

Lesson 1

Risk losing a friend – or break a rule?

We face dilemmas everywhere

This matrix sums up the information a teacher needs to plan and deliver the lesson.



Competence training refers directly to EDC/HRE.

The learning objective indicates what students know and understand.

The student task(s), together with the method, form the core element of the learning process.

The materials checklist supports lesson preparation.

The time budget gives a rough guideline for the teacher's time management.

Competence training	Competence in political decision making and action: making choices and giving reasons.	
Learning objective	We are responsible for the choices we make in our everyday lives. Concepts of dilemma and responsibility.	
Student tasks	The students think of the choices they make in everyday dilemma situations and share their reasons.	
Materials and resources	 Materials for teachers 2.1 and 2.2.  Student handouts 2.1 and 2.2.	
Method	Plenary discussion, lecture, group work.	
Time budget	1. The students deal with an everyday dilemma.	10 min
	2. The students are introduced to the tool for dilemma analysis.	20 min
	3. The students share their decisions in the school test dilemma.	10 min

Information box

This lesson introduces the students to the importance, and the necessity, of taking responsibility. In a trial run, so to speak, they apply the tool to reflect on their decisions in taking responsibility, and they are introduced to the key concept of dilemma.

All the students are immediately actively involved through the inductive approach. Within a few minutes, all students in class are thinking about how to solve a dilemma that is familiar to them from their experience in school.

The first lesson deals with the key theme – facing dilemmas, making choices, reflecting on the priorities involved in those choices. Rather than adding additional topics, the following lessons explore this theme of dilemma resolution. Like all the units in this manual, this unit also follows the didactic principle of thorough treatment of a selected piece of subject matter – “Do less, but do it well”. The reason for selecting so little, and omitting so much, is abundant experience. It is the intensity of the learning effort that yields the richest results, not the extensive coverage of ground.

Lesson description

Stage 1: The students think of their choices in everyday situations

 Materials for teachers 2.1

The teacher announces the beginning of a new unit and, as an introduction, tells the following case story.

Imagine the following situation. In your class, a written history test is being held. You are one of the best students in the class in history, and even you think that this test is quite difficult.

Your friend whispers from behind and asks you to show him your test paper. You know that cheating in tests is forbidden, and both you and your friend could be severely punished if you do it.

What would you do? Would you risk losing a friend – or break a rule?

The teacher writes down the dilemma question – the topic of this lesson – onto the blackboard or flipchart.


He/she makes the students aware that their answer must be either yes or no – there is no alternative or intermediate solution, nor can the students communicate – and then asks for a show of hands. The students vote, and the teacher records the results on the blackboard or flipchart.

A discussion round follows. The students give their reasons, and after some minutes the teacher sums up the points on the board. We may expect arguments like the following:

Would you risk losing a friend – or rather break a rule?	
Yes (vote x)	No (vote y)
<p>Good friends always help each other.</p> <p>I will need help from friends too one day.</p> <p>We need help from each other. It would be a cold unfriendly world in which no one cares for the other.</p> <p>...</p>	<p>Cheating is unfair on those who stick to the rules.</p> <p>By cheating I risk being punished myself. Friends should not expect that from each other.</p> <p>It depends on the friend how big the risk is. I can talk to a good friend, and he/she will respect my decision.</p> <p>...</p>

Stage 2: The students are introduced to the tool for dilemma analysis

 Student handouts 2.1 and 2.2

The teacher distributes  student handouts 2.1 and 2.2 to the students and introduces the dilemma concept (handout 2.1) in a brief lecture. The arguments that the students have used outline a conflict of loyalties: either I stay loyal to my friends when they ask me for help, or I follow the rules because they guarantee equal chances for everyone in a school test. The reasons that the students have given – and may be expected to give – refer to values: my understanding of friendship, loyalty, willingness to help others, fairness, respect for rules and law.

Now I face a situation in which I am going to violate one of these ties of loyalty, and the values underlying it – either I risk losing a friend and my reputation may suffer, or I risk punishment, and I may have a bad conscience because I broke a rule that I actually support. This type of situation, in which you can only choose what to do wrong, rather than doing everything right, is called a dilemma. This example is typical for many dilemmas:

- No compromise is possible. You must define your priority.
- Time pressure forces you to act immediately, which makes it difficult to consider your decision carefully.

- You cannot change your decision later, so its effects are irreversible.
- You take responsibility – both you and others must cope with the consequences.

In our everyday lives, just as in political decision making, we constantly face dilemmas. Handling such dilemmas is difficult, because the issues are often complicated, and we must act under time pressure.

However, solving dilemmas and reflecting on our responsibility is, to a certain extent, a skill that can be trained. Training takes place in a slow motion mode, as it were. We spend a few lessons on the consideration of dilemmas that must be settled immediately in real life situations.

✍ Student handout 2.2 offers a tool to help deal with dilemmas. The students are given the task of applying this tool to the school test issue. Taking approximately 5 to 10 minutes, the students should therefore select between one and three questions that they think are relevant and useful, and consider these carefully. They should make a decision and share their reason(s) in the plenary round which will follow. They work in groups of three or four.

Stage 3: The students share their decisions on the school test dilemma

In the concluding plenary round, the group speakers present their groups' decisions and the priorities that led to them. The teacher chairs the session and pays particular attention to the students' choices of questions and criteria.

To conclude the lesson, the teacher comments on this point, making the students aware of their shared, or different, priorities. By thinking about the priorities that guide their decisions, the students are taking responsibility.