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As They Wrote It – Students' Projects

Summary

With the reformed curriculum introduced in Serbia, students have a more active role during their studies. Projects may help make students more 'visible' in the learning/teaching process by both providing a broader basis and catering to different interests of students. They also enable teachers to continuously follow and assess the work and achievements of students, thus taking the 'burden' off the final exam.

Bearing that in mind, we organized a three-fold project for the third-year students at the English Department in Niš. The students could choose among writing for a magazine, acting in a drama club or translating a brochure. The paper will present the work in two projects: making a magazine for English students, and compiling a bilingual brochure for prospective students. The focus of this paper is on the students' choice of topics included in the brochure/magazine, the stages in their work, as well as various challenges encountered during their individual and team work.

Key words: project-based instruction, higher education, magazine project, brochure project, language-related problems, language-unrelated problems, assessment.

Kot so napisali – študentski projekti

Povzetek

V Srbiji je reforma učnega načrta uvedla bolj aktivno vlogo študentov v času študija. Projekti naj bi študentom dajali večjo prepoznavnost v učnem procesu, učiteljem pa omogočali stalno spremljanje in ocenjevanje študentskega dela in njihovih dosežkov ter tako razbremenili končne izpite.

S tem ciljem smo organizirali tridelni projekt za študente tretjega letnika na Oddelku za angleščino na Univerzi v Nišu. Študenti so lahko izbirali med pisanjem za časopis, igranjem v dramskem krožku ali prevajanjem brošure. V članku bova predstavili delo v dveh projektih: ustvarjanje časopisa za študente angleščine in pripravljanje dvojezične brošure za bodoče študente. V žarišču pozornosti bodo: izbor tem za časopis oziroma brošuro, potek dela in različni izzivi, s katerimi so se študenti soočili v individualnem ali timskem delu.

Ključne besede: projektni pouk, visokošolski študij, project: revija, project: brošura, jezikovne težave, nejezikovne težave, ocenjevanje.

As They Wrote It – Students’ Projects

1. Project-Based Instruction

Project-based instruction is an authentic instructional model or strategy in which students plan, implement, and evaluate projects that have real-world applications beyond the classroom (Blank, 1997; Dickinson *et al.*, 1998; Harwell, 1997). In the last 20 years many educators “have turned to content-based instruction and project work to promote meaningful student engagement with language and consistent learning” (Stoller 1997, 2). Such practice breaks the routine and contributes to “vibrant learning environments that require active student involvement, stimulate high-level thinking skills, and give students responsibility for their own learning” (Stoller 1997, 2). Enumerating the benefits of successful project-based learning, Allen and Stoller (2005) point out that it:

- focuses on real-world subject matter that can sustain the interest of students
- requires student collaboration and, at the same time, some degree of student autonomy and independence
- can accommodate a purposeful and explicit focus on form and other aspects of language
- is process and product oriented, with an emphasis on integrated skills and end-of-project reflection.

The end result is often authenticity of experience, improved language and content knowledge, increased metacognitive awareness, enhanced critical thinking and decision-making abilities, intensity of motivation and engagement, improved social skills, and a familiarity with target language resources.

Thus, learning based on projects has been described as an approach which puts the student in the centre of the teaching/learning process, within the framework of experiential learning (Eyring 2001, Beckett and Miller 2006). Project-based instructional strategies “have their roots in the constructivist approach evolved from the work of psychologists and educators such as Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget and John Dewey” (Railsback 2002, 6).

Despite many definitions of project-based learning, there is still neither a solid theory or model nor much research done in the field of EFL/ESL, so the positive voices have been based on teachers’ anecdotal reports of the successful incorporation of project work into language classrooms with young, adolescent, and adult learners, as well as classrooms with general, vocational, academic and specific language aims. (Beckett and Miller 2006, 20)

While Stoller (2006) believes that the theoretical framework can be based on the research in wider fields of L2 and FL teaching/learning (motivation, the development of expertise, the role of input and output in language learning, and the value of learner centeredness in classroom instruction), Beckett (2006a) advocates taking a functional perspective to language learning which includes project-based instruction since

language learning is the acquisition of linguistic as well as sociocultural knowledge... This view is a useful theoretical framework... because... it treats language as a focus of study as well as a medium of studying. (Becket 2006a, 58).

However, despite these theoretical and methodological problems, project-based instruction continues to intrigue teachers, challenging both their own and their students' creativity. For that reason a group of instructors at the English Department of the Faculty of Philosophy, Niš decided to include project work into their English language 3 courses as a logical step after the introduction of continuous assessment.

