

Using Wargames for Teaching Social Sciences in Secondary Schools. An Erasmus+ Experience.

Alonso Mateo Gómez¹, Agnieszka Kucharska Widera²

University of Castilla La Mancha, Spain¹
Zespół Szkół Mistrzostwa Sportowego, Poland²

Abstract

Teaching effectively social sciences to secondary school students poses a challenge nowadays to teachers. Triggering their interest in recent history needs the use of appealing strategies. In order to face this and other educational challenges, in 2016 schools from Spain, Italy, Poland, Turkey, Czech Republic and Bulgaria started an Erasmus+ association and presented an innovation project called 'Historical Board Games for Peace. Making History Alive'. It was approved by the Spanish National Agency to be run for two years, till 2018. With this project we introduced the use of historical board games, commonly known as wargames, into the process of teaching history to students. There is little experience with board games in teaching. Normally their use is related to military intelligence training. Indeed, historical board games have a huge, teaching potential because students are actively involved in the learning process, develop logical thinking, decision making, creativity and discover history as a dynamic process, linking it to active citizenship. This potential had not been developed enough in school education. Although there had been some isolated experiences with the use of board games for teaching purposes, there were no major projects involving international cooperation and there wasn't much awareness of their possibilities for school education. Through our project we tried to seize this potential. We played several strategy games with the pupils participating in the project and also had a common wargame 'Twilight Struggle' based on the Cold War, which was played in the different meetings. We also created a new cooperative boardgame called 'Refugees' based on the refugee crisis in Europe. This project had a transnational approach to the teaching of social sciences. The issues addressed, improved the quality and efficiency of education in our schools and enhanced creativity and innovation of the students involved. In addition, the methodology based on Content and Language Integrated Learning offered a more dynamic approach to teaching.

Keywords: Social Sciences, Citizenship, Wargames, CLIL, Erasmus+

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning history doesn't have to be limited to using textbooks and some punctual writings of students. It also should be a mean to develop cross-curricular competences and abilities. History can be taught as a very practical subject. Doing it through the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) approach, requires a more dynamic way of teaching. As a consequence, innovative methodologies have to be implemented. The introduction of strategical board games with students can be useful in many ways. The need for a proper learning of competences and skills can be fulfilled by a methodology implying active strategies for students. Our intention was to extend the benefits of board games, to develop skills and abilities, as well as historical knowledge, and the use of English. For this reason the use of strategical board games based on history, happened to be innovative in our schools. Additionally, this was done at a transnational level.

With this project we introduced historical board games into the process of teaching history to students. Contemporary students tend to have little idea of recent history of their countries as well as history of Europe. Most of the teachers focus on teaching history from textbooks, which is not appealing to pupils. Students' lack of interest is the cause of low knowledge of the important past events that shape the present. Moreover, majority of pupils consider history as something that is not connected to their lives. They experience it just as a narration of past events. Through this project we worked towards making our students aware of the fact that history is alive and that it can be changed, depending on how people act. With the final product of the project we drew students' attention to the present political situation in Europe and around the world.

This project had a transnational approach to the learning of history. Teachers and students by interacting with each other at an international level used English as a working tool to complete the projects' activities. Playing board games carried out the activities related to the project. By sharing learning experience, students broadened their general knowledge of the world, became more tolerant, open and ready for an European citizenship. Acquiring different historical topics highlighted its



European dimension. Although there are some experiences using strategical board games as a tool for teaching history, most of that work has been done at a local school level. Therefore, the aim of the project was to promote this tool in order to make it more common and more widely used. The project was innovative as it introduced board games as a new tool for teaching history in all schools taking part. The work was complemented by an Etwinning project and a webpage,.

2. Participants

The schools of the participating countries (Spain, Poland, Turkey, Czech, Italy and Bulgaria) focused on the use of the use of board games to learn about the main historical events in every country and the common History to all of them through an international board game. The participants, once acquired some basic skills related to boardgaming, created as well a board game about the current historical event of refugees in Europe.

Schools from six countries were the institutions participating in this project. In order to prepare the project there was a preparation meeting held in Bytom (Poland). Some of them were found through online, educational platform Etwinning, while the others were partners in previous projects.

