23 Learning by teaching: developing transferable skills

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1.   Introduction

Learning by teaching (German: *Lernen durch Lehren*, commonly abbreviated as *LdL*) is a teaching and learning approach which was developed by the French language teacher Jean-Pol Martin in German schools in the 1980s (Martin, 1985). The method sees students in the role of the teacher, and enhances their learning experience by encouraging them to teach other students and collaborate with fellow learners.

This case study presents an ongoing project in which second year students of German at the University of Nottingham plan, design and deliver a teaching session for first year beginners' students. The sessions are either carried out face-to-face or via video tutorials. This is an opportunity for the 'student teachers' to apply the knowledge they have acquired within the linguistics module *Fremdsprachen lernen und lehren* ('learning and teaching foreign languages') in a real-life context and to consolidate their own knowledge of German. The first year students, on the other hand, benefit from their peers' experience, knowledge and enthusiasm. By working on their projects, students have the opportunity to develop a number of transferable skills, such as teamwork, presentation and communication skills, and creativity.

Keywords: student engagement, collaboration, flipped classroom, computer-assisted language learning, ab initio language classes.

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2. What I did

My second year module *Fremdsprachen lernen und lehren* ('learning and teaching foreign languages') introduces students to second language acquisition theories, and academic research into language teaching and learning. In order to bridge the gap between theory and practice, students work on a mid-term project in groups of two or three, during which they choose an aspect of the German language, research it and produce teaching materials for their fellow students on the German *ab initio* strand. They then either plan and deliver a lesson, or create a video tutorial. Before delivering their lessons or creating their videos, the plans are discussed in class with particular focus on the interface of linguistic theory and practice.

Both variants of the task require thorough research, consideration of theory and practical implications, and the development of clear explanations. Students are free to choose an approach which they consider appropriate (e.g. role-plays, demonstration of rules with the help of PowerPoint presentations, group activities, etc.). The face-to-face lessons are attended by both my colleague, who convenes the language module, and myself; the videos are integrated into the first year students' self-study programme. Some of the materials have also been used at the University of Sheffield. At the end of the project, students receive individual feedback.

Since we introduced the project for the first time during the academic year 2014/15, the outcomes have been very positive. Students have produced very creative and well thought-out materials, and students from both cohorts involved have enjoyed the project and benefited from it. For sample materials created by students, see Stollhans (2015).

3. Discussion of outcomes

During the project, students are encouraged to develop a number of transferable skills. They work in teams on a collaborative project for which they need to structure content and present it in an accessible way. This requires, among

others, IT skills, communication competencies, abstract thinking, problem-solving strategies, and creativity.

After the module ran in the academic year 2014/15, the 'student teachers' (*N*=27) were asked to evaluate the following statements about the activity using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree):

- I enjoyed preparing and delivering the lesson. 4.36

- I got insight into the role of the teacher. 4.45

- Participating in this made me revise/consolidate certain aspects of the language myself. 4.18

- I would like to do something like this more often. 4.00

The overall very positive response to the project is also visible in the open comments, which include:

- "I was actually surprised at first by the fact that we were trusted to teach a class, especially first year students. It was a great idea, I enjoyed it a lot and everything went more or less as planned."

- "It was an opportunity for me to revise and test out what I had learned during the course (e.g. teaching methods), and I also gained some valuable experience teaching a foreign language to older students."

- "Mainly I learnt how to engage people in certain areas of language study and by flipping the role with me becoming the teacher, I had to learn what I was teaching in more detail and to be more accurate than I probably otherwise would have been."

These comments suggest that students also experienced that their confidence increased in the course of the project, as they were "trusted" with a significant

and authentic 'real-life' task. Overall, the project was very successful, and it has become a regular feature of the module.

4.   Conclusion

This case study demonstrates how *learning by teaching* approaches can enable students to practise key employability skills, not just for teaching professions. Grzega and Schöner (2008) emphasise that by using *learning by teaching* methods,

> "learners are given the chance to acquire creativity, independence, self-confidence and key competencies, such as the ability to work in teams, the ability to communicate, complex thinking, the competence to seek and find information, explorative behaviour, presentation skills, project competence, Internet skills, the ability to structure information and generate knowledge, punctuality, reliability and patience" (p. 169).

All these skills are valuable assets for language graduates entering the job market. In conclusion, as one of the students phrased it in their open survey comment, "teaching is a very valuable and effective form of learning".

References and links

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