

DEVELOPING LESSONS ON THE BASIS OF LESSON PLANS/STRATEGIES

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This chapter aims at supplying information about the following points:

- » *How to develop lesson plans and choose strategies.*
- » *The aims of the lesson plans in general.*
- » *Whether these aims were reached or not.*
- » *If so, how did the strategies help; if not, what were the problems.*
- » *The quality of the lesson plans and strategies as well as of additional information.*
- » *The difficulties experienced during teaching.*
- » *Adaptations applied to the lesson plans.*
- » *How student teachers feel about the lesson plans and strategies overall.*
- » *Whether the student teachers would want to use the strategies in their future classes.*

DEVELOPING LESSON PLANS AND CHOOSING STRATEGIES

During this second exchange, we did not use complete assignments as was done during the first exchange. This approach had proved to be difficult as the assignments were quite comprehensive and therefore needed profound modifications to be done in just one lesson. And to change them that way turned out to be too time consuming. For that reason the approach was changed and this time the student

teachers developed their own lesson plans by combining two or three strategies out of twelve different strategies offered.

The Turkish group developed three new strategies which are star diagram, chessboard, and press conference. Some of the other strategies, as the traffic light game, the snowball and a variety of the picture frame were tested before during the German-Slovakian exchange when German student teachers introduced them to the assignments. Some of the new strategies were the fishbowl, the four corner method, living map, role play and the silent debate. These latter activities were mainly used as main activities because the use of these strategies takes more time (around 20–25 minutes) than other tested strategies like brain writing, intelligent guesswork, the traffic lights game, the star-diagram and what would happen, if ... (that lasted approximately ten minutes).

To be able to prepare a lesson plan for forty or forty-five minutes and at the same time to test all of the strategies, the student teachers staged an election process and each pair chose their own activities in a democratic way. In the end each pair selected a main activity and at least one smaller strategy, for example a starter activity. After determining the activities, each pair created their own lesson focus question as for example ‘How important is it for European citizens to get married?’ under the general heading of the thematic question ‘Is Europe a place where family is considered to be important?’ Then, each group decided which maps of the Atlas of European Values they wanted to use and which materials they could benefit from such as using different country flags for the press conference and preparing red, yellow and green cards for the traffic light game.

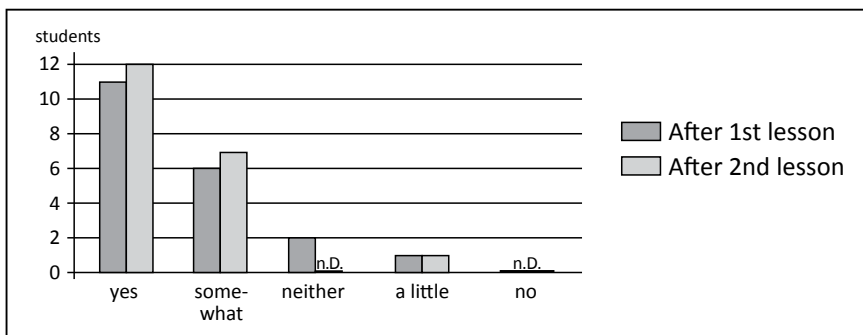
THE AIMS OF THE LESSON PLANS IN GENERAL

The aim of the lesson plans was to help the pupils learn more about the diverse family values in different European countries. To achieve this, they should use the maps of the Atlas of European Values, which show data related to these values and understand the differences and similarities presented in the maps. Furthermore, pupils should be enabled to realize that ideas and values are not stable and even vary from person to person. Finally, pupils should be enabled to critically think about these variations using pair or group work and class discussions.

STRATEGIES AS A MEANS TO ACHIEVE THE AIMS OF THE LESSON PLANS

Based on the data collected from the student teachers on whether they think that they have achieved their aims during their lessons in the schools or not, graph 1 has been created.

