

Unit 3

Understanding politics

1. Introduction: what must students learn?

The objective of EDC/HRE is to enable students to take part in decision-making processes that affect their interests and the community as a whole.

I can only take action when I have made up my mind, that is, when I know what I want. In somewhat more analytical terms, I must have identified or prioritised my interests or must have judged an issue, a conflict or a problem and decided which line of action to support. Judging in turn requires understanding, and understanding requires sound information.

Students should therefore understand important political topics – both for their own sake (learning “about” politics), but also to learn the competences that enable them to work independently in taking the necessary steps themselves: acquiring information, analysing and understanding a political issue or problem, and judging. This then enables a young citizen to participate and take action (learning “for” democratic participation).

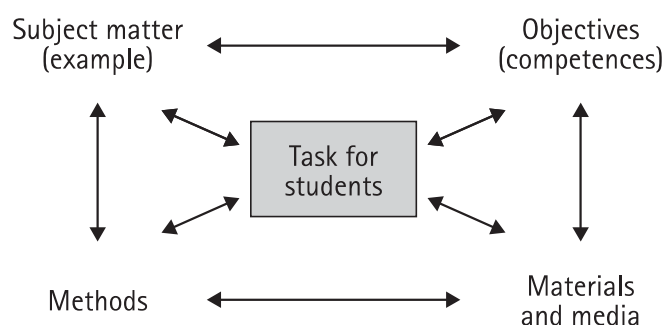
2. Task and key questions to understand politics

2.1 Task for teachers in EDC/HRE

In all domains of teaching and learning, not only in EDC/HRE, students understand complex subject matter best by studying well-chosen examples. The teacher’s manuals in this EDC/HRE edition for elementary, lower and upper secondary level (Volumes II-V) demonstrate this principle in every unit and show different possible approaches. The manuals also show that these examples can be taken from the context of school governance or political decision making from any level – depending on the age of the students, the material that is available or can be produced by the students, and the desired learning outcome.

These examples are basically of two types – the analysis of a political problem or issue, or the analysis of a political decision-making process. The teacher must decide what examples are suitable and clarify what material is at hand or can be obtained.

The EDC/HRE teacher’s task is to link the following elements in planning a lesson sequence on politics:



No lesson planning is possible without thinking about all of these teaching and learning elements and linking them. A change in one position will affect the others. On the other hand, the subject matter can be exchanged to achieve a certain objective, and vice versa.

2.2 Key questions

- What should my students be able to do after this teaching unit? What should they have understood and be able to explain to others, and what criteria should they be able to use in judging a political issue?
- In what way can I assess their competence development?
- In what way can students draw on their experience in everyday life or in school to understand politics?
- How do my students perceive political decision making?
- To what extent are my students aware of their interests?
- What current issues affect my students?
- What current issues are my students able to understand?
- Are these issues linked to school governance, or politics on a local, regional, national or international level?
- How can I encourage my students to participate in the choice of an issue?
- What media or materials will I choose to present different opinions on the issue?
- What tasks will I set my students to work by themselves?
- What inputs can my students give?
- What key concepts can they apply to the topic or issue?
- What opinions do I expect my students to express on an issue?
- What is my opinion? What criteria have I given priority to in my judgment?
- How will I ensure that I will not overwhelm my students by persuading them to adopt my point of view?
- In what way could my students take action?