

VOICE OD VOCATION: METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE for implementation of debate methodology in VET

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Editors: Ivona Anić and Branimira Penić

Authors: Prepared by the consortium team

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Introduction

This Methodological Guide has been developed within the Voice of Vocation project under the Erasmus+ KA2 – General Education. Led by the Croatian Debate Society and implemented by a consortium of nine partners (debate organisations and VET schools), the project responds to specific VET (Vocational Education and Training) needs: developing transferable soft skills, civic competence, resilience and motivation for lifelong learning—fully aligned with the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018) and the EU’s focus on employability, inclusion, and active citizenship. Voice of Vocation recognizes that VET teachers often lack tailored training and pedagogical materials adapted to VET, co-created with teachers and tested in classrooms.

The final version of the *Methodological Guide for Debate in VET Education* was developed through a structured, multi-phase process that was international, iterative, and evidence-informed to ensure both its quality and its applicability. The initial draft was created by a team of 9 educators (VET teachers and debate experts) from 5 countries (Croatia, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Serbia). Across **three feedback cycles**, the Methodological Guide was refined with the contributions of **24 VET educators** from partner schools and associated partner institutions, and later tested and validated by **40+ educators** from outside the partnership across more than 30 schools, representing diverse vocational and socio-geographic contexts (urban and rural areas, remote schools, as well as varied income regions).

Finally, the Methodological Guide underwent both an **expert review** (debate education and VET education perspectives) and a **peer review** conducted by VET teachers, ensuring it is both pedagogically sound and practically applicable.

Substantively, the Methodological Guide positions debate as a spring-board for active citizenship and soft skills (critical thinking, communication, collaboration, adaptability, problem-solving) within VET realities and labour-market demands. It details the fundamentals of debate (motion analysis, research, argumentation, policy models, case building, refutation), its formats (KP, WS, BP and classroom debate), classroom organization (role distribution, managing large groups, topic selection, timing), and assessment/learning (rubrics, self-assessment and peer-assessment, formative feedback). In short, the Methodological Guide answers the **“WHAT?”** and **“WHY?”** for debate-based pedagogy in VET.

The Methodological Guide is **deliberately paired** with another outcome of the project - the Implementation Toolkit. While the Methodological Guide provides the **theoretical and methodological framework**, the Implementation Toolkit translates it into **operational lesson plans and stand-alone activities** for immediate classroom use (e.g., civic and media literacy, human rights, interculturality, labour-market readiness, gender equality, non-violent communication, EU processes and values). This is complemented by **e-learning modules** which enable **self-paced learning** for teachers. Together, these three outputs form an **integrated resource suite**: *theoretical foundation + practical tools + online support*.

How to Use the Methodological Guide and the Implementation Toolkit Together

- 1 **Start with the Methodological Guide** — grasp the goals, structures, and pedagogy (the “What?” and the “Why?”).
- 2 **Move to the Implementation Toolkit** — choose a lesson plan or stand-alone activity that fits your subject, group, and time slot (rapid activities or full-period plans).
- 3 **Add e-learning** — use online modules for your professional development and micro-learning, as well as student primers (e.g., a short video on argumentation).
- 4 **Track impact** — apply rubrics and feedback forms (teacher and student) from the annexes; run mini-cycles of implementation → gathering feedback → adjustment.

Active Citizenship and Soft Skills in Vocational Education and Training (VET)

Active citizenship refers to the ability to make positive contributions to one's own community as well as society at large. This requires a deep understanding of democratic processes, critical thinking and the capacity to engage in meaningful dialogue. Debate can foster critical thinking, effective communication, and active listening skills, all of which are necessary in navigating complex social and professional landscapes.

Today, the world is undergoing rapid socio-economic, political and technological changes that pose significant challenges for the education sector, particularly in Vocational Education and Training (VET). In this context, fostering active citizenship and developing soft skills have become essential objectives for educational institutions. While hard skills such as technical

knowledge remain important, increasing emphasis is being placed on soft skills, critical thinking, communication, adaptability, and teamwork required for effective participation in work environments and civil society.

Indeed, recent studies¹ have underscored the importance of soft skills for the evolving job market. As workplaces become more dynamic and technologically more advanced, the ability to adapt, collaborate and solve problems grows in value. In VET, placing soft skills at the core of the curriculum ensures that students not only acquire technical expertise but also develop the reflective and behavioural skills essential for both personal growth and professional success.

Engaging in debate activities within VET programs helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. It enables students to articulate their thoughts clearly, defend their viewpoints and consider multiple perspectives. These activities promote lifelong learning by enhancing competences that are transferable across various contexts, such as personal, social, and learning-to-learn competences in addition to citizenship competences. Through debate, students also develop a sense of social responsibility which prepares them for active participation in democratic processes and community-building efforts.

Additionally, debate aligns with the European Union's emphasis on key competences for lifelong learning. According to the 2018 European Framework, education plays a critical role in promoting social inclusion and employability². The framework outlines eight key competences, including personal, social, and learning-to-learn competences, citizenship competence, and cultural awareness. Debate activities support the development of these competences, making them a strategic tool for enhancing employability and adaptability in a rapidly changing world.

Furthermore, the European Union recognizes³ the need for developing the employability skills needed to prepare new generations for a society characterized by globalization, competitiveness, and technological advancement⁴.

¹ [Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace](#)

² [Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning Text with EEA relevance.](#)

³ [European Skills Agenda - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion](#)

⁴ [European Commission communication \(COM\(2010\) 352 final\) — Europe, the world's No 1 tourist destination — a new political framework for tourism in Europe](#)

Employability ability means:

- that young people are able to enter into the world of work due to the knowledge and skills guaranteed by the quality of the training system;
- that workers, keeping it over time, have the possibility to move from one role to another within the same organization, satisfying the requirements to cover it.

These skills refer to a combination of technical and soft skills that are necessary for effective job performance and career advancement. These include communication skills, collaboration, problem-solving, creativity, leadership, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Debate serves as an effective method for cultivating these skills, mainly, within VET. Through structured debate activities, students learn to analyse issues, evaluate different perspectives, and formulate coherent arguments. This process involves critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to present and defend ideas in a persuasive way. By engaging in debates, students also develop their leadership skills and emotional intelligence as they learn to manage stress, understand different viewpoints, and constructively interact with their peers. Debate enhances students' adaptability and predisposition for lifelong learning. It encourages them to continuously seek new knowledge, adapt to changing circumstances, and remain open to diverse perspectives. These qualities are essential for personal and professional growth in addition to navigating the uncertainties of the modern job market.

Debate Skills ↔ EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018)

Debate Skill	Linked EU Key Competence	Debate's contribution
Critical thinking & problem-solving	Personal competence, social competence and learning to learn competence; Citizenship competence	Students learn to analyse complex issues, challenge assumptions, and evaluate arguments, which strengthens reflective judgment and democratic participation.

Communication (verbal, non-verbal, paraverbal)	Literary competence; Multilingual competence	Debaters practice clear structuring of ideas, adapting language to context, and effectively using body language and tone.
Collaboration & teamwork	Personal competence, social competence and learning to learn competence	Debates require coordinated team preparation, role distribution, and consensus-building, which mirrors workplace cooperation.
Argumentation & persuasion	Citizenship competence; Literary competence	Students develop the ability to defend their stances with evidence and reason, a skill essential for civic engagement and public discourse.
Research & information literacy	Digital competence; Literary competence	Debaters critically evaluate sources, verify credibility, and integrate evidence into arguments while fostering media literacy and information literacy.
Adaptability & creativity	Personal competence, social competence and learning to learn competence; Cultural awareness and expression competence	Impromptu debates train adaptability, creative framing of arguments, and openness to alternative perspectives.
Leadership & initiative	Entrepreneurship competence	Debate nurtures leadership roles (speakers, chairs, judges) and strategic decision-making under pressure.
Ethical reasoning & respect for diversity	Citizenship competence; Cultural awareness and expression competence	Debaters respectfully engage with opposing views, build empathy, and develop awareness of intercultural and ethical issues.

Confidence & resilience	Personal competence, social competence and learning to learn competence	Debate practice builds self-esteem, resilience to criticism, and capacity to perform under stress.
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Debating global and vocational issues for enhanced employability

After establishing a foundation for soft skills crucial for employability, engaging in debates on global and vocational issues allows VET students to refine these skills while addressing the complexities of the modern world. Events in one part of the globe can have a ripple effect across continents, thus influencing everything from local markets to daily lives. As global issues like inflation, economic trends, climate change, and social justice increasingly shape national agendas, it is crucial to understand their impact on our communities. Debating these topics requires students to conduct thorough research, analyse diverse viewpoints, and develop well-reasoned arguments. This process enhances critical thinking, research skills, and the ability to synthesize information acquired from various disciplines.