As can be seen in the chart, most of the student teachers feel that they have achieved their aims. The lessons they held took place on two different days and this provided an advantage for some student teachers who felt that they did not achieve their aims in their first lesson. They revised their lesson plans or strategies and in their second lesson, they were more successful in realizing the aims of their lesson plan.



Graph 1: Student teachers' responses to whether they achieved the aims of their lesson plans

The main reasons for some student teachers to change their rating from 'a little' and 'neither' to 'yes' after their second lesson were their adaptations to the lesson plan.

In addition to the pupils' motivation and choice of strategies, the most important reason for failing to achieve the aims was time limitation, which was pointed out by nearly every student teacher. This is also closely linked to the pupils' lack of background information. One of the student teachers' suggestions was that they needed to hold an extra lesson where they only teach the background information. This would lead to a deeper understanding of values, increase pupils' participation in discussions and make them think more critically.

According to all student teachers, the choice of an appropriate strategy was the key to achieve the aims of a lesson plan. Some strategies that were seen to be very successful were international press conference, intelligent guesswork and the traffic light game, whereas the group that worked with the four corner method thought it was a failure. This was due to the fact that the grounding of this strategy proved to be difficult and the explanations for the strategy were inadequate.

On the other hand, some student teachers came up with different ideas to achieve their aims and succeeded using them. Giving the pupils additional information about the project and background information when necessary were the main ideas of these student teachers. They used them in order to motivate students or to increase their energy for the tasks. According to the evaluation forms of the student teachers' and pupils' feedback on the lesson, the strategies and lesson plans created a collaborative and interactive learning atmosphere. Furthermore, most

of the strategies worked well with the pupils and therefore led to the achievement of their aims.

EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF LESSON PLANS

Although the student teachers had to find out how to best combine maps and strategies, some student teachers stated afterwards that the preparation of the lesson was easy, because of the well-explained strategies. Some also found that the strategies were easily adaptable to their group of pupils in relation to their age or level of knowledge. This means that most of the strategies were easy to understand for the pupils, but whenever some student teachers observed pupils hesitating to start an activity, they were able to make them work by explaining the strategy again or giving an example of the strategy in action. Another frequently mentioned quality of the strategies was that they helped pupils to come up with their own ideas and empathy.

Not only the strategies, also the main question of each map itself stirred some discussions, because being inhabitants of one of the countries in the map pupils were curious to find out whether they think the same way as the people interviewed.

In a positive way the lesson plans can be said to contain a huge variety of tasks, such as reading and analyzing a map, finding explanations for the differences between countries, developing critical thinking towards the data of the map, learning interaction and discussing during pair or group work etc.

Almost all student teachers stated that it was very important for the success of the lessons to give extra information on the project and on the development of the maps at the very beginning, because the pupils wanted to know more about these things. Nevertheless, the student teachers had not enough time to include all this information in a 45-minute lesson.

DIFFICULTIES DURING LESSONS AND ADAPTATIONS AFTERWARDS

As stated above, time limitation, lack of background information and the pupils' personality were the main problems for the student teachers. Some pupils were tired, sleepy, shy or just indifferent to the student teachers' lessons as stated in some evaluation forms filled in by the student teachers. A few student teachers had difficulties in using English as the common language, because some pupils were not very good at explaining their ideas in a foreign language. However, most of the student teachers allowed pupils to conduct their group discussions in their native languages. Moreover, some pupils had difficulties in reading maps because their geographical knowledge and analysing skills were not developed very well. Last but not least, a pair of student teachers had problems using the projector and

could not show the maps. Instead they decided to simply talk about the results of the maps. They also lost some time in trying to make the projector work.

Of course, the problems that the student teachers experienced do not stem from the pupils' personalities or the schools' profiles. It is necessary to evaluate our own teaching abilities and things we need to improve. According to the evaluation forms, most of the student teachers agreed on their problems relating to time and classroom management. Furthermore, they agreed that if they had behaved more like a self-confident teacher, they would have gotten better results. Some pointed out that they had difficulties in giving instructions and making students listen to them. Most of the student teachers also stated their inability to give background information or explanations for maps, because they were not geography students.

