

CONCRETE ASPECTS OF IMPROVING THE LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS USING NEW TEACHING METHODS

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Abstract

The topic of this paper concerns the following question: what aspects improve in the activity of the students of the German language, if after the exercises of *Partnerarbeit* (PA) type (working by two or in binomial), instead of the evaluation in ordinary plenary session, I will call *Gruppenarbeit* (GA) (working in groups) to evaluate the results? The starting point of this research was the following situation I encountered in the classroom: after the students conducted dialogues, interviews or telephone conversations with a colleague on a particular topic, not all the results could be presented and evaluated in plenary, because this didactic sequence would take too long and the learners' attention would be lost quickly. The impulse for improving this situation came from chapter 2.2: "Using work forms and social form" in the volume *Deutsch Lehren Lernen 4* (Aufgaben, Übungen, Interaktion by Hermann Funk, Christina Kuhn et al.): Changing the social form. From chapter 2.2 it is clear why it makes sense to change the social form to evaluate the results after working in binomial or by two.

Key words: teaching, method, language, teaching, education

The starting point for our action research was the following situation we encountered in the classroom: after our learners conducted dialogues, interviews, and phone conversations in partner work, not all the results could be presented and evaluated in plenary session because this sequence took too long and the attention of the learner sank quickly.

The impetus for the improvement of this situation came from the chapter 2.2: "Use of labor and social form" of the *Deutsch Lehren Lernen*, volume 4: the change of the social form. (Funk H., 2014, p. 57-76). In this chapter we found very good reflections on how we could increase the involvement of the learners and their awareness of taking a more active part in the learning process. I am often confronted with a similar situation (described by Demmig, 2007, p.132): most of my course is frontal teaching, I am in the middle and I still do many things alone, but I have observed this and I would like to change it, but this is by no means too easy to do. The statement of the respective teacher shows that it is not at all easy to change habits and that we are often confronted with uncertainty, when and what forms of work or social forms should we introduce and what aspects we should pay attention to.

The advantages of the frontal teaching can be quickly enumerated by many teachers:

1. Fast dissemination of the teaching material;
2. Simultaneous information transfer to all the students;
3. Less effort for the teaching organization;
4. Recognition of the professional authority of the teacher;
5. Simple and direct correction of the student's option.

However, we often forget that a teaching style that assigns the learner's passive role to learners requires rhetorical skills on the speaker side and the effective use of appropriate presentation techniques. Only in this way will the learners be encouraged to think along and remain attentive. As you probably know from your own experiences with courses that you have visited yourself, the ability to concentrate while listening decreases rapidly. Especially by with younger learners the attention and the concentration decreases after a few minutes (Büttner-Schmidt-Atzert 2004). Otherwise not all students can process the same information at the same time. The teacher can hardly do justice to these differences in the frontal class.

Switching from one social form to another is often very sensible. There are several advantages to moving from individual work to group work. Furthermore, it was found that the individual work

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often offers the change in cooperative social forms. Mostly other language acts are practiced than in the often short speeches in the evaluation in plenary. It is systematized, justified, questioned, demanded and discussed. The students gain confidence in their exchange of views on their work outcomes, and are more motivated to present them after in plenary, if necessary.

In chapter 2.2 it becomes clear to us why it makes sense to change the social form for the evaluation of the results after the partner work. Especially since we were able to determine from the lesson that it is both time-wise and in terms of content makes sense to present the results of the partner work not in plenary, but for the time being in groups and evaluate.

Therefore, after partner dialogues, partner interviews, phone calls and similar exercises, we decided to use group work to evaluate the results. With the change from partner work to group work, we intended to observe the following aspects:

1. Time management (increasing the participation of the individual learners in the total teaching time);
2. Cooperative learning (willingness to cooperate, fault tolerance, mutual help);
3. Practice other language actions (report, ask, explain, summarize).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This is how I did the practical research project: I did the research in a student group at my university, where I teach German as a Foreign Language. The group consists of 18 participants, but only 11-12 come regularly. The course takes place once a week, with 2 hours of lessons. There are not language differences between the students, we don't have foreigners in this group and a quarter have a satisfactory level, as the continuous evaluation has shown.

We plan to follow this scheme in the lesson sequence:

practice - evaluate - produce

Depending on the teaching situation, we propose the following activities: partner dialogues, partner interviews, telephone conversations, etc. The dialogues should first be practiced in partner work, and then the students should present their work results in group work or improve them. Finally, they should find a common variant, which will be presented at the end.