For example, debating climate change involves understanding scientific data, evaluating policy proposals and considering the socio-economic impacts of environmental decisions. Similarly, debating social justice issues, such as racial equality or gender rights, encourages students to explore historical contexts, legal frameworks, and contemporary challenges. These activities help students develop empathy, a sense of justice, and a deeper understanding of systemic issues which affect communities.

Debating international relations topics, such as global trade policies or refugee crises, requires students to understand geopolitical dynamics, cultural contexts and diplomatic strategies. This broadens their global perspectives and fosters a sense of global citizenship and intercultural competence. Public health debates on issues like pandemic responses or vaccination policies, demand an understanding of scientific principles, public policy, and ethical considerations, which then teaches students to evaluate evidence and make informed decisions.

Engaging in debates on these topics not only prepares students for future leadership roles but also instils a sense of global citizenship. They become informed, empathetic, and proactive participants in addressing the world's most critical challenges. By debating global issues,

students learn to navigate complex problems, appreciate diverse perspectives, and work together towards achieving common goals, embodying the principles of a truly global education.

Debating vocational topics provides a practical application of debate skills directly related to career-specific issues, which results in enhancing students' readiness for the job market. For instance, debates on vocational topics such as "The Impact of Automation on Skilled Trades" or "The Role of Renewable Energy in Future Vocational Jobs" require students to engage deeply with industry-specific knowledge and forecast future trends. These debates encourage students to think critically about technological advancements, labour market dynamics, and industry regulations, thus fostering a nuanced understanding of their chosen field. By debating these topics, students not only enhance their technical knowledge but also develop valuable soft skills, such as adaptability, communication, and strategic thinking, which are essential for navigating complex professional environments. The practical engagement ensures that students are better prepared to meet the demands of the modern workplace, making them more employable and capable of meaningfully contributing to their industries.

Debate helps students recognize and overcome cognitive biases, such as the confirmation bias which involves favouring information that confirms one's preexisting beliefs while disregarding contradictory evidence. By engaging in structured debates, students learn to consider multiple viewpoints, challenge their own assumptions, and develop well-rounded arguments. This fosters critical thinking and objectivity, which are essential for effective decision-making in both personal and professional contexts.

Application of debate skills in business settings

In the world of business, the ability to persuade others while effectively communicating one's own ideas is a vital skill that can determine the success or failure of an enterprise. From boardrooms to pitches, debate skills are essential for navigating the complexities of today's business environment. These skills, already discussed in previous chapters, also have clear applications in business, especially in negotiation, sales and leadership roles.

Famous entrepreneurs and inventors, such as Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, and Sara Blakely, have all demonstrated the power of debate and persuasive communication in their careers. Steve Jobs, known for his compelling presentations, used his ability to articulate his

vision clearly to inspire both his team and customers, propelling Apple to become a global technology leader. Richard Branson's skill in debating and persuading stakeholders has helped him build the Virgin Group into a diverse international brand. Sara Blakely, the founder of Spanx, relied on her persuasive skills to convince manufacturers and retailers to believe in her product when it was a completely new concept in the market.

For VET students, applying debate skills in business settings goes beyond the theoretical. It's about preparing to navigate real-world scenarios where clear, convincing communication can be the difference between success and failure. Whether it's negotiating with clients, persuading investors, or leading a team through a complex project, the ability to debate effectively equips students with the tools they need to thrive in competitive business environments.

Negotiation is a cornerstone of business transactions, requiring professionals to advocate for their interests, seek common ground, and secure mutually beneficial agreements. Debate skills, such as persuasive argumentation, active listening and strategic thinking, are vital in negotiation scenarios. Professionals who can effectively present their arguments, listen attentively to the other party, and devise creative solutions are more likely to achieve favourable outcomes.

In sales and marketing, effective communication and persuasion are essential for attracting customers and driving revenue. Professionals in these fields use debate skills to develop compelling pitches, address customer objections and differentiate their own products or services from those of their competitors. By leveraging persuasive storytelling, understanding audience psychology and adapting their messaging to resonate with target audiences, sales and marketing professionals can successfully influence purchasing decisions of their customer base and boost the company's sales.

Leadership and management roles demand strong communication abilities, strategic vision, and the capacity to inspire and motivate teams towards achieving common goals. Business leaders who possess debate skills can effectively communicate their vision, delegate tasks, and foster innovation within the organization. By employing persuasive communication techniques, actively listening to employee feedback, and adapting leadership strategies to various situations, leaders can cultivate a positive organizational culture and drive performance.

In strategic decision-making, critical thinking is essential for evaluating alternatives, assessing risk, and determining the best course of action to achieve the organization's objectives. Individuals with strong critical thinking skills can analyse complex data, identify patterns, and make informed decisions that drive business growth and profitability. By applying logical reasoning, evaluating evidence, and considering the long-term implications of their choices, professionals can steer their organizations toward success.

During times of crisis or uncertainty, effective crisis management is crucial for maintaining stability and safeguarding the interests of the organization. Business leaders must make swift decisions and communicate effectively in order to mitigate risks and reassure stakeholders. Debate skills such as adaptability, decisiveness, and effective communication are essential for effectively managing crises. By remaining quick-witted, making informed decisions under pressure and fostering transparent communication with stakeholders, leaders can navigate crises with confidence and preserve trust in their organizations.

Why debate in VET school?

In VET schools, the objective is to create an effective synergy between knowledge and skills ("know-how") in order to provide students with "professional skills" that are easily applicable in work contexts. Debate strengthens key soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, all of which directly support students' employability in the future.

Dialogical strategies, and Debate in particular, have their starting point as early as primary school and are considered essential teaching methods for the development of soft skills, citizen's education and access to the world of work in exponential transformation. Debate training includes many of the skills that the job market will require in the coming years, according to the Future of Jobs Report 2023.⁵

- problem solving
- creativity, originality and reasoning
- self-management, stress tolerance and active learning
- working with people, collaboration and leadership

⁵ [The Future of Jobs Report 2023](#)

The most recent analyses on the world of work have, for years, showcased the need to provide students with "soft skills" for lifelong learning, which AI is, thankfully, unable to replicate. Further, according to companies, effective communication, collaboration and team-building will continue to be strategic. For acquiring of these skills, a long-term process is necessary and, with intentional and structured activities, is possible in the school curriculum.

Therefore, Debate, certainly, has to be supported as a methodology of "knowing how to think" or "education in thinking" to be included in the curriculum of VET schools as education for active citizenship, job orientation and social inclusion. Furthermore, it presents itself as a tool capable of developing them while also strengthening language skills and creating a collaborative and motivating learning environment.

In the context of VET schools, the introduction of Debate can:

- combat communicative poverty, especially when the cultural, social and family contexts do not offer adequate linguistic tools: education in the power of the word and constructive dialectics, empathy and creative thinking,
- represent a tool for fostering a student's motivation to study towards a career by discussing current and interesting topics,
- help create a positive learning environment in a diversified socio-cultural context, with the presence of significant disadvantaged situations: in the Debate group, because the students share a common objective, team working skills and positive leadership are effective, allowing everyone to feel self-efficacy and self-esteem within their role,
- reduce failure and school dropout rates by expanding the training offer with dynamic proposals and active workshops designed to reinforce/enhance skills,
- encourage ethical and moral development.

It should also be noted that, by integrating debate into their education, vocational school students can significantly enhance their skill sets, which would make them more well-rounded individuals who are better prepared for their future careers. In other words, they could become more "employable", as defined above.

The implementation of soft skills in teaching is essential to support students' employability, allowing them to combine theoretical and practical knowledge and offer training experiences.

Many studies confirm the validity of Debate methodology: for example, Mezuk and colleagues (2021)⁶ analysed ten years of school data from the institutional registers of 116 high schools. The results of the analysis led to the conclusion that debaters were 19% more likely to graduate than non-debate participants. They were also shown to have a grade point average that was approximately 1 point higher.

Other studies also underline the impact Debate has on school performance: literacy, reading comprehension and overall school performance have been shown to improve, interest in current affairs and school subjects has been shown to increase, academic aspirations have been shown to be higher, while absenteeism was lower and more students enrolled in university in comparison to those who had not participated in Debate.