During the discussion and the sharing of ideas about the lessons with other student teachers, the main reasons pointed out for failing to realize the aims of the lesson plans were choosing an inappropriate strategy for their maps or topic, time limitations and lack of adequate explanation for the pupils. On their second try, the student teachers felt that they better achieved their aims thanks to their revised lesson plans and strategies.

However, even though they were not satisfied with some of the strategies, the student teachers preferred not to change the strategy, but instead made some adaptations to the strategy and their instructions. For example, after realising that pupils hesitated in adding comments on the map at the beginning of the silent debate, the pair of student teachers activated the pupils in their second lesson by writing down their own comments first.

Some of the strategies such as four-corner-method were revised more heavily, because it did not work at all in the first lesson. The pair of student teachers felt that pupils had to be more attached to the topic before using the 'four-corner-method' in the second lesson. Therefore, they came up with some explanations relating to the project and an introduction, in which the student teacher asked the pupils if their own mothers were working and if, in case of 'yes', it affected the mother-child-relationship in a negative way (which was also the main question of the map). For the same reason, they tried to analyse the map in more detail in collaboration with the class and included a role play. Actually, after all these adaptations, the four-corner-method worked better, but not good enough to be satisfied with the effort.

STUDENT TEACHERS' OVERALL FEELING ABOUT THEIR WORK

During the discussion of the student teachers after their lessons, all of them agreed that at least one extra lesson should have been used to give the pupils additional background information on the aims of the project, the importance of the data collected, how the maps were made up, and how these maps can be

read. This was due to the fact that after our lessons we realized that teaching was more successful in classes where the student teachers were able to give a little background information on the project's aim and about themselves (for example who they are, why they are in their classroom and so on) than the teaching that was done in classrooms where this kind of information was absent. It can be said that teaching was more successful since the pupils were more eager to participate in class discussions. Also their responses in the general evaluation were more positive, as can be seen in figure 1. To show what the faces were supposed to look like, the student teachers drew a smiley for the negative, neutral, and positive parts respectively, and then the pupils drew one smiley each. This means that none of the pupils were dissatisfied, just two of them were neutral – because of their low level of English, and the others were satisfied.