2. English Language 3

English language 3 used to be a third-year two-semester course, consisting of lecture classes (held by the professor) and three sub-courses: grammar, translation, essay (run by lectors). At the beginning of the course, students were supposed to have reached the B2+ level of CEFR and were expected to reach the C1 level by the end of the academic year. The 2007/08 generation of third-year students was the last to attend this course in the old curriculum; from 2008/09 on the course will be replaced with two one-semester courses of equally complex structure: *Modern English Language 5* and *Modern English Language 6*.

In an attempt to introduce and test other ways of teaching and learning, the instructors of this last group offered students the options of participating in one of three projects: a magazine project, brochure project, or a drama club. In this way, the instructors wanted students to have a more visible engagement and a more active role during the teaching/learning process. All three projects were semi-structured and productive:¹ the instructors offered the general outlook of the projects, which the students further developed, and as the result of this work, the students made end-products – a magazine in English, a bilingual brochure for freshmen, and a theatrical production in English. The participation was obligatory, but which of the three projects students would join was their choice. The projects were organized as additional activities carried out outside regular classes as a way “to bridge the gap between language study and language use”, as Fried-Booth (1997, 7) would say. The projects were announced by the professor in October 2007; they were prepared by the lectors in early November, first meetings were held at the end of November, and the final products were expected by the end of May 2008.

The projects were planned following the ten-step outline given by Stoller (1997), which, however, was adapted to the demands of these projects. According to Stoller, the ten steps are: 1) agreeing on a theme for the project; 2) determining the final outcome; 3) structuring the project; 4) the instructor preparing students for the demands of information gathering; 5) students gathering information; 6) the instructor preparing students for compiling and analyzing data; 7) students compiling and analyzing data; 8) the instructor preparing students for the language demands of the final activity; 9) students presenting the final product; and 10) students evaluating the project. However, since the students involved in these projects possessed a high level of linguistic competence, steps 4 and 6 – the instructor's linguistic preparation of students – were restructured and made assignments on the students' part. Originally, only step 8 – linguistic preparation before presenting the final products to the

¹ For the classification of projects according to the respective participation of the teacher and students into structured, semi-structured, and unstructured, see Henry 1994; for the classification of projects according to end-products into production, performance, and organizational projects, see Stoller 1997.

public – was to be organized in accord with Stoller’s model and expected to include the instructors’ intervention.

This paper will present two written projects: the newspaper project and the brochure project, since the work of the drama club was rather specific in comparison with these two.

3. Presentation of the Projects

3.1 ENGZINE

Newspaper projects are often used in classes and reported on in the literature on project-based instruction (Tal and Rishpi 1998; Chan 2001; Foss et al. 2007). These projects are popular for many reasons: they are easy to organise, they allow students to express their varied interests, they are motivating for students to learn something about the topic or to share their knowledge with others, and they include the presentation of final products to the public. Besides, the literature reveals that this writing assignment contributes to developing various – and not solely language – skills. Thus, Foss et al. (2007) emphasize, quoting Schmetzer, that “reading and creating newspapers can [...] offer advanced-level students the chance to extend their reading and writing skills beyond typical exercises and into real-world literary scenarios, while also providing a chance to develop post-literacy skills” (Foss et al. (2007, 9). Also, in regular writing classes, there is

[a] massive neglect in the area of students anticipating readers’ needs because ... the teacher is the only reader whose response actually counts, there is simply no call for a reflective discussion which considers how readers might react. (Johnston 1987, 48)

Thus, this kind of projects allows practicing writing for an audience other than the teacher. Furthermore, a newspaper project enables students to explore schematic knowledge: a knowledge of genres, general world knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge and topic knowledge, and how a genre constrains writers (Harmer 2004). All these reasons contributed also to our including a newspaper project in our courses.

ENGZINE (as the students themselves named it) was the English Department third-year students’ magazine for students. Originally, the students had to write two articles on the topic which they chose individually or in pairs; the articles were to be published in two issues: one due in April and the other in May. The length of the articles was not specified in advance – the instructor left it to the students to determine, bearing in mind that students differ in their interests, motivation, skills and language needs. Thirty students chose to do this project; a few did so reluctantly – because this activity was obligatory, these students’ accomplishment was not quite satisfactory. (However, as Fried-Booth (1997) says, this is not uncommon in projects in general.)

