



From landscape interpretation to the identification of agroecological skills

Sector of activity : identification of agroecological skills and analysis of the conceptions of learners with regards to agroecology

Objective of the method

The landscape represents an endless source of emotion and information. Landscape interpretation may have a number of objectives but it notably enables us to highlight learners' conceptions about agroecology and identify, on a territorial or smallholding scale, agroecological skills which have shaped the landscape.

Description of the method

Everyone is more sensitive or rational when considering an immediate environment. In pedagogical terms, sensitivity and rationality are highly complementary and we can develop this theme to generate information about agroecological skills which have shaped a given landscape. Where the 'rational' has a predominant place in our teaching, one must always take sensitivity into account too, whether applied consciously or not.

Factors of success

It is preferable to choose a new landscape, one which is unknown to the participants. The surprise effect will stimulate the desire to understand and interpret without a feeling of 'déjà vu'. The leader takes care to always ensure listening and respect, void of any value judgements.

Difficulties encountered

Depending on the group dynamic, the approach may be reduced to a simple walk, an opportunity to get out and about and exchange with colleagues. It is always important though to alternate between group moments and individual moments, between introspection and sharing.

We propose different methods and tools which promote a sensitive or rational approach to the landscape.

The sensitive approach

The objective of the sensitive approach is to reveal and assist the affective and imaginary link between a person and the environment around them. A landscape may be agroecologically deteriorated or on the other hand be the result of practices which respect a certain agroecological dynamic. But in all cases, our sensitivity is subjective, based on our own experiences, our culture, etc. The sensitive approach is not there to identify the agroecological 'quality' of a landscape but rather to define the sensorial perceptions that we have and to enable individual expression of our relationship with the said landscape. Once this relationship is expressed, it can be linked to agroecological principles.

The sensitive approach is best made in small groups (5-10 persons) during a quiet walk with a stop on a well-chosen high point where the landscape is easily visible.

It is necessary to follow a certain progression, to invite the participants to express themselves (words, poetry, drawings, games...).

- Begin by creating a climate of trust. Give clear instructions which reassure.
- Alternate between group and individual moments: after a period of individual expression, develop group exchanges, without judgement values on the quality of the 'production'.
- Adopt short sequences, of varying lengths.

Amongst the wide variety of activities we can propose, here are some examples which are easy to use without being a specialist of any given mode of expression. You can then invent new methods in line with your personal requirements, your landscapes...

Nature games

These enable observation of the landscape in an amusing manner, a chance to explore new sensations which are often masked by the 'view' aspect which is generally considered the main element, thus creating a dynamic within the group.

TOUCHING THE LANDSCAPE

One sometimes talks about the texture of the landscape: this involves imagining that you can touch given zones or reliefs as one would touch a piece of material. You can then apply a contextual vocabulary: rough, ploughed fields, cotton-soft leaves, soft or spiky reliefs...

CREATING A SLIDE SHOW

Each participant brings a small object (preferably flat) from the area and places it between the two plates on a slide projector (you can also create a 'slide map' by preparing maps with folded card which is cut through with tracing paper covering the window).

Everyone gathers round for the projection. The group looks at the slides against the light (the more the objects let light pass through, the better the result).

THE CAMERA

In pairs, one is the photographer, the other is the camera.

The photographer guides the camera who has his/her eyes shut (the shutter).

When the photographer wants to take a picture he/she guides the camera towards the subject to be photographed.

He/she pulls on the *camera's* ear, its eyes open, the photographer pulls again and the eyes close. The retina (film) has captured the scene. Each photographer takes 5 pictures, trying to vary the scales (from macro to landscape). The camera recalls the photo which made the strongest impression, drawing it from memory.

THE HIDDEN IMAGE

Choose a site in a rich and diversified landscape.

The group sits down and closes their eyes, except one person who looks for a small detail or mini landscape that they find particularly beautiful, interesting, unusual, unexpected...

He/she describes this as precisely as possible, using a frame to define the landscape zone.

The others open their eyes and try to find the element described. When one person finds it, they become the describer and the sequence begins again. This can be repeated as long as the group remains interested. Possible extensions: this activity forces observation of details, the use of shared vocabulary and enables the entire group to focus on a single detail. It is often possible to go into further detail with regards to aspects of the landscape thus detected.

