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1. Introduction

This term-paper will examine the German course book Orange Line 4 published by Klett regarding project based learning. The examined circulation from 2012 has two mostly similar editions: 'Grundkurs' and 'Erweiterungskurs'. Both editions have the same layout and also cover the same topics within the units. However, the 'Erweiterungskurs' version contains slightly more activities. Fortunately, both books comprise of a whole section called *Extras* which provides different project topics with guiding activities, materials and recommendations.

Based on project learning theory, one project from the 'Erweiterungskurs' edition will be analyzed in this term paper. Before the analysis can be carried out, it is necessary to provide a gist of the theoretical background of project learning. This includes a proper definition as well as the benefits and challenges which come along with project learning in the foreign language classroom.

2. Project Based Language Teaching

To evaluate the project from the schoolbook properly it is necessary to clarify the project based teaching approach. Then, one can determine whether the proclaimed project is grounded on thoroughly researched theory by reliable scholars. Vollmer published a very broad definition of a project:

“Generally speaking, a ‘project’ is a complex learning-teaching encounter comprising not just one, but many activities and tasks all geared towards engaging with a certain issue or problem (either individually, in groups of learners, or in a whole class) in order to study it more closely, to find out about it in detail and to report about the findings to others” (Vollmer 2007: 46).

Additionally, “the concept is often used as an umbrella term comprising all kinds of theme-, topic- or problem-oriented classroom procedures, independent of subject-matter and educational institution” (Ibid.: 46). That means, following the definition by Vollmer, content is very important for project based language teaching approaches. Furthermore, content-based lessons in general and project work at school have reached big significance among language educators (cf. Stoller 2002: 107). This teaching approach helps students to develop their language skills while working on content based subject matters. “Projects provide contacts with real world subject matter which require students to apply and adapt what they already know” (Stoller 2002: 107) .

Nonetheless, language is not neglected when project based teaching comes into play. Thus, Vollmer also points out that

“the target language is used in manifold ways within projects, for example in order to plan and perform the activities, to interact with others in order to prepare a presentation or to evaluate the process of engaging in project work. These tasks are considered to be motivating and meaningful to the learner, but above all they are intended to support and develop the processes of L2 language acquisition, mainly through language use, less so through systematic language teaching – although I would argue that within each project there should be ‘language islands’, in which the necessary linguistic tools for a successful continuation of a project can be either provided or systematically revised and extended” (2007: 46).

Being linked to the real world content based learning environments are very vibrant and require student involvement, stimulate higher-level thinking skills, and give students responsibility for their own learning (cf. *ibid.*).

Concerning responsibility, “students should become involved in and responsible for all major decisions, especially those related to choice of topic, working methods and the nature of any end product” (Haines 1989: 1). Naturally, the strong student involvement tends to foster their motivation and interest in language learning (cf. *Ibid.*). Furthermore, “projects are more likely to succeed if students work cooperatively with others and independently of the teacher towards a mutually agreed goal” (*ibid.*). The goal as “a clearly defined and agreed upon end product is an essential feature of project work. Whatever its form, this end product should be the final result of the various tasks students engage in during the project” (Stoller 2002: 2).

This approach to language learning, with its emphasis on interesting topics and student autonomy, and its apparently informal methodology, can in many circumstances provide a welcome break from ‘normal’ classroom routines.

3. Text Book Analysis

3.1 Introduction

The analysis of the projects found in the text is mainly based on two major references. The first reference is a guideline found in the book ‘Process and Experience in the Language Classroom’ by Michael Legutke and Howard Thomas from 1991. On the pages 158 to 161, they declare eleven fundamental characteristics of project learning. On the basis of this, the provided projects will be analyzed to determine whether they are an appropriate choice to execute in class concerning project based learning theory.

Secondly, Fredricka L. Stoller also came up with primary characteristics of project work. She committed six essential features of project learning to paper which were the quintessence of how a number of language educators had described project learning before (cf. 2013: 109-110). Additionally to Legutke and Thomas, these features are also important to decide whether the project really fulfills the

requirements of project based learning and is worth being executed in an EFL classroom.