The objectives of the project were: exploring the genre of magazine articles; going through all the stages of writing an article (from research to publication); developing a sense of what the process of writing includes (especially writing several drafts, editing, paying attention to cohesion and coherence, grammatical correctness...); writing for a broad audience; working in pairs/groups; developing the skill of peer-response and review; producing computer-processed texts (primarily through the use of Microsoft Word).

The instructor set the general outline of the project with the deadlines to meet and the students were expected to contribute to scheduling, organizing and performing the tasks in the meantime. It was planned that the instructor would be more involved in preparing Issue 1, which was organized in two phases: phase I was to consist of a number of workshops in which all the students would take part, and phase II, which coincided with Step 8 of Stoller's model, would have the form of teacher-student conferences in order to polish the final versions of the articles for publishing (the final linguistic preparation before the articles reach the public). In contrast, during the work on Issue 2 the students were expected to be more independent, having the previous experience to rely on (Egushi and Egushi (2006) experience proves that this is possible). This work was to be performed in small teams (four to five students), carried out at a time and in a manner convenient for the students, (with fewer workshops including the attendance of all participants); and only in the final stage (Stoller's step 8) would the emphasis be on teacher-writer conferences. Organized in this way, Issue 2 was to be completed within a month.

However, during the course of the project the original plan had to be changed. One of the reasons was the students' inability to meet the deadlines. Confronted with a lack of time (which does happen in projects – Foss et al. (2007) also report this as a problem), preoccupied with duties for other courses and the April exam term, students lost their initial enthusiasm. Faced with these problems (and some others that will be discussed below), the instructor decided to free students of the duty to prepare Issue 2 and respect the students' wish to bring the ongoing work to completion. This decision also resulted from the conference with the instructors of the other two projects, who agreed that the workload of the students working on Issue 1 approximately equalled the workload of the students in the brochure project and drama club.

The other reason why the instructor decided to change the original plan was influenced by the fact that, after a series of four workshops, group work was not as productive and efficient as it had been at the beginning of the project (this problem will also be discussed below). Therefore, the instructor decided to assume a more active role and work with the authors of individual articles in a series of sessions (instead of having just one such conference, as previously planned). This considerably increased the instructor's workload, but it was necessary to do to help the students bring the project to its satisfactory end.

Thus, the work on the magazine project underwent significant changes, but in the end it did produce the expected outcomes: the students did learn first-hand about the genre of magazine articles; they did go through all the stages of writing an article; in the process they did learn that writing in general, as well as writing a magazine article in particular, consisted of different stages which included writing, rewriting and editing different drafts, constantly bearing in mind the potential reader and balancing the demands of the genre, the authors' purpose and linguistic appropriateness; the students did practice peer-review, though these reviews were as successful as expected; and they did have some experience in mastering the text-processing standards using Microsoft Word.

That the students experienced the project in the way that the objectives defined it and that they recognized the same outcomes as the instructor became evident from the feedback questionnaire.

Originally, this was supposed to be an interim questionnaire given to students in April to express their feelings and opinions at the end of the work on Issue 1 of ENGZINE; however, since Issue 2 was not prepared, this questionnaire turned out to be final.

The questionnaire consisted of 11 open-ended questions (see: Appendix 1), because the instructor, organizing this kind of activity for the first time, wanted to get (as much as possible) honest, detailed answers to serve as a guide for future work. The questionnaire was filled in by 15 out of 30 students.

In the feedback sheet, the students expressed their satisfaction with the project, they emphasized that all their expectations were met although most of the students had expected the task to be easier and take less time. They particularly valued the workshops and peer review and the cooperativeness of other teammates who were all joined together for a common cause. They praised the idea of having a project since it was real refreshment (though a few students thought it should be an optional activity) and also enjoyed working with the instructor.² The major criticism was a lack of time, just as in the project carried out by Foss et al. (2007).

Summing up our experience with this project, we can say – judging from the final product, the outcomes of the project, and the students' feedback – that the ENGZINE project generally served its purpose.

3.2 Survival Guide Brochure

The Survival Guide project started with a very general idea of a brochure for the English Department students and the instructor expected the students to shape and organise it. This turned out to be a sound expectation because the students were more than eager to provide starting points. Since many of the students were not from Niš, they had easy time remembering their first encounter with the Faculty, as well as all the information they had needed but had not been provided with. Further, the students were supposed to cooperate and do independent research in order to organize and present the information in a manner best suited to the target audience – future students.

