

Use of the portfolio using the example of a class with minority character

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Objective of the Chapter

The research contribution of the Language Teachers' College Opole rested initially on the perception based on observation that despite emphasis on pedagogics, methodology and specialist didactics during teacher training, the aspect of "heterogeneity" is dealt with only superficially or indeed not at all and that teachers are not made aware of this topic. In addition, current educational problems at a national level or specific regional problems are hardly or not at all addressed. So the particular situation of regional bilingualism in the Wojewodschaft Opole is not dealt with either in theory or in practice. The in-class differentiation in pupil support and expectation in German lessons which should result almost never occurs; it is uncommon and often not seen as desirable for pupils to develop an independent style of learning using their own initiative and sustained activity. Pupil decision-making in regard to their learning processes is also usually not encouraged.

Module Part 1: Empirical investigation among student teachers to identify heterogeneity and how it is dealt with using the German ethnic minority in Oppelian Silesia (www.lo.rckjo.opole.pl/new/tipp).

Module Part 2: Compilation of recommendations for teaching conducted using the portfolio in a class with minority character. (the classroom implementation has been completed and documented in films and presentations, www.lo.rckjo.opole.pl/new/tipp).

Module Part 3: Dissemination of results in workshops and lectures as well as inclusion of the results of the investigation in the internal syllabuses of the subjects Pedagogics and Methodology/ Didactics at RCKJO/NKJO Opole. (Internal evaluation at the Institute began in the summer term 2009)

Conclusions for Teaching

Criticism of foreign language teaching is based on insufficient preparation for the teaching profession and the lack of awareness on the part of the teachers for dealing with heterogeneous groups of pupils (in our case sufficient support for pupils from a minority background). Neither discussion of the forms of "heterogeneity" in Polish schools nor options for reacting to them are to be found in most areas of university training. The reason for this deficit is certainly partly a lack of terms in the Polish language for words such as

“heterogeneity”, “teaching support” and “expectation”. An additional reason lies in the different significance of these words with regard to content and metaphysics which often arises from a different perception of the individual in society. These basic differences in significance in terminology were gone into particularly during the initial phases of the TIPP project and a mutual exchange of views was called for.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the study:

1. The pupils of the ethnic German minority learning German in schools in Opole ...

- a. ... do not achieve or extend their command of the language through the available German lessons (DaF).
- b. ... do not on the whole regard German as their mother tongue (☞ Silesian/Polish).
- c. ... have difficulties with standard Polish.
- d. ... do not feel supported and challenged despite many years of language lessons.
- e. ... have too few well-qualified German-language lessons in other subjects.

2. The situation as regards the methodology of German-language teaching in the Wojewodschaft Opole

- emphasis on grammar and translation as the method of teaching is still dominant and largely obstructs communicative German teaching.
- there is no in-class differentiation arising from heterogeneity in German lessons.
- subjective (perceived) and objective (measurable) teacher expectation towards students of German from the ethnic German minority is too low.

3. The term heterogeneity in Poland

- ❖ this term is almost unknown in Polish-language specialized literature.
- ❖ Heterogeneity of classroom groups and treatment of this are largely rejected.
- ❖ The aim of teaching is homogeneity of classroom groups (Everybody should learn the same without any regard to individual capabilities, learning support and interest in learning).
- ❖ Teachers do not have a developed repertoire of methods and have no enterprise although the need for action is recognized.

TIPs for Teachers – suggestions for solving the demonstrated problem of heterogeneity and recommendations for lessons

Here it must be emphasized that use of the portfolio method can and should take place in *all* areas of teaching. I refer in this context particularly to the further references in the bibliography.

