

# Unit 1

## Toolbox for teachers

### 1. Introduction

EDC/HRE is a distinctive form of educational activity that aims to equip young people to participate as active citizens, and as such employs distinctive forms of learning. Teachers need to be fluent in these forms of learning and able to put them into practice in different settings. They include different forms:

- inductive – presenting learners with concrete problems to resolve or make a decision on, and encouraging them to generalise from these to other situations – rather than by starting from abstract concepts;
- active – encouraging learners to learn by doing, rather than being told or preached at;
- relevant – designing learning activities around real situations in the life of the school or college, the community or the wider world;
- collaborative – employing group-work and co-operative learning;
- interactive – teaching through discussion and debate;
- critical – encouraging learners to think for themselves, by asking for their opinions and views and helping them develop the skills of argument;
- participative – allowing learners to contribute to their own learning, for example by suggesting topics for discussion or research, or by assessing their own learning or the learning of their peers.

To fulfil these plans, teachers need tools to support the students. Some of them are especially important for EDC/HRE. Therefore they will be described here in a very practical form.

## Toolbox for teachers

### Tool 1: Task-based learning

#### How to support learning by setting tasks

Interactive teaching and learning plays a key role in most of the activities in the teaching suggested in this manual. The objectives of interactive teaching are cognition (that is, thinking and understanding), learning, and action. Every stage of planning the lessons, monitoring the tasks, evaluating the results and reflecting the whole process has a lot of hidden learning potential for the students.

The basic approach of integrating thinking and doing has implications for the whole process of learning. It does not mean that active handling of learning objects is confined to the preliminary stages of “real” learning, which is then understood to involve only the minds of learners. Rather, integration of learning and doing can give all learners a clear idea of why they are learning by doing: they have a task to do, and this requires many abilities and skills. In this kind of teaching, the learner must define his or her learning needs in each new situation that arises. Learners will then also require instruction by the teacher, which means that students set their teachers tasks, and not vice versa. Task-based learning produces ideal combinations of constructivist learning and learning by instruction.

In task-based learning, students face problems that they wish to solve. Learning is not an end in itself, but leads to something useful and meaningful. Students learn by exploring ways to solve a problem, setting themselves, and their teacher, the tasks that pave the way to the solution of the problem. School is life – this *leitmotif* of EDC/HRE also applies in task-based learning. Many real-life situations consist of finding solutions for problems. Task-based learning prepares students for life by creating real-life situations as settings for learning.

Task-based learning follows a pattern that can be described in general terms. If the teacher keeps to this pattern, the potentials of learning by doing, that is, active learning, will unfold almost by themselves:

#### Elements of task-based learning

The students face a task that needs to be solved (presented either by the teacher or a textbook).

The students plan their action.

The students implement their action plan.

The students reflect on their process of learning and present their results.

It is important for the students to experience the principles of task-based learning frequently in different contexts. A good task that gives rise to many problems that need to be solved is the best means to create a productive and exciting learning environment.

## Toolbox for teachers

### Tool 2: Co-operative learning

This form of teaching is not about simply letting students work in groups in the hope that the work will somehow get done. What is meant by this is a learning process in some shape or form which is delegated to the area of social learning for lack of visible cognitive success. The expression “co-operative learning”, however, is concentrated on the achievement of the learners.

Clear role distribution among the members of the group is a prerequisite for successful teaching according to a co-operative model. In this, formal tasks that provide equal status among the members are distributed and practised and this thus leads to successful learning. It is, however, clear that not every task is suitable for this type of teaching and therefore a polarised relationship between co-operative learning forms and teacher-centred teaching is not meant. In this model of teaching, the teacher plays a clear and meaningful role. The success of co-operative learning, as many class comparisons have shown, is dependent on basic elements. The following procedure seems to be tried and tested by many teachers:

#### Co-operative learning: how to go about organising a group

1. The names of the group members are listed alphabetically.
2. Each person in the group is assigned one of the following roles.

**Moderator:** This person ensures that all the members understand the task and is, as well, the group’s speaker.

**Reporter:** This person organises the presentation or final product.

**Materials manager:** This person ensures that all the necessary materials are available and makes sure that everything has been cleaned up at the end.

**Planner:** This person makes sure that the group manages its time well and checks that the group sticks to its schedule. This person makes sure that the group plans out its course of action in a reasonable way at the beginning of the assignment and adapts this plan accordingly.