Integrating debate methodology into classroom instruction can significantly enhance student engagement and interest, which is especially valuable in vocational schools where students may sometimes lack motivation. Debates transform the traditional learning environment by making it more interactive and student-centered. Instead of passively receiving information, students are encouraged to actively participate, voice their opinions, and defend their viewpoints on various topics. This active involvement fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning, making them more invested in the subject matter. For example, in a vocational school setting, debate can be used in a variety of subjects to encourage critical thinking and practical application of knowledge.

In **business and entrepreneurship classes**, for instance, students could debate the ethical implications of various business practices, such as the use of social media data in marketing strategies. This not only deepens their understanding of ethical considerations in business but also helps them essential skills for future business professionals, such as learning to construct arguments and considering multiple perspectives. They could also debate the pros and cons of different management styles or the impact of globalization on local businesses, which encourages them to think critically about real-world business issues and apply their knowledge in a practical context.

⁶ [Debate Participation and Academic Achievement among High School Students in the Houston Independent School District: 2012-2015](#)

In **healthcare or medical classes**, debates could focus on topics such as the allocation of limited medical resources or the ethics of emerging medical technologies. Students could be asked to argue for or against the use of a specific medical intervention based on its cost-effectiveness and potential outcomes. This not only helps them understand complex healthcare policies and procedures but also improves their ability to articulate their thoughts clearly and persuasively which is an important skill in any medical profession.

Technology and IT classes could incorporate debates on the impact of artificial intelligence on the job market, the ethics of hacking in cybersecurity, or the benefits and drawbacks of open-source software. By debating these topics, students engage with the subject matter on a deeper level, developing a more nuanced understanding of the issues at hand. They also learn to explain technical concepts to non-experts, which is a valuable skill in any technology-related field.

In **hospitality and tourism programs**, students might debate the impact of tourism on local economies versus the potential harm to local cultures and environments. This kind of debate helps students understand the complexities of their field and prepares them to think critically about the challenges they might face in their careers. It also encourages them to consider sustainable and ethical practices, which are increasingly important in the global tourism industry.

Integrating debate into different subjects helps teachers create more interactive and engaging classrooms, where students take on an active role in their learning. Debates tap into students' natural desire for recognition and social interaction, which motivates them to participate more enthusiastically. In vocational schools, debates are especially beneficial, as they develop critical skills such as analytical thinking, effective communication and ethical reasoning. These skills not only enhance students' academic experiences but also better prepare them for their future careers, ensuring they become well-rounded, thoughtful, and active members of society.

What is Debate?

Debate is a formal, structured discussion in which participants present and argue opposing viewpoints on a specific topic. The objective is to persuade an audience or judges through well-organized arguments, clear communication, and strategic refutation. Effective debating

involves mastering several key elements: communication, analysis, research, argumentation, and refutation.

Debate is not a chaotic argument or a contest of who can be the loudest. It is not about winning at any cost but rather about presenting and defending well-reasoned viewpoints while engaging respectfully with opposing perspectives.

The debate takes place around a controversial topic stated through a **motion**. The motion is a proposition that states, in a clear and defined manner, the issue to be debated and its usefulness and appropriateness to be assessed. There are different types of motions, each of which determines different ways of analysing and preparing for debate.

In every debate, several common components structure the discussion. It begins with the Introduction, where teams present their positions and clarify the topic at hand. Following this, the main arguments phase involves each team laying out their key points supported by evidence. During the rebuttals, teams challenge and respond to the arguments presented by their opponents by addressing counterpoints and defending their positions. The cross-examination allows participants to ask questions designed to expose weaknesses or inconsistencies in the opposing team's case. In the conclusion, each team summarizes their arguments, reinforcing their main points and making the final appeal to the judges or audience to support their side of the debate.

There are numerous debate formats, each with its own rules regarding speech length and the presentation of arguments, but regardless of the format, they all adhere to a structured framework that ensures a systematic and coherent discussion.

Basics of Debate

The need for teams to thoroughly understand and engage with the given thesis or topic is at the core of any debate. This involves **analysing** the core issue, determining the central point of the discussion, and identifying what needs to be proven. Teams must evaluate the topic from multiple angles, decide which arguments will be most effective, and prepare to substantiate their positions with relevant evidence. This foundational preparation sets the stage for a well-structured and impactful debate.

The debate process is based on the following steps:

- Motion analysis
- Research
- Making arguments
- Building a case
- Rebuttal/Refutation

1 Motion analysis

A good debate requires a **topic** expressed through a balanced and debatable **motion**. In fact, the motion must allow both teams to come up with arguments. Different motions can be extracted from a single topic: it depends on what aspect of the problem is to be addressed.

The Debate's **motion** is the central statement or proposition that a team seeks to prove or disprove. It is the very foundation of the debate, framing the entire discussion and determining the direction of the arguments. A strong motion should be **clear, concise, and debatable**. It must be specific enough to focus the debate but broad enough to allow for a range of perspectives and arguments to be made. The motion should be formulated in a way that presents a clear stance on an issue, inviting either support or opposition. For example, "School uniforms should be mandatory in all public schools" is a clear and specific motion that allows for substantial arguments to be made on both sides.

Knowing what types of motions exist is important because every motion places a different burden on each team, and demands a different direction. The main types of motion are:

- **FACT**: Something is or is not
- **VALUE**: Something is of inherent worth or not.
- **POLICY**: Something should be done or should not be done.

MOTION OF FACT

The motion of fact is based on examples and a large amount of evidence. The debate team is tasked with proving it true beyond reasonable doubt. An example of such a notion is "Advertising does more harm than good for society."

MOTION OF VALUE

When it comes to the motion of value, the discussion is centred around a comparison based

on defined criteria; for example, “*Shakespeare is the world’s greatest writer.*”

POLICY MOTION

Policy motions are usually concerned with the status quo and a proposal for changing it. Policy motions usually begin with 'This house would/should' for example, ‘*THBT something should be banned or legalized*’.

After identifying the type of motion, it is necessary to make a further analysis about the framing, the impact and the stakeholders involved in what is being discussed.

When it comes to the way the teams prepare for the debate, there are two types: the impromptu debate and the prepared debate. In the impromptu debate, the motion is announced a short while before the very debate (e.g. an hour before) and the debaters mainly employ their immediate logical-argumentative skills. On the other hand, when it comes to the prepared debate, the debaters are made aware of the motion well in advance (e.g. a month before) in order to allow thorough preparation for the topic.

For further reading, refer to the following lessons in the Implementation Toolkit:

- **Motion Analysis**
- **Understanding Types of Motions in the World Schools Debate Format**

2 Research

The debate performance occupies a relatively short part of the entire debate process. Much of the time is dedicated to delving deeper into the topic and looking for evidence that can strengthen arguments. Thorough **research** is the backbone of a successful debate.

Source selection involves choosing reliable and credible sources, such as academic journals and reputable news outlets to support one's arguments. **Evidence gathering** is the process of collecting relevant data, statistics, case studies, and examples that will reinforce the team's position. The researcher’s role implies:

- collecting general information on the topic;
- identifying the research hypothesis
- organizing and evaluating evidence that supports the arguments and allows refutation

For further reading, refer to the lesson **Research in the Implementation Toolkit**.

3 Making an argument

An **argument** is a set of statements or reasons used to support or oppose the thesis. In order to construct a compelling argument in a debate, it is vital that the argument includes four key components: the claim, the explanation, the evidence, and the link to the thesis. Each part plays a distinct role in building a persuasive case and ensuring that the argument is both clearly presented and logically sound.

- 1 **Claim:** The claim is the central statement or assertion that the debater is attempting to prove. It represents the main point of the argument and should be a straightforward and specific statement that aligns with the overall thesis. For example, if the thesis is "School uniforms should be mandatory in all public schools," a claim supporting this motion might be, "Mandatory school uniforms lead to improved student behaviour." This claim sets the stage for further elaboration and support.
- 2 **Explanation:** The explanation provides the reasoning behind the claim, clarifying why the claim is valid or important. It elaborates on the claim by describing the underlying logic or principles that justify it. In our example, the explanation might detail how a uniform policy creates a more disciplined and focused environment by minimizing distractions and reducing competition over clothing choices. The explanation helps the audience understand the rationale behind the claim, thus making it more persuasive.
- 3 **Evidence:** Evidence consists of factual information and data that support the claim and strengthen the argument. This can include statistics, expert opinions, research findings, case studies, and real-life examples. The evidence must be credible, relevant, and robust enough to substantiate the claim being made. For instance, to support the claim about improved behaviour, a debater might present statistics showing a significant decrease in disciplinary incidents in schools with uniform policies. Providing solid evidence is crucial for convincing the audience and judges of the argument's validity.
- 4 **Link to Thesis:** The link to the thesis connects the argument back to the main proposition or thesis of the debate, showing how the argument directly supports the

overall position. It answers the question, "How does this argument contribute to proving the thesis?" In our example, the link to the thesis would explain that since uniforms improve behaviour, they contribute to a better learning environment. This aligns with the thesis that uniforms should be mandatory in all public schools. The connection reinforces the argument's relevance and ensures that each argument serves to strengthen the team's overall case.

