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interests, so that they will have something to say, as well as certain groups of words and structures, so that the language content is manageable. These conditions do not seem very hard to meet. However, teachers experience quite often that a sure-fire topic for one class will leave another class bored and silent. There are several solutions to this problem. The teacher can collect texts and materials on a wide range of topics of possible interest, in this way hoping to find something for every class. Or, the teacher could choose different classroom approaches for the same topic in various classes. A variation in method may create the spark to get the discussion going. For this strategy the material must be flexible and adaptable, and the teacher should possess a substantial methodological repertoire. Conversations and discussions in English lessons will become more interesting for teachers and students alike when a range of topics are linked to a variety of teaching procedures.

The transparency

When you look at the graph on the transparency you may wonder what it is about. Four lines in different colours trace developments which are not named. The horizontal scale merely lists the numbers from 1 to 12, the vertical scale has no subdivisions. Nevertheless, there are a number of things you can interpret and more which you might speculate about. The graph was invented just for this purpose, i. e. in order to get pupils to interpret and to speculate. It is not a representation of any development in the real world, as far as I am aware. But it follows common sense insofar as the numbered scale was conceived as a time line, either the twelve months of the year, the twenty-four-hour-day in two-hour segments, or a span of twelve years. Of course, other interpretations are also possible. The transparency thus conforms to the demands outlined above – that materials for conversation and discussion be flexible and adaptable.

Teaching hints

Teachers can use the transparency in the classroom in a number of ways. The first group of activities focuses on the interpretation of the graph, the second group on creating follow-up situations.

1. Interpretation

The transparency is shown and the pupils are asked to comment. Helpful questions and suggestions are: *What could the numbers stand for? Let's suppose*

Für den Tageslichtprojektor:

Zu unserer Folienbeilage

Friederike Klippel

Mysterious Graph

It is one of the main tasks of foreign language teachers to get their pupils to talk. This is not an easy task. Many learners are reluctant to use the foreign language in free conversation, some do not know what to say, others do not know how to say it. The textbook provides material for controlled language practice, but it rarely stimulates discussion.

A language teacher who wants to prepare his learners for conversations in English will want to create practice situations. These should contain questions or topics relevant to the learners' age and

they are the months of the year. How does that influence your guesses about the graph? Let's suppose three of these are the sales figures for chocolate, swim-suits and ice-cream; which is which? Why do you think so? What is the significance of the circles?

Pupils should be encouraged to find other possible interpretations for the lines of the graph, e.g. pocket money spent throughout the year, time spent outdoors throughout the year, traffic during the day, feelings of four people within a time of twelve years. They discuss their ideas in groups or pairs and then outline them to the rest of the class. A vote may be taken on the most convincing or the most unusual interpretations. The positions of the graph which are circled may either be ignored or given special attention as focal points, e.g. summer sales, Easter, preparations for Christmas – if the scale is seen as a period of twelve months.

When they interpret the graph pupils use speech acts like *making a suggestion, giving reasons, comparing* or *stating probabilities*. They need to be able to produce some modal auxiliaries (*could, may/might*) and forms of comparison. In addition, verbs like *increase, decrease, stay the same* are useful for talking about the graph.

2. Making up stories

The teacher tells her class that the graph represents the lifelines of four people for a period of twelve years. A competent class used to working on their own can be asked to imagine those four people and to develop a storyline based on the graph. The story may be set in any time or place the pupils choose. So, a medieval romance is just as possible as the history of a street gang or the adventures of space explorers.

In a less confident class the characters and the storyline may be worked out together. Pupils take turns in writing down the story as it evolves. At the end the final text is checked by the teacher and duplicated for everyone.

3. Drawing your personal graph

The pupils are asked to think about a typical week in their lives. They should make up their own graph about this particular week. They might select things like *time spent watching TV, happy feelings, spending money, doing sports, drinking or eating particular things, homework* etc. for visualisation. When they have drawn their graph, preferably on a transparency, they show it to the class without revealing what the lines represent. The others try to guess.