

# SCAFFOLDING IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING. THE TEACHING UNIT “THE POEM ‘DER HERBST STEHT AUF DER LEITER’ BY PETER HACKS“

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**Abstract.** This article presents a lesson plan for German taught as a second language in Middle School. The plan shows the creative integration of a poem by Peter Hacks into the lesson. The artful and partly three-dimensional work improves the understanding of the text and benefits the student’s feeling for the language. The students are guided to the underlying objective through different tasks. In the end, they memorize the poem and present it in front of the class.

**Key words:** German as a second language, lesson plan, poetry analysis, Regelschule (Regelschool)

## 1. Introduction

In this paper we will explore the implementation possibilities of the poem “Der Herbst steht auf der Leiter” by Peter Hacks in a German as a Second Language class for children at the Regelschule in Kölldeda, in Thuringia.

It is often said that the practice of teaching is far from the theory written about it. But theory helps us understand why some methods work while others do not. Hence, it also helps us when planning our lessons and which methods to use when. So, at the beginning in chapter two we will introduce some theories of learning acquisition and link these theories to classroom practice.

One special theory we discussed during the seminar is scaffolding. This strategy is a mix of methods applied to support the students in using their full potential in

learning. Two examples of differentiation of scaffolding strategies based on explanation of Klewitz will be described in chapter three.

The learner-centered teaching is the main topic of chapter four of presented paper. It is based on Hatties success indicators and seven steps of his Direct Instruction.

Following up, we will show how helpful and also necessary the usage of rhymed texts is during second language acquisition. From personal experience many people know the interpretation of poems and the like from their native language classes, but it often falls short in second, or third, language classes. Why and how this should be changed will be the issue of the fifth chapter of the paper.

The presentation of the teaching unit and corresponding reflections will conclude the paper. They are the main content of chapter six and seven, respectively.

At the end of the presented paper there is an appendix. It contains pictures of the black board taken the lesson before, as well as the tabellary presentation of the teaching unit and the gap filling exercise. Moreover, the reader will find some examples of the finished products of the pupils in the appendix.

## 2. Theories of Learning

At least since the time of the ancient Greeks, philosophies and theories of education have been in existence. Plato for his part felt that there should be two main foci in education: culture and athletics (Wyse/Jones 2007: 24).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two main theories regarding language acquisition were popular. Firstly, the behaviourist point of view. The behaviourist approach suggests that much early learning in language comes through imitation (Wyse/Jones 2007: 25). However, so Crystal, “if imitation were the governing principle, then we would expect children to produce rather different patterns in their language than in fact they do. On the other hand, we would expect them not to produce some of the patterns that in fact they come out with.” (Wyse/Jones 2007: 25). A fitting example of the behaviourist theory of language acquisition is to apply the same rule to initiate a word such as “eated” (for “ate”) or “goed” (for “went”).

By contrast, Chomsky’s theory is the cognitive view of language acquisition. He proposed that language is not learned as a form of behaviour, it is acquired as a set of grammatical rules. With this, the children were further able to not only understand meanings of words, but also understand the grammatical rules which governed the ways in which sentences made sense (or not) (Wyse/Jones 2007: 26).

In the 80s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the social interactionist theories became very influential. The exploration of the social nature of language and knowledge acquisition were the focus of Vygotsky’s work, who wrote *Mind of Society* 1983 and who thought that both maturation and learning influence each other as children develop (Wyse/Jones 2007: 26f.). He discovered that children who had a mental age of eight

as measured on a standardised test were able to solve a test for a 12-year-old-child if they were given “the first step in a solution, a leading question, or some other form of help” (Vygotsky 1987:187). The scientist suggested that the difference between the children’s level working alone and the children’s level with some assistance should be called the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Klewitz 2017: 15, Wyse/Jones 2007: 27). Thus, according to Vygotsky, the study of ZPD is also important, because it is the dynamic region of sensitivity in which the transition from interpsychological to intrapsychological functioning takes place (Turuk 2008: 249).