Persuasiveness involves ensuring that arguments are both logically consistent and relevant to the topic. Debaters should also anticipate potential counterarguments and address weaknesses in their own case to strengthen their position. In order to construct an effective argument, it is important to assess its **impact**. This requires evaluating the significance of arguments and their influence on the overall debate, ensuring that each presented argument has a meaningful effect on the outcome.

For further reading, refer to the following lessons in the Implementation Toolkit:

- **Argumentation**
- **Logic in Debate**
- **Build Your Argument**

4 Model

If the debate's motion is a policy motion, it is necessary to construct a model where the discussion focuses on what should be done about a particular problem. A model in a debate outlines the specific actions or steps that a team proposes to address the issue at hand. A good model should include clear details about the proposed actions, those who will implement them (**the agent**), the ways in which these actions will be carried out (**the mechanism**) and the associated drawbacks (**the cost**).

The model is necessary when the debate centres on proposing a solution to a problem rather than merely discussing its existence or implications. For instance, in a debate on "Government intervention is necessary to combat climate change," a model might detail specific policies such as implementing carbon taxes (mechanism), the government or a designated agency as the responsible party (agent), and the estimated financial costs and economic impacts of these policies (cost). Having a well-developed model can strengthen a team's position by demonstrating that their solution is feasible, practical, and well-prepared to effectively address the problem.

For further reading, refer to the following lessons in the Implementation Toolkit:

- **Model**
- **Building a Plan: How to Create a Model in Policy Debate**

5 Building a case

The case is a cohesive set of arguments that justify the team's stance of the topic; it is the process of putting together the team's arguments and making sure that they are solid and consistent. The debate case allows debaters to focus on the arguments they think are important and how to interpret the topic to defend these arguments. It sets up the framework for the rest of the debate. The debaters have to define the team line that is a strategically arranged succession of arguments. For example, in a policy motion, the case is related to the problem to be solved and the reasons behind their solutions.

For further reading, refer to the lessons Case Building in the Implementation Toolkit.

6 Rebuttal/Refutation

Refutation is the process of challenging and disproving an opponent's arguments. Effective refutation is crucial in debate as it allows a team to dismantle and directly engage with the opposing side's case. In order to effectively refute an argument, debaters should focus on the following key strategies:

- 1 **Identifying flaws:** pointing out logical inconsistencies, lack of evidence or unsupported assumptions in the opponent's arguments.
- 2 **Counter-evidence:** presenting evidence that directly contradicts or undermines the opponent's claims. The evidence should be strong enough to create doubt about the validity of the opposing argument.
- 3 **Reframing:** offering a different perspective that diminishes the importance or relevance of the opponent's arguments. For example, if the opposing team argues that school uniforms limit freedom of expression, a debater might reframe this by arguing that the educational benefits outweigh the limitations.
- 4 **Minimization:** demonstrating that the opponent's argument, even if true, has minimal impact on the overall debate or the resolution. This technique is often used when

conceding minor points that do not significantly affect the core thesis.

Refutation should be **clear, concise, and direct**, targeting the core weaknesses in the opponent's arguments. Strong refutation can effectively shift the momentum of a debate, showing critical thinking and the ability to respond under pressure.

The debater can rebut during their own speech or by asking for a Point of Information (POI) during the opponent's speech. These questions have to be short, lasting no more than 15 seconds.

For further reading, refer to the lesson “Refutation” in the Implementation Toolkit.

Debate formats

There are several different debate formats used around the world, each with its own rules and structure. In this chapter, we will provide an overview of the most common formats used in Europe.

Karl Popper Debate (KP)

In this format, two teams, each consisting of three speakers, engage in a debate on a pre-determined motion.

- 1 The debate starts with the **First Proposition Speaker**, who has 6 minutes to present their team's case. This is followed by the **First Opposition Speaker**, who also speaks for 6 minutes, offering counterarguments to the Proposition's initial points.
- 2 In between speeches, there is a 3-minute **Cross Examination** period where each speaker questions the other team's arguments, aiming to uncover weaknesses and clarify the presented points.
- 3 The **Second Proposition Speaker** delivers a 5-minute speech, building upon the initial case and responding to the Opposition's points. This is followed by the **Second Opposition Speaker**, who also speaks for 5 minutes and further challenges the Proposition's arguments and presenting their own rebuttals.
- 4 The debate ends with each team delivering a **Summary Speech** of 5 minutes, in which they summarise their main arguments and make a final appeal to the

judges.

World Schools Debate (WS)

The World Schools Debate format blends traditional debating principles with a team-oriented approach. Typically, each team consists of three members. The WS format is designed to test both prepared and impromptu debating skills.

The course of a typical WS debate:

- 1 **Opening Speeches:** The debate begins with the **Prime Minister** (PM) from the proposition side, who speaks for 8 minutes. The PM's speech is followed by the **Leader of the Opposition** (LO), whose speech also lasts for 8 minutes. Next, the **Deputy Prime Minister** (DPM) and **Deputy Leader of the Opposition** (DLO) each have 8 minutes to continue their team's arguments.
- 2 **Additional Speeches:** The **Member of Government** (MG) and the **Member of Opposition** (MO) then each speak for 8 minutes, presenting further arguments and rebuttals.
- 3 **Reply Speeches:** After the main speeches, each team delivers a **Reply Speech** of 4 minutes. The opposition team delivers their reply first, followed by the proposition team. These speeches summarize the key points and provide a final argument for their team's side.

Between the first and last minute of each speech, teams are allowed to make brief interjections for questions or comments, known as **Points of Information (POIs)**, which helps teams dynamically engage with the opposing arguments.

British Parliamentary Debate (BP)

The British Parliamentary Debate format is a dynamic and engaging style of debating involving four teams of two speakers each. Teams are organized into two sides: the Government (Proposition) and the Opposition. Each side has two teams: the Opening Government and Closing Government, and the Opening Opposition and Closing Opposition.

- 1 **Opening Government:** The debate starts with the **Prime Minister** (PM) and the **Deputy Prime Minister** (DPM) from the Opening Government. The PM has 7 minutes

to present their team's case, and the DPM follows with another 7 minutes while focusing on further arguments and rebuttals.

- 2 **Opening Opposition:** Next, the **Leader of the Opposition** (LO) and the **Deputy Leader of the Opposition** (DLO) from the Opening Opposition take the floor. The LO speaks for 7 minutes, followed by the DLO, who also has 7 minutes to counter the Government's arguments.
- 3 **Closing Government and Closing Opposition:** The debate then moves to the Closing Government and Closing Opposition teams. The **Member of Government** (MG) and **Member of Opposition** (MO) from the Closing Government and Closing Opposition each have 7 minutes to present their case and offer additional arguments or rebuttals.
- 4 **Summary Speeches:** Finally, each team delivers a **Summary Speech** of 5 minutes. These speeches are intended to summarize and reinforce the team's arguments, address key points raised by other teams, and provide a final push for their side.

Classroom debate

The classroom is an ideal environment for debate because it offers a safe and familiar setting for students to practice their skills under the guidance of a teacher. Using debate activities can foster critical thinking, improve argumentative skills, and boost student confidence. For example, instead of a traditional lecture on a scientific topic, such as the ethical implications of genetic engineering, teachers can organize a debate where some students argue in favour of genetic modifications for disease prevention, while others present arguments against it while focusing on potential risks and ethical concerns. Another engaging exercise is a "fishbowl debate," where a small group of students debates in the centre of the classroom while the rest of the class observes and takes notes. Observers can later join the discussion or provide feedback, ensuring active participation from all students. Another engaging debate activity is known as the "debate carousel", where students rotate through different stations, each representing a different aspect of a topic. This keeps discussions lively and ensures all students actively participate.

In this chapter, we will explore how to organize and integrate debates into the classroom in ways that align with the curriculum, available time, and size of the group.

