

Workshop

Language and intercultural awareness in primary school

Soca Fidler *Pedagoška fakulteta, Ljubljana*

Bernarda Avsenik, Andrea German Velušček, OŠ Bicevje, Ljubljana, Alma Šketa, OŠ Riharda Jakopica, Ljubljana

Teja Klavs, Katja Grad, Nataša Dražumeric, OŠ Danile Kumar, Ljubljana

Introduction

The relatively new approach of language and intercultural awareness mainly originated in Eric Hawkins's ideas in the 1970s, and has been developed by several international projects, the most recent one being **JaLing Comenius** 2001-2004 (Janua linguarum or The Door to Languages). It aims at building metalinguistic competence, developing a positive attitude to language and cultural diversity (including lesser used and immigrant languages), helping immigrant students keep their mother tongue, and generally enhancing motivation for learning languages (mother tongue included).

Some of the JaLing aims concerning attitudes, skills and knowledge are part of the Slovene primary school curricula for language subjects (Slovene, minority languages, foreign languages), although these aims are mainly limited to the relation Slovene – the target foreign or minority language. Curricula for other subjects taught in the first two triads (Environmental studies, Social studies, Geography, History, Art, Music) include aims concerning positive acceptance of / interest in / language and cultural diversity and the objects which form it.

Slovene contribution to the JaLing project

Knowing that the JaLing aims could be integrated into the aims of Slovene primary school curricula, members of the Slovene project group have produced some materials relating to curriculum topics in the first four grades. Being turned into little language detectives, students explore differences and similarities between languages and thus develop language awareness as well as acquire tools for language learning.

In our workshop we have shown our materials related to two different topics, and how they can be implemented in the classroom.

1. CARNIVAL CELEBRATIONS

The first two activities are suitable for 7- and 8-year olds, although their author, Nevenka Angelski (OŠ Vodmat, Ljubljana), tried them out successfully with a class of 6-year olds. In two lessons, a cross-curricular approach is applied by linking the aims of Slovene and Environmental studies. First, students are made aware that in different environments people speak differently, and that different expressions can have the same meaning by being shown drawings of a doughnut, a mask and a masked person and asked to name each drawing in Slovene. Then, pairs of students are given slips of paper with Slovene literary and dialect words (KROF, BOB, MASKA, ŠEMA, LARFA, MAŠKARA, MACKARA, MACKORA) for the objects in the three drawings.

They match up the drawings with the words and justify their decision. Students help their teacher match the words with the drawings on the blackboard. The teacher encourages students to think of more examples of words that have the same meaning (e.g. ocka – ata, babica – stara mama – nona, roža – cvetlica, pes – kuža).

In the next activity, after introductory motivation, students are first asked to put ten cards with words for *carnival* and *mask* in five different languages (Slovene, English, German, Italian and French) into two columns according to their visual similarity. Then they look for their aural similarity by listening to the teacher saying first one and then the other word in these five languages. Finally, students find out that there can be a difference between how the word is pronounced and spelled.

KARNEVAL	MASKA
KARNEVAL	MASKE
CARNAVAL	MASQUE
CARNEVALE	MASCHERA
CARNIVAL	MASK

Looking for visual similarity

Third- and fourth-graders could do activities at a higher, i.e. sentence level. Students are made aware that languages differ in their structures, in this case the use of the articles in English and German. The topic of carnival celebrations can link Slovene with Social studies. The first task was tried out in Justina Zupancic's class (OŠ Veliki Gaber).

Students are first asked to match up the sentences with the languages:

Jaz sem klovn.
Ja sam klaun.
Me hinju klovno.
I am a clown.
Ich bin ein Clown.

ENGLISH, SLOVENE, GERMAN, ROMANY, CROATIAN

then to colour certain words in these sentences:



Colour the word for  red.



Colour the words that mean /blue.



Colour the words that mean *AM* yellow.



Colour all the other words green. How many other words are there? In which languages?

In this way students realise that in English and German there is an extra word not used either in Slovene, Croatian or Romany. They consolidate their newly acquired findings by trying to solve a problem in a similar example.

