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Seminar text of German in blended learning

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Abstract

The paper starts with the characteristics of selected coherent text and it introduces some criteria of such a selection. The focus of the article is in the description of methods used in seminar lesson teaching and in listing of topics suitable for the teaching mentioned. Attention is given to applying of word formation as a help with increasing students' vocabulary of German. As for reading methods, the author refers to her article on that issue published recently.

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1. Seminar text of German in blended learning

A text as we understand this term in this article, has its range about 250 written words, is coherent and has its own topic. Except for such texts we use so called "hörtexte" in our seminar German lesson, which are printed recordings used for practicing of listening skill. But the usage of those reprinted recordings is not within the scope of this paper.

The text we use are printed in the sheet form. They represent literal or a little adapted passages of longer texts, books, short stories, newspaper articles, exceptionally letters. Some of them are professional texts from the field of sports, tourism, economics, finances and electronics.

Each seminar group at the Faculty of Informatics and Management has its own specific set of texts. That depends on the professional field the seminar group is devoted to. The teaching usage of texts covers the study of composition, syntax, vocabulary, sentence stress, reading and contents analysis. One single text usage never covers more than two seminars in the schedule of a curriculum, but several points of subject matter are taught at every seminar lesson.

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We use the texts in blended learning. The applying of them is almost always accompanied by listening of a recording spoken by a native speaker or supplemented by students' study of a short eLearning program. That is well and free available and it is given as an optional homework to students.

Using the text we follow four teaching principles: a balance, a change, a well-tryed method, interaction based on collaboration. Because proficiency in German implies the ability to compose and express as well as to understand, every seminar lesson contains some elements of both reading and listening as well as some points of grammar, syntax and composing in written and spoken language. We always try to maintain the balance by the students, newly learnt information and its practicing as well as practical usage.

Our choice of texts is affected by possible motivation. Our effort is to have students interested in the contents of texts. Those should be motivating for everyone and should provide their own motivation given by interesting contents.

We change the difficulty of texts. That is why we usually use adapted texts. Our adaptation rests mostly upon vocabulary. We leave out very rare single words completely or we replace them by more common synonyms. We divide compound and very long sentences into two or more units. We leave out two descriptive stretches of sentences that do not carry any important contents and may therefore be seen as relatively boring by students.

For the sake of change we incorporate texts of different topics from one to another. There is a text even with language teaching or grammar point in one seminar in every term. We not only change the text characteristics and difficulty, we also change procedures of work with a text during every seminar lesson, we change the organization of lessons and pace during every separate lesson.

Our own well-tryed methodical principle is to begin every separate point of the lesson with active students who volunteer. Such a progress is very flexible, it brings a great saving of time in most cases and first of all it is very motivating for other students. Sometimes even quite a wide range of seminar work may only rest upon volunteers' activity.

At the beginning of the first term we continue on the access to a text students are accustomed to since the time spent at their secondary schools. Therefore we distribute the sheets with one single text to students several days before the seminar under consideration and we invite them to sign their full names to the sheet and to get really familiar with the text in the way they had been used to at the secondary school. We do not ask any specific familiarization with the text this time. We explicitly allow to students to write down any notes into the printed text.

Our experience makes me collect the lesson, check students' signatures and get familiar with student's notes written between the lines of every student's sheet. The findings may be quite surprising. There are no notes in some cases. That may show up a bright student who does not need any supportive notes, or a lazy student who missed any home preparation, or a student who wrote down his notes into his copybook, because he does not want to write anything into the sheet. However, there usually are some notes. Most often isolated words as mother tongue equivalents looked up in a dictionary, sometimes the translations of several language structures, sometimes even stretches of language longer than a sentence. A note concerning a grammar point is very scarce. I always pay attention to students' notes on the text and I put down some extreme cases with related names.

No work with vocabulary or with a translation of the text will represent the teaching effort of this seminary. My task will be to ask comprehensive questions checking the understanding of contents and aim of the text. At this stage of work the students are allowed to use words or phrases of the text in their answers. We progress quite differently before some next seminars.

Interactive as well as collaborative learning is conditional on the teacher's presence in the classroom. Whenever the students work on their own at individual tasks, they usually are required to work as they are asked to. They are allowed to do more independently when they collaborate in pairs or in small groups. There is more interaction when they work as a full class with the teacher.

If the students had the text at their disposal during their home preparation, we do not incorporate any work on vocabulary. We concentrate on reading the text out without any mistakes and on dividing every sentence into

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