

## Unit 3

# Educating for democracy and human rights

### 1. The three dimensions of EDC/HRE

Education for democratic citizenship and human rights education (EDC/HRE) focuses on what students should be capable of doing rather than on what teachers should teach them. The three basic principles that govern this student- and outcome-centred approach may be best illustrated by an example.

- Freedom of opinion and expression is a basic condition of democratic participation and is a fundamental civil and political right. In EDC/HRE, students know, understand and appreciate the right to free opinion and expression and they know how it is protected by their national constitution. This is the cognitive dimension of learning (knowledge, concepts and understanding).
- Students learn how to use this fundamental human right. Precisely because the active use of this right is essential for participation in a democratic community, students are also encouraged to reflect on their point of view and to be able to express this through a variety of ways, including the ability to make a public argument (skills-based dimension of learning).
- To exercise their freedom of expression, students need courage to express their views even when they are in situations where they are facing a majority opposing them. And they listen to the opinions of others in a spirit of tolerance and personal respect. By confining disagreement and controversy to the issues and not to personalise differences of opinion, conflicts can be resolved by non-violent means (attitudes- and values-based dimension of understanding).

What this example shows may be generalised, not only to what students should be capable of in exercising any other human right, but also to learning and education in general. To be relevant and to add to a person's competences, learning must unfold in these three dimensions that mutually support each other – knowledge, concepts and understanding; skills; and attitudes and values. For several decades, educators and teachers have agreed on this concept of learning.

If this is how students learn, what must EDC/HRE teachers do to provide adequate opportunities to learn? Briefly, the answer is as follows.

In EDC/HRE, the goal is to support students to be young citizens who:

- know their human rights and have understood the conditions they depend on (learning “about” democracy and human rights);
- have experienced school as a micro-society that respects the freedoms and equality of its students, and have been trained in exercising their human rights and respecting the rights of others (learning “through” democracy and human rights);
- are therefore competent and confident to exercise their human rights, with a mature sense of responsibility towards others and their community (learning “for” democracy and human rights).

#### 1.1 The cognitive dimension of EDC/HRE: learning “about” democracy and human rights

EDC/HRE at secondary level requires students to study key documents such as the UDHR and the Convention. To summarise the example given above, they need to know that every person enjoys the right of free thought and expression, and free access to information through uncensored media, with exceptions possible only for good reason and in limited circumstances (Article 10 of the Convention). The state's constitution and legal environment should reflect and protect these human

rights standards, and can be studied by students from this perspective. In doing so, they can understand how important, indeed indispensable, just this one right is to make democracy come to life.

It is also necessary for students to understand Article 14 of the Convention, which addresses the key principle of equality and non-discrimination: women and men, rich and poor, young and old, nationals and immigrants – we all equally possess these rights. The enjoyment of these rights is an evolving process and one of the agendas of democratic systems of government based on human rights.

Finally, the students need to understand why liberties require a framework of laws and also carry responsibilities (UDHR, Article 29). Freedom of expression allows citizens to promote their interests in a pluralist society, and in such a competitive setting, there will be winners and losers. A constitution, rules and laws must provide a framework that limits the liberties of the strong and protects the weak – without legalising differences. However, rules cannot take care of every problem, so the members of a community must share an attitude of responsibility towards each other.

Human rights is a legal framework but it is also a normative one. This requires students to recognise to what degree human rights principles are actually realised within their school community as well as society at large.

#### **European Convention on Human Rights (4.11.1950)**

##### **Article 10**

##### **Freedom of expression**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

(2) The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or the rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

##### **Article 14**

##### **Prohibition of discrimination**

The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status.

#### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10.12.1948)**

##### **Article 29**

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.

2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

In short, these three articles outline the tension between individual liberties and the need to balance the rights of individuals through a framework that both limits and protects these liberties.

Students who can explain this have learnt a lot “about” democracy and human rights; this is the cognitive dimension of EDC/HRE.

## **1.2 The participative dimension of EDC/HRE: learning “for” democracy and human rights**

To be able to take part in democracy, the students should learn how to exercise their rights and freedoms – for example, their right of free access to information and of free thought, opinion and expression. They should also have active experience in interacting with others – such as promoting their interests, negotiating for compromise, or agreeing on how to define “the general welfare” (UDHR, Article 29). They should be able to act in a framework of rules and accept the limits they may impose on them. They should have developed an attitude of responsibility for the welfare of others and the community as a whole.

In short, they should not only have understood the implications and links between the three human rights articles addressed above, but also appreciate their underlying values and act accordingly. In doing so, through democratic decision-making processes that do not result in a violation of human rights, they must be able to balance their interests with those of others and their community as a whole.

Students who have been trained in this way have learnt how to take part in democracy. This is the action-based dimension of EDC/HRE – learning “for” democracy and human rights, that is, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

## **1.3 The cultural dimension of EDC/HRE: learning “through” democracy and human rights**

Knowledge and skills may enable a person to take part in democracy in technical terms, but they do not turn that person into a democrat. In the hands of racists, for example, this kind of expertise could be abused as a weapon to attack a democratic, human rights-based community. In a very literal sense, knowledge and skills that are not supported by human rights values are worthless for democracy.

EDC/HRE therefore includes a cultural dimension. The culture of teaching and learning must reflect the message of EDC/HRE.

While students acquire knowledge through instruction (listening to a lecture, reading) and competences through training (demonstration, practice and coaching), they develop values and attitudes through experience.

For example, young people build their self-esteem through encouragement by their parents and teachers. Only students who have experienced and enjoyed respectful treatment by their teachers may be expected to behave likewise toward their peers. Human rights values are acquired through a process of socialisation in school – teaching “through”, or in the spirit of democracy and human rights.

Human rights values have been defined by the United Nations, the Council of Europe and other organisations, and include the principles of equality and non-discrimination; participation and inclusion; and accountability.

While teaching “about” democracy and human rights may be assigned to special subjects (such as social studies, history, civic education), the cultural dimension of EDC/HRE, teaching “through” democracy and human rights, is a challenge for the whole school – human rights and democracy become the school community’s pedagogical guideline and the lens through which all of the elements of school governance are judged.