

Information about the action

Title of the action : Writing and directing a trial

File name : 55CThierville

Useful information :

NANCY-METZ academy

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Classes : 2 year 10 classes

Subject concerned: French

Written exam : May 2003

Local education authority guide lines n° 3

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SUMMARY

Claude Gueux from Victor Hugo was chosen to make these pupils study an argumentative novel, in order to learn how to express their personal opinion. After an overview of the french judiciary system, they wrote the script for the trial and played it with the help of a professional actress.

Key-Words

Structures	Modalities - apparatus	Thèmes	Subject
Secondary school	Pedagogical Diversification Partnership	Mastering the language	French

WRITING AND DIRECTING A TRIAL

Results of the action

NANCY-METZ Academy

St Exupéry Secondary school- THIERVILLE

I) Description of the action

The action consists in reading an argumentative novel which is part of the government official curriculum: Claude Gueux from Victor HUGO. The study of this novel aims at developing their readiness to criticize as they have to justify their opinions at every moment. Therefore they learn how to argue using their own emotions and not using artificial argumentative technics. They can understand current affairs better and build up their own point of view.

Then they write the script for the trial.

II) Context of the action

1) Frame of the action :

The action is set up in two heterogenous 10 year classes. We can read in the Official Instructions: «Curriculum accompaniment » (1999), leaflet 1, page 10 : « The line of argument is a form of discourse which intends to influence the addressee and to modify its opinion(...). It consists in expressing and defending an opinion thanks to well chosen arguments. It requires a concrete communication situation in which the sender and the receiver recognize each other, accept the contact and show a common interest in what is discussed. Its study implies that communication situations should be taken into account. »

2) Chronology for the setting up of the action:

This action started during the third term of the school year 2001/2002. 2001 was a good opportunity to remember the numerous debates around the abolition of the death penalty.

The years 2002-2003 are important because of the 200th year anniversary of Victor Hugo's birth: The pupils are aware of this event thanks to the media and it seems judicious to study one of his novels.

- Our past experience was helpful to improve two things:

- The distribution of the writing tasks to ease the work of each corrector
- The direction of the trial : place of each actor...

3) pedagogical interest :

Victor Hugo's social preoccupations are still relevant today, and so are the debates on violence and the role of the prison (place where you work ?place for your reeducation?). Working on the writing of a trial is a perfect example of our mission as part of the ministry of Education: learning how to become a citizen.

4) Worked skills :

Thanks to this project, we work on the three fundamental skills : Reading, Writing, Speaking.

The writing work is on narrative(stories from the witnesses) and argumentative(speeches for the defence and closing speeches for the prosecution) discourses. The pupils have to express their personal opinion, their point of view, in order to convince the audience.

III) Goals of the action:

1) Main goal:

Reading and Studying an argumentative novel, in order to learn how to express their personal opinion (oral or written)

2) Intermediate goals :

- Organizing an argumentative text,

- Identifying and mastering the grammatical tools and oratorical processes of the Artifice of persuasion
- Arguing in order to move the audience,
- Familiarizing oneself with the law vocabulary and with the development of a trial in court,
- Memorizing and dramatizing written texts for the pupils,
- Learning to work in groups.

IV) Chosen Demarches :

1) Length :

The action lasts 6 weeks, and only 6 weeks, at the beginning of the third term, to avoid boredom.

2) Chronology of the action :

- Inside the class: identifying the meaning and the impact of the text, writing the trial,
- The training : familiarizing oneself with stage technics,
- The performance : showing the work when achieved.

3) Organization of the sessions and goals:

A) Goal 1 :READING: gauging how guilty the accused is.

The pupils must learn how to pick the most important information in a text. Therefore they learn the law vocabulary and widen their knowledge on the way a trial in court takes place.

- *1st session* : The pupils do researches on Victor Hugo in the internet room thanks to a questionnaire given by the teachers. They find out that, throughout his work, social struggle is one of his main preoccupations.
- *2nd and 3rd sessions*: They select the information to start the writing work : study of Claude Gueux's relationships with the other prisoners, with Albin and the Director, Mr Delacelle. These sessions must highlight Claude's influence on the convicts and the Director's domination in Claude's relation to him. The pupils can therefore understand what has motivated Mr Delacelle's assassination.
- *4th session* : Reading of the final speech for the defence (Claude Gueux) to highlight the question of responsibility and the oratorical processes used by the accused.
- *5th session* : Study of an imaginary speech for the defence (anonymous citizen) in front of the House of Representatives. This session allows us to raise the society responsibility.