1 Role assignments

Imagine you have to teach your students the causes and effects of a historical or social events, like the 1929 financial crisis. In a traditional lecture, you might explain the theory while students take notes—or perhaps yawn. Instead, consider organizing them into groups, assigning different sources and perspectives to each one. This encourages active participation, critical thinking, and engagement. The activity then leads to shared, conscious knowledge where students take centre stage.

Young debaters often debate with peers they already know, quickly building new relationships through the activity. The challenge is twofold: involving all students simultaneously and choosing the right topic. In the World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC) format, the roles include:

- Three speakers in proposition
- Three speakers in opposition
- One timekeeper
- One chairperson
- Three judges

This setup involves 11 participants, but class sizes vary. It is important to engage all students, particularly in elective or extracurricular settings, in order to ensure active participation and avoid idle time.

2 Tweaking the debate to your group size

Teachers should be flexible with the number of participants to suit their group size. Adjusting the WSDC standard does not detract from the debate's objectives, as even major tournaments modify formats based on available personnel.

For smaller groups, common adjustments include:

- Assigning just one judge (winner takes all)
- Two-judge setup, with the more experienced judge having two votes
- Omitting timekeepers or chairpersons, using team members instead

- 'Iron-manning,' where a speaker gives two speeches to fill a missing team member's role

These adjustments are useful when the number of participants is limited. The more challenging scenario is managing a large group of 30+ students.

3 Managing large groups

With 20-30+ students, every student should have a role. Debates often extend beyond a single session, and it is crucial not to leave any students idle, particularly if the activity contributes to grades.

Debating roles and their involvement levels:

- **Speaking:** Strong involvement in preparation and debate
- **Judging:** Minimal preparation, active during the debate and feedback
- **Chairperson/Timekeeper:** Minimal preparation, active during the debate
- **Research:** Extra roles can be assigned for research or promotion

During role selection, each student's abilities and interests should be considered. Some may prefer speaking, while others might be more comfortable in supporting roles. Encourage students to try new roles to discover hidden talents and build their confidence.

4 Allocating time

The time for preparing and conducting debates is up to the teacher, seeing as it depends on factors like available time and the curriculum. More preparation time allows deeper exploration of topics, but impromptu debates with minimal preparation can also be effective. Adjust speaking times as needed to fit the class schedule.

5 Choosing the right topic

The freedom to choose debate topics can be a double-edged sword. It is essential to select motions that are fair, balanced, and relevant to the students' interests and the curriculum. For example, in a history class, a debate motion like "This house believes that the Industrial Revolution did more harm than good." allows students to explore the social, economic, and environmental impacts of historical events. In a science class, a motion such as "This house

supports mandatory vaccinations for all children" helps students understand public health policies and the science behind vaccinations.

6 Evaluation and feedback

Effective judging involves providing clear and constructive feedback. Foster positivity and focus on areas for improvement without discouraging the participants. Emphasize the bravery required to participate in debates and reinforce the idea that all students are learning and growing together.

Using Debate Games in the Classroom

Incorporating debate games into the classroom setting is an innovative approach to engage students actively in learning while developing essential skills. Debate games such as "The Continuum Line" and "The Four Corners" offer dynamic, interactive formats that make learning more engaging and effective. These games help students develop critical thinking, improve their communication abilities, and encourage collaborative learning. This is what makes them excellent tools for any educational setting.

Why Use Debate Games in the Classroom?

Debate games are beneficial for several reasons:

- 1 **Engagement and motivation:** These games create a lively and dynamic classroom environment that can motivate students to actively participate. They turn learning into an interactive experience, which can be more engaging than traditional lecture-based teaching.
- 2 **Skill development:** Debate games help students develop a range of skills, including critical thinking, public speaking, active listening, and the ability to construct logical arguments. They also improve emotional intelligence by teaching students how to manage disagreements and work collaboratively.
- 3 **Real-World application:** The skills learned through debate games are directly applicable to real-life situations. Whether it is negotiating in a business meeting, participating in civic discussions or making informed decisions, the ability to debate effectively is a valuable life skill.

Examples of Debate Games in Action

- **The Continuum Line** could be used in history class to debate the causes of a particular event or discuss ethical implications of a new technology in science class.
- **Four Corners** could be applied in literature class to discuss different interpretations of a text or to debate current events or policies in social studies class.
- **Hot Seat:** In this game, one student sits in the "hot seat" and takes on the role of a specific character, historical figure, politician, or expert on a topic. The other students ask them questions. The student in "the hot seat" responds from the perspective of the character they are portraying.
- **Think-Pair-Share:** In this activity, students first think about a specific topic or question individually. They then pair up with another student to discuss their thoughts and perspectives. Afterward, each pair shares their conclusions with the entire class. This game encourages students to clearly articulate their thoughts, actively listen to their peers and participate in collective discussion.
- **Fishbowl:** In this game, a small group of students sits in the inner circle and participates in a discussion on a specific topic while the rest of the class sits in the outer circle and listens. Students in the outer circle can swap places with those in the inner circle when they want to contribute to the discussion or introduce a new argument.
- **Role Play Debate:** Students are organized into small groups, and each group is assigned a specific role or perspective to defend during the debate.
- **Devil's Advocate:** In this game, students are divided into two groups. One group presents a particular viewpoint on an issue while the other group, the "Devil's Advocates," argues against it, regardless of their personal beliefs.

For further insights, refer to the lesson "Debate Exercises for Practicing Negotiation, Communication, and Presentation Skills" in the Implementation Toolkit.

Competitive debate

Competitive debate involves the team's participation in tournaments. There are a lot of opportunities to compete both in local contests and at international tournaments. One of the most important roles is played by the coach of the team.

As a debate coach, the primary role is to guide students in developing the skills, strategies, and confidence needed to succeed in competitive debates. Coaching goes beyond simply teaching the basics of debate; it involves nurturing critical thinking, fostering teamwork and helping students understand how to construct and deconstruct arguments effectively. Here is how you can prepare your team for success in debate competitions and tournaments.

1 Forming a Balanced Team

The first step in preparing for debate competitions is forming a well-balanced team. A good debate team consists of members who bring diverse skills and strengths to the table.

- **First Speakers:** Identify students who excel in research and are capable of presenting structured, well-supported arguments. They should be clear and confident speakers who can lay down the foundational case for their team.
- **Second Speakers:** Look for students who are quick thinkers and can effectively respond to the opposing team's arguments. These speakers need to be adaptable and skilled in delivering rebuttals while strengthening their own team's arguments.
- **Third Speakers:** Choose students with strong analytical abilities who can synthesize the debate's key points and provide a compelling summary. In formats like the World Schools Debate, third speakers also need to engage in rebuttals, which requires a combination of summarization and counter-argumentation skills.

By understanding the individual strengths of your team members, you can create a balanced and cohesive team where each member contributes effectively to the overall strategy.

2 Developing Debate and strategy Skills

It is essential for the coach to help their team develop the core skills required for competitive debating (research skills, argumentation skills, refutation skills and public speaking skills). Further, a successful debate team requires a cohesive strategy: debaters have to work together to understand the problem, build the case and simulate a debate.

- **Research skills:** Teach your team how to gather credible evidence from diverse sources, such as academic journals, reputable news outlets and expert opinions. Encourage them to keep up with current global events and familiarize themselves with various perspectives on debate topics.

- **Argumentation skills:** Guide students in constructing well-structured arguments that include a clear claim, explanation, evidence, and a link to the debate motion. Emphasize the importance of logical consistency, relevance and persuasiveness in their arguments.
- **Refutation skills:** Train your team to critically analyse possible counter-arguments and prepare effective rebuttals. Introduce activities that focus on identifying weaknesses in the opponent's case and developing strong counter-arguments.
- **Public speaking skills:** Focus on enhancing your team's verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Conduct practice sessions that focus on speech delivery, tone, pacing, body language and eye contact to build confidence and clarity.

3 Building team cohesion and confidence

Team dynamics are crucial for success in debate. The coach has the responsibility to foster a positive and collaborative environment:

- **Encourage collaboration:** Promote open communication and teamwork among your debaters. Encourage them to share ideas, offer constructive criticism and support each other throughout the preparation process.
- **Build confidence:** Help your students build confidence by highlighting their strengths and encouraging them to work on their weaknesses. Provide positive reinforcement and remind them that every debate is an opportunity to learn and grow.
- **Stress management:** Teach your team how to handle the pressure of competition. Encourage them to stay focused, calm, and composed during debates. Provide strategies for managing nerves and stress, such as breathing exercises or mental preparation techniques.