**Mediator:** This person solves any problems within the group.

#### 3. Rules:

a) Some members of the group have special tasks/roles, but every single person is responsible for the entire process and the group’s results.

b) If a question is to be asked to the teacher or student-leader, then the whole group must decide which question is to be asked. Like this, the group decides upon the question collectively. The leaders do not answer any individual questions during this group process.

c) Each group is responsible for the presentation. Each member of the group is responsible for answering any questions.

Teachers who often work with the group method say that it often makes sense for learners to keep their roles for a longer period of time. This provides a certain security, speeds up learning, and improves group performance.

## Toolbox for teachers

### Tool 3: Chairing plenary sessions (discussion and critical thinking) in EDC/HRE classes

#### Introduction

Students share their thoughts and ideas, guided by their teacher. That is all. The setting is simple, and it requires only a blackboard or flipchart, but the teacher's task is a demanding one. Plato's "Socratic dialogues" mark the long tradition of this mode of teaching, and Socrates focused on problematising and deconstructing his partner's false or dogmatic views. We suggest a role more fitting for a teacher in EDC/HRE – a more supportive one like that of a coach. The aspect of competence development – students learn how to think and share their thoughts – is a goal as important as the contents.

The students are engaged in a process of thinking and interactive constructivist learning. The teacher supports them. Generally speaking, thinking is the effort to link the concrete to the abstract. Plenary sessions train the students' ability to think. Thinking takes time. Careful students are often slow thinkers.

Only school can offer guided plenary sessions as a format of learning. Like a teacher's lecture, it can be adapted precisely to the learner's needs, much more so than any textbook or video. Critics have rightly pointed out the abuse of this format: it is applied too often, and too long; teachers ask questions that students are uninterested in and unable to answer; teachers enact a crude Socratic type of role, treating students as inferiors who are expected to deliver what the teacher wants to hear.

But if used thoughtfully, and with a certain amount of practice, plenary sessions are one of the most powerful and flexible, and indeed indispensable, learning formats in EDC/HRE. The following checklist outlines the learning potentials and gives the teacher some tips what to do and what to avoid. Volumes II-V in this EDC/HRE edition offer numerous descriptions of plenary sessions with students and students from elementary to upper secondary level. Therefore no example is included in this tool.

#### The students' role

The students:

- enter the session with some expertise – on different levels, and they are interested in the topic under discussion;
- know that their contribution is welcome, and no grades are given for "wrong" ideas or suggestions;
- have the lion's share of the speaking time;
- have different learning needs (example: "slow thinkers" – "fast talkers").

#### The teachers' role

The teacher:

- communicates with the class, and is able and willing to improvise, reacting to whatever the students say;
- fully grasps the topic and has a clear idea of the outcome of the session;
- controls, but does not dominate, the plenary session, taking a small share of speaking time;
- gives the students sufficient time to think;
- listens without taking notes;

- listens actively, “fleshing out” ideas that students hint at;
- encourages students to participate and addresses students who tend to stay silent;
- acts as time keeper, group manager, process manager;
- gives structure to the discussion by using the blackboard (preferable to a flipchart), offering images, symbols, examples, information, concepts and frameworks;
- identifies the students’ learning needs and reacts accordingly. He or she instructs students on matters they do not know, and makes sure that arguments and lines of thought that are wrong or incomplete are criticised and deconstructed by a student or the teacher.

### **Suitable topics and contexts in EDC/HRE**

Suitable topics include:

- working with student inputs (questions, comments, presentations, homework, experience and feelings);
- working with teacher inputs (question, prompt, picture, lecture);
- introduction of a new concept;
- follow-up to a reading or research task;
- follow-up to a phase of task- or problem-based learning (debriefing, reflection);
- feedback;
- developing a hypothesis for further research.

### **Learning potential**

The students:

- create the context for a new concept that the teacher delivers by instruction (constructivist learning);
- experience how thinking takes place – asking questions, carefully considering answers, linking the concrete to the abstract and vice versa (competence development through demonstrations of analytical thinking and critical judgment);
- students share their criteria for judgment and reflect the reasons for their choice of criteria (competence of judgment or interactive constructivist learning);
- experience their class as a learning micro-community in which they are encouraged to participate (learning through democracy and human rights);
- are addressed as experts (strengthening self-esteem);
- pass judgment after having considered controversial views on a political issue (simulation of political decision making).

