

Best Practice

Sporty Conversations about Politics and More with MEP Tom Berendsen

1. Basic Information

- **Title/Name of the Best Practice:** Sporty Conversations about Politics and More with MEP Tom Berendsen
- **Country/Region of Origin:** Netherlands
- **Institution/Organization Implementing the Practice:** Firda Vocational School, DebatUnie
- **Kind of activity:** Informal group discussion combined with a sports activity (padel)
- **Target Audience:** Vocational education students, aged 16–20
- **Duration of the activity:** 3-4 hours (including sports session and discussion)
- **Accessibility:** Free (provided by the school and guest speaker)
- **Year of Implementation:** 2024

2. Description of the Practice

- **Objective:**

The goal of this practice is to engage students in a lively discussion about political topics, the importance of voting, and European cooperation, while also providing a unique and informal setting through a sporting activity (padel). This approach enhances political awareness among students and strengthens their skills in debate and critical thinking.
- **Description of Activities:**

Students at Firda Vocational School participated in an informal debate on important political issues with Member of the European Parliament Tom Berendsen (CDA/EVP), while engaging in a padel game. The students were split into two groups, practicing their debating skills under the guidance of DebatUnie facilitators. Topics such as whether young people should be given voting rights at the age of 16 were discussed, with students presenting arguments for and against. Following the sports session, the students continued their discussions with Berendsen, who shared his insights on European cooperation and the role of voting in shaping Europe's future.
- **Implementation Steps:**
 1. **Prepare students:** Split the class into pro- and con-side groups for a debate on the chosen political topic.

2. **Sports activity:** Engage students in a friendly padel match, which serves as a more relaxed setting for conversation.
3. **Host a discussion:** Invite a guest speaker (in this case, Tom Berendsen) to discuss political topics and share insights from a MEP’s perspective.
4. **Follow-up discussions:** After the game, continue discussions on Europe, voting, and the importance of youth involvement in politics.

- **EU Citizenship Focus Areas:**

- EU Institutions
- Civic Participation
- Democratic Participation
- European Values and Principles
- EU Law and Policies

Strong Points	Weak Points
Encourages active participation and critical thinking in a relaxed, informal setting	May require extra time and preparation to organize both the debate and the sports activity
Promotes direct engagement with real-world political issues	Requires coordination between teachers, sports facilities, and guest speakers
Fosters teamwork and communication skills	Some students may feel uncomfortable debating or participating in a sport they are unfamiliar with

3. Pedagogical Details (if these data are available)

- **Teaching Methodology:**

Interactive learning through debate and sports, providing a combination of informal learning and active participation. Role-playing and real-life examples enhance the connection to EU-related topics.

- **Resources and Tools Used:**

Sports equipment for padel, debate materials (e.g., arguments for and against voting rights), guest speaker (Tom Berendsen), DebatUnie facilitators.

- **Innovative Aspects:**

This practice innovatively combines physical activity with political discourse, creating a dynamic learning experience that makes political engagement more accessible and less intimidating for students.

- **Adaptability to VET Settings:**

Easily adaptable to other vocational education settings. The topic and activity can be customized to reflect issues related to the specific sector of the students involved.

4. Outcomes and Impact (if these data are available)

- **Measured Outcomes:**

Students reported an increased understanding of the political process, particularly around the EU and voting. Many expressed a greater interest in European affairs after the activity.

- **Student/Teacher Feedback:**

Students enjoyed the opportunity to engage in a discussion in a less formal environment, allowing them to express their views freely. Teachers noted improved communication and debating skills, as well as heightened interest in European politics.

- **Evidence of Success:**

The positive feedback from students and teachers, alongside the active participation in the discussions, demonstrates the success of this approach.

5. Inclusivity and Accessibility (if these data are available)

- **How Inclusive is the Practice?**

The practice is inclusive, as it encourages participation from all students, regardless of background or political knowledge. The sports activity provides an opportunity for students who might be hesitant to engage in debates to become more comfortable with the process.

- **Accessibility of Resources:**

The resources used (sports facilities, debate materials) are locally available and do not require significant funding. The guest speaker's involvement was arranged with minimal cost to the students.

6. Alignment with EU Citizenship Education Goals (if these data are available)

- **Relevance to EU Citizenship Topics:**

Directly aligns with EU citizenship goals by fostering discussions on European

cooperation, the importance of voting, and the role of young people in shaping Europe's future.

- **Policy Alignment:**

This practice supports the EU's goals for increasing youth participation in democracy and promoting understanding of European values and governance.

7. Additional Notes or Recommendations

- **Challenges in Implementation:** Organizing such a session requires careful planning to coordinate the sports activity and the debate session, as well as securing a guest speaker.
- **Suggestions for Improvement:** To improve this practice, the debate topic could be tied more directly to current EU issues or student-relevant topics. In addition, inviting a larger group of EU policymakers could help expand the scope of the discussion.
- **Additional Resources (if applicable):**
 - [DebatUnie](#)
 - [Tom Berendsen's MEP Profile](#)