By taking a strategic, supportive, and skill-focused approach to coaching, you can effectively prepare your students for competitive debate and help them achieve success in tournaments. Your role as a coach is not just to teach debate but to inspire and guide your students to become confident, critical thinkers and effective communicators.

Debating in VET - Curricula

Debate activities can be added into the curriculum in order to make the impact on learning

more effective and to incorporate it significantly into the general teaching methodology. We propose **three types of debate curricula** in order for teachers to decide, based on their own school context and level of mastery of debate methodologies, to choose from three different organisational suggestions.

The three types are:

- 1) Classroom Debate or curricular Debate
- 2) Long-term Debate Curriculum
- 3) Extracurricular Debate

Considering the Methodological Guide is aimed at VET school students, we suggest starting with the classroom debate in case the students have no previous debate experience. This may then be followed by planning a multi-year curriculum and, finally, if there is a lot of interest and a lot of willing participants among students and teachers, proposing extracurricular activities with the aim of participating in competitive tournaments.

1 Classroom Debate - curricular Debate

The "classroom debate" is an educational methodology that engages students of a class in a structured discussion on a specific topic usually connected to their individual subjects. Classroom debate should be practised periodically throughout the school year (e.g. once a week) because this makes it systematic and effective for learning.

In the following table, you can find our proposal for a structured path of classroom debate activities for beginners, divided into 45-minute modules/sessions. The proposed sessions can be replicated based on the needs of the class/students. They are designed to alternate moments of theoretical content with interactive activities. **For more details, please refer to the "basic track" in the Implementation Toolkit.**

<u>Introduction to debate</u> (1 session)	
The aim of this session is to show students why debating is important.	
Objectives	- Introduce the students to the skills developed through debate

	- Highlight the ethical values of debating
Content	- What is debate and why is it important? - Ethical responsibilities of debaters - Explanation of debate format and rules (speaking time, number of speakers, roles of speakers)
Guided practice / Warm-up	- Introduction to basic debating skills: <i>Why-game</i>, tongue-twisters
Activity examples	- Activities focusing on body language - Short debate on a simple topic (e.g., “<i>cats are better than dogs</i>”, “<i>all zoos should close</i>”) to familiarise students with debating techniques and procedures
Self-assessment	- Encourage students to reflect on what they have learned and how they feel
<u>Constructing Arguments</u> (more than 1 session)	
Constructing sound arguments is fundamental to sustaining discussion and debate: an argument must have a clear and effective structure and must be developed according to a structure that guarantees its logical validity. Like a house, it must have a solid foundation and a supporting structure, which is why students must be taught to construct arguments according to a structure we call AREL (Assertion, Reasoning, Evidence, Link-Back).	
Objectives	- students are able to recognize and construct logically sound arguments
Content	- recognizing the structure of the argument, completing the ARE-L structure; - constructing persuasive arguments with the AREL structure
Guided practice /	- the balloon debate, “may I have a minute to talk about....”,

Warm-up	the for/against game
Activity examples	- Proposing simple motions and building PRO/CON arguments - Practice developing arguments on vocational topics through different activities (topics like workplace safety, industry regulations, technological advancements, ethical issues). - Launching a motion
Self-assessment	- Encourage students to reflect on what they have learned and how they feel
<u>Research Skills</u> (1 session)	
Documentary research is an essential step for anyone wishing to address a topic and debate on it with full knowledge and awareness. In the modern world of information, sources are innumerable and not always reliable. It is, therefore, important to be able to acquire the skills needed to search for, recognise and select reliable information.	
Objectives	- students develop research skills, evaluate sources, and manage information
Content	- the basics of document research and the use of bibliographic resources. - assessment of the quality and reliability of sources.
Guided practice / Warm-up	- guidance on using libraries, databases, web resource and digital tools
Activity examples	- topic selection: Each student selects a research topic related to the curriculum. - research: Students use online and bibliographic resources to find information on their chosen topic.

	- source evaluation: Students evaluate the quality of the sources found using the learned criteria. - research report: Students compile a report summarising the information they found as well as including a correctly formatted bibliography - hands-on activities which focus on research of vocational topics which are relevant to the students' career paths.
Self-assessment	- Encourage students to reflect on what they have learned and how they feel
<u>Rebuttal</u> (more than 1 session)	
After the argument construction phase, debaters must be able to construct the rebuttal. It is a counter-argument or a response to an assertion made by the opposite team. It aims to disprove or weaken the original argument by presenting evidence, logic, or examples that contradict or undermine it. A good rebuttal addresses the key points of the original argument, identifies its flaws or inconsistencies and provides alternative perspectives or facts that challenge the validity of the initial claim.	
Objectives	- the students develop the ability to recognise the opponent's logical weaknesses and construct effective rebuttals
Content	- the structure of a rebuttal (summarising the point, providing a logical counterpoint, supporting with evidence, explaining the impact) - types of rebuttals: Direct; indirect: through a comparison of arguments; pre-emptive rebuttals: which precede the possible arguments of opponents - strategies of rebuttal: a. <i>Negation</i> (with denial, one does not produce a new argument, but enters into the argument itself, denying it and using evidence to do so)

	b. <i>Overcoming</i> (a more important element is introduced than the one presented by the opponents) c. <i>Overturning</i> (one takes the other person's argument and turns it upside down) - Logical fallacies - Rebuttal with Point of Information (PoI)
Guided practice / Warm-up	- present a statement to the class (for example "Homework should be banned in schools.") and give students 1 minute to think of a rebuttal. Ask a couple of students to share their rebuttals.
Activity examples	- writing a rebuttal to this argument, ensuring you restate the opponent's point, present a counter-argument, support it with evidence, and explain the impact. - using different types of rebuttals on the same argument. - students practise different motions in pairs in order to give 1-minute-arguments and to counter the opponent's arguments with a rebuttal"
Self-assessment	- encourage students to reflect on what they have learned and how they feel
<u>Communication Skills</u> (more than 1 session)	
Debating is about speaking: it is an oral exercise of discussion and comparison where students must be able to employ their communicative skills which involve not only the verbal, but also the non-verbal and paraverbal parts of communication (intonation, loudness, voice pitch, etc.). Mastering these skills allows students to wield a powerful and fundamental persuasive tool.	
Objectives	- successfully handling verbal, paraverbal and non-verbal communication with awareness and rhetorics.

Content	- effective communication skills (public speaking, active listening, and non-verbal communication). - techniques for engaging an audience, conveying ideas clearly as well as responding to questions and challenges.
Guided practice / Warm-up	- A game of Pantomime: without using words, two people have to communicate a concept or action using only gestures and facial expressions. The other has to guess what they are trying to communicate. - A paraverbal activity: in pairs, students have to deliver messages using the given fictional words and expressing different emotions (sad, excited, angry, happy, ...)
Activity examples	- active listening: in pairs, one partner tells a story or talks about a personal experience while the other practices active listening, asking questions to clarify and reflect on the content. - scenario simulations: small teams are assigned difficult communication scenarios (e.g. handling a conflict situation, negotiating an agreement); each team prepares a brief presentation on how they would solve the problem. - analysing famous speeches
Self-assessment	- encourage students to reflect on what they have learned and how they feel

Judging a debate

Judging is an important part of the debate. The judges must award the victory to one of the two teams: the debate does not end in a draw.

The debate formats provide different evaluation criteria. It is important that the debaters are aware of the criteria on which they will be judged and know how to adapt the debate to these requirements in advance. It can also be useful to have the students themselves act

as judges and discuss the evaluation together.

In the most common debate format, debates are usually judged on content (arguments discussed), style (how we communicate) and strategy (how the debaters follow the format and act in accordance with their own role). For class purposes, the first two of these are, usually, the most relevant ones.

Objectives	- the students recognize criteria of judging and evaluate a debate
Content	- examples of feedback - assessment of debating skills throughout the debating curriculum (after each debate) in order to enhance skills
Guided practice / Warm-up	- start with a mini-judging activity: play a short video clip of a debate speech. Ask students to rate it on content, style, and strategy using simple thumbs-up/thumbs-down or a quick 1–3 scale.
Activity examples	- while viewing a debate (also for individual speeches), students evaluate speakers by using an evaluation sheet; they discuss their evaluations and decide on the winning team.
Self-assessment	- encourage students to reflect on what they have learned and how they feel

Practice Debate (more than 1 session)

The class is now in a position to simulate a full debate in class: choose a motion of interest for your students, divide them into two (or more) teams, have them work in groups (also at home), mentor them in constructing arguments and finding rebuttals, and have them debate. At the beginning, we suggest that you have the two teams compare each stage of preparation in order to make them more confident about the performance required of them.

