

Introduction

What does this book offer?

This manual addresses teachers, teacher trainers, curriculum developers, textbook editors and translators in the member states of the Council of Europe. It may be translated and adapted to meet the specific requirements within their education systems.

This book contains nine teaching units in Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) and Human Rights Education (HRE). The units, consisting of four lessons each, are intended for students in their final year at lower secondary level (8th or 9th grade, depending on the school system). Each unit focuses on a key concept related to EDC or HRE: identity – freedom – responsibility – conflict – communication – pluralism – rules and law – equality – government.

For each lesson, a sequence of suggested teaching steps is described in detail, as far as this is reasonably possible. Student handouts are included as appendices to each unit, so that the teacher receives as much support as a manual can give. This book therefore addresses teachers, not students. Our experience in teacher training has shown that trainees and beginners in the teaching profession appreciate detailed lesson descriptions, but perhaps experienced teachers will also find some ideas and materials useful for their classes. Teacher trainers may use this book as a manual in training EDC and human rights teachers.

This is a revised version of the manual. The first edition was developed in Bosnia and Herzegovina to support a new school subject, democracy and human rights, that was introduced in 2002. Since 1996, the Council of Europe has been engaged in training teachers and teacher trainers of EDC and HRE to support the peace-building process after the war. The editors and authors of the first edition were members of the international team of trainers participating in this project. We delivered in-service training of teachers and teacher trainers, and developed materials, including the first draft of this manual, both for teacher training and for use in the classroom.¹

What is the approach of EDC/HRE?

The basic principles of EDC may be best illustrated by an example. Freedom of opinion and expression² is a basic right of democratic participation. In EDC/HRE, students should know, understand and appreciate the right to free opinion and expression and they should know how it is protected by their national constitution (the learning dimension of knowledge and understanding). Precisely because the active use of this right is essential for participation in a democratic community, students must also learn and practise how to argue in public (the learning dimension of skills development and competence building). Finally, freedom of expression and opinion lays the foundation for an open, pluralist society. Controversy and competition of interests and opinions are the norm, not the exception. Conflicts will arise, and they need to be resolved by non-violent means, that is, through the spoken word (arguing, bargaining, negotiating – both in public and behind closed doors). An open pluralist society relies on a set of binding rules and strong institutions to enforce these rules, but perhaps even more on a shared set of values among the citizens. These values include tolerance, mutual respect, appreciation of fair compromise, non-violence, and the ability to deal with open situations of disagreement and controversy in which issues have not yet been decided. If political decision making is supported and framed by a strong consensus of order and democratic values, a society can handle a high degree of disagreement on concrete issues. Freedom of opinion is then far from becoming a danger to effective government, but rather supports it as a means of finding fair and efficient solutions to problems and conflicts.

1. For a more detailed account of this project, see Volume I of this series.

2. See UDHR, 10 December 1948, Article 19; ECHR, 4 November 1950, Article 10.

Democracy has a cultural dimension and in political theory this has been conceived as an unwritten social contract entered into by every citizen. Every new generation must therefore understand and support this unwritten social contract (the acquisition of values).

This example shows that EDC/HRE follows a holistic approach, integrating learning processes in three dimensions:

- knowledge and understanding (cognitive dimension);
- skills training and competence building;
- acquisition of values and attitudes.

This model of learning dimensions applies to education in general, and therefore will be familiar to many readers. Every teacher knows how strong the bias is towards cognitive learning, particularly in the higher grades. How does EDC/HRE therefore respond to the challenge that this holistic model of learning presents? In other words, if this is what students should learn, what must teachers do?

What are the basic principles of EDC/HRE?

Broadly speaking, EDC and HRE integrate these dimensions of learning by creating a setting that includes learning in class and learning from real life experience. EDC and HRE are based on a set of three didactic approaches:

- learning “about” democracy and human rights;
- learning “through” democracy and human rights;
- learning “for” democracy and human rights.

These three didactic approaches of EDC/HRE form an integrated whole. In everything teachers do, all three didactic approaches are involved, serving all three dimensions of learning. The balance of deliberate emphasis should vary. We will look at each of these approaches in somewhat more detail.

Learning “about”

This involves civic education as a regular school subject. Learning “about” refers to the cognitive dimension of learning. The standards of the cognitive EDC/HRE curriculum include the following: the students can explain how democracy works, in contrast to other forms of state (dictatorship, oligarchy); the students can describe the tradition and history of human rights; and they can demonstrate how some of these human rights have been integrated into their national constitutions, thereby giving them the status of civil rights that are more strongly protected. The curriculum must therefore include courses in EDC/HRE and closely linked subjects, such as history, social studies and economics.

Learning “through”

Students should not only know their rights regarding participation, they must also be able to use them. Students therefore need practical experience and training opportunities within school life through participation in decision making, where this is possible and useful. For example, teachers must give students the opportunity to state their opinions, both on topics in class and on issues related to teaching and the running of the school. When understood in this way, EDC and HRE provide a pedagogical guideline rather than a curriculum, and involve the whole school, not only specially trained EDC/HRE teachers. Values such as tolerance and responsibility are learnt through experience, and a lot may depend on the teachers – all teachers, in all subjects – to provide convincing role models. On the other hand, democratic values as a non-verbal mode of behaviour will not suffice either. Experience in school life needs to be reflected in and linked to categories and systematic ways of understanding (learning “about”). EDC/HRE depends on both dimensions, and the debate whether EDC/HRE or civic education as a subject could be substituted in the curriculum by EDC/HRE as a generalised pedagogical principle is misleading.