

# DEVELOPING LESSONS

Diana Povalačová, Marjon Leffers, Evelien Scheepens

This part will deal with how we created the lessons, how the lessons went and what the reactions to the lessons were.

## STRUCTURE OF THE ASSIGNMENT

Before the Dutch students left for Slovakia, there had been a two hours consultation with our mentors in the respective countries. During these meetings we received some input about the project, the strategies and some background information. Our task was to read through it and think about which strategies we would like to use. When both student groups met in Banská Bystrica for the first time, we had four hours to develop our lesson, after we had received more general information. We were provided with two questions, which were: What kind of place is Europe, and what kind of place would you like it to be? What kind of society is Europe, and what kind of society would you like it to be? These questions were the main theme of our project, which during this exchange were exemplified by the topic family. With this information in mind, we had to find our lesson focus, using the maps from the Atlas of European Values, the principles and the strategies which we received beforehand.

## BEFORE THE LESSON

On our first day we had a couple of hours to prepare the lessons. Most of the groups browsed through the maps to find a topic for their lesson. After having chosen a topic it was difficult for most of the groups to formulate a good lesson

focus question that was expected to have pith and rigour (as we learned during the information meeting, pith and rigour means: making a question attractive, so that pupils want to answer it, and that it is grounded in the subject (Taylor<sup>1</sup>)). After having formulated a lesson focus question we started making our lesson plan and started choosing strategies for our lesson plan. The most popular strategies which were used in the lessons were the traffic light game, the fish bowl, intelligent guesswork and living maps. Some other strategies, which were used were role-plays and the four-corner method. We chose our strategies by looking at the stages (relating to students, describing differences, deepening understanding, and developing critical perspectives) and thus we saw which strategies would suit each stage and thereby ultimately reaching the aims of the project. We received a format in which we had to write the lesson plan. In this format we had to explain how we were going to use our strategies. However, some of us decided to adapt and modify some of the strategies, in order to make them more suitable for their own lesson. According to the lesson plan format we had to state the overarching question which we received from our mentor. Furthermore, we had to fill in the thematic question and to facilitate this, examples were provided. Then we had to write down the rationale and an explanation of how the questions are connected with the subject. The next thing we had to state was the lesson focus question. Most of us used at least two strategies for their lesson and some of us used three, depending on the length of the lesson. In the lesson format we had to describe the strategies. The description had to include what the teacher was going to do, what he or she expected from the pupils and the actual assignment which was given to the pupils. Furthermore, debriefing questions had to be defined, in order to find out if the pupils understood the assignment and what they learnt from it. Some strategies required a worksheet, which we also had to prepare. We had the opportunity to use our creativity and imagination while preparing the assignment and worksheets. In the worksheets we also had to state the thematic and lesson focus questions and an explanation of what was expected from them in the assignment. We also had to prepare some educational aids like the coloured cards for the traffic light game or the grids and tables, which were used for several strategies. After having completed all these steps we also had to create a PowerPoint presentation which we used as a visual aid for teaching and showing some of the maps. Therefore, some of us did not use a worksheet but included the assignments in the PowerPoint presentation.

Afterwards we received background information about the class which we were going to teach. We came to know the amount of time, as well as the age and grade of the pupils and also what kind of class it would be, for example, a geography class or an English class. So, we did not know anything about the pupils' level of English and which skills and background knowledge they already possessed. For the Dutch student teachers it was very difficult to have an idea about what

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1 Source: [http://flot.presentations2go.eu/P2GTV/viewer.html?path=Flot/2010/11/17/2/video\\_post.wmv&time=21182](http://flot.presentations2go.eu/P2GTV/viewer.html?path=Flot/2010/11/17/2/video_post.wmv&time=21182).

the pupils were going to be like. Both the Slovak student teachers as well as the Dutch student teachers were not used to teaching 17 to 19 year old pupils.