Objectives	- To practice debating
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Content	- Practice activities which focus on refining debating techniques and adapting strategies to different debate formats and opponents. - Mock debates on complex vocational topics, allowing students to apply advanced debate skills in a simulated debate setting.
Guided practice / Warm-up	- Before the full debate, run a “lightning round”: present a very simple motion (e.g. “This house prefers summer to winter”). Give each side 5 minutes to prepare and then 2–3 minutes per speaker to present.
Activity examples	- team prep simulation: in groups, students outline their case structure on flipcharts/posters and present only the skeleton of their argument (claims + reasons) before developing full speeches. - rotating roles: run a debate where halfway through, students swap roles (proposition/opposition, or even speaker/judge). This forces them to adapt quickly and see the debate from multiple perspectives. - vocational mock debate: choose a VET-relevant motion (e.g. “All vocational schools should include financial literacy as a compulsory subject”) and run a full debate, with students taking turns as speakers, judges, and chairs.
Self-assessment	- encourage students to reflect on what they have learned and how they feel

Cross-curricular integration After a basic debate course or after the introductory theoretical sessions, it is advisable to start actually practising debate in class on topics relevant to your subject: this way, both disciplinary and interdisciplinary objectives are achieved. For example:

- The above curriculum should be used in all VET-subjects (e.g. history, biology, ethics, economics, social studies, etc.) in order to foster interdisciplinary learning.

- Introduce debating as a project for relevant topics in other subjects to promote research and speaking skills

2 Long-term debate curriculum

We also propose a long-term debate curriculum because it allows you to develop the educational potential of debate on multiple levels. After using the classroom debate as an activity for beginners, during which students were introduced to basic debate techniques, it is possible to use the debate with a focus on specific skills and activities in order to reinforce fundamental skills over two years of teaching.

We have selected three soft skills associated with various disciplines but you could work with other specific skills based on your school's area of specialisation:

- Critical thinking - humanistic and social subjects
- Communication skills - humanistic and social subjects
- Team working skills - professional area

Year 1: Developing critical thinking and communication

Following the completion of the basic debate curriculum course (see Classroom Debate above), it is possible to implement the debate methodology in different subjects through systematic practice with a focus on critical and communication skills. These skills are the basis for, not only debating, but learning in general, which is why they should be a priority when it comes to transdisciplinary teaching.

Objectives:

- Students will learn to analyse and evaluate arguments, identify logical fallacies and develop evidence-based reasoning.
- Students will refine their public speaking skills, learn to communicate complex ideas effectively and engage in persuasive discourse

Activities throughout the year:

- Structured debates on simple topics designed to practise argument construction and rebuttal.
- Analysis of debate videos and case studies with the aim of identifying effective persuasive techniques.
- Individual research projects on relevant social issues aimed at enhancing information

literacy and evidence gathering.

- Impromptu speaking activities intended to improve spontaneity and clarity under pressure.
- Guest speakers from various professions who can provide insights into real-world applications of communication skills.

Year 2: Team Dynamics and Leadership (Strengthening Teamwork)

In the second year of integrated debate practice, the focus could be placed on professionalising skills or transversal skills that are required by the world of work/job market, as well as addressing issues related to the social and professional context of the students in debates.

Objectives:

- Students will learn to collaborate effectively within debate teams, delegate tasks, resolve conflicts, and demonstrate leadership qualities.

Activities throughout the year:

- Workshops on conflict resolution techniques and consensus-building strategies.
- Peer mentoring and coaching sessions to foster leadership skills and support team members' growth.
- Participation in regional or national debate competitions to apply learned skills in competitive settings and build resilience.
- Individual reflections and self-assessment with the purpose of tracking personal growth and identify areas for improvement.
- Self-orientation assessment and construction of a personal debater curriculum

3 Extracurricular Debate

Extracurricular debate activities are, for the most part, linked to the opportunity to participate in competitive debate on the local and national level, as well as debates done in a foreign language. These activities are chosen by students who stay at the school after class, usually on a voluntary basis. In this case, the coach should plan advanced debate activities which allow the students to refine the skills already developed in class. In particular, the coach works on the students' argumentation and documentary research skills as well as the construction of the case under discussion. The goal of the Debate Club is participation in competitions such

as the World Schools Debate.

For detailed reading, please refer to the “Advanced Track” in the Implementation Toolkit.

4 Debate Methodology in Everyday Class

In addition to units or extracurricular clubs entirely focused on debate, this project has also developed **topical lessons** that integrate debate methodology directly into regular VET classes. The idea behind this is simple: teachers continue delivering the content of their subject—whether it is transport safety, hospitality management, IT security, entrepreneurship or healthcare ethics—while incorporating debate elements into the classroom. This results in the students’ active participation in class in addition to developing their soft skills.

There is no need for debate in VET to be confined to extracurricular clubs or large-scale debate formats. This adjustable approach allows teachers to employ debate methodology as a **one-off** introductory/closing activity, or as a **recurring activity** integrated into their teaching practice in general. For example, a teacher might use a short debate on *road rage* to complement a transport safety class, or introduce a discussion on *gender equality in the workplace* within a business-oriented class.

One of the key innovations of this project has been the development of **topical lessons** that directly connect debate methodology with regular classroom practice. In this way, VET teachers can deliver their subject content while, at the same time, strengthening transversal skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and civic competence described earlier in this Methodological Guide. Even when lesson time is limited, debate can take the form of structured discussions, mini-debates of 20–30 minutes or reflective exercises that encourage students to take multiple perspectives into account.

The topical lessons have been designed to align with the broader aims of the Methodological Guide and cover ten key thematic areas identified in the project proposal as crucial for VET education and employability:

- Increasing civic literacy
- Increasing media and information literacy

- Understanding human rights
- Encouraging interculturalism
- Understanding European political and economic processes
- Empowering students for entering the labour market
- Promoting gender equality
- Improving communication and social skills
- Combating violence and aggression
- Understanding EU values, institutions and impact

By working within these areas, teachers can make debate not only a method for developing communication and argumentation skills, but also a tool for addressing central educational priorities and EU Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The value of this integration lies in its adaptability: it keeps subject learning at the centre while developing transversal competences such as communication, reasoning, teamwork, and problem-solving. By rotating student roles and encouraging reflection, teachers can ensure active participation from all learners, while at the same time reinforcing competences that mirror authentic workplace situations such as negotiation, presenting justifications or handling ethical dilemmas.

For specific examples and ready-to-use lesson plans, readers are invited to consult the **Topical Lessons section in the Implementation Toolkit**, where they can find debate-infused lessons which translate aforementioned themes into different vocational fields. The materials demonstrate how debate can be interwoven with everyday teaching practices as either a single or recurring activity without disrupting the flow of the subject curriculum.

Assessment, evaluation in the Debate curricula

Assessment and evaluation of debate are important for both teachers and students. If well

structured, they can:

- help teachers identify areas where students need reinforcement or recovery of knowledge and skills,
- provide students with tools for self-assessment and personal growth,
- measure the acquisition of transversal skills alongside disciplinary knowledge.

Can the particular activity of Debate fulfil these functions in disciplinary activities?

Absolutely, if you are willing to modify traditional assessment schemes and tools to a certain degree. In point 6 of paragraph regarding the Classroom Debate, we have already pinpointed the moment of debate evaluation as the final step to be taken by both the judges and the students. It represents both an opportunity for critical analysis and active observation of the debater's performance.

This activity can be considered as training by itself, but it, certainly, has more of a transversal effectiveness (linked to soft skills) than a disciplinary one (linked to specific disciplinary knowledge).

There are three complementary phases of evaluation:

1. **Self-assessment** – students reflect on their own performance.
2. **Peer assessment** – students provide each other with constructive feedback.
3. **Teacher assessment** – the teacher evaluates student performance, taking into account both disciplinary content and debate skills.

In all of the phases, evaluation is based on a certain set of criteria which depend on the chosen format and/or on the specific objectives of the educational activities planned with the debate. The **phase 1 and 2** allow students to: not only strengthen their own debate skills, but also develop self-assessment and peer assessment skills which are very important as transversal soft skills. These are certainly fundamental activities to which adequate space should be dedicated also because they have a notable educational impact, creating empathy, critical sense and awareness. The very feedback that the students provide as "judges" is a precious element of evaluation for the teacher who will have to take it into account in the final evaluation

of the activity.