Both of the two first theories, and also the last one based on Vygotsky’s studies can be applied to second language acquisition just like they are applied to general language acquisition.

### 3. Scaffolding in Second Language Classes

When planning and constructing a lesson plan, three main issues arise: curriculum design, instructional design and, connected to that, lesson design. MET (Model of Effective Teaching) is a model of effective and successful learning that consist of 30 smaller steps (Klewitz 2017: 9f., 19). Accordingly, the pedagogical-didactic design of second language instruction could be summarized in three steps:

- introduction phase,
- interaction phase, and
- various evaluation phases (Klewitz 2017: 12).

Scaffolding as a teaching and learning strategy supports the learning process and influences the structure of the lesson, respectively. Scaffolding is a metaphor and is understood as a supporting scaffold on the way from start to finish in a learners process. This process enables the students step by step to act independently (Klewitz 2017: 15).

There are two forms of scaffolding strategies. The first of them is macro scaffolding, which refers to an analysis of the needs and current learning status of the students. The second one is micro scaffolding, which concentrates on the interactions in classes (Klewitz 2017:17). Another model of the differentiation of scaffolding strategies is the following:

- process scaffolding – using hints and structural instructions to implement working steps and their sequence;
- input scaffolding – using *information grids* with the goals of reconstructing information of a text, a structuring proposal that is transferable to other texts, transparency of a genre, the design of an *information grid* by the students themselves, evaluation tasks, and patterns for short presentations;
- output scaffolding – with the preparation of student presentations (Hallet 2012, cited in Klewitz 2017: 18).

To summarise, we can say after Klewitz:

„Bei authentischen Lernaufgaben spielt scaffolding (...) eine zentrale Rolle, weil die in der ZPD angestrebten Kompetenzen mit dem task-based learning nicht nur verlässlich angebahnt werden können, sondern scaffolding auch in dem dazu entwickelten task cycle in unterschiedlicher Form und Funktion genutzt wird“ (Klewitz 2017: 21).

#### 4. Learner-Centered Teaching

At this point it is appropriate to mention the 150 success indicator that John Hattie uses in his meta-analyses that enhance the problems of developing lessons. Hattie discovered a need for the development of feedback as dialogical learning with the teacher, which he uses parallel to the metaphor of scaffolding (Klewitz 2017: 15). He describes seven steps of Direct Instruction that are used as the fundament of a lesson:

1. learning intentions,
2. success criteria,
3. hooking attention,
4. input, modelling, checking,
5. guided practice,
6. conclusion of a lesson and
7. independent practice (Hattie 2009: 207f.).

Direct instruction shows clearly that lessons are mainly viewed through the eyes of the students.

At the core of much present-day thinking on language teaching lies namely the idea of learner-centeredness. Within this idea “learner-focused” and “learner-directed” learning is discussed (Benson 2012: 30). Benson states that

“One of the main factors that the pupils began to be visible in the classrooms has been the exponential growth in the number of language learners around the world that began in the early 1960s and has continued as a consequence of the expansion of institutionalized education, overseas study, voluntary and forced migration, business travel and tourism, and the development of global communication technologies” (Benson 2012: 31).

Therefore, the learner-centered teaching leads to more effective learning and is thus pedagogical. The reasons for the effectiveness include:

- It is sensitive to individual needs and preferences.
- It encourages construction of knowledge and meaning.
- It draws on and integrates language learning with students’ life experiences.
- It generates more student participation and target-language output.
- It encourages authentic communication.
- It breaks down barriers between in-class and out-of-class learning.

It opens up spaces for discussion of motivations, learning preferences, and styles. It encourages students to take more personal responsibility for their learning. It challenges the view that learning is equivalent to being taught (Benson 2012: 32). Although the idea of learner-centered teaching is nowadays used less frequently than it was a few years ago, it remains a useful notion, because autonomy is, strictly speaking, an educational goal (Benson 2012: 35).