We intend to form matching pairs. For lower performing couples, the work materials could receive more linguistic help: redelivery boxes, vocabulary explanations. For the presentation and evaluation of the work results, we intend to form performance-heterogeneous groups, because here

the mutual learning with mutual error correction / assistance stands in the center.

Time:

Activities in partner work (approx. 7-10 minutes);

Group activities (approx. 5-7 minutes);

Presentation of the group results (approx. 3-5 minutes);

The exercise for the comparison of adjectives.

Part 1:

The learners will get a copy template in PA (for two) (the example below) and they will first practice the adjective forms in the comparative and superlative in the sentences. Afterwards, the results will be evaluated with another two-membered group and in the end they will be corrected with the help of a solution key.

Part 2:

You will present the other examples in plenary.

Exercise about traveling:

Part 1:

Learners are determined by the teacher to share their language level in PA. Each binomial gets a few questions about travel (about a balloon ride), which they should then ask each other: Examples: Would you make a balloon trip? If so, where would you go? What would you like to see from the air? How much money would you spend on it? etc. If not, why not? □

The PAs who need more vocabulary or grammar support will get expressions, beginnings of sentences, speech, etc.

Part 2:

The learners check their results in group work (up to five). The students have to imagine that they cannot travel in a balloon for two. Each person has a different occupation (computer scientist, artist, teacher, hairdresser, IT specialist, writer, architect, etc.). You have to explain to your partner's partner why they have to stay in the

balloon. They then exchange their opinions with another partner group (binom). You will decide in the GA who has the best arguments and may stay.

I would like to make the exchange between my students in PA and the evaluation in GA much livelier, than asking questions in plenary and not being able to hear all opinions because of the time constraints. This form of work will also support the less experienced learners and be more active. I want to make it possible for all learners in the classroom to speak and use the time in the classroom highly effectively.

The practical research project lasted for three weeks, with a total of 6 lessons. This research was conducted beginning with the fourth of a total of ten course weeks.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This is how I collected data and these are the instruments that I thought:

- Structured observation (time management / time use, cooperation of the learners)
- Qualitative interview with learners (learner attitudes to co-operative learning)
- Video recording (speech actions / sample output).

I conducted the interview with a part of the learners. (Random selection) In the essence, the interview questions are based on the following basic elements of cooperative learning:

1. Willingness to cooperate;
2. Personal responsibility;
3. Time use;
4. Helping each other;
5. Fault tolerance;
6. Mutual encouragement;

The interview:

„In the last few weeks, we have conducted group work activities in German lessons after the partner work. I want to know what your attitude towards these activities is.

1. Do you enjoy working in the group?
2. What do you find most important in group work?
3. How do you handle time during group work?
4. How do you help the other group members when they need assistance?
5. How do you deal with the erroneous utterances of other group members?
6. How do you treat the group members if they make good suggestions?”

The data allow the following conclusions. The use of the GA instead of the plenum for the evaluation of the exercises solved in PA has the following advantages:

- time saving;

- increased efficiency in training the speech acts;
- increased motivation to speak the learners;
- lower fear of errors and inhibitions;
- fun to work with changing partners;
- better group feeling;
- increased willingness to learn from others;
- lively exchange in the classroom.

CONCLUSIONS

I have personally learned from the evaluation of this practical research project in the team and from the reactions of the colleagues during the presentation:

- ✓ It stimulates communication and exchange.
- ✓ It allows the good exchange of information.
- ✓ It's time-economical.
- ✓ Through mutual suggestions we work tasks more motivated and more creative.
- ✓ It promotes the development of social skills.
- ✓ It uses a lot in reflection and correction phases about the subject matter.

The presentations from the other colleagues sparked the desire to make further experiments and to use other methods, because the change from partner work to group work enables a cooperative atmosphere and increases the participation of the individual learners in the total teaching time. Through the exchange with the colleagues I got a better idea of the evaluation of the interview.

The research has given me a different perspective on how to orient the learners and how to solve the difficult handling of heterogeneity: the learners' emotional attachment to their work is a very important aspect - the motivation and their own needs, the development of the learner to see language competence as a strengthening of self-confidence and the teacher not only as a correctional authority, but as a learning companion. The students have learned to help each other and to listen to each other.

Through this research, I realized that the responsibility for control shifts from the teacher to the group.

This practical research project gives me the opportunity to write this contribution and I found the results of this project very positive and motivating to create further perspectives.

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