The main goal of the project was to prepare an electronic and paper edition in time for the entrance exam of the would-be students at the English Department. Another objective was to make our present-day students, as well as freshmen, acquainted with the academia-related terminology and the new concepts that are entering our educational system (such as credits, Student Parliament, accreditation etc.).

The number of the students who applied for the project was 45, and that was an important factor in organizing the workshops and group work. The students explored different sources and were grouped according to those sources, while they were further sub-grouped according to the topics

² It is interesting that throughout the feedback sheet, students kept using the word **professional**, whether they described their own aspirations, their team-mates activities or the instructor's. This would probably result from the fact that they really felt like professional journalists writing for a wide audience.

they found important for the future brochure (the process is described in more detail below). The workshops were held on a monthly basis with very specific tasks for the students, and roughly followed Stoller's ten phases (Stoller 1997). First, the students had to choose which information they wanted to include in the brochure. In order to do that, we organized a small survey – each of the groups had to explore the web sites of different universities and filter through general information on studying, as well as the information on language departments. One group was assigned to explore British sites, another American sites, and the last one sites in Serbia and the region. The most important aim of this phase of the project was to acquaint the students with the terminology, but also with the organization of information, and differences that exist between the British and American educational systems as compared to our own.

The next step was to clearly define the target audience, which would consequently resolve the matter of the style and tone of the brochure. Since future students were seen as the target audience, some of the students were more in favour of informal and 'chatty' tone, while others were more in favour of formal style, which they deemed more appropriate for the university setting. However, they were not completely independent in making this decision, as the sources they used were of various styles and, consequently, influenced the style of the translation. In the end, the students decided to use 'mid-formal' style and satisfy the demands of a wide audience, sometimes slightly altering the style of the original texts.

After searching through the sites and brochures of other universities, the students had to decide on the contents and submit both source texts and translations. These included texts on the credit system, accreditation process in Serbia and abroad, English department entrance exam, documents needed to enrol, etc. Also, they had to compile a glossary of the academia-related terminology and use it to appropriately translate the material. Once they finished drafts, they made them available to all the colleagues using the possibilities of Google Groups (administered by the instructor), where they could post their texts for others to read (or download) and peer-review.

The next step was to trim and tailor the information according to the comments made by the peers and the instructor. The students had to pinpoint not only grammatical inconsistencies but also the appropriateness of style and clarity of the translations done by other students. Another task for the students while forming the second draft was to collaborate with the colleagues who worked on the similar (or same) topics within their own groups (e.g. each of the subgroups had to separately devise the contents of the future brochure and then to negotiate the final version with other subgroups).

Organised in this way, the brochure project met all the objectives: the students went through the whole process of translation outside the classroom context; they took full responsibility for the brochure by selecting and organising the material; they tailored the material to suit the audience; they follow their peers' comments and suggestions; and finally, they enriched their vocabulary with academia-related terminology and improved their IT skills (on-line glossaries, file sharing, etc.).

At the end of the project the students had their say by filling in the feedback questionnaire. The feedback form consisted of a number of open-ended questions and one section in the form of a scale (see Appendix 2). Out of 45 participants in the project, 29 gave their feedback on the project. What the feedback showed was that the students were mostly satisfied with the organization of the project, and almost all students found it useful. They had various expectations (ranging from improving skills and learning something new, to doing something with purpose, to expecting a bonus for their final mark), and the students pointed out that all their expectations were met. Only a few students had no particular expectations and stated they would not like to participate in other translation projects. As for the difficulties during the project, it is interesting that working with the members of different subgroups provoked different emotions: while a third of the students pointed out that they had had problems when working with colleagues from other subgroups, another third stressed that they had learned a lot about the team work in this phase of the project (how to adjust to others, how to cooperate, and how to be patient with their colleagues).

In the end, everybody was proud when the web issue of the brochure appeared on the faculty website in early July – just in time for a new year of freshmen to enrol.

4. Discussion

Although the work on the projects was painstaking (since the projects were an additional as well as a time-consuming activity), it was at the same time a great pleasure. The students expressed great interest and enthusiasm, they looked forward to sharing ideas with other team-mates, they took peer-review sections very seriously because they felt that they were part of something bigger and that the contribution of each improves the quality of the final product, etc. What particularly amazed the instructors were features – either of the students' personality or their linguistic competence – that would otherwise pass unnoticed. For example, the work on the ENGZINE project provided evidence of some students' masterly command of certain specialist registers (the articles on cars and fashion), their subtle sense of humour (the film review article), ambition in mastering a topic from different angles (the article about the 'old' and 'Bologna' programs), perseverance in accomplishing tasks on one's own despite difficulties, etc. Also, in the brochure project, some students (who had not been 'visible' during regular classes) took initiative, suggested different solutions, and were eager to help others. However, the work also entailed some expected as well as unexpected problems. These will be discussed in two sub-sections since, due to the different nature of the two projects, there were few characteristics they had in common.

