

RELATING TO THE STUDENTS

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Our goal is to explain the principle of relating to the pupils and to relate it to the strategies and their aims.

First of all, we have to clarify what relating to the pupils means. Relating to the pupils means that you provide them with explanations and examples of their own surroundings. To do that, they get some time to think about the situation on their own at the beginning of a lesson or new topic. Then they can compare their findings with those of the others in order to make it more interesting and valuable for them. Thereby, they may develop a stronger feeling of being a part of the lesson.

The first step gives them opportunity to compare the topic with their experiences, so it becomes more recognizable for them. Thereby they realise that they already knew the answer. Due to the exchange of different opinions, they get to know what the rest of the class thinks about the issue and what they feel about the topic. So, they can see that their classmates' opinions are sometimes similar to and sometimes different from their own opinion. Generally speaking, they can relate all those answers to their own.

Every lesson should incorporate this principle. Thus, pupils can relate the topic to their own place, home, surroundings and in this case, to their own values (and to compare their own values or their family values to the countries' values).

Most members of our student teacher group said, that they understood this principle quite well. They think that because they have also been pupils, they can easily relate topics to the pupils, as they know what pupils feel and think. They think they can straightforwardly identify with them, because they have been in the same situation.

Most of the student teachers thought the strategies were nice and really different from what pupils are used to. This is also mirrored in the evaluation results

that were very positive about the strategies. Most of the pupils told us that the strategies were very ‘cool’. To us this means that the strategies themselves helped to reach the aim of relating to students.

Nevertheless, it is up to teacher to make them fit into the lesson or help reach the aim because the strategies are rather general and the teacher has to change them, so they fit the purpose. The use of the strategies did work quite well in all of the lessons that we held because most of the times the pupils gave us the correct answers. They were good at giving their opinions and compare them with the results shown in the map and the overall view of the country. Some pupils were shy, but when you gave them the chance to think about the statement for a second and then give the answer, the whole lesson worked quite well. If necessary the Slovak student teachers could translate difficult words or sentences either into Slovak or English to help the pupils make up their minds or state their opinions.

In this lesson they have learnt to listen to the opinions and statements of other classmates and they have also learnt to tolerate different opinions of other people about the same issue. They have learnt that they should not be intimidated by other opinions and just state their own opinion because everybody’s opinion has to be valued.



Picture 1: Pupils discussing family values

They have also learnt that it is fine to have a different opinion from the rest of the country. Every student teacher in our group taught that the results of the interviews which are shown in the maps are average results of a certain country. Thus, they do not have to be of the same opinion because an average value means that not everyone thinks like that. It is also possible that someone has a more positive or a more negative attitude towards some issues. Pupils should not only

believe that they have freedom of speech, but they should have good arguments for their opinions and they have to consider the opinions of someone else as well.

To achieve this understanding we take two steps: First they compare their attitudes and values to the values of their classmates and then to the values of their country, that is the Slovak people.

The first step can be achieved for example by using the traffic light game. This strategy allows them to voice their own opinion and find out about their classmates' opinions without being influenced by these opinions because everybody should raise their colour simultaneously. Then they move on to the view of the people of the village they are living in, and when they have compared that, they will explore the view of their region. Then they examine the view of the country and when they compared this, they can go to the maps to see what people from other countries think about that topic. Afterwards, they can think about what they have written down and why their opinion differs from the opinion of their country, or why it is similar.

Most of the student teachers started with an attractive question and appealed to the pupils to take part in the lesson. Just to *give the pupils an understanding of the topic*, they converted the theory into informal activities. So, it was easier for them to take part in the latter.



Picture 2: Student teacher trying out one of the strategies

For example, the strategy intelligent guesswork was used by many student teachers, and everybody said this was suitable to relate the topic to the pupils. It is a strategy which aims at getting the pupils more involved with the facts and figures shown in the maps of the Atlas of European Values. The pupils receive a table with either the names of some countries or the data for a number of countries, with the other column missing respectively. They have to fill in the missing information by guessing what might belong where. So, they have to identify with some other

pupils from other countries. This strategy combines many positive aspects. First of all, the pupils have to think of their own, and have to consider what other pupils of their age-group think about the same topic. Furthermore, they have to identify with others which is a good way for pupils to relate one thing to another.

It has to be stressed that in our opinion the most important issue to relate to the pupils is an understanding of the topic of 'values'. It is essential for this values-project because it is a difficult topic which is very abstract.

STRATEGIES

A strategy is also an activity that is used during lessons. Most of us used the traffic light game which allows students to express their own opinions and at the same time see whether others hold similar or different views. The groups discussed the topics a lot as they all had different views, In our experience, this activity does not work as an initial activity because the pupils were very shy and did not know what to say. In some groups this activity worked pretty well because the pupils were interested in the questions and statements, which we used. To summarize, we can say that this strategy depends on the statements and questions used with it. Therefore, the choice has to be done carefully. The questions have to be simple and comprehensible for pupils. In order to succeed with this strategy, their attention has to be caught. Afterwards, another strategy which has to be included in the lesson is chosen. This is sometimes very difficult because we have only a small amount of time.

Another strategy that was used is called intelligent guess work. The pupils had to think about differences or similarities of opinions on a specific topic in a number of different European countries and had to give reasons for it. Then, they compare it to the data represented in the maps. While they were discussing the differences between their opinions and the data shown in the maps, the pupils had to try to understand reasons for why the study produced certain results as shown in the maps. The pupils had the possibility to see and understand different points of view on different issues concerning European values. As there is not one correct answer but many possibilities, it was sometimes hard to stop them to talking. The pupils were interested in the topic and wanted to give the right answer, so they were thinking about it too much. This activity helped to catch their attention. It is very good to use this activity at the beginning of the lesson because it provides them with time to adapt to a new topic.