B) Goal 2 : WRITING / CORRECTION: mastering the argumentative discourse thanks to appropriate grammatical tools and oratorical processes.

- *1st and 2nd session*: The pupils learn how to select information concerning the witnesses for the prosecution (the clerk, Mr Delacelle's best friend, Mrs Delacelle) and the witnesses for the defence (Albin, Ferrari, Faillette, Pernot, the young 16 year old convict, the last convict having spoken to Claude Gueux). They carefully write each testimony to emphasize how it can influence the jury's decision. These writings rely on Victor Hugo's text but the pupils are free to invent other testimonies, for example, the best friend's testimony and Mrs Delacelle's testimony which are not in the novel.

- *3rd session:* The pupils work in groups and imagine Claude's and Albin's testimony. They must find the reasons why these two friends separated and the consequences on the accused.
- *4th and 5th sessions:* The pupils build landmarks to write the speech for the prosecution and for the defence. Excerpts from other speeches are given to them, as well as questionnaires about oratorical processes. The texts given are:
Excerpts from the Meursault's trial in Camus' L'Etranger .
An excerpt from the speech for the defence of Mathurin's advocate.
(book L'Art d'écrire 3° Bordas, page 70)

The pupils write a report about the artifice of persuasion they will use in their future writings, that is the advocates' speeches.

Several essays are given to the pupils after these sessions:

- 1) Imagine the speech for the defence by Claude Gueux(appendix 1)
- 2) Imagine the speech for the prosecution by the General Advocate in Claude Gueux's trial. (see appendix 2)
- 3) Imagine the speech for the defence by Claude Gueux's advocate. (see appendix 3)

- *6th session:* highlighting the artifice of persuasion, using logical links expressing cause, consequence and concession.

- *7th session:* writing less important but necessary texts related to the trial :
The ruling read by the registrar at the beginning of the trial.
The questions asked to the jury by the president of the court after the advocate's speeches.
Reading of the sentence by the President of the court.

At this stage the pupils understand how a trial in Court works and develops.

C) Goal 3 : ORAL / THEATRE : The trial.

- *1st session :* The pupils get used to the proper law vocabulary and to the different parts played by the speakers... In order to explain how a trial develops, the session is based on a television program (*France 3, C'est pas sorcier*) about the french judiciary system and on pupils'works. The different classes can therefore see the differences between the French and the American judiciary system often depicted in movies and soaps.
- *Following sessions :* The pupils learn how to play their parts in rehearsal sessions... The pupils have a two day practice with a professional actress, Pierrette Dupoyet (pdupoyet@wanadoo.fr) : The different exercises are based on corporal expression, diction, improvisation...

Examples :

The same word is whispered, screamed, shrieked...

Every gesture must have a precise direction and a precise meaning.
(they work on musics and rhythms)

The way they look at things must be as meaningful as the words they say.

4) Pedagogical strategies:

- Alternation of the pedagogical situations :

This project favors the building of a mastered speech (oral and written), that is a speech mixing narrative, descriptive and argumentative technics. Teachers organize writing, reading and oral sessions to motivate pupils. Then, once a testimony or a speech for the defence is written a pupil volunteers to learn the text and to play it in front of the others, which allows us to work on direction.

- External speakers are involved :

To widen our pupils' knowledge:

- A professional actress to help directing the trial,
- A warder to tell them about the prison environment and to highlight the differences between reality and the pupils' representations,
- An advocate to explain the role of the Judiciary system and how it works.

The pupils also go to a real trial in Court to see how it works in practical terms.

