TEACHING PATTERNS AND TRENDS

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OUTLINE

Teaching patterns and trends are important issues to be careful about while implementing the assignments in a classroom environment. That's mostly because the assignments include lots of patterns and trends that need to be correctly understood by the pupils so that using the assignments you can reach the aims mentioned in the curriculum framework.

In the following paper you will find information about how the teaching of patterns and trends was achieved with the religion assignments. Firstly, we will take a closer look at patterns and trends as they are defined in the curriculum framework. Secondly, we will explain why it is important to use patterns and trends in the assignments. Then we will describe why the teaching of patterns and trends is important (or not, if it be the case). We will then show how the teaching of patterns and trends features in the original assignments and show the strengths and weaknesses using examples from our experience with the assignments. Then we will describe how the student teachers adapted the assignment in order to teach patterns and trends and we will give some examples of how they taught it in the classroom and what methods they used to do so. Finally we will present some suggestions of how the assignments could be improved.

DEFINITION

Teaching patterns and trends can be interpreted in many ways. So in order for us to understand its meaning in the context of this project we will use the definition given in the curriculum framework. In the curriculum framework teaching about patterns and trends is explained as follows:

Describing differences (and recognising similarities) — *Pupils need to be able to recognise patterns and trends as they appear in the maps of Atlas of European Values. These patterns*

may be, for example, spatial, social, cultural or economical, and as such pupils may require some specialist support (either through their teacher or through engagement with relevant theories and ideas) in recognising, and identifying them.

For most of the student teachers this explanation in the curriculum framework was really clear. They say they understand what is said in the framework, but they were not really clear about how the teaching of patterns and trends was put into practice in the assignments. For them the assignments were a bit too vague about how this should be done.

The thing they missed (in the curriculum framework or maybe also in the oral explanations of their lecturers) was a guideline on how to teach these patterns and trends in the classroom. In some assignments it was clear but in others it was not as clear (as we will see later).

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT (OR NOT) TO TEACH ABOUT PATTERNS AND TRENDS? WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF TEACHING PATTERNS AND TRENDS?

We think it is important to train pupils to recognise patterns and trends. There are several reasons that can be put forward to support this view.

» *Firstly, if pupils are able to see the differences and similarities between countries, they will perhaps start to wonder, why things are different (or similar) in some places. At least, that is what seems to be expected, if you look at the tasks following the consideration of patterns and trends in the assignment. The aim is to make the pupils curious about these differences and similarities and to make them discuss about them. They should become more open minded, more understanding of other places and other cultures and realise that the world is full of different places and views other than their own.*

» *Once they are aware of these 'cultural' differences they will also be able to communicate with others more easily, which will be a huge advantage for them in their lives. This is a good way to make them see differences and similarities they have not been aware of before. Often you only see differences when you visit or communicate with people from other places and it seems better if you have an idea of the differences before you go.*

» *Also if they have to look at the differences and similarities and they are stimulated to see patterns and trends in this, they will be able to explain these differences and similarities. They will be able to see, why these patterns and trends exist. It is about developing their knowledge.*

» *Another point that is really important about the teaching of patterns and trends is that it develops a lot of different skills. This is not something they can just fill in and don't have to think about. They will have to go through some distinctive steps*

when they have to describe patterns and trends: They will have to know where to look, they will have to compare different maps and then they will have to look for a pattern in them. This can be quite hard for some pupils as these skills seem not to be used very often.

» *Finally, after the whole procedure they should reflect on what they have done and how they have done it. This might then lead to critical thinking.*

All these different reasons can actually also be considered as weaknesses of the approach because of all the different steps and skills pupils need. Some pupils will find patterns harder to see than others. But we can question this critique because maybe it is not a bad thing to also learn such skills, which are not trained very often.

HOW WERE PATTERNS AND TRENDS OFFERED IN THE ORIGINAL ASSIGNMENTS?

When the student teachers received the assignments, they all saw that there were some patterns in them, which they could use in the classroom.

In most of the assignments the tables and maps are supported by tasks that should help the pupils to recognise patterns and to draw conclusions from them.

WHAT DID THE STUDENT TEACHER CHANGE IN PRACTICE? HOW DID IT GO?

The very first problem that the student teachers had was about the 'Teacher Notes'. They were expecting more explanations about the patterns, some practical clues for the classroom implementation or even some hints for using the maps with the help of technology. However, in most of the assignments, the teachers' notes on describing patterns were not detailed enough and sometimes they were not useful at all. Also the explanations given in the teachers' notes about the tables and the maps were considered to be too complicated for the pupils. The level of English in the assignments is high and too sophisticated for the pupils.

