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Catrin Bellay, Christine Evain

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Self-assessment for collaborative digital text mediation projects

Compte-rendu de pratiques

BELLAY Catrin, EVAIN Christine

Université de Rennes 2, EA 3874 LIDILE Linguistique, Ingénierie et Didactique des Langues

Self-assessment, text mediation, electronic books, creativity, collaboration



This contribution reports on the experimental use of an innovative pedagogical tool in English for Specific Purposes classes. One of the outcomes of the experiment was the development of a self-assessment method. The participants, first year students of French language and literature, were asked to work on their reading-in-English skills, mediated writing skills, (e.g. expressing a personal response to creative texts, analysis and criticism of artistic texts. See the CEFR Companion Volume (2017) for more examples of mediated writing skills). Students also worked on digital editing skills using a new tool called eZoomBook (eZB). An eZB is a multi-level electronic book incorporating different layers of content accessible by tabs in a menu. eZoomBooks include a zooming in and out function allowing writers to link content across layers and enabling readers to navigate between the different layers, much as one navigates between different pages of a website. The teacher was given the opportunity to experiment with course content and pedagogical approach. She used this opportunity to develop a creative project-based programme which included digital skills and to test it within an action research framework. She started out with the following set of objectives: to provide students with an opportunity to simultaneously develop several skills related to their speciality (modern literature), their future professional trajectories (teachers, librarians, publishers), their English language skills, technical skills related to electronic book production, and in addition “soft skills” such as autonomy, self-awareness, collaboration, and creativity. The students were required to work in groups to produce an electronic book to be used in the classroom.

Out of 24 hours of total class time, 9 hours were dedicated to group project work, with 4 hours devoted to oral presentations of the finished eZoomBooks. The remaining 11 hours were used to present the author, the field of children’s literature studies, electronic books, an example of an eZB for the classroom, and technical aspects of eZB editing. Resources and finished products were shared online (on a *padlet*). The teacher was able to adapt the assessment system used in the department and replaced the mid-semester written test with a group mark for the finished eZB (25% of the final mark). The oral presentation of the eZBs, while being carried out as a group exercise, was assessed individually and counted for 25% of the final grade. The remaining 50% of the final mark was allocated to the end of semester written exam comprising a question about the book they had read, a question about their reading experience, and a question about their project

experience. Student answers were used as feedback for the evaluation of the pedagogical approach and the eZoomBook tool. This data, along with the teacher's and co-author's observations, and discussion with the students, indicate that the approach enabled students to develop all the targeted skills and also motivated them to read a whole book in English, often with a resulting increase in the desire to read in English for pleasure. In addition, we identified the need to design an assessment method which is aligned with the teaching and learning method, as recommended by Biggs (2003), assigning more importance to evaluation of the process, and taking into account individual students' progression with targeted skills. We chose to design a tool which could promote learner autonomy, as defined by Holec, (1981) and Little, (1990, 2000), helping students develop their capacity to take control of their learning by involving them in the identification and definition of learning objectives. Since self-assessment is a necessary element of learner autonomy, we also decided to make self-assessment an integral part of the programme, as recommended by Champagne et al's 2001 study.

The assessment of all the skills involved in such a project needs to take into account both the learning objectives set out by the teacher, the objectives each student and each group of students had set for themselves, and the formal framework of continuous assessment outlines agreed on by the department. Most importantly in this case, the last of these three elements was flexible. The teacher was given considerable freedom to innovate including a certain flexibility concerning the modes of assessment. This experience can be contrasted with the constraints which are imposed by the kind of assessment guidelines that must be adhered to in much larger university-wide language centres where a considerably higher number of staff provide teaching to a larger number of students within a more varied range of disciplines. The question of the transferability of the method can be a focus for discussion with colleagues during the conference. The method is presented below with reference to the eZB project described above. Colleagues are invited to think about how it could be transferred to a different speciality.

The proposed method invites students to specify their own learning objectives. At the beginning of the course, the teacher presents the main objective of the project, in this case: "Produce an eZoomBook for learners of English as a foreign language, based on a book by Roald Dahl, which will motivate the learners to read the book for themselves." The teacher then outlines the broad categories of skills that are to be improved (learning objectives): English language, Text mediation, Collaboration, Autonomy, Technical (electronic book production), Creativity. The teacher also introduces the constraints: Work in a group; Choose a book by Roald Dahl; Use eZoomBook; Aim the eZB at learners of English as a foreign language. The teacher can also highlight the areas in which students have more freedom. Next, the teacher explains that the students will identify their own personal learning objectives within the broad categories mentioned above and that these objectives will form the basis of self-assessment. The teacher can give some examples of objectives (see Figure 1).

