Chapter 7
Planning and Assessing Group (Video) Projects in Foreign Language Classes

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ABSTRACT
This chapter provides suggestions for the planning, conduct, and assessment of group (video) projects in foreign language classes. It first outlines a rationale for the use of project work and discusses the benefits and challenges of incorporating group projects in foreign language classes. To illustrate how group projects may be implemented and assessed within a specific course, the chapter describes an intermediate-level content- and task-based foreign language course on fairy tales. It details how course objectives, tasks, and assessments are aligned and how a group video project, in which students plan, produce, and present their own (modern) fairy tale film, is integrated in the course. The proposed assessments are both process-based and product-based and include self-assessment, peer assessment, and assessment by the instructor. Forms and rubrics that are used by students and instructor to assess the process of participating in the project and the project’s end product are presented so that they can be adapted easily by interested readers.

INTRODUCTION: PROJECT WORK IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES
Group projects are good opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate complex language or cultural skills. Unlike individual student projects and presentations, they provide opportunities for simulated “interpersonal communication” in which “learners interact and negotiate meaning in spoken . . . or written conversations to share information, reactions, feelings, and opinions” (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017). Communicative (Canale & Swain, 1980; Duff, 2014; Littlewood, 1981), content-based (Brinton, 2003; Lyster, 2011; Snow, 2014), and task-based (Long, 2015; Nunan, 2014; Willis & Willis, 2007) language courses lend themselves to the inclusion of at least one large-scale group project—for example, a video project in which students demonstrate not only skills in interpersonal communication but also the abil-
ity to collaborate in a team and to apply digital media and technology. As Weinstein (2006) notes, such projects “help learners document not only what they are learning about language, but also to document the increasing range of functions they can do with language” (p. 162).

Content-based and task-based approaches to language teaching are seen here as varieties or extensions of communicative language teaching (CLT) (Richards, 2006). According to Duff (2014), CLT “is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes learning a language first and foremost for the purpose of communicating with others” (p. 15). Krahnke (1987) defines content-based language teaching as “the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teaching the language itself separately from the content being taught” (p. 65). Richards (2006) points out that proponents of task-based language instruction assume “that grammar and other dimensions of communicative competence can be developed as a by-product of engaging learners in interactive tasks” (p. 30).

Project work naturally lends itself to such teaching approaches because it provides learners with concrete tasks to acquire, reflect on, and present content, to complete (simulated) real-life tasks, and to perform functions in clearly described real-life contexts and situations. CLT approaches have in common a focus on meaning-making, interaction, and problem-solving and do not primarily teach language form. Language is seen as a means to acquire content (in content-based instruction) and complete (real-life) tasks (in task-based instruction). Accordingly, assessments are designed mainly to measure learners’ acquisition of (non-linguistic) content, their completion of tasks, and their appropriate performance in communicative situations and contexts (Wigglesworth, 2008). Although language skills may be assessed insofar as they make possible content learning and task completion, specific knowledge about the target language (e.g., grammar rules or isolated vocabulary) is not the primary object of assessment.

While many instructors will recognize the potential benefits from learning experiences in group projects, some may shy away from incorporating them because of the complexity of the associated tasks and assessments (see Beckett, 2002). How does one assess student performance in complex group projects? How does one align course objectives and projected learning outcomes with assessments? How and to what extent does one assess individual student performance versus group performance? How does one make sure that assessments are fair, practical, and reliable? To what extent does one assess the process of working on a complex project, the completion of subtasks and preliminary products, and the delivered end product? These are important questions that one needs to clarify and answer before having students embark on complex group projects.

In this chapter the author will provide suggestions for the planning, conduct, and assessment of large-scale group projects in second/foreign language (L2) classes. In order to illustrate how group projects may be implemented and assessed within a specific course, he will describe an intermediate-level (fourth-semester) language course on fairy tales that includes content- and task-based components as well as an integrated video project in which students plan, produce, and present their own (modern) fairy tale film.

**Characteristics of Project Work**

Group video projects and project work in general are nothing new in the field of foreign language teaching (see Alan & Stoller, 2005; Foss, Carney, McDonald, & Rooks, 2007; Gareis, 2000; Gaunt, 2002; Goulah, 2007; Meyer & Forester, 2015; Nikitina, 2010; Sildus, 2006; Weinstein, 2006). Some time ago, Stoller (2002) made a convincing case for the integration of project work in content-based ESL classes.