V) Look on the action:

1) Positive aspects

*** on the pupils' side:**

- They worked in groups: They learned to listen to each other, to respect the other people's opinion and to accept differences...
- There was a strong link and cohesion between the two classes who wrote the script and who played it. The pupils liked evoking this project together and debating about the different parts. A casting was even organized to choose the advocates,
- Valorization of a common goal,
- Some pupils became more self assured and others managed to contain their overflowing energy,
- Some pupils with real difficulties revealed themselves, which changed the other pupils' way of looking at them.
- Better memory
- The difficulties to pass from writing to speaking were taken into account (re-writing works). Ex : use of the different past tenses in french,
- The pupils understood better what "a cut event " was compared to an "anchored event" in an enunciative situation,
- They realized that our current affairs were not far from current affairs in the XIX° century (social misery and its consequences, despair which gave rise to violence, the role of the prison, the prison environment, the death penalty, aso...).

*** on the teacher's side:**

- Argumentation was studied in practical terms,
- Pleasant working conditions: Pupils were enthusiastic about the whole project.

2) Obstacles :

*** For the pupils:**

This project is extremely demanding for the pupils as the writing and the memorization are concerned because time is limited.

*** For the teachers :**

The main difficulty is the time needed:

- For the correction work and the gathering of information: indeed, the texts were written by all the pupils and therefore we had to select the best parts in each text to get the best final result.
- For the rehearsals.

These 6 weeks demanded an intensive work and everybody's good will.

3) Perception of the action by all the concerned staff :

- Arrangement of the timetables by the headmaster :
 - Two common half-days for the teachers, which made meetings possible;
 - Two periods at the same time for the two classes, which made rehearsals easier.
- The pupils acted three times in front of their schoolmates, gaining confidence each time and enjoying it more and more. They did not regret the adventure and were often surprised to see how good they were.
- Lots of teachers from the school were quite surprised by some pupils who had significant difficulties in class. They regretted this had not taken place earlier during the school year because it would have changed the people's opinion concerning these pupils.
- The pupils' parents were glad to have been invited and well surprised by their investment and the quality of their performance..

VI) Evaluation of the action :

1) Mastered skills :

*** reading :**

- Understanding of the notion of « commitment » in literature.
- Realizing how modern the topic was.
- Acknowledgement of the various oratorical processes.

*** writing :**

- Rigorous structuration of the thought : building paragraphs, using link words...
- Choosing and organizing ideas,
- Learning how to convince and move thanks to concrete argumentative technics.

*** speaking :**

- Speaking more easily : stronger involvement of the whole class...
- Mastering the speech : the right word at the right time...
- Learning vocabulary : law, social, theatrical.

*** Benefits from this particular project :**

- The pupils are authors and actors of their work,
- The pupils can work in groups around the same instructions,
- The pupils realize they can use the space better (amplitude of their movements)
- The other pupils' look is no longer a problem.

Concrete and playful activities reinforce their motivation and their investment.

This experiment can develop social cohesion in making pupils aware of the society moral values. Directing a story, putting ideas on stage allow pupils to think about what citizenship really means. They now know what « commitment » can mean for a hero and above all for them.

2) **Evaluation tools :**

*** written :**

- One class was asked to write the interrogatories for the defence and for the prosecution. Pupils could work in groups of two. Their texts were redistributed to simply be noted and to be improved.
- The most important interrogatories (Claude's and Albin's) had to be written individually and were marked.
- The pupils had to write the two speeches for the defence and the closing speech for the prosecution. They had to choose one to be marked just like a normal written work.

Example of marking scheme :

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| - arguments /6 | - logical links /2 |
| - oratorical processes /4 | - talking to Court members /2 |
| - ability to move /3 | - language correction/3 |

*** oral :**

- This session favored pupils' participation because they had their own point of view and they were glad to debate about it.
- An oral mark could be given during rehearsals.

Examples of evaluation criteria:

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------|------------|
| - elocution | - movements | - emotions |
| - intonation | - gestures | |

Conclusion :

Even if this project was demanding, the many positive aspects made us forget the few organizational difficulties we encountered.

This experiment was rewarding and fulfilling because it allowed us to work together : We could oppose our points of view on certain goals of the curriculum to reach and we managed to improve our pedagogical technics.

We are happy to say that pupils were enthusiastic but whether or not it has a stronger impact on pupils than a traditional session about argumentative technics is hard to tell. Though we can certainly assume it is the case.