At the end of this first empirical phase of the TIPP project it can be stated that in the great majority of schools in Opole, Silesia there is no consideration of particular teaching support and expectation for the pupils of German from the ethnic German minority. As a result of a lack of any diagnostic process, they are taught according to the standards of content and methodology of German as a foreign language. As there are no extensive and precise teaching concepts and recommendation for lessons for German as a minority language, the TIPP project is to be used, in addition to making teachers more aware of this topic (level sustainability of the project results in teacher training), to demonstrate and test didactical alternatives for this situation (level model didactic application in classes with minority character).

With regard to teacher training and in-service training concerning awareness of this topic, we can, at the end of the summer term 2009, point to a relatively broad and sustained range at the Language Teachers' College Opole. Primarily the results of the study and the almost simultaneous implementation (from the winter term 2007/2008 on) of the teaching experiment at the bilingual secondary school of the Regional Centre for Languages in Opole could be included in the first-year pedagogics curriculum. Further, the results were disseminated within the framework of subject-related didactic in-service training for teachers at RCKJI Opole (fuller information on this in the chapter "Internal Evaluation and Dissemination of the Polish Project Contribution" , www.lo.rckjo.opole.pl/new/tipp).

Didactic Prior Considerations and Teaching Experiment

As suitable teaching material and guidelines (syllabus) for learners of German as a minority language are not available in the Polish education system, many teachers feel abandoned when dealing with special language tuition for classroom groups with minority character. Frequently they fall back on the available teaching material of the German Language department, which, however, does not challenge this particular group of students and offers little specific support. Therefore a method must be found and tested which offers teachers and students the necessary freedom for individual support without violating the official guidelines relating to the educational qualification aimed at.

The use of the portfolio method in German classes with minority character appears appropriate and should be seen as a reaction to the findings, in order to ...

1. diagnose the individual level of competence,
2. develop individual learning programmes,

3. document these by the learner and
4. as a result achieve the maximum possible individual support for the learner.

The first-year students at the General Secondary School with bilingual instruction and their portfolio work

These students of the General Secondary School with bilingual instruction form a learning group consisting of eleven girls, all of whom have a minority background. Despite their German ethnicity, the students have very varying knowledge of the German language so that a uniform (homogeneous) teaching programme is difficult and individual support appears to be required in view of the bilingual school-leaving examination they will be sitting (Matura) (Level C1 of the European Framework of Reference). While the receptive skill of listening comprehension and the spoken language production of almost all students are well or even excellently developed and the qualitative (grammatical) use of the language is largely intuitively executed, there are numerous deficits in written language production, in reading comprehension and also a lack of techniques for text analysis and interpretation.

For this reason, during the first term of the first year, with the help of the Assessment Grid of the European Framework of Reference and the national guidelines for the standards of bilingual classes, an individual diagnosis of the level of competence was carried out. At the end of this first phase an individual programme could be prepared for each student, which contained exercises, assignments and instructions, consisted mainly of authentic or adapted learning material and was then worked on **from the second term on**. Subject matter was chosen equally by the teacher and the students. During the lessons the teacher was available to students for questions concerning their work and its organization and prepared the whole learner group for the type of exercises and topics of the school-leaving examination they would be taking. The entire process of learning and working was documented by the students in the individual portfolios. Before long it became apparent that the group very much enjoyed compiling their results in this way and it was agreed that the students would be taught in the same way in geography and in an optional course on the topic "The German Cultural Landscape". In this way, the portfolio documentation method could be introduced in other subjects as well. The portfolio with all the documented work and also its presentation at the end of each term was agreed on with the students as the basis for the assessment of the grades at the end of each term.

Summary and Results

1. Diagnosis of the learner group's skills in German; for example using the Language Framework of Reference

2. Classification of the students in DaF (German as a foreign language) and DaM (German as a minority language) learner groups.
3. Extensive thematic individualization of the subject matter for the DaM study groups.
4. Documentation of progress using the student portfolios; portfolio also basis for assessment.