## 5. Literature and Poetry in Second Language Classrooms

The philosopher mentioned in chapter 1, Plato, proposed that there should be rigid censorship over the literature and music that children are exposed to (Wyse/Jones 2007: 24), which further could mean that he, already in ancient time, saw the immense potential of literary texts while studying.

In *Lernbereich 4: Umgang mit Texten* of the document *Lehrplan für Vorbereitungsgruppen, Vorbereitungsklassen, Vorbereitungsklassen mit berufspraktischen Aspekten Deutsch als Zweitsprache, vorbereitet durch das Sächsische Staatsministerium für Kultus aus den Jahren 2008/2009*<sup>1</sup> we can read as follows:

“Die Schüler können am Ende der zweiten Etappe altersgerechte Sach- und literarische Texte hörend oder lesend ohne größeren Informationsverlust verstehen. Sie sind grundsätzlich in der Lage, sich Lehrbuchtexte ihrer Klassenstufe verstehend zu erschließen, Informationen der Lehrkraft zu verarbeiten und Aufgaben schriftlich zu lösen. Sie lernen unterschiedliche Lesestrategien/-techniken (Textrezeptionsstrategien) kennen“ (Lehrplan: 34).

Text examples suggested in this context are among others „kurze, einfache literarische Texte“, which are to be understood as „Gedichte, Lieder, Hörspielszenen, Geschichten, Märchen, Sprachspiele u. a.; auch Texte in den Herkunftssprachen, Nutzung von Übersetzungen und zweisprachigen Textausgaben“ (Lehrplan: 34).

The methodological explanations of the Lehrplan further indicate to the teachers:

“Mit literarischen Texten sollte anders umgegangen werden. Zwar sollen auch sie in ihrer „wörtlichen“ Bedeutung erklärt und verstanden werden, wesentlich aber ist ihre kreative Aneignung. Dies geschieht durch Zuhören und Vortragen, Nacherzählen und Ausschmücken, Aufführung oder bildnerische Umsetzung. Kritisches Besprechen und Bewerten kommt in den höheren Klassenstufen hinzu. Gedichte auswendig zu können, kann auf allen Klassenstufen ein sprachliches Vergnügen sein“ (Lehrplan: 35).

To use poetry is among others a good way to develop children’s understanding of inference. Many literary devices in poetic language cannot be understood literal-

<sup>1</sup> Parallel to Saxon Curriculum there is also the curriculum for Thuringia on the home page given in the bibliography. Since it cannot be opened, the author decided to refer to the Saxon counterpart.

ly; they invite the reader “to look beyond the literal meaning of the word on the page”. Only this can lead to a deeper understanding of the poem itself. However, readers should not follow the question of “what does the poet really mean?”, but rather look for different ways of reading a poem and the means by which it is achieved (Wyse/Jones 2007: 69).

Some teachers find it difficult to teach children about inference. They see this as asking children to “read between the lines” and interpret this as asking them to read what is “not there”. This could be an unhelpful way of conceiving inference. The meaning is always right there in the text. There are just different clues to signal the meaning (Wyse/Jones 2007: 68).

Poems about animals or plants offer several opportunities for teachers to introduce analytical terms and concepts. It is not unreasonable to suggest that children would be able to establish a meaningful correlation between the white snow and the blank paper (Wyse/Jones 2007: 70). Children towards the top end of Key Stage 2<sup>2</sup> should also be offered opportunities to work with poetry which has themes appropriate for their experience and understanding (ibid: 70).

## 6. Teaching Unit

In this chapter we will present a teaching unit with the title: “The poem ‘Der Herbst steht auf der Leiter’ by Peter Hacks”. This teaching unit was introduced at the time of the presentation during the Seminars about scaffolding. The unit was for the German as a second language class of eight pupils of nongermane heritage, who are originally from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan and who learn the German language at the Regelschule in Kölldeda.

