Celebrating and sharing:** recognise and celebrate students' achievements. You can also encourage them to share their projects with the community or through public exhibitions.

Example Lesson Plan

The lesson plan proposed as a practical example is based on Professor Enzo Zecchi's 'Lepida Scuola' method. The duration of each action varies depending on the project chosen.

- **Preliminary action:** carry out a series of preliminary operations that are fundamental for the development of a project in the educational sphere, where both students and teachers are not experienced designers. In particular, the following must be defined: the theme, the sub-themes and the products; the organisation of the class group, the planned time frame, and the necessary teaching interventions
- **Conceptualisation:** phase in which the project idea is defined, in particular with reference to the product the following must be made explicit: users, needs, characteristics.

- **Planning:** Phase in which the feasibility of the product is assessed and the necessary activities and resources are articulated. Feasibility study. Prerequisites are created for the evaluation of the individual.
- **Execution:** Products are developed in adaptive iterative mode.
- **Closure:**
 - Celebration: presentation of each group member
 - Retrospective: questions

Essential Vademecum

To go deeper into each phase:

[PROJECT BASED LEARNING \(PBL\) THROUGH THE 'LEPIDA SCUOLA' METHOD](#)

A practical example

One example could be the organisation of an event at school or for the local area; in this respect, a useful guide can be the [Creare eventi platform](#) of Istituto Oikos.

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Implementing the participative methodologies described in this guide is an important step towards innovative and engaging teaching. Each methodology offers unique opportunities for active learning, stimulating students' curiosity, collaboration and critical thinking.

It is important to emphasise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach and that flexibility in adapting these methodologies to the context and specific needs of one's classroom is crucial. Listening carefully to student feedback and constantly reflecting on one's own teaching practice are key elements of effective fine-tuning.

The active involvement of students through these methodologies not only fosters the acquisition of knowledge, but also the development of transversal skills that are crucial for success in today's society. The ability to collaborate, communicate effectively, solve problems and think critically are skills that students will carry with them beyond the confines of the classroom.

Adopting these methodologies will not only enrich the educational experience but also make it more inclusive and adapted to the different learning modes of students, preparing them for the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly complex future.

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