It is essential that students should be left to use as much of their own initiative as possible and if some of them notice e.g. that only the German Clown is written in a capital letter, this might lead to another language discovery adventure. It should also be noted that the JaLing aims emphasise the importance of including languages that are usually not taught, but are present in the classroom. This was Romany in our case. It is assumed that in this way students' confidence will build up, which was also proved in one of the classes as students became genuinely interested in the Romany language and kept asking the Romany students to translate Slovene words into Romany. Giving a chance to students who have extra knowledge to share with their classmates is not only fair to them but also motivating for students to open to other languages and cultures.

A perhaps more obvious example of language and intercultural awareness going hand in hand is related to a local carnival custom called Šelmarija. A whole range of tasks based on a text written by Bernarda Avsenik and Alma Šketa challenges students to reflect on different languages. The text was tested in 3rd and 4th grades in two different primary schools and was presented to pupils in the Slovene language. Later, it was also adapted into a second, simplified version.

First students are given a table with different words and are asked to tick off the words that they consider to be connected with the carnival of Kostanjevica. Afterwards they have to give the reasons for their choice.

In the next exercise students are given a new word table. They cut the words into strips and then glue them onto a blank piece of paper using their own criteria of grouping. Having done this, they justify the criteria they used (visual similarities, the same letters, roots of words, language, length of words etc.).

After listening to the pronunciation of the words from the above exercise, students try to define the languages the words originate from and discuss any visual indicators suggesting the roots of the words. Finally, students are invited to look for visual similarities between the words in each group and colour the same letters.

Prforcenhaus - a corruption word from German [pʔr'forcʔnhaus]	canonicus Lat. [ka'nonikus]	purgar - a corruption word from German ['purgəɾ]	Selma - a Slovene corruption word ['ɛlma]	kandelaber Slov. [kande'labʔr]
Perforcenhavs - a corruption word from German [pʔr'forcʔnhaus]	kanonik Slov. [ka'nonik]	purger - a corruption word from German ['purgəɾ]	šema Slov. ['ʔema]	candelabrum Lat. [kande'labrum]
		Bürger German ['byrgəɾ]	schema Lat., Gr. ['skema]	candela Lat., It. [kan'dela]
				candélabre Fr. [kãde'labR(ə)]
				candelabro It., Span. [kande'labro]

After completing the task, students are given the text Šelmarija to read silently. Afterwards they look for the suffixes of the given words and try to explain their derivatives.

ŠELMARIJA - A carnival celebration in Kostanjevica on the Krka

BAKLADA - A procession with torches

KOSTANJEVICA - A Slovene town

PEPELNICA - Ash Wednesday; beginning of Lent

JEŽICA - The prickly outer part of a chestnut / a money unit used during the carnival celebrations in Kostanjevica on the Krka

In the last exercise students match the words with their definitions, thus checking their understanding of the text and expanding their vocabulary.

2. A POEM IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

As each student acquires new knowledge and skills in his or her own way, teachers need to take different teaching and learning styles into consideration. Using an example of learning a poem in a foreign language, students, while doing something funny and enjoyable, not only become aware of a need to use different learning styles but also become acquainted with some. The tasks are suitable for students aged 9 and up.

Students work as a whole class, in groups and also in pairs. First, the teacher asks pairs of students to put down all the languages in which they can greet somebody as well as say a few more words. While the students report, a volunteer puts all the words down on the board. Then the students are shown a Japanese poem on a transparency and are asked to pay attention to repetition in the poem. They listen to the poem, and “read” it in Japanese as well as its simplified phonetic transcription. In order to learn the poem, students are divided into three groups: group one should learn it by using the phonetic transcription and the original, group two by using the phonetic transcription and illustrations, later also a translation, and group three by using the phonetic transcription, illustrations and movement.

After each group’s recital the students discuss the strategies they used to learn the poem, the problems they faced and how they overcame them.

Conclusion

In these times of increased mobility and promoting language learning, the teacher will almost always find some knowledge and experience of various languages in her/his classes. It is therefore vital that s/he takes advantage of the existing “classroom experts” and motivates students to share their knowledge with their classmates. The initiative shown by students should be appreciated and considered when setting new tasks.

Soca.Fidler@guest.arnes.si