The pupils were in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class. However, their language level does not correspond to these class levels. They could be classified as level A1 or A2 according to the European References Framework. This is due to the fact that the children have only been learning German since autumn 2015, when they fled to Germany. They did not have any contact with the German language or culture before that. Moreover, their general educational level is rather low because they have never or only seldomly gone to school in their home countries.

Although they are attending regular classes and are graded in them, these pupils have to attend one lesson German as a second language every day. They are excused from their regular classes for this. The amount of lessons spent on German as a second language should not be taken too lightly. You can detect an appropriate increase in language capabilities in some students. However, there are also students in which you cannot notice any actual language development due to deficient prior schooling, trauma, or disability.

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<sup>2</sup> In Great Britain, the Key Stage 2 is attended by children between 7 and 11 years.

Three impacts have influenced the choice of topic for this lesson. Firstly, we have been talking about seasons prior to this lesson. Every season was named and described with appropriate words like colors and sensations. On top of that, we talked about typical activities and leisure possibilities for each season. The structure that evolved on the black board that lesson<sup>3</sup> can be found in the appendix (Pic. 1.):

Secondly, the topic of autumn was the latest interest for the children since it was October. I talked about this topic in a similar but slightly limited way with the students who took part in the lesson I presented in the seminar. The conversation in class resulted in the black board structure (see Pic. 2. in the appendix).

Last but not least, I wanted to memorize a poem with the students again in order for them to enjoy speaking German, practice their pronunciation, and learn a text.

All of these considerations have led to the creation of the lesson that is the topic of this paper. The lesson structure as a chart can be found in the appendix as Pic. 3.

The presented teaching unit lasted 90 minutes, and was divided in five phases: Introduction, so called „Ice Breaker“, Workshop 1, Workshop 2 and Stabilization of the learned. The evaluation that is needed for every topic cannot be done in this period of time. This is why I scheduled additional time for the stabilizing tasks, namely Gallery Walk and recitation of the poem, in one of the next meetings. The single parts of the lesson will be discussed further in the following part.

The Introduction took about 5 minutes. During this time, I asked the students:

Which seasons do you know?

What is the present season called?

What is the typical kind of weather in the autumn?

With which colors could you describe the autumn?

What can you do in your free time in the autumn?

The main aim of Scaffolding in this part was to hook the students to the topic and getting them involved. The students gave appropriate answers and fossilized their knowledge about the seasons.

The so-called Ice Breaker was the follow-up to this. In the next 10 minutes I recited the poem for the students. I wanted to reach the children solely through their listening. By using the strategy of scaffolding I explained the meaning of the poem as best as possible and tried to arouse their interest for it. Furthermore, I wanted to evoke their interest in the topic itself. After the recitation I handed out the poem to the students and read it out loud again after I told them to read along to it.

As a first workshop I chose a gap filling exercise. I handed out worksheets. An example of this can be found in appendix as Pic. 4.

The students had to work with the words of the poem and learn them. Apart from the usual word groups like nouns, verbs, and adjectives, the students had to

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<sup>3</sup> The attached black board was created by students in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, whose language level was at that point of time A2 according European References Framework.

also add the words „Am Ende“ and the first name of the author. The role of the teacher was, according to the guidelines of scaffolding strategy, solely to motivate and eventually give feedback to the results of the exercise.

In the next phase of the lesson, the students engaged in the poem in a creative way. I handed out white sheets of paper DIN A4. The students folded it once in the middle. On the front page they drew a ladder and on each step was the name of the author and the title of the poem. After this, the students cut the front page in four equal pieces that can be opened independently like windows. On the back page of the sheet, the students wrote or glued the single stanzas of the poem in accordance with the windows of the front page. Now, the students drew pictures on the back side of the windows and next to the stanzas which fit to the content of the single stanzas. This phase lasted for about 45 minutes. Not every student was able to finish in due time, and therefore homework was to finish the task.

