

Unit 2

Setting objectives and selecting materials

1. Introduction

Teachers repeatedly face the problem of justification: what are the reasons for my selection of possible objectives and topics? Identifying a teaching objective and selecting topics mean making a fundamental decision related to teaching. Objectives should not simply be copied or adapted, nor should they merely be dogmatically imposed. Rather, they should be scrupulously questioned, and their choice should be based on sound reasoning and justification. And then you make – maybe together with the students – a deliberate choice of topics and objectives for teaching, you reflect your decision in a range of wider contexts and you check on your selection of topics to identify their educational value. This task is of crucial importance, as the number of possible teaching topics is endless, while the time disposable for planning and teaching is limited.

The following key questions are intended to guide and assist you in this complex task of selecting and preparing topics for teaching.

2. Task and key questions for setting objectives and selecting materials

2.1 Task

Teachers with a sense of responsibility in their work repeatedly face the problem of justification: what are the reasons for my selection of possible objectives and topics?

Identifying a teaching objective means making the most fundamental of all decisions related to teaching. Objectives should not simply be copied or adapted, nor should they merely be dogmatically imposed. Rather, they should be scrupulously questioned, and their choice should be based on sound reasoning and justification. It is important for a teacher to relate the teaching objectives he or she is considering to the students' learning conditions and to adjust them accordingly (see Unit 1, Conditions of Teaching and Learning).

As soon as the objectives have become more concrete, aspects of content need to be included. Not until you have decided on the desired level of attainment concerning content matter, that is, the topics to be included, will it be possible for you to define your teaching objectives.

In the planning process, the work on aspects of contents in teaching is both difficult and time-consuming. At first sight, little effort might seem necessary, as the curriculum sets clear guidelines and some teaching media offer detailed suggestions. The main task, however, is left to you, the teacher: you must be well informed on the whole field of knowledge that you wish to teach, you must structure it, acquire a comprehensive understanding of it, analyse it thoroughly, evaluate it critically, make a deliberate choice of topics and objectives for teaching, reflect your decision in a range of wider contexts, check on your selection of topics to identify their educational value, etc. This task is of crucial importance, as the number of possible teaching topics is endless, while the disposable time for planning and teaching is limited.

The following key questions and follow-up questions for your self-control are intended to guide and assist you in this complex task of selecting and preparing topics for teaching. We suggest you co-operate with other teachers, and perhaps also with the students.

2.2 Key questions

For setting objectives:

- What objectives do I wish to achieve?
- What competences will be most important at the end of the unit?

- What reasons do I give for the selection of these objectives?
- What priority do I give to my objectives (primary and secondary objectives)?
- What objectives are important now – for the class as a whole, for individual students, male and/or female?
- Have I ensured that the objectives that I have selected serve the main interests and needs of my students? Do my lessons really respond to what my students are preoccupied with?
- Is it possible for the students to participate in the definition or selection of the learning objectives?
- How much time (lessons and weeks) has been assigned to achieving the objectives?
- What objectives should be achieved by all the students within the disposable teaching time (general standard of attainment)?
- Are specific levels of attainment to be defined for individual students (education according to individual ability)?
- Have I enabled the students to move forward from knowledge to action, that is, can they confidently apply the knowledge they have acquired?
- What do I focus on in my teaching – cognitive, personal or social competence?
- Have I got a clear idea of the short- and long-term objectives which are of primary importance for my class, for learning groups, for individual male and female students?
- Have I clearly and explicitly stated the objectives?

For selecting topics and materials:

- Which topic have I chosen?
- What are the reasons for my choice?
- What is the structure of my topic?
- Does my choice of topic comply with the syllabus?
- Which aspects of my topic are interesting for my students?
- In what way is learning in school linked with learning out of school?
- Is there a connection between the topic and real life and the students' environment?
- Do I have a general understanding of the whole subject matter which enables me to select a specific topic? How can I become better informed? Do I need to carry out any studies or experiments before treating the subject in class?
- What teaching materials are available for the specific aspects of the topic?
- Will there be a chance for the students, both boys and girls, to draw on their personal experience, knowledge and skills in the lessons (for example, children with a different cultural or linguistic background)?
- Will the topic be equally suitable for the specific needs of the two sexes?
- Does the selected topic interest me?