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## A Few Notes on Practising Europragmatic Studies with Students

### Abstract

This short contribution suggests the method *LdL* (*Lernen durch Lehren* = *Learning by Teaching*) as a concept through which seminar participants can comparatively rapidly acquire skills that allow them to carry out Europragmatic research projects. The seminar may be seen as a big research team here. The skills trained cover both discipline-specific and general skills (such as the skill to work in a team). It is shown that team products—either traditional such as a seminar paper or innovative such as a research website and guides—are still possible even if study program regulations allow only an individual performance record.

### Sommaire

Cette brève contribution propose la méthode *LdL* (*Lernen durch Lehren* = *Apprendre par Enseigner*) en tant que concept par lequel les participants d'un séminaire peuvent acquérir d'une manière comparativement rapide des compétences qui les rend capables d'exécuter des projets de recherche europragmatique. Le séminaire est vu comme une équipe de recherche. Les compétences étudiées incluent des compétences spécifiques de la disciplines autant que des compétences générales (comme l'aptitude de travailler dans une équipe). La contribution illustre que les produits d'équipe – soit traditionnels comme un exposé, soit innovatifs comme un site de recherche sur Internet et des guides – eux, sont même possibles si les règlement des examens ne permettent que des travaux individuels.

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Kurzbeitrag schlägt die Methode *LdL* (*Lernen durch Lehren*) als Konzept vor, mit dem Seminarteilnehmer vergleichsweise schnell Fähigkeiten erwerben sollen, mit denen sie europragmatische Forschungsprojekte durchführen können. Das Seminar wird als Forschungsteam gesehen. Die eingeübten Fähigkeiten umfassen sowohl disziplinspezifische als auch allgemeine Fähigkeiten (wie die Fähigkeit, im Team zu arbeiten). Es wird dargelegt, dass im Team erstellte Produkte – seien es traditionelle wie eine Seminararbeit oder innovative wie eine Forschungswebseite oder Führer – selbst dann möglich sind, wenn Studienordnungen nur individuelle Arbeiten erlauben.

### Introductory Remarks

Can students, let alone B.A. students, really generate European knowledge the way *European* has been presented in the introduction: respecting the cultures of all corners of Europe? At the EHP conference we presented students' products of research, which were supposed to illustrate that this is possible. For several years, we have both held seminars on European studies. We have both made the experience that already B.A. students can rapidly improve their skills in carrying out comparative, cross-cultural research that involves more than two cultures if seminars are held according to the *LdL* method, i.e. *Lernen durch Lehren* 'Learning by Teaching'. This note is to encourage colleagues to try out *LdL* for seminars which prepare European communication studies and to give ideas for overcoming potential obstacles..

### Preparing Students for Europragmatic Projects – the Basics of *LdL*

*LdL* was first developed as a technique by Jean-Pol Martin (cf., e.g., 1985), retired professor for teaching French as a foreign language, and has by now been elaborated as a full model applicable to all age-groups and all topics. The idea of *LdL* is to offer frame-independent ways for learners to reach a certain set of goals. By *frame-independent* we mean that the model can be used in different

classrooms and official study program regulations. The goals that we strive for are declarative and, even more important, procedural expert competences (among which we also see the competence to present expert knowledge to a lay audience [cf. Grzega/Klüsener 2011]) as well as specialized knowledge according to learners' wants plus key competences often referred to as "soft skills". Among these are: working in a team, contributing to the solution of societal problems, making knowledge fruitful for oneself and for others (not only for the test or teacher), generating and evaluating information and knowledge, thinking in complex ways, "enduring fuzziness" (*Unbestimmtheiten/Unschärfe aushalten* in Martin's terminology), and connecting people—all this at a very early stage of the learning process. *LdL* integrates sociological, psychological, economic and anthropological knowledge (cf. Grzega/Klüsener 2011: 19, 2012: 9, 11).

What does *LdL* look like? The methodological core is that each student leads at least one part of a course where s/he has to instruct or revise topics selected by the teacher or by the students themselves. Leading a part of the course does not mean that the student-expert does the talking all the time. Just the contrary: although for some goals, a brief chalk-and-talk section may be efficient, the prominent principle should be the "polylog". We refrain from the term "dialog" to avoid the impression that it would be enough to have exchanges between the student-expert and one or two extroverted participants from the class. Rather, we think of the network-like interaction of many persons (*poly-* 'many') (cf. Grzega/Klüsener 2011: 20):

- (1) The students who have worked on a certain topic to become experts (student-experts) present a more or less complex, challenging and captivating task to the class.
- (2) Students deal with the task in pairs or small teams (maybe after a phase of individual reflection).
- (3) After this phase, the student-experts open the discussion phase, in which they should see that students listen to each other with empathy and tolerance.
- (4) Someone offers an answer or solution.—For this answer/solution—this is crucial—the student should give a reason. The others are listening.
- (5) The student-experts ask the others if they consider the answer not convincing.
- (6) Others or the student-experts may say where and why a certain answer is not convincing or they may ask for clarification, e.g. for an illustrative example they can understand with their knowledge or for a reformulation or definition.
- (7) Others offer or the student-experts trigger alternative solutions.
- (8) Eventually, the student-experts summarize the discussion, give (if applicable) a possible master solution for the problem and highlight the core knowledge.
- (9) Possibly, the instructor adds information that is important for later exams.