While the students were working, I opened the poem on YouTube. In order to stabilize what we have learned so far, we listened the poem as a song sung by Monika Hauff and Klaus Dieter Henkler, found under: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC4JQyhW0hg>. After listening to the song, the students read the text once more. They did this in pairs. To finish the lesson, the students got the homework to memorize the poem and I played the song once more. The students were encouraged to sing along or just read the poem in accordance to the song.

## 7. Reflections on the Lesson

The evaluation of the lesson could not be done in the same unit. This was due to two facts. Firstly, the huge part of the lesson was spent on the creative task. Secondly, the students had to memorize and recite the poem. It is clear that the students cannot memorize the poem in one day. This is why I decided to do this phase three days later.

On that day, we prepared a kind of exhibition in which every student could show off his work and also admire what the other students have done. You can find some examples of the students' work in the appendix as Pic. 5–8. While the finished projects were on the black board, every student had the chance to recite the poem in front of the class. Some children had not learned the poem at all. Others were not able to recite it. However, most of them had memorized the poem very well and were able to recite it without hesitation or shyness.

Afterwards, we fashioned a small price competition. Every student chose the picture he liked most. The picture with the most votes won and the creator was rewarded with some sweets.

Reassessing the lesson, one could consider omitting the song. The reason is that the video is obviously rather old which you can see in the clothing and the hairstyles



of the actors. Unfortunately, this is the only version on YouTube that is presentable to a class. Plus, the video is more about the poem and the musical form of it, so the 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion should not be the focus of the attention.

Furthermore, you could consider spending only the 15 minutes planned on the first workshop. During the lesson, they were just enough to fill the gaps and check them on the black board. But maybe you could evaluate the task without the black-board, considering that the missing words are written down in the poem first handed out. This way you could spend the remaining 5 minutes on the creative task that followed.

The students of the seminar found little incentive to criticize the structure of the lesson. They remarked that the language level was rather low for the Regelschule. However, this objection was taken back when I explained that the students of my German as a second language class have not reached the usual level in their German language competence.

Positive feedback was that the topic of the lesson had a very clear connection to reality. Furthermore, it was mentioned that many different methods were used to get to know the poem and get familiar with the theme of the autumn.

An optional method to the presented lesson that was suggested was to have the students create a collection of words they learned. The students could prepare this independently and compare it in class. It could also be useful to talk about birds they know from their home countries in the Middle East, or which birds are completely new to them now that they came here. I tried to apply the ornithological conversation. Unfortunately, this failed due to the language competencies and general knowledge of both the students and me.

To sum up, one can observe that the lesson was very successful. Luckily, I was able to get this feedback from the students as well. I as the teacher gave the children only support in the form of hints and methods of how to do their tasks. This is in accordance to the overall method of scaffolding. The work created by the students and its diversity shows clearly that the students worked according to their own opinion and autonomously. The students were very motivated, and I was able to observe the delight they had when working which lead to a very high commitment to the task. Furthermore, they were very happy to be able to present their pictures (see even pictures 5–8 of the appendix) and the poem themselves, and maybe even get rewarded for it.

## **8. Summary**

Summing up, it is worth emphasizing that the strategy of scaffolding, which was described in chapter three, fits very well in the second language learning process of students with a low language level, who learn German as a second language on the

Regelschool. The example of the teaching unit “The poem ‘Der Herbst steht auf der Leiter’ by Peter Hacks” shows that scaffolding used in that classroom guides the students to good and expected goals, which are to know the vocabulary about the autumn and, in particular, to enjoy speaking German rhymes.

