

# Introduction to the Pedagogy Section

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STEFFEN KAUPP

What are the most effective and rewarding ways for students to demonstrate their learning progress, and for teachers to assess how much their students have learned? While the traditional blue book exam might offer an easily measurable score, it leaves hardly any room for learners to engage at a deeper level with intellectually stimulating topics through the target language. The theories of situated cognition (John Seely Brown, Allan Collins, Paul Duguid) and situated learning (Jean Lave, Etienne Wenger) pose that learning always happens in context. That is, when we learn something, it is not only important *what* we learn but also *where*, *how*, and *in what context* we learn it. If the context in which a new topic is introduced (e.g. a new grammatical structure in a beginning German class) does not present the learner with a scenario in which the new material is directly applicable, then the material will not be mastered. Put differently, the learning context must present clear affordances of applicability in order for learners to form meaningful connections and eventually to be able to apply their knowledge.

These insights about what constitutes productive learning also then have consequences for the areas of testing and assessment. Testing at its best must present students with learning opportunities. That is, testing becomes learning, and vice versa; there is no testing for the grades' sake. Rather, assessment becomes an integral part of the teaching and learning experience.

In this pedagogy section of *andererseits*, all essays present learner-focused, context-specific, and project-based approaches to teaching and testing. The first three essays (Vasant, Brooks, and Brisson) emerged from a panel at the 2018 annual conference of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) that focused on project-based assessment. Project-based assessment draws on the theoretical core of integrated performance assessment – which poses that assessment should allow students to holistically apply the learned material in authentic projects that go beyond simply recalling memorized information.

In her essay, ULRIKE BRISSON introduces a variety of projects that she has used at different stages of her German Studies curriculum. Besides the importance of crafting projects as multi-stage assignments in order to ensure that students stay on track, Brisson also discusses how crucial detailed rubrics are. They make the often-multi-layered projects more tangible for students (i.e. what

is expected of me?), and make it easier for the professor to grade the projects more fairly. LAUREN BROOKS introduces a project from an *Introduction to German Literature* class in which students write their own screenplay adaptation of a literary text. Her essay highlights the importance of scaffolding when working with project-based assessment. Just telling the students to create a screenplay is too overwhelming of a task. Thus, Brooks designed a series of smaller, increasingly complex assignments that gave students the analytical tools to complete the more complex task of writing their own screenplays.

In the third essay of this section, JACQUELINE VANSANT uses the real-world task of planning an overseas trip in order to assess her students' German skills. As part of the class, each student must plan a study trip, only delineated by some basic parameters that students can interpret creatively. At a university without a German major, this task lets Vansant's students connect their disciplinary interests to the study of the German language and culture. While the last essay of the pedagogy section was not part of the same ACTLF panel, ROLF PARR's reflections on how journalistic applications of literary material can be used in German classes present another interesting case study on learner-focused and context-specific learning. While the application of short literary snippets might not do the totality of a literary work justice, Parr shows convincingly,

dass es manchmal Sinn macht – und dies auch für die Fremdsprachendidaktik – den überkommenen emphatischen literarischen Werkbegriff temporär aufzugeben, und zwar zugunsten von Literatur als Ensemble literarischer Verfahren, zu denen nicht zuletzt dasjenige der Applikation gehört.

I hope that the four essays in this pedagogy section not only offer you interesting theoretical insights, but also inspire you to make your teaching and testing more project-based and thus learner-centered.