

Case archive (Part II)¹ Lesson report Part II

Problem solving in classroom *The fox and the grapes*

On the strategic task of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the communist party of the former German Democratic Republic) to evolve a GDR's developed, socialistic society.

10th grade, polytechnical secondary school, Berlin/German Democratic Republic (GDR)
recorded approximately 1984.

Source: Fuhrmann, Elisabeth (supported by Krause, Winfried and Rönsch, Monika): Problemlösen im Unterricht [problem solving within lessons], Berlin/GDR: Volk und Wissen 1986, pages 51-55.

In a 10th grade, a teacher plans a specific unit on "The strategic task of the SED to evolve a GDR's developed, socialistic society", to be dealt with in the last civic education lesson ("Staatsbürgerkundeunterricht"). She prepared a problem-based systematic and usage-orientated lesson. The pupils were asked to use their knowledge and ability acquired within the former lessons in order to analyze an argument of the class enemy independently.

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher starts to read out the fable *The Fox and the Grapes* without a comment.

The Fox and the Grapes²

One hot summer's day a Fox was strolling through an orchard till he came to a bunch of Grapes just ripening on a vine which had been trained over a lofty branch. "Just the things to quench my thirst," quoth he. Drawing back a few paces, he took a run and a jump, and just missed the bunch. Turning round again with a One, Two, Three, he jumped up, but with no greater success. Again and again he tried after the tempting morsel, but at last had to give it up, and walked away with his nose in the air, saying: "I am sure they are sour." It is easy to despise what you cannot get.

<http://www.bartleby.com/17/1/31.html>

Afterwards, the pupils discuss the following question: "In your eyes, what is the poet's intention of the fable?"

A couple of the pupils' answers are:

"The fox is not able to fulfill his wishes due to his incompetency. Now he veiled his incompetency by inventing flimsy excuses."

"The fox does not want to admit that the grapes are unreachable for him. Therefore, he says, they are too sour. – The poet wants to decry untruthful behavior, the attempt to draw a veil over everything among humans, or towards oneself."

"In short: Since the aim cannot be reached, excuses are made."

At first, the teacher does not participate in the discussion; then after two minutes, she interrupts and presents a hidden picture on the board. This picture shows a quotation of the class enemy (see also "Unterrichtshilfe", 10th grade, page 63). It says that the "developed, socialistic society" has only been evolved because communism will not become reality.

The teacher asks the pupils to read the quotation on the board and to compare it to the fable.

Here after, they discuss the following: the quotation suggests that the communists have the same way of thinking as the fox has in the fable: The grapes are not reachable for the communists. Therefore, they seek for flimsy excuses. The developed, socialistic society is supposed to be such an excuse. It is rejected, that it is a necessary step towards the communist society. – No doubt, it is aimed to be a denial of the class enemy.

The teacher offers only a few directions to think of: Rate this quotation! – What do the others think of it? – Can everybody agree on it?

Now, the teacher leads again: "So far, so good. You suggest that we have to deal with a thesis that is not correct. This, we have to prove thoroughly. Try to find an anti-thesis."

After a short discussion with the neighbor (pair work), the pupils write down their anti-thesis'. The following pupil's suggestion is put into contrast to the quotation on the board:

"The developed, socialistic society is a necessary step towards communism."

Now, it is crucial to prove scientifically that this thesis is correct. In order to do that, a guideline is discussed shortly, and the following questions are written down on the board:

1 Part I in JSSE 2010, 3 (Rudolf Engelhardt: Parteipolitik in der Schule, 1964): <http://www.jsse.org/2010/2010-3/pdf/Engelhardt-de-JSSE-3-2010.pdf>.

2 In the document the fable's text is excluded, because the story is well-known to teachers. Here is a version of the narrative, which the teacher might have used.



1. What do classic thinkers of Marxism-Leninism recommend to be the necessary steps towards communism?
2. Where is the difference between building the basis of socialism and evolving a developed, socialistic society?
3. What are our next tasks?

By proving the anti-thesis, the pupils work in pairs and use their notes, textbook and specific work sheets that contain abstracts of Marx's documents and the party's documents. In order to work on their argumentation, the pupils scribble down some notes. They have got fifteen minutes time to prepare. During this preparation time, the teacher walks from desk to desk in order to get a general idea of the way her pupils work on the task. At the same time, she has the opportunity to correct and give advice to them.

Now, the results are discussed in class: Two pupils from different groups are asked to present their results on each question. The others have to add something or agree on it.

In order to disapprove of the enemy's opinion, several essential arguments have been found. The most important are:

The classics of Marxism-Leninism make a difference only between the two big phases of the communistic society's fabric: Socialism and the "real" communistic society. However, they emphasize that it takes a long time to develop this process. Due to their society's perspective, they were not able to provide any details, because they did not speculate but made scientifically proved and realistic predictions, respectively.

Due to the victory of the socialistic relations of production (*Produktionsverhältnisse*), a problematic situation occurred in the European socialistic countries. What was on the agenda historically: Firstly, to pave the way for transition to build communism directly, or secondly, to build socialism broadly? With regard to a collective perception process of the brother parties, they searched for a justified answer. Within this process, the Marxist-Leninist theory was enriched by the theory of a developed, socialistic society. (see: decision of the 8th SED party congress on the society's strategy)

The fabric of a developed, socialistic society is known for its essential development process, in particular for the development of its productive forces (*Produktivkräfte*), such as to implement a highly developed materialistic-technical basis, to minimize the differences between classes and hierarchy in society, to enable people to plan and lead sociological processes, and to overcome traditional habits and ways of thinking.

Although her pupils prove to have good knowledge and find logical arguments, the teacher is not fully satisfied: The pupil's presentations are too flat, too superficial. (Perhaps this is due to the guideline ques-

tions?) She asks: "Is it really that simple? Has the development been as formal as you have described it?"

Now, some of the pupils admit hesitantly a number of problems they discussed during the breaks frequently – including their experiences of productive work at their company, for instance the attitude towards work among some workers, discipline of planning (*Plandisziplin*), full time working, usage rate of machines and plants. In addition, their discussion includes the questions in what way the disturbance of the class enemy, the impact of the world's political situation, etc. have an effect on their own country's economic development.

Finally, the teacher recalls the enemy's thesis again and asks her pupils to conclude their standpoint.

Here is an abstract of a pupil's answer:

"The grapes are not unreachable for us but for the capitalistic system. They have to find new excuses regularly, in order to justify or palliate their situation (high unemployment rates, social insecurity, wars, and sorrow of the people). Therefore, only by establishing socialism and communism the big problems of humanity such as keeping peace, offering social security for everyone, and improving social progress can be solved. – However, socialism is not a gift. We have to 'form' it. By our work only, socialism can come true."

Translation: Julia Sammoray

