

An Action Research project: Can I improve the student's engagement in first year German literature tutorials with the implementation of discussions?

Andreas Boldt, NUI Maynooth, Andreas.D.Boldt@nuim.ie

For many years I have been teaching First Year German students in literature tutorial groups, with its prescribed contents and familiar goals. The main objectives are to monitor these students using continuous assessments and also to develop their ability to answer the exam questions at the end of the course. Whilst in the main course the students would be taught by the lecturer, it is my job to familiarise the students more with the reading material. The reading material consists of two books which must be read and understood: Duerrenmatt: *Der Richter und sein Henker*; and Frisch: *Andorra*. The first book is a crime novel, whereas the second one is a dramatic play. Both works were written in the 1950s and refer to the experience of the Third Reich and the Holocaust. The biggest problem I have experienced in the past was the difficulty to generate a discussion on the books and specifically on the topic of prejudices, right and wrong due to a limited student engagement.

For my Action Research project I wanted to improve on my discussion techniques – especially how to get a discussion started and therefore to engage the students – and more importantly how to keep it going. To achieve this I intended to incorporate more group or paired work into the class environment and by this method encouraging more classroom activity and engagement. *Der Richter und sein Henker* is a crime novel, with three main characters involved in an elaborate situation which, as the story unfolds ultimately exposes the nature of these characters. The book forces us to attempt to answer the question of what is right and what is wrong in relation to the part each person plays within the novel. I hoped to instigate a debate by encouraging the class to voice their opinion, to side with right or wrong, not only to decide on their choice but to explain their reasoning behind their choice and this, I hoped should encourage further discussion. Another activity I used involves asking the students to write down their impression of what they believe to be prejudice, in relation to *Andorra* and generally. I asked them to write down this opinion, I collected it at the end of the class and in two weeks time we re-examined their initial thoughts on the subject. This brought about a greater opportunity for a discussion forum.

I want to change my teaching methods in order to ensure the fullest participation of each student, to instil in them a greater sense of enquiry and to make them more responsible for their own learning. I want to teach and guide rather than instruct. I want them to think generally and critically about prejudices, right and wrong and to form their own opinion. With this presentation I want to share my found experiences, how the students engagement worked out and what the students thought themselves of this project.

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