3. Objectives

The main objective of the project was the exchange of good practices among the participating schools. Complementary to this one, another objective of this project was to introduce the use of historical board games into the process of teaching history to students as an active and innovative learning method. We also had as an objective to link recent European history to their personal interests, so that students could see that history is alive.



Figure 1. Students playing “Twilight Struggle” in Blended teams during the Italian mobility.

4. Methodology

For the development of the activities of the project, we implemented in our schools the CLIL methodology, using language as the vehicle language to deal with the historical issues. CLIL has got an important potential for schools. CLIL based methodology encourages the use of learning contents, promoting proper interpersonal skills, an enhanced cultural sensitivity as well as communication and language abilities as basic competences demanded in our societies. This teaching approach was based on competence learning. The main goal of this methodology is to teach both the subject and the foreign language. The project aimed to develop students' skills to learn actively, as they had to learn to take decisions, determine strategies and plan the steps to be taken. It developed team working, as students played the games in pairs or groups and discussed about best options to achieve their goals. The learning approach was student centered, the teachers acted as facilitators within the pupils learning process. Other students' skills were enhanced in two distinctive ways. Firstly, by getting to know the culture of other countries and secondly, by interacting with fellow students from all partner countries.



4.1. Methodological strategies

The metacognitive skills we trained and developed with students were:

- a) Learner - centered approach where students do not act as a passive recipient of informations but becomes an active contributor to the content of training.
- b) To apply strategic approach to learning where students need to organize their time and space efficiently in order to succeed.
- c) Develop the critical thinking, decision-making, strategies for problem solving and becoming independent learners.

4.2. Description of activities

Students played strategical board games in blended international teams. The rules and working language of these games was English. The students taking part in the mobilities trained their classmates in playing the new games. A language test was held to assess the acquisition of English skills. Some students lead activities in their project groups at schools in order to show the others how to play Twilight Struggle game, which was practised regularly during the meetings. The rules of the Twilight Struggle game were uploaded on the etwinning platform and a video tutorial was elaborated. Skype conferences were held for online playing games. Each school prepared an exhibition about the results of the project including pictures from mobilities, board game player, videos from school board and game clubs. Pupils created a collage, which was exhibited in the mobility in Poland.



Figure 2. Meeting in Bulgaria testing the new board game "Refugees"

4.3. Project management

Transnational Project Meetings were held in addition to the meetings with students. The responsibilities among partners were shared, the development was monitored, we had evaluation activities and planned the following steps to be taken.

The meetings took place in Spain (November, 2016), Italy (February, 2017), Czech Republic (March, 2017), Poland (May, 2017) where we had a training on how to create and play board games, what rules have to be followed in order to create strategy based board games., Bulgaria (October, 2017) and Turkey (June, 2018) where we had a final assessment of the project and agreed the tasks to be done in preparation of the final report. We also had learning/teaching/training activities during the meetings. Effective communication and cooperation relied on an intensive use of Information and Communication Technologies in order to maintain contact, ensure the smooth running of the project, share information within the team, arrange the scheduled and ongoing activities, organise actions and events and, finally, prepare the end products.

5. Results and impact

The results of this project benefited our students and schools by using new teaching methods developed in a transnational context. The main material result of the project was a new board game

published by the partner schools., created by students and teachers of all the schools and available to be played by other students and other people interested, as it is one of the products of the results platform of the EU Erasmus webpage. It related the present political situation of refugees and migration issues in Europe, and is supported by a video tutorial.

The use of historical board games helped our students to process actively information and acquire knowledge about history. They enhanced their ability to conceive History as a vivid reality in which people play an active role. The development of ICT competences is another need that was focused, as they developed their work using the Twinspace platform of the project to upload information, pictures, coments on blogs, etc.

Another important result was the improvement of language skills through communication on different levels among students and teachers.

Among the potential longer term benefits, our schools and communities had the opportunity to be a reference within our cities for European partnerships based on innovative teaching methodologies. The results of the experience are available to train other teachers interested in this approach. The main results, like the video tutorial, the downloadable game of "Regugees" and other materials are available for the public in the Erasmus Result's Platform of the European Commision. They are Open Educational Resources and can be used freely with educational purposes.

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