

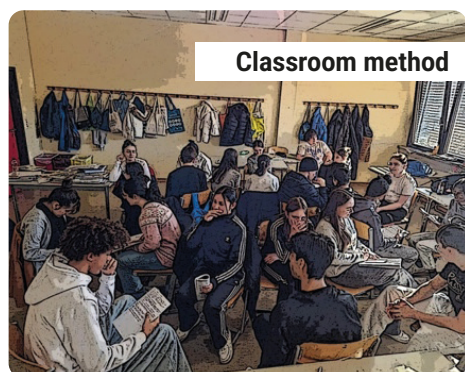
The lesson described here took place in an Austrian secondary school. The students are in the 9th grade and are between 14 and 16 years old. The topic of the lesson is the privatization of water, and the focus is on discussion.

TALK WITH THE TEACHER AFTER CLASS

Teacher: I don't like to interrupt; I really like to let them get heated (...) I actually happened to think about this yesterday: When does a class need an apolitical teacher, and when does a class need a political teacher? And in that situation, I realized they need an apolitical teacher who moderates. Some classes are so asleep that you have to take a position to get anything out of them. But I try to hold back my opinion whenever possible. Every now and then, they ask questions on their own (...) and, funnily enough, that's usually when they've gotten excited enough. And then I answer honestly in classes that I already know a little bit, and I also express my views.

Observer: And how do you feel students deal with your opinion?

Teacher: Some students take offense at my opinion. [...] Yesterday, one student from that class said again, "Yes, communism is bad." And if he's just trying to be right or to provoke me, then it gets on my nerves. If a student doesn't see it as a personal thing with me, that's perhaps the key point – if I notice that opposing opinions are being put forward in order to get into a conflict with me as a person and to show aggression towards me, then it bothers me (...) But if someone justifies it well, without me noticing that there is anything negative between us, then I don't really care, then we can discuss it.



CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

Simon: If the population benefits from it, then maybe privatization is a good thing? For example, it was good for Gastein water because the money is also used to pay for nature conservation, and that's good for the people there. We have a vacation home in Gastein, and I think that's good.

Selma: Yeah, cool, and people who don't own an additional vacation home there, but live there, now have to buy their water.

Teacher: Is that okay?

Konstantin: I think distribution is important. Everyone should benefit from profit maximization, not just companies.

Teacher: What is the name of the economic system that is characterized by corporate profit maximization?

Selma: Capitalism! – Another student rolls his eyes and mutters to his neighbor: "Criticism of capitalism again."

Teacher: What could be changed, what regulations could be put in place to make it fairer?

Lina: I think there shouldn't be fixed amounts that the municipalities receive, but rather they should receive a percentage of the profits.

Selma: No, I find it generally questionable that water can be privatized. Teacher, how is that even possible?!

Teacher: Because that's the current legal situation... and in parliament, just like here, different interests are discussed and arguments are weighed... and every now and then, just like in class, those who shout the loudest or have the most power simply prevail.

Selma: I think it should be prohibited by law; we need a law like that. Can't you make a law like that?

Teacher: (laughs) I'm a teacher, not a member of parliament. But what you can do in cases like this is start a petition, and if it gets a lot of signatures, it has to be dealt with in parliament.

About 60 minutes earlier: The teacher and I enter the classroom, which looks different than usual—the students have pushed all the tables to the edge of the room and formed an inner and outer circle with chairs. After all, the teacher has announced that today they will be doing a "ball bearing" exercise – a method that the students seem to be familiar with and are clearly looking forward to. The first round begins, and the students in the inner circle have one minute to explain their video → (= Video 1: Water – How the Nestlé corporation is drying up a city) to the student sitting opposite them; after one minute, the roles are reversed, and the students in the outer circle now have to summarize their video → (= Video 2: Privatization of drinking water in Austria, which Strache meant #IbizaAffair | Hallstein Water). The students in the inner circle move on, and the same thing happens again – all students seem to be very confident about the content of their video. In the next round, the students have to explain how privatization plays a role in their video – the answers are now more hesitant, some students look uncertainly at their neighbors. Next round: "What do you think of the video? Which perspectives do you understand best, which least?" asks the teacher. The students look thoughtful, but some quickly take a concrete position: "I think it's logical that the mayor likes it because he's the one who makes money from it, but in my opinion, water should be a public good." After two rounds, so that each student could express an opinion about their own video, the teacher opens the discussion at the class level.



Sticker in the classroom

The teacher looks at the clock; the lesson is almost over and she actually wanted to start a new topic in the next lesson. "Yes, as you can see, this is all a very controversial issue. To conclude this topic, please write your own opinion on the subject in three to four sentences in your notebook, and I'll take a look at it." The bell rings; the lesson is over.