3.2. Project Analysis: Scenes from American History

In the textbook *Orange Line 4: Erweiterungskurs* published by Klett, is a whole section which provides different project ideas together with some material and possible tasks that lead to a specific outcome. The presented and analyzed project in this paper is called *Scenes from American History* (Klett 2012: 102). The predetermined outcome is an information stand to tell visitors about different topics regarding American history. Possible topics are also provided by the book but not mandatory. The students are advised to come up with own ideas. Additionally, there is a short text combined with a timeline and some pictures which show remarkable events in American history. Furthermore, there is a project plan which separates the whole project into three steps. Step 1 reads: “Make groups of four or five and decide which group should do which topic(s)” (Klett 2012: 103). Followed by Step 2: “In your group talk about what you have to do (for example find information, draw posters, etc.). Decide who does what and when. Make a plan. Look at the group skills on page 48 for help” (ibid.: 103). Finally, step 3 reads: “After you have finished your group projects, plan the information stand with your teacher” (ibid.: 103).

Henry specifies project work at school as a continuum between structured and unstructured. Structured projects are almost completely prescribed by the teacher in terms of topic, material and outcome (cf., 1995: 15). Hence, unstructured projects are completely carried out by the students without any limitations given by the teacher. Between these two stands the semi-structured project as a broader form of a structured project with more learner autonomy and responsibility (cf. ibid. 1994: 15). Here, although the topic, methodology, and form of presentation are prescribed by the teacher respectively by the textbook, learner autonomy regarding materials and organization is given. Thus, it is a semi-structured project. Students are responsible for the research of valid information about American history and organizing themselves as a group. Also the composition of the information stand itself is in the

students' hands. Solely in the end of the whole project the book advises teacher involvement. However, this does not restrict student autonomy and is only to plan where and when the information stand can be presented to the school community. The teacher may have to ask the administration to find a suitable spot and opportunity to arrange the information stand.

Initially, the features of project learning formulated by Stoller are used to decide whether the project from the textbook is well composed and suitable for the foreign language classroom. Stoller's first feature is the focus "on content learning rather than on specific language targets. Real-world subject matter and topics of interest to students can become central to projects" (2002: 110). This is partly covered by the project idea of the book. The focus is undoubtedly on content. Students will be able to create appropriate products even on a very low language level. Nevertheless, they will learn new words to enhance their vocabulary. Also the past tense will play a significant role when writing and reading about historic events. Thus, the focus is on content but language targets are not neglected, though. The subject matter is also linked to the real-world. This does not necessarily mean that students are interested and therefore motivated. It highly depends on the class and teachers ought to know whether a project topic is likely to be adopted and successfully executed by the students. In general the project idea to create an information stand about American history has its capability but is no guarantee to be successful.

Secondly, Stoller states that project learning is student centered. The teacher offers support and guidance during the project process (cf. 2002: 110). This feature is also fulfilled. The activities provided by the book are like a very broad guideline to make it easier for students to dive into the topic and to organize themselves. However, there is plenty of space for students to realize their own ideas. Additionally, the book advises to create a plan and to share the workload. But, how the students organize the groups is up to them. Because of the fact that the book is intended for students the role of the teacher is not being specified. To get more information about what the authors intended the teacher to do, a glance into the Lehrerband is needed. There, for every step of the project some hints are provided to

help the teacher fulfilling his or her role as a guide through the project. For example when students are together in their groups at project step two and organizing themselves, some leading questions

hints and guiding questions like “” “” “” “” (Klett 2011: 434) can be found. Regarding this it can be stated that the teacher is seen as guide who provides information and helps the students progressing throughout the project. Exactly like the teacher’s role is defined by Stoller.

Next, the third focuses on cooperation among the students. That means a project is mostly considered being cooperative rather than competitive. Although students can work alone, in small groups, or as whole class, they work together to achieve the project goal. They share resources, ideas, and expertise during the project process (cf. Stoller 2002: 110). Here, the book is slightly strict concerning groups and autonomous organization. It is clearly prescribed to build groups of four to five people. This restricts the freedom of students in terms of organizing themselves as it fits best for them. However, this freedom is given back to the students within their groups. They are then free to make their own working plan and to share the workload amongst each other. Thus, in this project the focus is on cooperation between the group members rather than on working alone or with a partner. In addition, all groups work sort of autonomously but have to communicate between the group members as well as with the other groups in order to achieve the mutual outcome. It is therefore proven that this project requires a lot of communication and cooperation between all students working on the project. In sum, the third feature of project learning, following the definitions by Stoller, is fulfilled.

The fourth characteristic means the “authentic integration of skills and processing of information from varied sources, mirroring real-life tasks” (Stoller 2002: 110). It is

3.3 Critique

3.4 Recommendations

4. Conclusion

Works Cited

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