From Summative to Performance-Based Assessments

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In 2009 my colleague and I decided to switch from traditional summative examinations to project-based and performance-oriented tasks. Instead of a cumulative final exam, student teams set out to perform various episodes of one soap opera. After having seen them roll around the classroom, jumping from desks and chairs, wearing green wigs, beaming flashing lights across the room along with roaring music, and using phrases beyond any textbook, I was convinced we were on the right track.

Since then I have adopted and adapted project-based learning in a variety of forms for different levels of language learning. Yet, teaching in an environment and in a society in which grades matter for the students' continued financial support with grade-based scholarships and for employers who use GPAs in their selection process, assessment of project-based learning takes on essential meaning and goes beyond measuring learning outcomes. Thus, all the fun has a serious side as well and has compelled me to seek alternative venues of evaluating students' non-traditional display of language skills, which I would like to demonstrate in two ways: First, I will describe some of the projects to present the range of products the students have created over the span of ten years. Second, I will focus on two recent projects with their guidelines, the scope of expectations, and various types of assessments. The choice for project-based learning and assessments is based on the following theoretical approaches: autonomous learning or konstruktivistisches Lernen, drama pedagogy, space theories with ritual and play, and since I am teaching at an engineering school, I have taken ideas from the *KEEN Entrepreneurial Mindset*, especially their ideas about assessing teams, which I learned at a KEEN workshop.[1]

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1 | Dieter Wolff: Fremdsprachenlernen als Konstruktion. In: Babylonia 4 (2002), p. 7–14, online at http://babylonia.ch/de/archiv/anni-precedenti/2002/nummer-4-04/fremdsprachenlernen-als-konstruktion: Susanne Even and Manfred Schewe have published numerous articles on drama pedagogy, I will just list their monographs: Susanne Even: Performative Teaching, Learning and Research (edited volume with Manfred Schewe). Berlin: Schibri 2016; Drama Grammatik. Dramapädagogische Ansätze für den Grammatikunterricht Deutsch als Fremdsprache. München: iudicium 2003; Manfred Schewe: Fremdsprache inszenieren: Zur Fundierung einer dramapädagogi-

Since Worcester Polytechnic Institute is known for its focus on project-and team-based learning, adopting this form of learning for our German classes thus followed the educational guidelines of the university as a whole. When we eliminated the final examination at the end of the first year of German and replaced it with performing a five-minute episode of a soap opera, we left the topic open. The plays usually centered around relationship break-ups, accidents or death, and/or reconciliation. Amazingly, the students often came up with colloquial phrases or expressions outside any textbook or classroom. The students' performances thus confirmed Krashen's i+1 language acquisition theory and motivated the students to apply more than the material they would have studied for the test, free speaking and acting included.

In the more advanced courses – after one and a half years of German – I limited the content of the projects to the material we had covered during the course based on the textbook *Anders gedacht*.[2] Over the years, the students' preferred forms of presentation crystallized into a skit or a video, but they also created excellent newspapers, highly developed board games, and beautifully illustrated children's books. Yet, my ways of assessing these results were still rather holistic and unsatisfactory; moreover, the students had only a vague sense of how their performances or products and their language skills were measured. From various teaching workshops I have now arrived at a form of evaluation that comprises language skills as well as teamwork in more detailed rubrics and tables thus giving the students a concrete framework for their projects. The following two most recent final projects for my advanced courses »Negotiating Navigation Challenges in Berlin« or Berlin-Project[3] and »Dose vs. Flasche« exemplify my assessment approaches. The instructions are designed in the following manner:

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schen Lehr- und Lernpraxis. Oldenburg: Zentrum für pädogogische Berufpraxis 1993; Texte lesen, verstehen und inszenieren: Alfred Andersch – Sansibar oder der letzte Grund. Munich: Klett 1995; Welttheater: übersetzen, adaptieren, inszenieren – World Theatre: translation, adaptation, production. Berlin: Schibri 2012; in Richard Schechner: Performance Studies: An Introduction. 3rd Ed. New York: Routledge 2013, also available online at http://sduk.us/2016/krisis_testi/schechner_performance_theory.pdf; Timothy J. Kriewall/Kristen Mekemson: Instilling the Entrepreneurial Mindset into Engineering Undergraduates, In: The Journal of Engineering Entrepreneurship 1/1 (2010), p. 5–19, online at http://jeenonline.org/Vol1/Num1/Vol1No1P1.pdf.