The results and students' thoughts on the use of the portfolio method in class will be briefly described in the following summary. In order to allow the reader an authentic impression of the learner group's work and standard achieved, the students were each requested to present a part of their portfolio in a short film. These can be seen on www.lo.rckjo.opole.pl/new/tipp and also via FILMS and IMAGES. As a preliminary, an image-presentation was produced to introduce the students and their portfolios.

Film 1 – Manuela – Why Portfolios?

- The portfolio as a method of documentation
- Documentation of learning progress during three college years
- Systemization according to one's own ideas
- Designing the portfolio
- Collection of authentic material as a result of a lack of teaching material
- Diagnosis of level of competence using the European Framework of Reference in order to counter weaknesses and encourage strengths
- Possibility of individual learning
- Self-assessment by students as a principle of teaching
- Changes in the roles of students and teachers

Film 2 – Mirela – Working with the European Language Portfolio

The European Language Portfolio as an instrument of diagnosis for the level of competence

- Language passport
- Field for self-assessment of the individual language level
- Table for experiences in language and intercultural matters

Space for certificates and diplomas

- Language Biography

The three-year student portfolio as documentation of language study

- Checklists

Assessment grid from A1 to C2 in the fields of receptive language skills (written and oral comprehension) and productive language skills (writing, speaking in monologue and dialogue form).

Film 3 – Aleksandra – Documentation of Test Papers

- Test papers during term 1 to diagnose the level of competence
 - (1) Strengths and weaknesses in language study
 - (2) What do I want to achieve during my language study and what have I already achieved?
 - (3) Experiences during language study
 - (4) Exercises in Creative Writing
- During term 2 individual study priorities are defined on the basis of the above diagnosis procedure.

Film 4 – Sandra – My Creative Writing Assignment

- "... You passed me without a word yet leaving a trace..." – an example of a student with language difficulties.

Film 5 – Helena – Documentation of Lessons

- Form for documentation of lessons ...
- Individual formulation of the topics of the lessons...
- Individual assessment of grades for contributions during the lessons...
...allow for easy, creative and sustained learning as the contents of lessons are recorded as rapidly as possible.

Film 6 – Kasia – Classroom Oral Reports in the Portfolio

- Documentation of written and oral reports
- Documentation of reports and handouts of other students
Topics of reports in semester 1 and 2
 - (1) Topic of your own choice
 - (2) Report on EU member states according to preset criteria
 - (3) German music scene (no preset content)

- (4) German classical music (preset content)
- The special significance of the use of media

Film 7 – Eliza – Project Documentation in Other Subjects taught in German

- Geography project: 50 Ways to Save the World –Living with Climate Change
- Short overall view of the project
 - (1) Individual observation assignments
 - (2) Film: Al Gore – An Inconvenient Truth (1)
 - (3) Discussion of the film
 - (4) Film: Al Gore – An Inconvenient Truth (2)
 - (5) Production of a power point presentation on subtopic “Causes of Climate Change”
 - (6) Preparation of presentation (advertising, tickets, ...)
 - (7) Presentation of the project to parents, siblings, teachers, the press, ...)

Film 8 – Joanna – Documentation of Individual Study (1)

- Documentation of individual study as an integral part of study course during term time
- Main topic: interpretation of poetry (Rilke project)
 - (1) Written interpretation
 - (2) Oral interpretation
 - (3) Reciting of a poem

Film 10 – Manuela/Ola – Documentation of Participation in Language Contests

- Documentation of results achieved
- External testing of achieved results of study

Film 11 – Monika/Ola – Documentation of Language Work during the Summer Holidays

- Documentation of individual language learning
 - (1) Essay on experiences in the summer holidays
 - (2) Poems
 - (3) Recipes
 - (4) Report on German culture
 - (5) Comment on a newspaper article

- (6) Synopsis and review of a film
- (7) Holiday trip
- (8) Wedding as occasion for use of spoken language
- (9) Traditions in Silesia
- (10) Essay on Greek cooking

Time Required

Use of the portfolio should cover at least one school year; preferably two to three years.

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