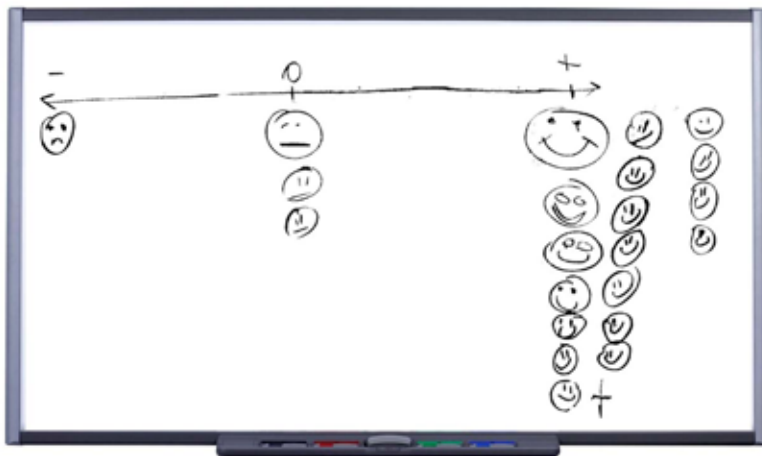


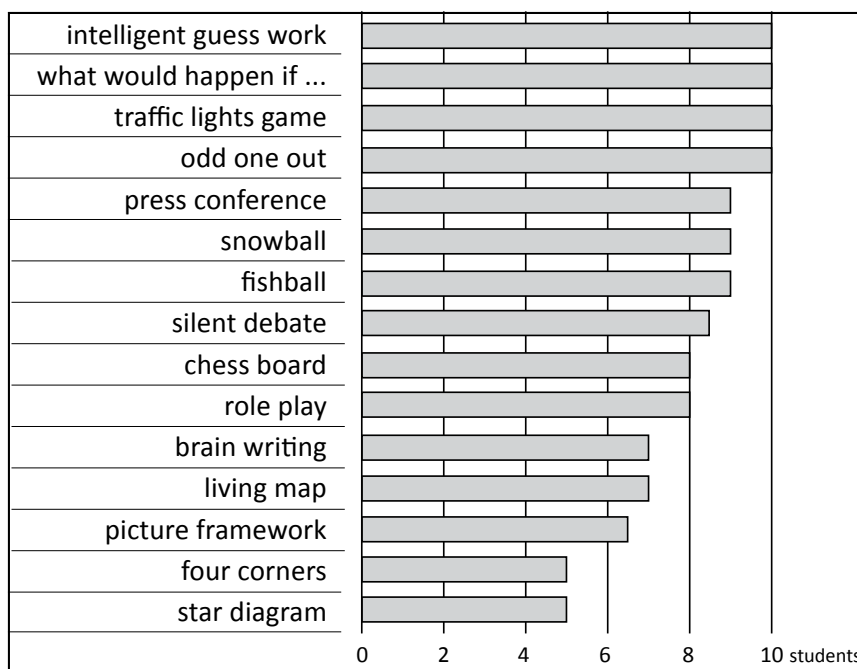
Figure 1: Pupils' evaluation of one of the lessons

However, in other classes the pupils were not interested in the subject matter, played with their mobile phones, chatted with friends, and were not satisfied with the teaching because they could not understand the aims and importance of the project from the beginning.

Some of the student teachers said that the brain-writing-strategy should be modified, since when it is performed in its original form, the pupils get the feeling that the activity finishes in the middle of the discussions. For that reason, at the end of the activity, each group should choose a spokesperson and this pupil should summarise their discussion. Furthermore, it was stated that the four-corner-method and the star diagram were felt to be too complicated for the pupils and they did not work very well, while intelligent guess work, the traffic light game, the role play, odd one out, what would happen, if ..., the fishbowl, the snowball, the chessboard and the press conference worked quite well as can be seen in graph 2. Some student teachers argued that if the aim of this project was

to make the pupils active, talkative and ‘non-silent’, the strategy silent debate should be changed. Furthermore, it was concluded that if sufficient background information was supplied and enough time was given, the strategies rated with low grades could also be applied successfully.

In conclusion, the student teachers agreed that the success of these strategies depends on the length of the lesson, the age of the pupils, their proficiency level in English and their background knowledge.



Graph 2: Student teachers' rating of strategies

USING THE STRATEGIES IN FUTURE CLASSES

Nearly every student teacher would like to work with the strategies in the future. Explanations given for the answer ‘yes’ were, for example, that they are also useful for teaching English or that they are motivating, because mostly there is no ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. Furthermore, some student teachers mentioned that there should be more time for self-preparation as well as discussions afterwards (e.g. after brain writing). One of our group members would use them only in combination with other methods and two student teachers would use all the strategies except the four-corner-method. Only one student answered the question with ‘maybe’ without explaining it any further.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the student teachers' feedback and discussion after their lesson, the following points can be concluded:

- » *At least one extra lesson should be used for providing background information before the actual teaching starts.*
- » *In order to ensure a successful lesson, the strategies should be chosen according to topics, focus question and thematic question, and also the strategies should be related to each other.*
- » *In order to reach ultimate success, the student teachers should make use of different techniques of classroom management, and be careful about pupils' age, motivation, English proficiency, geography knowledge and social background.*
- » *Lesson plans should be prepared considering time limitations and in case of time restriction some adaptations should be made to strategies.*
- » *The usage of maps, coloured paper or technology (power point etc.) makes the lesson content more concrete and helps the pupils to understand it better.*
- » *Generally, it can be said that all student teachers were satisfied with the strategies and lesson plans, so they think they may use them in their future teaching.*