THE FOOTPRINT

We aim to make "landscape drawings":

- Using sheets of paper and different types of pens, pencils, markers... by making rubbings of different objects: tree bark, stones, branches...

You place the sheet of paper on top of the object and rub over it with the pencil to highlight the relief form.

- The objects can also be stuck to a piece of card with the composition, taking into account different colours, textures, volumes.

THE ARTIST'S CANVAS

On a small card with a sticky surface (double sided sticky-tape on one side of the card), everyone sticks small elements picked up on the path in order to create their personal composition.

POT-POURRI OF SMELLS

Each participant has a small container in which they will make their own perfume by collecting natural elements and mixing them. They must then find a name which illustrates the character of the perfume and then we compare the different productions...

PRIVATE CONCERT

Each participant is invited to sit down in a place of their choice. The concert begins after rubbing your ears in order to better perceive the ambient sounds. Then, note down the sounds heard, in any way you like: you can locate the origin, translate them into drawings, letters, symbols, etc.

Writing games

The expression workshops must be carried out within the framework of a progression towards placing the participants in a trusting environment. We often hear objections such as, "oh, I'm no good at creative writing". These activities give a framework, a trigger point, from which each participant can explore their imagination and thus limit the effect of any mental barriers.

It is important to ensure an atmosphere propitious to the 'solitude of dreams' as referred to by Bachelard ("We dream before contemplating, before a participating in a conscious display, every landscape is a dreamlike experience ") by enabling each participant to isolate themselves in a place where they feel comfortable.

THE EXQUISITE CORPSE

Each participant writes down a question related to the given theme (the landscape, vegetation...) then folds over the top of the paper in order to hide the question.

Each paper is passed to the next participant who gives a random answer, without reading the question.

The answer is folded over and the paper passed along to the next participant who asks a question...

The papers move around the room with questions / answers being alternated without any direct link between them.

At the end, each participant reads out the paper they get back.

WORD MIX

The leader distributes 5 pieces of paper to each participant. The instructions are to write down a keyword on each sheet of paper, to fold it up and to put it in the "hat". The papers are mixed up and each participant picks out 5 papers that they have to use to create one or two sentences.

WORD CASCADE

Each participant notes, spontaneously, 8 words related to the landscape. He/she then groups these words into pairs and then notes 4 words through word association with the pairs formed. Then these are again grouped into pairs and 2 new words are formed. Finally, the last 2 words make the ultimate word. Using the 15 words produced you can write a sentence or a short text. It is also possible to swap papers during each phase, so at the end each participant has words from another participant to work with.

HAIKU

Using Japanese poetry, 3 verses to suggest or evoke an ephemeral moment... never to be forgotten!

An example:

*The snake escaped
but the glance it threw my way
remained lying there in the grass*

“LIKE”

This is an exercise to incite us to dive into a landscape.

It is based on the correspondence between real elements identified in the landscape and imaginary subjects.

An initial moment when, everyone is in their own ‘bubble’, senses on alert.

You can use a table:

<i>I describe elements of a landscape</i>	<i>I compare</i>	<i>... anything that comes to mind</i>
Descriptive nouns	like	Descriptive nouns
Example: a twisted juniper bush	like	<i>concrete:</i> a very old man <i>abstract:</i> a suffering soul

Secondly, form small groups to read out the results.

This enables exchange and comparisons. You can exchange and steal words and ideas.

Thirdly, back in individual 'bubbles' each participant writes a text.

Some constraints may be useful to guide the participants:

- a text of 6 to 8 lines,
- it may be sad, comic, crazy or fantasy,
- use 2 or 3 ideas from other participants,
- begin the text with a trigger phrase chosen in relation to the location and the group leader's directives, for example "Here, we only have one sun per year...", "Do you know if we are far from the sea...", "Here is like nowhere else...".

Fourthly, reading and sharing the texts.

It isn't easy! You can always swap texts for this phase. This sequence is always rich in shared emotion.

Drawing workshops

This is a good way of entering into contact with the landscape and establishing an initial vision.

Then, the participants can share their impressions and show that different points of view exist (without value judgements), whether you are a hiker, cyclist, architect, geologist, naturalist, etc.

We learn to get to know other views.

This exercise can often lead to questioning more concrete notions and can be extended by an analysis (rational approach).