<i>Targeted skills</i>	<i>Personal and group objectives (examples)</i>
English language	Lexical objective: adjectives related to size Structural objective: Comparative structures (X is Comp Adj than Y) + questions Pragmatic objective: Asking and answering questions about comparisons
Text mediation	I want my eZB to motivate pupils to read the original book.

	I want my eZB to be accessible to 10-year-old learners.
Creativity	I want the content and structure of the eZB to be creative. I/we want to use the tool in a creative way.
Collaboration	Each member of the group must contribute. The work must be evenly distributed. I must carry out my role.
Autonomy	I/we will work autonomously. I/we will deal with difficulties successfully.
Technical	I want to master the eZB tool. I want to explore the tool's potential.

Figure 1: Example of an Objectives form

The teacher will probably need to guide the students when setting their objectives, particularly their linguistic objectives. In order to personalize these objectives, student and teacher can identify recurring difficulties and choose to address them. The technical aspect of the project, the constraint of having to use eZB, means that the project will be technically challenging for all students. The teacher will also provide a learner journal or group logbook and explain that it will help students to identify their objectives, to keep track of whether they are adhering to those objectives, and collect evidence on which they will base their self-assessment.

The self-assessment form can be based on the table of objectives developed by each group and each individual student. By reformulating the objectives into questions, students will then grade their achievement of the objectives on a five-point scale where 1 means that the objective was not achieved at all and 5 means that it was fully achieved. Figure 2. is an example of a scored self-assessment form. While it is laudable to offer students the opportunity to create a finished product, with all the advantages this has over simply sitting a test, creating an assessment method that values the process has an additional benefit. By creating a tool that also evaluates the process, we can avoid falling into the trap of only assessing the end product (the eZB) which might be just as limiting as only assessing performance in a test (another form of end product). By including categories that refer to the process in the objectives and assessment form, we are able to maintain a balance between the two areas of assessment.

General objectives	Personal and group objectives	Self-Assessment	Teacher Assessment
End result: English language	Did I achieve my lexical, structural and pragmatic linguistic objectives? <i>(a detailed list of linguistic objectives and evidence of achievement must be included)</i>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
End result: Text mediation	Would the eZB motivate pupils to read the book?	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
End result: Creativity	Was the content and structure of the eZB creative?	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Process: Collaboration	Did each member of the group contribute?	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5

(group mark and individual mark)	Did I fully contribute to the project? <i>(the group mark does not contribute to the individual mark, it is for information only)</i>	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Process: Autonomy	Did I/we deal with difficulties successfully?	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
Process: Technical	Did I master the tool?	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5	1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5
	TOTAL SCORE (out of 30)	18/30	20/30

Figure 2: Example of a graded Assessment form

This method is designed to help students develop the skills required for learner autonomy, such as the ability to identify personal objectives, to design a programme which will enable them to work towards those objectives, and to assess whether their objectives have been achieved. Involving students in the definition of the objectives and providing them with a model for guiding and evaluating project progress is a way to help them develop such skills. It is also a way to guide students towards self-awareness of the learning process and their own responsibility in that process. Finally, it has also been designed with the aim of giving students an opportunity to be creative language users and for that creativity to be included in the assessment criteria. The authors suggest that the completed assessment forms could help teachers to compare their perceptions of student achievement with the student's own perceptions and perhaps guide teachers in their attribution of project marks. It is also hoped that the method could enable students to simultaneously work on a creative project and prepare for the test, since the final oral and/or written test(s) could require the students to describe and analyse their work and their perceptions of their evolution as an autonomous user of another language. The ability to describe and analyse oneself as an autonomous language learner needs to be explicitly developed as part of the broader learning programme. As stated by Tassinari, "self-assessment both of language and of learning competencies is a key strategy in autonomous learning processes, and needs to be practiced and supported within a pedagogical frame with appropriate tools and methods in order to be learned" (Tassinari, 2012, p. 26-27). It is hoped that the method proposed here will make it possible for both the project and the evaluation to contribute to students' simultaneous development of specific language skills and more general learning skills.



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