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## APPENDIX

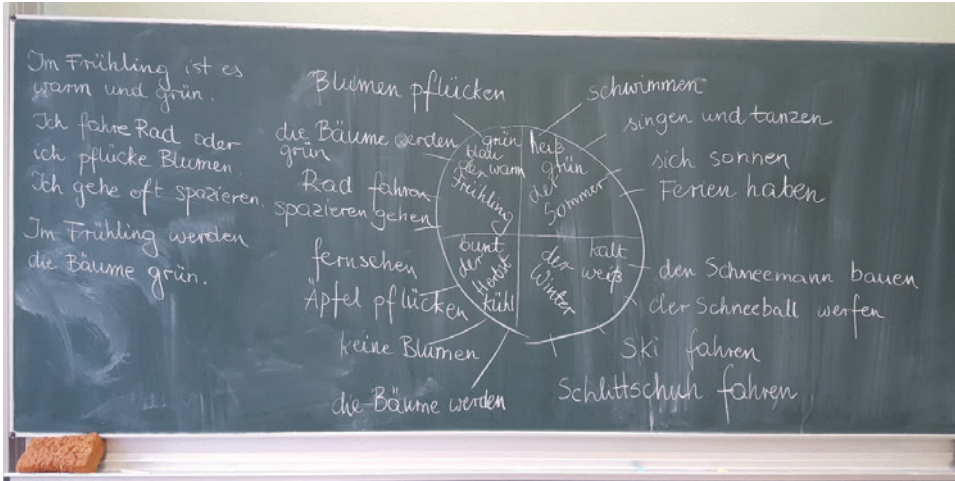


Fig. 1. A picture of the black board as a result of the lesson about seasons done by older students

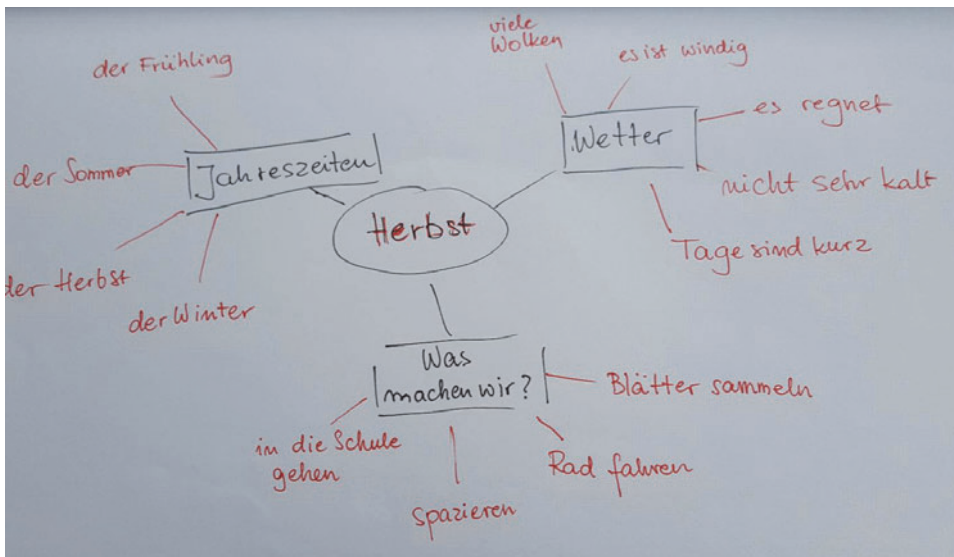


Fig. 2. A picture of the black board of the lesson before the teaching unit on the topic of autumn