Figure 1: The first day creating our lessons

## DURING THE LESSON

Overall each group had to hold two lessons in the course of two days. The first day was very exciting because nobody knew what to expect from the lesson. Immediately, some of us experienced some unexpected situations with the PowerPoint. One group could not use the PowerPoint at all and had to be flexible and use their lesson plan format as a visual aid for the pupils. Another unexpected situation was that the pupils' level of English was not too good at some schools. This caused some problems with the time management because a lot had to be translated into Slovak and from Slovak into English. Due to the shyness of some pupils, it was also very difficult to get them talking which resulted in some very difficult discussions. Nevertheless, we gave them the opportunity to express themselves in Slovak, which made it somewhat easier for them. However, because of the language barrier, the length and intensity of the discussions were sometimes short and superficial, and not as profound as we had aimed for. Due to the fact that we were not aware of the duration of some of the strategies beforehand, it was hard for us to plan our time. Some strategies took more time than we expected and some were much shorter. Thus, most of us had a back-up plan or extra strategies prepared. Those students who did not prepare this had to improvise (so some Dutch words were taught to the Slovak pupils, or they could ask questions about

the Netherlands). As a trigger for discussions we made use of various questions (some which came from the Atlas of European Values or modifications of these questions, others were debriefing questions which belonged to the strategies) in which we tried to stimulate further discussions. We asked for examples of their reasons and asked controversial questions (trying to imagine the opinion of someone who thinks the opposite) to provoke their thinking. This was one way of lengthening discussions, so the pupils would not only have the chance to answer with yes or no, but they actually had to think about why they feel this way. Another way to lengthen discussions was to ask them why people in another country would think differently. Regarding the organisation of the discussions, most of us decided to form smaller groups or pairs in which the pupils would feel more comfortable to state their opinion. Most of us had the feeling that the pupils really enjoyed the discussions. During the feedback, some pupils stated that it was nice to do something different and that they liked being involved in the process of teaching, instead of just listening.

Some groups of student teachers thought that they did not have enough background information concerning some situations in various countries (e.g. history, economy, culture and religion). Because when the pupils asked them questions, they found it difficult to answer them. In addition, the maps were sometimes difficult to read and especially the legends were occasionally rather confusing. The theories and explanations we had received from one of the researchers from the University of Tilburg gave us some chance to answer the questions but not completely. The information we received helped us while planning the lesson and helped us to decide which strategies we could use.

Owing to the fact that the second lesson was the following day, we had some time to adapt our second lesson. This was very useful because now we were able to improve our lessons. Besides, now we knew what we could expect from the pupils and plan our time more efficiently. At the beginning of the lesson we tried to create a comfortable atmosphere by telling the pupils not to be afraid of speaking up (telling them whatever they feel cannot be wrong) and also having a more suitable classroom by rearranging the seating into a U-shape. In some cases the student teachers had to alter the time of their lesson. Some had to shorten their lesson from 90 to 45 minutes by skipping some strategies (the ones that did not work so well) and some had to lengthen their lesson from 45 to 90 minutes by adding some strategies.

We were also asked us about embarrassing moments while teaching, but when looking at the evaluations of our fellow students, they hardly had any embarrassing moments. The only problem that could be seen as an embarrassing moment was the pupils' silence caused by their shyness, which arose immediately after the student teachers asked a question.

## AFTER THE LESSON

When we asked the question ‘Which idea did you have for your lesson beforehand, and how did it go finally?’ most student teachers responded in a positive manner. In general, all of us were very positive about their second lesson because we had some time to adjust the lesson plan of the first day.

At the end of every lesson all groups asked the pupils to write down their impressions, as well as answers to evaluation questions like: Did you like the lesson? What did you like/dislike? What did you learn? Moreover, we asked them to answer the lesson focus question at the end, so that we could be sure if they understood the lesson and what they had learnt. Some of the pupils’ comments were ineffective (e.g. I liked the teachers shoes, or I liked the teachers perfume) and some were not very informative (e.g. I liked the lesson because it was interesting). However, we also received some good critical comments (e.g. use pictures to make it clearer), but mostly if we asked the pupils to be critical they were critical towards themselves (e.g. sorry our English was bad, we were too shy and did not speak that much).

## CONCLUSION

The day after the lessons, we were asked to evaluate ourselves in such a way that we had to express our opinion about the preparation and about the lessons. This was done in form of a diagram where we had to place ourselves on two lines (horizontal: lesson, vertical: lesson preparation), according to our perception of the whole process. Most of us were satisfied with both aspects.

Overall, we can conclude that it was a very interesting, inspiring and educational experience which gave us a lot of new information, motivation, and a good starting point to further our teaching career.