The third activity which was mainly used in our lessons is the fish bowl. It is a method that can be used for discussing a topic and involving a relatively big group. Yet, this activity was modified by the student teachers because it is sometimes too difficult to organise it according to the given rules. Therefore, we just formed three or four groups and provided them with five questions which

they had to discuss. The time limit for performing the task was seven minutes. Afterwards, one pupil of each group moved to another group and they discussed the questions in the new constellation. After some time everybody was back with the same group from which he or she had started and told his or her home group of the different opinions of each group and after learning about these attitudes they could change their opinions or not. This activity is useful in a big class where pupils like to work in smaller group to tell others their opinions. This helps them to overcome their shyness because it is easier than talking in front of the whole class.

Living map is another activity we used in our teaching process. It is based on the maps and a real context that allows making connections between the abstraction of the map and the stories of people. It is also a very good activity because pupils had to work with the map and then connect it to their own opinions. There are several options possible. Pupils have to know how to read maps or how to analyse them. Furthermore, they have several statements from people of different countries and they have to match a statement with the right country. In our opinion, most pupils liked the guessing part because they want to find more correct answers than their classmates. This activity led to long discussions between pupils and student teachers when the correct matches were displayed.

As we can clearly see there are several strategies which we can use in our teaching. When one of our activities does not work we have to choose another one in a very short time. For that reason it is good for teachers to know a great number of activities and choose the one that fits best to his or her pupils because when it does not work then pupils may keep quiet and not express their own opinions.

FEEDBACK FROM PUPILS AND STUDENT TEACHERS

During our lessons we tried to include the principle of relating to pupils and used suitable strategies in order to fulfil our aims. At the end of the lesson we went through the pupils' evaluation forms and discussed our feelings about teaching. In this section we would like to present some positive and negative comments of pupils, as well as student teachers, and give some suggestions as to how teaching could be improved.

The pupils' evaluations revealed that most of the pupils appreciated to have an opportunity to express their opinions freely and also to find out about the attitudes of other people. The lessons in Slovak schools are usually taught in a traditional way, so for the pupils it was an extraordinary lesson and they enjoyed the strategies. Many pupils were interested in the lessons because they proceeded in a different way than the traditional ones, which are usually full of facts and pupils feel overloaded with information. They were sometimes so interested in the discussion that it took too much time and it was not concluded properly. Pupils

were especially willing to discuss when the question or statement was controversial and they had opposite opinions to those of others. The pupils also liked the organisation of the lessons. They could work in small groups (for example with the snowball strategy) and share their opinions at first within small groups of people who they knew. So, they were not as embarrassed as they could be when expressing opinions in front of the whole class. The pupils also thought that information was more practical and more useful than information presented during usual lessons. They claimed that they learnt new facts about Europe and gained a better perspective on European countries and their values. Moreover, they could relate it to their own country. The pupils also admitted that it is necessary to be tolerant and accept other opinions although it is sometimes very difficult as everybody is different. They enjoyed the strategies and they considered them interesting and useful.

On the other hand, some pupils wrote that they are not used to expressing their opinions and feelings so they felt uneasy when they were supposed to present their attitudes publically. Some pupils wrote that they did not know what to say because they did not know anything about the issue (the pupils were about 18 years old). For others it was difficult to express their opinion about controversial statements such as abortion and divorce. They felt really uncomfortable and found it very difficult to discuss such a topic even in their mother tongue. Sometimes, pupils were not interested in the topic family and therefore they did not want to participate in discussions. Some pupils did not like generalizations and they preferred to present their opinions individually. They would have appreciated it if the lesson was a bit longer so that they could all participate in the discussion. They also admitted that their level of English was a barrier in communication and even though they thought they had some good ideas they were not able to express them clearly.

While discussing our feelings about the lessons we found that the choice of the lesson focus question is really difficult and it must be done properly, otherwise it may cause serious problems. We think that all of us had the experience that pupils are not interested in the topic or do not have an idea on what to say. Another aspect was the creation of a positive and friendly atmosphere. It was vital to do that, so that pupils did not feel uneasy and we think that working in small groups secured this safe environment. It was also useful to appoint a speaker in each group who should summarise the opinions of the whole group. We also agreed on the fact that this principle is very useful for teaching how to be tolerant, how to express opinions politely and also accept other points of view and maybe change them.

After the student teachers' evaluations, we would like to give some suggestions. Firstly, we would like to suggest that some background knowledge should be provided for pupils, so that they can base their opinions and estimations on something relevant. Secondly, each lesson should consist of a pre-task and an

after-task part. It is necessary to prepare pupils for the activity so that they are engaged with the topic and we should also try to activate their previous knowledge of the subject. Moreover, the role of the pre- and after-task should not be underestimated. It is necessary to summarise all points so that they get a clear picture of what they learnt during the lesson. Thirdly, the organisation of pupils should vary: at first they should work individually, then in pairs or small groups and after this as a whole class. They would share their opinions more willingly if they had a chance to discuss within groups at first. And finally, it is advisable to have a second plan just in case that something does not work as it should. In that case the teacher can make use of extra activities which might be more suitable for the needs of the class.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that relating to the pupils is important because then the lesson is more interesting and valuable for them and you really let them feel comfortable and they feel like being a part of the lesson.