If used for the first time, *LdL* is likely to not go smoothly yet—after all, there is no fixed recipe, only general principles whose precise best form the teacher-and-students group has to find first. But we have both gathered a several-year-long fruitful experience with *LdL* in various contexts (cf. Grzega/Klüsener 2012). A first report on the experience with *LdL* in comparative linguistics seminars at the universities of Eichstätt, Münster and Bayreuth was given in Grzega (2009). Experiences with first-year students in their acquisition of basic knowledge and competence in linguistics have led to the innovative coursebook *Introduction to Linguistics from a Global Perspective: An Alternative Approach to Language and Languages* (Grzega 2011). It seems possible to let (or make) students train *LdL*'s target competences with focus on truly European competences even if official regulations on test formats and the like may seem obstacles at first sight.

Each seminar can be arranged so that all participants can harvest truly European fruits: the student-experts, the instructor and the class. Before carrying out and presenting research projects, students

may get preparatory training in two steps: they first predominantly develop revision exercises, then they may be charged with introducing new knowledge—always in a polylog with the instructor and their colleagues, training both the declarative and procedural knowledge of the discipline as well as general key competences.

## Forms of Europragmatic Student Projects and Teachers' Mentoring

Studies that are termed European in the sense presented in the preface to this volume require the inclusion of a number of languages and nations. Of course, we cannot expect to have only hyperpolyglots in the classroom. But we can conceive the seminar group as one research team, where all members work on the same questions according to the same method. The atmosphere is rather one of a flat hierarchy—the instructor is the project coordinator. Each student can become expert for one sub-question and one country. The sub-questions can be suggested by the instructor or mainly developed by the students (it is advisable for the instructor to give considerable input, if the sub-questions should be seen within one large frame).

A country or sub-question can also be represented by not just one student, but by a team of students. Since many study program regulations do not allow teamwork, but require individually gradable papers, the instructor needs to find creative solutions. One example: A team of three students has worked on one single paper. Each student hands in a separate paper where the main part is the same, but where they explain in the introduction that this is the result of teamwork and who was responsible for which part. Of course, there can also be entirely unconnected topics. Each project team can then ask the rest of the class to serve as informants or informant-finders. The project team should make sure, though, that the lesson is nevertheless interesting and fruitful for the rest of the class. This also holds true if the instructor involves the students as informants or informant-finders.

As already said, it is advisable that students do not just do this for the grade, but for the goal they define as a research team. And they need to be credited for that. A simple way is to put the paper on a specific website. An example is <http://www1.ku-eichstaett.de/SLF/EngluVglSW/schule.htm>. Some of these seminar papers by student teams in Eichstätt, Münster, Bayreuth and Erfurt have helped in the publication of a monograph (Grzega 2012). Volume 5 of this journal included several studies carried out either alone or to a large part by students from the universities of Eichstätt and Freiburg. Here, one common questionnaire was used. A complete questionnaire had been suggested by the instructor at the beginning, but the first sessions of the seminar were used to adapt it so that the students could already view it as one of their products. Different cultures were then analyzed by different students or student teams or even professors from other universities.

Many regulations allow only the traditional seminar paper or essay. Other forms of product such as teacher guidelines, a radio program contribution or a project website which presents results not in a linear, but a hierarchical way are not allowed. Here, it is possible to have students write a brief essay and see the actual main product as some sort of appendix to the essay. Part of the student projects presented at the conference was generated from a course on intercultural communication. After having worked on different fields of intercultural communication on a more theoretical level, students were given two months to think of research questions and projects whose findings would be beneficial for them and their fellow students. The results were manifold:

1. an advice book on intercultural communication presenting its ideas in a language that is understandable for an audience that does not only consist of experts
2. websites, brochures and programmes for incoming students staying at the university
3. a brochure on movies dealing with intercultural experiences, illustrating and explaining

- eventually problematic aspects
4. a magazine discussing the topic of intercultural romance on the basis of already existing research but also of interviews

No matter what the form of product is, the students need to know what the evaluation criteria are. We use a grid that includes criteria such as “The bibliography is written in a consistent and usual way.”, “The candidate formulates a clear question or hypothesis.”, “The candidate explains how the method chosen addresses the research question or hypothesis.”, “Technical terms (above basic level) are defined.”, “The candidate uses an appropriate style.”, “Observations and evaluations are clearly kept apart.”, “Existing research is respected to an adequate degree.” The instructor should verify, however, if different grids are necessary for different kinds of products—it needs to be clear that even in the alternative product forms the academic quality is central. At any rate, such grids help us in evaluating a student product fairly (because students know what we expect from them) and efficiently (because the number of ticks simply equals the number of points and thus to the grade).

Another way to gain and train truly European knowledge is to have students work on one topic over time. They may be allowed to analyze a question in relation to just a restricted set of cultures in a seminar paper (e.g. German, English, French, Spanish), but need to extend it to a truly European set for the B.A. thesis (add one northern and one eastern language).

Moreover, not all Europragmatic research questions require the knowledge of more than one language. For instance, every student can individually analyze contexts in which a common lingua franca is used or close translations are sufficient. With issues where results for other countries are already available, students can also simply apply the available research design to a new country.

## Final Remark

If we want students to be able to show good academic skills in papers and final examinations, we need to give them good training platforms before. *LdL* is one teaching concepts that allows such training in a protected environment.

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