Furthermore, the assignments assume that the pupils are experienced in reading maps, graphs and so on. However, in our classes, it turned out that there are always a few pupils who don't know how to read the maps and draw conclusions. So, at some point, the pupils were confused and slow in understanding what the maps meant and how to complete the whole task.

When this happened, the student teachers had to introduce some adaptations. For example, they divided the task into smaller parts to make the sequence of steps needed more explicit. This made it easier for the pupils to follow and to understand.

Another strategy that the student teachers used was that they gave the explanations first and then asked questions to see whether the students got the instruction right. Some student teachers used games like the traffic light game to help students interpret the graphs and tables. This way, they made pupils look at the maps more closely and compare them. The pupils were asked to hold up the green card if they saw a pattern in these maps or a red card if they didn't see a pattern.

Also the student teachers simplified some of the explanations by repeating them in other words. When they realised that there were pupils lacking the basic skills, the student teachers first taught them what the maps were showing.

Some criticisms coming from the student teachers were that sometimes there were too many maps and they didn't have enough time. So, they had to skip some tasks and also some maps and graphs to fit the assignment into the time schedule. This brought with it the difficulty of deciding which tasks they definitely had to keep. They would have liked some alternatives being prepared for the student teachers to make it easier to adapt the whole assignment in different lessons with different time restrictions. Because of these restrictions the student teachers felt they didn't have enough time to go into detail and to discuss the issues with the pupils.

Another criticism about the usage of maps and tables in the assignments was that the people who prepared the assignments sometimes seem to have misinterpreted the maps. Also, some maps and tables included seemed unnecessary.

The student teachers advised that maybe next time, the maps should be prepared and printed in a better way because sometimes pupils had difficulty in understanding them just because of their appearance on the paper.

The lecturers who prepared these assignments seemed to have assumed that all the pupils would know the names of the countries on the map. However, in practice, it was clear that some of them didn't know. This is acceptable when we bear in mind that they are secondary school students. So, it would be better, if the names of the countries were provided on the maps as well. This is what the student teachers suggested generally. Student teachers had this problem in Turkish schools as well.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING PATTERNS AND TRENDS

As we can see from the instances and explanations provided above, there is a certain need for improving the teaching of patterns and trends in the assignments. This need mainly arose due to two reasons: the first reason can be traced back to the organisation and nature of the patterns and trends in general. The second one is mainly due to the mismatch between the intellectual levels of the pupils and the structure of the patterns and trends in the assignments. In the following paragraphs you will find specific suggestions to make the teaching of patterns and trends more applicable and feasible.

The first suggestion is that there should be some guidelines as to how to make use of patterns and trends in the assignments. Although the patterns and trends are structured

quite well on the whole, pupils in the classrooms had some problems in understanding how to make sense of the patterns and trends. That is why it might be a good idea to have some useful, clear guideline which indicates the way the pupils should make use of and interpret patterns and trends. We saw that, for example, some pupils did not know how to use maps and interpret them. This might also be traced back to the intellectual levels of students because clearly some of the assignments could not be implemented with the target group of pupils stated in the assignments. The teacher students believe that it might be a good idea to have these kinds of guidelines just to avoid this kind of a problem. One way to achieve this may be by providing tentative patterns and trends. An example is that pupils could be asked to do some kind of interpretation work before they move on to the real tasks, which include patterns and trends in the assignment.

Secondly, most of the student teachers indicated that they preferred to have pupils interpret the patterns and trends themselves. In other words, instead of directly explaining what is shown in the maps, graphs and tables, they firstly asked them what they saw in the maps and what they believed these maps etc. indicated. However, they state that students were not successful at drawing conclusions and making generalisations using patterns and trends. Nevertheless, we also know that it is not a good idea to present information directly to pupils for the purposes of this project. That is why we believe that providing student teachers with some useful hints how to encourage pupils to find the information on patterns and trends on their own might be a good idea. In this way, we would not only realise deductive learning but we would foster critical thinking as well. Additionally, student teachers can fall back on these hints when students get stuck while interpreting patterns and trends.

Thirdly, student teachers point out that pupils, especially young ones, have a hard time understanding the academic language presented in the assignments, even the term 'pattern'. So the language used in the tasks that include interpretations of patterns and trends could be simplified just to make sure that student teachers will not lose time explaining the terms present in the assignments.

And finally, we believe that it is not really a good idea to ask students to find patterns and trends in maps, graphs etc. when there are no patterns or trends.

We believe that if patterns and trends are organised and structured in light of the suggestions we presented above, the teaching of them will be a lot more feasible and applicable.