After the two phases, it is up to the teacher to provide evaluate the students' performance. The teacher can also decide to integrate this evaluation with the observation notes collected during the preparatory phases of the debate (research, in-depth analysis and construction of the arguments made by the student in the classroom). In fact, it is a good idea to **create observation grids** for the different phases of debate preparation and take note of the students' observable skills and evaluate them on a scale from minimally to fully acquired. Finally, at the end of the debate, the teacher evaluates the students based on the criteria established and clearly communicated to the them in advance.

Since the evaluation scores of the Debate formats differ from school evaluation, the teacher also **has to decide how to transform the score into a "school grade"** by deciding the weighting of the different criteria of the Debate format. If the objective is mainly disciplinary (i.e. relating to evaluating above all how much the student has demonstrated mastery of the contents of the proposed topic), the teacher will be able to assign a scholastic evaluation by prioritizing the "content" criterion and the logical structuring of the arguments and refutations, assigning less weight to strategy or style. During the process of disciplinary evaluation of the students' performance, the teacher will also have to take into account the students' learning styles: when it comes to more sensitive students with communication difficulties, the criterion of "style" will have to play a secondary role in comparison to the argumentative or refutative efforts, or that of summarizing or listening to the speech.

Unlike in competitive debate, in the classroom debate, it is necessary for the assigned evaluation (and related feedback) to be of a formative type, in the sense that it helps the student to further improve upon and strengthen the positive awareness of their own performance in front of a class, which is often tiring and/or presents a source of stress for students.

To make this easier for teachers, we provide a **sample rubric** that can be adapted depending on focus (disciplinary knowledge vs. transversal skills):

Example: Debate Evaluation Rubric (Classroom Use)

Criterion	What to Look For	Points (1–5)
Content (arguments and evidence)	Clarity of arguments, use of relevant examples, quality of evidence	1 = weak/unclear, 5 = strong and well-supported
Organization and structure	Logical flow, clear case-building, effective use of time	1 = disorganized, 5 = very clear and structured
Delivery and style	Voice, body language, eye contact, engagement with audience	1 = very weak, 5 = confident and persuasive
Refutation and responsiveness	Ability to address opposing arguments, effective rebuttals	1 = ignoring or misrepresenting, 5 = strong and precise
Teamwork and collaboration	Balanced roles, smooth transitions, mutual support	1 = unbalanced, 5 = excellent collaboration

In addition to the sample rubric provided above, teachers may find it useful to consider several broader principles for structuring assessment and evaluation in debate-based learning. These can be grouped into three dimensions: **assessment**, **evaluation**, and **feedback**.

Assessment should begin with the development of a clear rubric that outlines the criteria for debate performance. Categories typically include content, delivery, organization, and rebuttals. It is important that criteria remain objective, specific, and measurable so that students understand what is expected of them. Alongside teacher assessment, both peer evaluation

and self-assessment should be incorporated. By evaluating their own performance or that of their classmates' against agreed upon criteria, students strengthen their own reflection skills and take responsibility for their learning. Ongoing formative assessment across the training period allows teachers to monitor progress and adapt activities where necessary.

Evaluation requires active observation of debates, paying attention not only to the arguments but also to non-verbal and paraverbal communication. Recording debates can provide opportunities for more detailed later analysis. Individual feedback is particularly valuable, as it allows teachers to highlight strengths and areas for improvement in a constructive manner. This can be supported through scheduled one-on-one feedback sessions, where students and teachers review performances together and set realistic development goals.

Feedback is most effective when it is specific and delivered in a timely manner. Positive reinforcement should always be accompanied by constructive criticism in order to help build students' confidence and motivation. Feedback should refer to concrete examples from the debate, ensuring clarity and practical relevance. Teachers are also encouraged to support students in setting achievable goals, thereby reinforcing a process of continuous improvement.

Conclusion

Voice of Vocation establishes a research-informed, scalable model for integrating debate into VET schools: the **Methodological Guide** provides you with the **pedagogical compass** (goals, principles, structures, alignment with EU key competences and learning outcomes), the **Implementation Toolkit** turns it into **ready-to-use classroom materials** (lesson plans and quick activities), and **E-learning** ensures **continuous professional development** for teachers.

This enables:

- **teachers** to diversify methods with low “pedagogical risk,” save on prep time, use clear rubrics, and phase in debate into the classroom in various forms: from micro-activities to full units.
- **students** to improve critical thinking, communication skills, teamwork, self-confidence, and active citizenship, which results in boosting employability and resilience.

- **schools & partners** to sustain quality practice through open resources and networks (IDEA and beyond), while remaining aligned with European policies and recommendations.

Ultimately, this is not “just another manual,” but a mechanism for shifting classroom practice: turning VET classrooms into spaces of discussion, cooperation, and reflection as well as making VET even more relevant for everyday life, working life and democratic participation. The Methodological Guide explains the “What?” and the “Why?”, the Implementation Toolkit shows the “How?” and E-learning ensures we keep learning and improving—continuously.

Reviews

On top of the whole creation process, this Methodological Guide has also undergone comprehensive expert and peer review to ensure both its academic quality and practical applicability. A total of four reviews were conducted: one by a debate education expert, two by VET teachers (one of whom was directly involved in the project activities, while the other was not), and one by an education expert.

These reviews provided valuable feedback from different perspectives—debate methodology, vocational education, and broader pedagogical expertise—helping us refine the Guide into a resource that is methodologically accurate, pedagogically sound, and directly applicable to everyday teaching in vocational schools.

“The methodological guide *Voice of Vocation* is an exceptionally valuable resource for teachers in vocational schools. It clearly demonstrates how debate methodology can foster active learning, develop communication, critical thinking, and teamwork—key skills for students’ employability and civic engagement.

The text is clear, professionally grounded, and pedagogically applicable. As a teacher in the VET sector, I believe the guide makes a significant contribution to modernizing teaching and enhancing both student and teacher competencies. It encourages teachers to apply debate methodology in their lessons through simple and concrete examples, and it also demonstrates how to do so.”

- Mirna Dovhanj, teacher of English and German at the Vocational Secondary School Vinkovci

“The methodological guide enables teachers without prior debate experience to gradually, thoroughly, and effectively prepare students for participation in debates. The guide supports the use of active learning methods, the application of debate methodology as a teaching tool, and refers to other sources of knowledge acquisition. Teachers can use the guide within the vocational curriculum leading to relevant qualifications, particularly due to its connection with key competences for lifelong learning and cross-curricular themes.”

- Ivanka Jareb, dipl.iur, teacher of Legal Subjects at the School of Economics and Office Technology Bjelovar and the Commercial and Trade School Bjelovar

“The Voice of Vocation Methodological Guide is a well-structured, highly practical, and innovative educational resource. It successfully links the theoretical foundations of debate methodology with the specific needs of VET, fostering the development of key competences in line with recent EU standards and policies. The text is clear, coherent, and engaging, while the integration of the Guide, Toolkit, and e-learning modules will provide a comprehensive system of support and innovative materials for teachers, directly applicable to everyday classroom practice. Its particular strength lies in promoting active citizenship and enhancing communication skills that are especially relevant for VET students, particularly those coming from vulnerable groups. The Guide stands as an excellent example of pedagogical practice and a valuable contribution to improving teaching methodology and the development of much-needed soft skills among students in the VET sector.”

- Eli Pijaca Plavšić, independent educational expert

“*Voice of Vocation Methodological Guide* stands out as both a pedagogical tool and a transformative vision for modern teaching practice. It shows how critical thinking, communication, and civic engagement can become an organic part of vocational education. By providing a structured yet flexible approach, the *Guide* enables teachers to enrich their lessons with meaningful dialogue and foster a more engaged, reflective, and collaborative learning environment. The *Guide* convincingly argues that the modern labour market demands far more than technical proficiency. What distinguishes *Voice of Vocation* from other methodological publications is its commitment to accessibility and practical implementation.

The structure of the Guide is clear, detailed, and user-oriented: it begins with theoretical grounding and progressively translates these concepts into adaptable lesson plans, classroom models, and evaluation rubrics. Teachers are guided step by step—from motion analysis and argument construction to assessment and feedback—showing how debate can be introduced even by educators without prior debating experience. By integrating debate into the heart of vocational pedagogy, it positions learning as an active, reflective, and democratic process. In doing so, it offers a compelling argument—both intellectually and practically—that education becomes most powerful when it merges the hands-on precision of VET with the dialogical spirit of debate.”

- Gabrijela Martić, debate expert and trainer at the Croatian Debate Society