2 | Irene Motyl-Mudretzkyj/Michaela Späinghaus: Anders gedacht. Boston: Cengage Learning 2004.

3 | The Berlin-Project is available online in German under https://engineeringunleashed.com/cards/card.aspx?CardGuid=dc7624a2-b390-4aa4-8823-8b521e3f5980 or my colleague's version (Daniel DiMassa) in English under https://engineeringunleashed.com/cards/card.aspx?CardGuid=2b8d9363-34b5-4954-a3f2-34677c3e66ef.

a. The description of the task.
b. The tasks of each team member.
c. The expectations and the respective grade break-down (e.g. presentation 10 %, teamwork 5 %, final product 75 % for the entire project).
d. The time frame with exact due dates.
e. Personality profiles for the role play (Berlin-Project).
f. Rubrics for assessing team work (individual, the team as a whole, the instructor).
g. Specifications for the oral presentation (mid-semester) and an assessment rubric.
h. Specifications for the final role play and a grading rubric.

In the description of the project it is important to include a problem that challenges the students and has some relevance for them, for example dealing with unforeseeable events for their Berlin trip or the lack of *Mehrwegflaschen* or returnable bottles due to the hot summer of 2018. Assigning specific tasks to each team member, such as editing or organizing meetings, allows them to draw on their personal skills, take on responsibilities, and be accountable for their part in the team. Personality profiles for the Berlin-Project have proven highly useful as they allowed the students to step into a specific role that spiced up the play with a high performance dynamic. These profiles tend to be stereotypical but can of course vary depending on the given project. One character for example has the following traits »weiß alles besser; gibt sich cool; aber verliert die Nerven in Stress-Situationen; mag keine Kritik.« This person is interested in »Diskos; Rock-Konzerte; Autos; Mode und schicke Kleidung; moderne Architektur; interessante Menschen.«

It is important to give students a specific time frame with due dates in order to break down the tasks, such as a bibliography or the first draft of the script, and to regularly provide feedback on their progress to insure high quality work.

The description of the project with team assignments and personality profiles sets the paradigm for the task itself. Rubrics with grade breakdowns help students to understand how they are being graded and what is expected. Most of the rubrics are in German because the projects are designed for advanced-level courses, but more complex ones are in English to ensure the students understand what is expected. It is, of course, up to each instructor to decide on the language of rubrics. In an ideal world, students would invest one hundred percent of their time to all the given aspects of the project, but in a real world, students set priorities and the rubrics allow them to make choices and take responsibility for their decisions. Whereas the final product, the performance, stood in the center of assessment in my courses with 75 %, the overall grade break-down can be changed, depending on whether the individual instructor is more progress or product oriented.

In the end, the performances of the role-plays are usually recorded on video in class or exist as a video submitted by the students so I can evaluate them afterwards. If recording is not possible, note taking is important during the performances in which I write down the props or media used, who said how much and how well for individual grading. For the team as a whole I include the results of the team evaluation sheets but also their level of creativity and how it was carried out (pronunciation, lexic, grammar, acting). As a note of pedagogical caution, since I have included team evaluations in my assessments, I have found the students competing against each other more than without those rubrics, or at least, they have been more open with me about unfair involvement than without the self-assessment forms for their teamwork. It felt like defeating the team spirit, therefore more observations are necessary for more conclusive results.

Overall, my holistic approach might in the end have led to the same grades, but it was not helpful for the students not knowing what was expected and how to achieve a high grade. Thus, including the assessments with tables and rubrics as well as the grade brake-down have contributed to more transparency for the students and have allowed me to grade more objectively and to bring in greater accountability.