

What Is Democracy?

Democracy is a core value of the United Nations (although they do not promote a specific model of democracy). In addition, Sustainable Development Goal 16 points to a global effort to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

In Stanford USA democracy is discussed as:

“...very generally [to] a method of collective decision making characterized by a kind of equality among the participants at an essential stage of the decision-making process.”

In addition, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy states:

“The function of normative democratic theory is not to settle questions of definition but to determine which, if any, of the forms democracy may take are morally desirable and when and how.”

How important is it to live in a place where we can all have our say and be treated fairly?

Previous Projects (and a current one too) have looked various aspects of this theme, including challenging extremism, debating skills, Campaigning for Girls' Rights.

Why did we chose to start these projects?

Campaigning:

How does change happen? When does it need a nudge? Are our politicians always aware of areas of concern?



We looked at the rights of girls and young women and took a group of young women to the House of Lords to debate girls' rights and equality. In particular, we looked at the sexual objectification of girls.

Teaching young people HOW and WHY and WHEN to campaign is vital to the future of democracy and redo of speech. We can work together with you to show young people the skills required.

Extremism:

What is extreme behaviour and how do we approach tackling it? In one project we looked specifically at homophobia and how to embed stories about same sex relationships and the LGBT+ community within school libraries and lessons. Children found that as their backgrounds and families differ so much, they appreciated challenging stereotypes within traditional lessons. However, a programme like this requires sensitivity, communication with parents and time to build in order to elicit appropriate responses.

In another project we looked at extreme political and religious behaviour - defining "extreme", where it stems from and how to report it. Sensitive at the best of times, some of the behaviour we addressed was carefully trailed at each stage to ensure fairness and to address concerns. We looked at extreme political views and areas of the world where democracy is lacking. We explored the effects of religious extremism, where people can be "groomed" and persuaded to join cults or factions that may not have their best interests at heart.

We encourage questions in all work around extremism in a safe space, so that concerns and worries can be worked through rather than kept to oneself, promoting healthy discussion and hopefully educating people on the need for inclusivity and empathy toward diversity.

The Great Debate

In this current project, students are working on their own debating skills. Developing the idea, we thought how the recent events with Brexit, political differences and even holding extreme views could cause friendships to fold - even family relationships to break down. Young people and adults alike (especially adults!) were losing the ability to debate without falling out!

Therefore The Great Debate was born. Working with schools in Plymouth, Spain, Sweden and Romania, learners spent time practising their debating skills. We then introduced the theme of Climate Change and included aspects of this topic into the debate as a transnational exercise.

At the time of writing, learners are preparing to travel to meet and discuss this emotive topic using their debating skills. The project is in English so it also a challenge for those whose first language is not English.

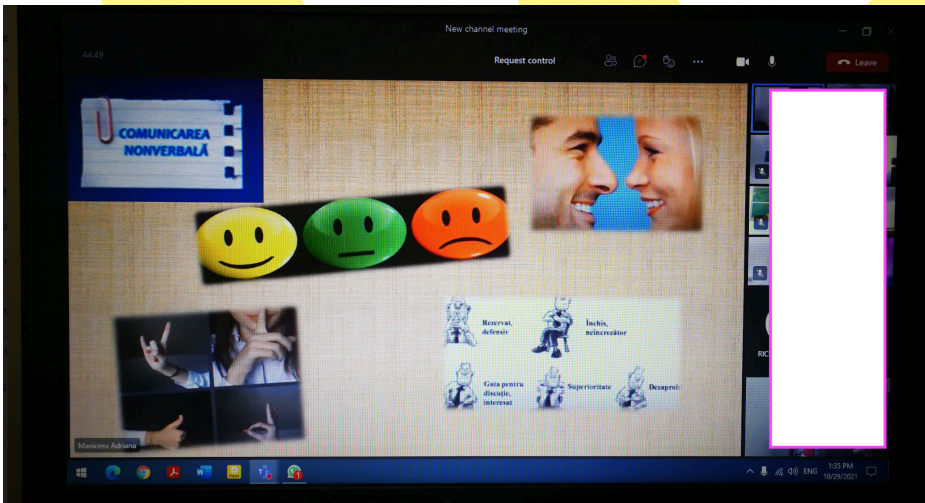
Lessons we are learning as we work together:

- * **Democracy is not something we can impose on any state or nation but we can encourage it**
- * **People of ALL ages could sometimes use some tips on how to participate in a debate without falling out or getting annoyed.**



Swedish students in Upper High School debating Climate Change

Spanish students researching their topic



Romanian teachers showing the transnational group their work on debating skills