### **Preparation**

Criteria for choosing a topic:

- The students must be informed on the topic (links to students’ expertise).
- The students see why the topic is worth discussing (relevance, personal interest).
- Controversy: the topic poses a problem and allows the students to take different views; the teacher has a personal view, but is not in possession of “the correct solution”.

- The teacher has a matrix in mind that allows her or him to anticipate most of what the students are likely to say and to integrate their ideas into a conceptual framework (for example, pros and cons, criteria of fairness and efficiency, concrete and abstract, interests and compromise).
- If the discussion does not begin with a student input, the teacher thinks about the starter (a question or a prompt, for example).
- The teacher drafts the summary of the session – for example a diagram with a new concept, a thesis, or a set of keywords that the students work out into a text as a follow-up homework task.

### **Some "do's"**

- When you give a prompt or ask a question, give your students time to think – wait for several seconds. Then give the floor to several students in succession.
- Variants (they require more time, but greatly improve the quality of student and teacher inputs): when you give a prompt or ask a question:
  - give your students time to write down their ideas, and then let them have the floor; the students read their statements, or collect their written ideas on the floor or a poster and cluster them;
  - let your students share their ideas in pairs, and then let them present their results.
- Basic rule: "One teacher input – many student responses." In terms of time management, this may already be the whole plenary session, rounded off by the teacher's summary or conclusion.
- Make sure your students are seated in a square or circle, allowing everyone to address and to see each other.
- Make sure the students can understand each other. Encourage them to explain their ideas and any terminology that other students do not know.

### **Some "don'ts"**

Avoid:

- asking yes/no questions. You will then have to ask the next one immediately after. Prefer open questions or prompts. Follow-up questions can then be tighter and more specific;
- getting drawn into a discussion with one or two students. Rather, pass on their questions to the class;
- side-stepping or ignoring statements by students that catch you unprepared. They may be the most interesting ones! Here again, get the class involved;
- commenting on every single statement by students that you agree or disagree with. Rather, give a prompt to help students identify strengths or weaknesses in each other's arguments;
- restricting your role to calling on students in the order of their showing hands. Quite often, students will address different aspects and sub-topics, and the discussion may slip into confusion or chaos. Therefore, take the initiative and decide or suggest which topic to focus on first. Point out the dilemma that time and concentration is too limited to discuss everything if students question the need to prioritise.

### **The teacher as improviser – students spark off a discussion**

So far, we have considered plenary sessions that the teacher has included in planning an EDC/HRE lesson.

However, students may ask for a discussion spontaneously, often by making an observation or comment that sparks off a controversy. If ever time allows, the teacher should give the students the

opportunity to go ahead. Their learning needs are apparent – they, or at least some of them, are interested in an issue.

Examples:

- “In the end, you can only rely on your family.”
- “I think for some people the death penalty would be a good idea.”
- “What happens to politicians who break their election promises?”
- A student refers to a current issue from the daily news.

In such a situation, the students set their teacher a task. She or he must chair a discussion without prior preparation, by improvisation only. Teachers need not be afraid of such a situation. Usually the teacher will have a grasp of the topic, and the modes of interaction are the same as in any plenary session included in a lesson plan. A similar situation arises when the students ask a teacher to deliver an explanation unprepared (“what does democracy mean?”).

Here are some tips on how to react in spontaneous discussions:

- Ask the student(s) who started the discussion to explain the issue to the class. This gives everyone the chance to take part, and gives you time to think as well.
- Clarify how much time you want to set aside. Decide how to continue with the topic(s) and the lesson after the discussion.
- When you listen to your students, watch out for what they know and have, or have not, understood.
- Take the initiative to deliver a summary or conclusion of the discussion. This may not be of the same quality as one that you have had time to think about beforehand, but it serves the students better than ending a discussion without at least a preliminary statement on why it was held and what it led to.
- Alternatively, you can set this as a follow-up task for your students, but only if you have a solution in mind.

## Toolbox for teachers

### Tool 4: Interviewing an expert – how to collect information

In EDC/HRE there are many situations when students need to acquire information by interviewing people who come from outside the classroom.

These interviews may take place within class, or the class or a group of students can visit them outside.

The interview partners may be experts in the strict sense of the word, such as a member of national or local parliament, a representative of an administrative board or a scientist. But interview partners could also be people who have a specific background of social or professional experience, such as a shiftworker, a single mother, a migrant or an unemployed person.

