

Virtuální hospitace – Anglický jazyk: A Formal Debate

Odborná analýza hodiny (evaluace)

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The lesson of English conversation was recorded at the Jazykové gymnázium Pavla Tigrida in Ostrava-Poruba. In a short introduction presented by the teacher at the beginning of the recording we learn that the lesson will have a format of a formal debate; the students will present valid arguments either supporting or contradicting a proposition. Thus they will learn to view a controversial topic from multiple perspectives.

First of all, it is important to appreciate the potential of the lesson to develop, consistently with the Framework Education Programme for Secondary General Education (Grammar Schools), key competencies in learners, namely the communication competency, the social and personal competency, the civic competency, and the environmental competency. Furthermore, the recorded lesson puts forward a debate in the context of English language teaching and learning, however, it also provides a valuable source of inspiration for using the activity type in other subjects.

As regards the beginning of the lesson, rather than stating the aim the teacher introduced the content of the lesson. The students were told what they would be expected to do, i.e. to argue for or against the proposition *Factories are ignorant but our ignorance is worse*. It was obvious from the video that the class was familiar with it. After dividing the students into two groups, “agree” and “disagree” teams, the teacher opened up the discussion. Unlike the students, virtual observers did not have any information about the choice of the topic or the topic itself at the start of the lesson. After fifteen minutes it transpired from the discussion that it was specifically related to the Ostrava Region.

Debate is a social interaction activity through which all areas of communicative competence may be developed. It provides students with a chance to learn to connect language forms and functions as a part of developing their pragmatic competence, in this particular case expressing formal agreement or disagreement. However, no attention was paid to this issue in the recorded lesson but it may be assumed that it was dealt with in previous lessons. To be able to participate in a debate, students have to be ready also in terms of what to say, otherwise, there is no discussion or it is very superficial. The students were well prepared, they were able to provide valid arguments, although their contributions varied considerably in terms of length and complexity; it is not obvious whether they worked on the topic individually or some kind of topic-relevant input was provided through a text or a recording in classes before.

In order to develop learners' communicative competence through a debate it is important to use adequate interaction patterns. In a debate learner-learner interaction should dominate. However, the recorded lesson was predominantly based on teacher-learner(s) interaction patterns. This is also reflected in the proportion of teacher and student talking time. If we analyse the lesson from this particular point of view, we may conclude that the teacher talking time is roughly equal to that of all the eleven students together (20 minutes and 30 seconds). As regards individual students' contributions, four of them spoke for less than half

a minute, three learners talked for about one minute, and four learners actively participated for more than three minutes. Given that the lesson was aimed at developing learners' communicative competence in spoken English, the student talking time of the majority of learners was very low. However, it is important to emphasise that the students, apart from profiting otherwise, were exposed to the native English speaker and they had a chance to develop their listening comprehension.

The intention to have a debate was very good, however, to create conditions for equal participation is a challenge. The teacher probably wanted to give everybody a chance to speak and therefore asked both teams to present arguments one by one, the "disagree" team first and the "agree" team afterwards. In spite of that, as it has already been mentioned, individual students' contributions differed considerably in terms of time. The pending question is whether the participation would have been different if the students had been encouraged to react spontaneously to contradicting opinions as it is common in real life communicative exchanges. The lesson could have been more dynamic as at the end of the lesson when the teacher managed to initiate a genuine discussion. Four students actively discussed raised issues while the remaining students were listeners. This supports the teacher's decision to ask everybody to speak one by one in the introductory phase. However, the teacher might have considered using strategies targeted at achieving a more balanced participation of individual students.

As a consequence of the preferred way of organising the debate the first part rather resembled a preparation for a debate because the students in interaction with the teacher polished their arguments in terms of content and language. The teacher-learner interaction was a valuable learning opportunity as the teacher skilfully posed complementary questions and guided the individual students to a more precise formulation of their arguments. In this aspect the lesson was exceptional, the teacher managed to challenge the students' higher-order thinking.

Providing feedback is a vital part of teaching and learning processes. While the teacher acknowledged the content of arguments, he did not comment on the students' use of English at all. In this particular context, the students might have benefited from learning whether the language forms they used were appropriate to expressing formal agreement or disagreement.

To conclude, the lesson consisted of one activity, the debate, which the teacher planned carefully. His role in the process was central, thus the success of the lesson was very much dependant on him for the reasons mentioned above. The presented lesson is a great example of creating opportunities for learning in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The question is whether and to what extent the learners achieved lesson aims as they remained implicit.