

Presentation of a selected confectionery product from the personal portfolio in preparation for the final exam

Elena Lehmann, Nina Snopek

Introduction

This Lesson Study (LS) was carried out with students in the last year of their vocational education and training to be confectioners and bakers.

For their final exam they must produce and present a cake, which creates an authentic situation linked with the goal to give an oral presentation to a live audience in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. Thus, the LS-research lessons (LS-RLs), developed within the framework of a 3-week project, focused on creating Power Point presentations (PPTs) for their final exam. The students were given the free choice in selecting the product they would present but they had to follow the organisational and linguistic guidelines provided by their EFL teachers.

The main objectives and key topics of the LS-RLs were the following:

The students are able to

- give a presentation in front of their class.
- prepare a talk using visual aids like PowerPoint and a handout for their peers.
- present their talk using notes in natural pronunciation and intonation but not reading a text word for word.
- understand questions after the talk.
- respond spontaneously and answer questions in a short monologue.

Situation and process

The LS was carried out in a VET school in Lower Austria using the block-release system with students attending 1 block of 10 weeks each year. The school teaches apprentices in the following professions: bakers, confectioners, chocolatiers, dental nurses, and dental technicians.

Based on the concept of the dual education system, vocational education in Austria provides for educational training ranging around 20 % (both theoretical and practical), whereas the work company covers 80% of the apprenticeship training, mainly practical.

The confectioners in this LS were in their 3rd year of apprenticeship and in preparation for the final exam, which includes the production and presentation of several products and is usually carried out in the language of schooling (German).

The LS team consisted of the two subject teachers for English as a Foreign Language (EFL, Nina Snopek and Elena Lehmann), as well as Claudia Mewald as the knowledgeable other. The LS was implemented in a confectioner class, with 24 students, who were divided into two cohorts of 12 students each.

The syllabus for EFL in the final year requires working on a project, which includes writing and delivering a product presentation on the showpiece of the upcoming final apprenticeship examination in English and discussing their presentation with their peers in English language.

The time frame of the LS was aligned to this project. For this purpose, both EFL units were used in three consecutive weeks for a duration of 50 minutes each. Due to the sequential order of the project work, the first cohort was taught in the 3rd to 6th week and the 2nd group in the 7th to 9th week of their school placement. The students of the 2nd cohort and their teacher were able to draw insights from the LS-observations in the 1st group, which led to an adaptation/improvement of their own projects already in the process of project development.

Subsequently, four students from each cohort participated in a group-interview with the knowledgeable other after their presentations. The aim of the interview was to find out how working on practical and exam-related subject matter affected their learning in general EFL and occupational aspects. Moreover, the interview was considered an opportunity to adhere to student voice, which is why it also inquired about the students' experience with the LS in more general terms as well as how they had experienced their integration into the process of designing learning. This included their contribution to self-and peer-assessment. The collaborative development of an assessment scale, which created a backward learning design with the expected performance in mind, was part of this process and reflected in the interview.

Focus

Based on the assumption that the use and activation of subject-specific content in another language would lead to cognitive consolidation, the EFL teachers developed a lesson plan including the creation of a product folder for the final exam.

By planning the LS project in two cycles, the LS team wanted to ensure that the 2nd cohort was able to profit from the learning experience and project outcome of the first.

The LS team met twice before the start of the project to discuss the procedure and twice on a weekly basis while the project was developed and presented.

The project consisted of the following steps:

1. The teacher's input and task presentation
2. the students' selection of a work piece from their portfolio
3. the research of technical keywords, independent work on the presentation in the school's computer lab and the development of a PPT presentation or short video clip
4. the actual presentation in class, and student feedback in the interview.

Response

The outcomes suggest that the students benefitted from participating in the development of an assessment scale for the evaluation of their presentation and that the second cohort gained additionally from being invited to their peers' presentations at the end of the first LS cycle.

Their feedback suggests that learning from an available design (their peers' learning outcomes) was not just motivating but it also functioned as a good-practice-example for their independent work on the presentation.

The interviewees also voiced strongly that working on their product presentation for their final exam in another language made them think about the ingredients, the tools, machinery, and workflow in a

more specific way, which seemed to help them to consolidate subject-specific content in the German language as well.

The interviews also showed that researching keywords and speaking English during the presentation made the students feel they had benefitted linguistically as well as professionally.

It seems that dealing with content that is inherently motivating and authentic (e.g., final exam, the need to perform sales conversation with tourists in their confectionery), reinforces the acquisition of a second language and the knowledge of the subject matter as such.

The Lesson Study journey

Based on the students' reflections and the observations of the LS team, the LS-team obtained various impulses for further improvement. The teachers decided after the LS that giving the students a clear idea of what the grading is made up of and which value certain tasks carry is crucial and that letting them participate in the development of the assessment concept from the start is even more rewarding for their learning process. This is especially relevant in job-related tasks which refer to real-life activities. The students will also become better at evaluating their performance in their jobs if they understand the concept of assessment.

Also, an appropriate ELF lesson plan and the planning of performances according to the students' needs and expectations, can provide a strong contextual connection with the working life and the languages spoken by the students. Constantly referring to their workplace and connecting the languages of schooling, of the workplace, and the students' idiolect can also have a benefit on language acquisition as well as comprehension.