Here we will leave aside the question of who contacts the expert. In most cases this will be the teacher, but of course this task could be delegated to students, particularly at secondary level. Rather, we will focus on the question of how the students can prepare and carry out the interview.

Clearly a scenario should be avoided in which the teacher or a handful of students interview an expert, with the rest of the class looking on, not understanding why certain questions are being asked. An interview involves competences that are useful in any kind of project work, field studies or more advanced work in science or the media.

A standard model procedure for the preparation of an interview with an expert includes the following steps:

1. The students identify an important issue that deserves more detailed study.
2. The teacher suggests that the students interview an expert. He or she contacts the expert and arranges a date for the interview, either in the classroom or at a place outside school.
3. The teacher explains to the students what their task will be: in the time available for the interview (45-90 minutes), the students can raise a number of key questions. As each of these key questions will need some time to be answered, and the answers will prompt some follow-up questions, the students will have to decide which questions and issues to focus on. The students will form groups, each of which will be responsible for one key question. Each group will be assigned a time slot (10-15 minutes) to interview the experts. It is important for the students to understand this framework and its purpose, so the teacher should answer any questions patiently and carefully.
4. In the plenary round, the students engage in a brainstorming session. They write all the questions they would like to ask and that they can think of on cards or slips of paper, using a new card for each question. To avoid consuming too much time, the teacher can limit the number of cards for each student to two or three. After five to eight minutes, these questions are collected on the blackboard or flipchart, with the students coming forward and presenting their ideas.
5. Questions referring to one topic are clustered under a key question. The students then decide which key questions will be used in the interview and in which order they will be addressed. In a session of 60 minutes, not more than four key questions should be asked. As a rule, the first one should be about the person himself so that the students have an idea of who they are talking to. The last 10 minutes should be left to a round of open discussion or additional questions by individual students.
6. The students enter groups. They take the cards with the students' suggestions from the board or flipchart, and they decide whether to include them in the interview.
7. If the students have no experience of interviewing, the teacher should give a brief instruction on the basic technique of interviewing. The opening question should be broad in scope, allowing the partner to offer a lot of information and keywords. The students can then ask follow-up questions that are tighter in focus. Generally questions that can be answered by yes or no should



be avoided, as a new question has to follow immediately after. The students should also make sure not to mix discussion and interview (“Don’t you agree with me that ...?”).

8. In the end, the students should have a list of four to six questions which they have ordered and ranked. To build confidence, the class can rehearse the interview in a role play, with the teacher acting as the expert.
9. It is important to clarify the roles of the team members during the interview. Who will ask which question? Who will record the answers? Who replaces a team member who is absent on the day of the interview? The interviewers should be able to maintain eye contact with the partner, so they should be supported by one or two note-takers (see the model questionnaire below). It is not advisable to use a cassette recorder, as the transcription is too time-consuming for the students. Rather, they should concentrate on the essentials and translate their notes into a full text from memory immediately after the interview.
10. After the interview, the teams report in class, orally and/or in writing. Depending on the media available, this could be by handout, wall newspaper or electronic document. Now is the time to refer to the context that gave rise to the interview. Have we received the information we needed? What have we learned? What new questions have arisen?
11. The students should also review the process and the skills they have acquired, and the problems they have incurred. This will give the teacher important feedback for planning future tasks.

### Planning sheet for an interview team

Interview with \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Time available per group: \_\_\_\_\_ minutes.

Team no \_\_\_\_\_ Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Team members:

No.	Key question	Interviewer	Note-taker
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			

## Toolbox for teachers

### Tool 5. Defining competence-based teaching objectives<sup>47</sup>

1. Curriculum standard (only one):		
2. Please answer the following question: What is a student capable of doing when she or he has acquired the competence that you have in mind?		
Description:		
3. Please describe what a student should at least be capable of doing, and then think of more advanced levels of achievement.		
After my students have taken part in the EDC/HRE classes on ... consisting of x lessons ...		
... the least I would expect from every student is that she/he is able to ...	... what I would like my students to be able to do is ...	... actually I hope that my students will be able to ...
“Minimum standard” (acceptable)	“Regular standard” (satisfactory)	“Expert standard” (good)

47. See the chapter in this volume on competences in EDC/HRE. This tool is based on Ziener G (2008), *Bildungsstandards in der Praxis. Kompetenzorientiert unterrichten* (2nd edn), Seelze-Velber, p. 56.

4. First steps to planning EDC/HRE classes		
Objective	Input by the teacher	Student activities, tasks