10 PEN LINES

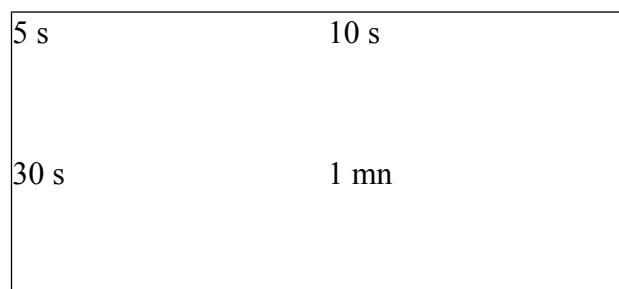
In front of a relatively simple but diversified landscape:

Draw the component lines in 10 pen strokes.

4 STROKE

Divide a sheet of paper in 4

In each section, respect the timing using a watch. It is often the lines of strength which are the first.



The strong time constrain means that there cannot be any complexification with regards to the quality of the production.

You can then draw the same landscape but by taking your time.

BACK TO BACK

In groups of 2. One observes a section of the landscape and describes it to the other, who has his/her back turned to the landscape and must draw it on the basis of the description given....

SLIDE VIEW

The group faces the landscape.

Behind the group, a person aims at a section of the landscape through an empty slide holder.

By asking questions, the group must find the selected sector...

TURN / return

Everyone faces the landscape and observes for 1 minute. Then everyone turns away and tries to draw the landscape during a further minute.

UPSIDE DOWN

Try to draw a section of the landscape by looking at it upside down, through your legs. You can also simply look, try it, you really do see things differently!

THE ORIENTATION TABLE

4 persons stand back to back, each one looking towards a point of the compass.

The idea is for each person in turn to describe the landscape they see.

To reduce the volume of the description, you can place a sheet of paper horizontally on each participant's nose, reducing the point of view to the distant landscape only.

The rational approach

This approach enables identification of elements comprising the landscape and raises questions about the agroecological practices which shaped the said landscape.

The landscape is thus observed as a collection of information to be decrypted, analysed, completed, verified.

Here too, as in the sensitive approach, you can easily observe that each person has a point of view shaped by his/her background, training, leisure activities...

It is particularly enriching in a group to exchange points of view, to view the landscape through the filter of other points of view, notably that of the farmer.

A LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS WORKSHOP

This can begin by a short approach phase in order to get a feeling of the landscape before moving towards expression.

Secondly, the leader (or the group) defines the themes to be identified in the landscape, e.g.

- Rocks, geology, relief
- Climate, water
- Vegetation
- Biodiversity
- Human agricultural activity

The participants choose one theme per group. Each sub-group can move around in order to get a better feeling of their environment, in relation to their theme.

Then, the groups get back together and each sub-group expresses their remarks, questions and hypotheses concerning the agroecological dynamic of the environment using elements of the landscape which illustrate their expression.

This phase of exchange is very important as a means of relating these partial views to a global approach to the environment.

We therefore build a link between the different components and influences which form a landscape.

Space and time take shape, the system is beginning to take form in our mind.

The interest here is to highlight a series of questions and hypotheses with regards to the actual agroecological practices viewed.

The landscape is an excellent source of questioning and motivation, but the answers often lie elsewhere and this is just the beginning of the quest.

A FUN VARIATION OF THE LANDSCAPE INTERPRETATION WORKSHOP

The leader prepares cards of different colours. Each colour represents a group of elements in the landscape (vegetation, mineral, human activity, climate, biodiversity, agricultural zones...). On each card there is an element of the landscape: pasture, river, forest...). The cards are stacked in the middle of the table.

Everyone draws a card and integrates the element of the landscape duly allocated. You have to find where the element is located in the landscape and give hypotheses about its position, shape, evolution... This can be carried out in theme-based sub-groups, per colour, etc.

The leader invites the group to explain interrelations between the elements and the evolution of the landscape.

CARD READING

As a complement, it is a good idea to use maps, notably to a 1/25000 scale.

This can be a starting point, positioning oneself on the map, identifying altitudes, names of hamlets, rivers and peaks...

Topographical maps provide a great deal of information about orientation, relief (altitude, inclines), the source of rivers, paths, administrative boundaries... But one can also use maps based on the geology or vegetation for more detailed questions.