Phase	Activity of the teacher	Activity of students	Scaffolding and additional material
Introduction (5 min)	Questions, writing on the blackboard, explanation of the unit tasks	Identifying and explaining words/phrases relative to the topic	Hooking students, involving in the topic / blackboard
Ice breaker (10 min)	recitation of the poem, handing out the poem sheet	Listening to the poem	Waking up of interest, explaining of the meaning of the poem / the poem sheet
Workshop 1 (15 min)	Handing out the worksheets, evaluating	Filling the gaps, writing the words on the blackboard	Working with words, learning words / worksheets
Workshop 2 (45 min)	Explanation of the task	Creative handling with the poem	Creative work / white arks, pencils, scissors, glue
<b>Festigungsphase</b> (15 min)	Listening, turning of the record	Listening of the poem, Reading in pairs	Learning poem / the poem sheet, Internet: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC4JQyhW0hg">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OC4JQyhW0hg</a>
<b>Next time (in 3–4 days)</b>			
Gallery walk (15 min)	Managing	Hanging up the texts, voting on the best work	Evaluation, Summative feedback / blackboard, magnets
The (lucky) end (20 min)	Listening	Reciting poem	Reciting poem by each student

**Pic. 3.** Tabellary presentation of the teaching unit

<p><b>_____ Hacks</b>  <b>Der Herbst steht auf der Leiter</b></p> <p>Der Herbst steht auf der Leiter  und malt die Blätter an –  ein _____ Waldarbeiter,  ein froher Malersmann.</p> <p>Die Tanne _____ zum Herbste:  „Das ist ja fürchterlich,  die andern Bäume färbste,  was färbste nicht mal _____?“</p> <p>Er kleckst und _____ fleißig  auf jedes Blattgewächs.  Und kommt ein _____ Zeisig,  schwupp, kriegt der auch ´nen Klecks.</p> <p>Die _____ flattern munter  und finden sich so schön.  Sie werden immer bunter.  _____ fall´n sie runter.</p>
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**Pic. 4.** The gap filling exercise



Fig. 5. Diverse examples of the finished products of the pupils



Fig. 6. Diverse examples of the finished products of the pupils





Fig. 7. Diverse examples of the finished products of the pupils

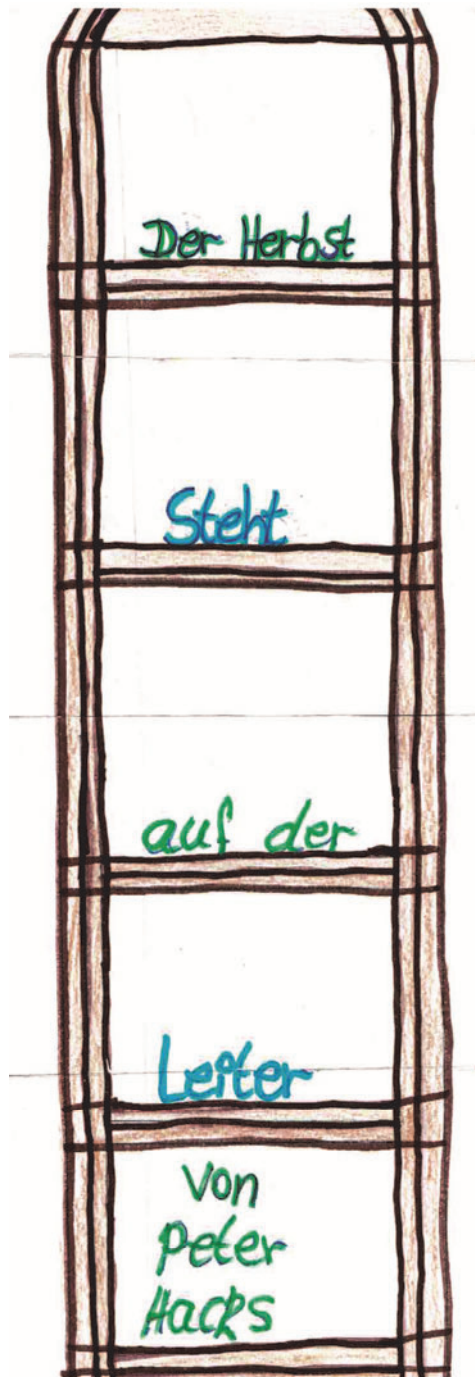


Fig. 8. Diverse examples of the finished products of the pupils