4.1 ENGZINE

Among the problematic issues related to the ENGZINE project, the most prominent ones were: peer-reviewing sessions and developing language-unrelated and basic language skills.

The peer-reviewing workshops in which students read, reviewed and discussed each other's drafts were a novel and interesting experience for the students, and they enjoyed it. The comments that the writers received after a fruitful discussion considerably contributed to better quality of

the articles. For example, the reviewers suggested changing the intended audience to make the article more meaningful and purposeful – instead of addressing third-year students, who were already familiar with the topic, the article should be aimed at freshmen (the *Leaning tips and tricks* article); changing the style and tone – seasoning the article with humour (the article on the earpiece); transforming the form of the article – transforming an interview into a report (the *American Corner* article), etc.

However, this productive phase lasted only as long as the reviewers could rely on their experience as readers and could focus on the content; after three sessions the work came to a standstill and the reviewers either marked the articles as ‘great’ or focused on minor issues (which were not always necessarily wrong). This was the stage when the students/ reviewers had to employ specific knowledge related to the structure of articles (topic sentence, cohesion and coherence) or to exhibit a high level of language competence (detecting faulty collocations, wrong choice of word and traditionally problematic grammatical areas such as: articles, prepositions, present perfect, indirect questions, sequence of tenses). Seeing no progress in further work conducted through workshops, the instructor decided to restructure this phase of the project and organise work in the form of teacher-writer conferences.

To be fair, it must be admitted that problems with peer-reading and peer-reviewing are generally quite common and noted in the literature. Min (2008) notices that students, unaccustomed to peer-review, seem to “[lack] knowledge of what to attend to [and give] vague or unhelpful feedback” (285–6). Therefore, she recommends devising training sessions consisting of a number of classes where students will be trained to assume the role of the intended audience and give an objective account of another student’s work. She herself has organised a training session for her own students, and after the experiment she reports that trained students are able

to generate more specific and relevant written feedback on global features of their peers’ compositions ... and that most of peer comments were incorporated into subsequent revision and contributed to enhanced revision quality. (Min 2008, 288)

She has also devised a guidance sheet for students to help them while doing peer-review, which, at the same time, can be used as help for self-evaluation and self-review.³

This project also gave the students an opportunity to develop some other – not language-related – skills (such as: problem solving, decision making, selection of material...), which usually cannot be exercised in teacher-directed instruction. As for the basic language skills (apart from writing), there is little evidence as to when and how they were used – particularly speaking. It was noticed that in workshops the students preferred to speak in Serbian (or, rather, ‘Serbish’ – a combination of Serbian and English). Although Egushi and Egushi (2006) consider the use of L1 in monolingual classes a factor which minimizes the well-known potential of project-based learning, the ENGZINE instructor tolerated this for several reasons: first, almost all courses at the English Department are done in English, so the students probably wanted to behave

³ Another device which can be used to guide students in the process of reading their own (and other students’) work is a poster with a set of questions displayed in the classroom (Johnston 1987).

differently in this extra-curricular activity; second, the atmosphere in workshops was relaxed, so they probably adopted this habit as a way of relaxed behaviour; and finally, it is reasonable to suppose that the students felt more confident when speaking in their mother-tongue in order to comment on their peers' work and to express all shades of meaning in a face-saving way.

As for writing skills, it is difficult to say how productive the work on the project was for the students. Originally, it was expected that the work on the article for Issue 2 would give indirect evidence of the progress made, but, as we have seen, the change in the organisation of the project made this evidence unavailable. As a useful tool to monitor students' work, Beckett and Slater (2005) and Stoller (2006) suggest introducing "project framework", which helps students

[engage] in setting explicit goals; [chart] plans for meeting goals; and [monitor] language content and skills learning. The use of the project framework is reported to result in students' heightened consciousness about a new way of learning language, increased motivation and a greater appreciation for project work. (Stoller 2006, 34).

Unfortunately, since this record of students' work was not introduced on time, it could not be used to provide valuable information about the ways in which students' writing skills had developed.

In retrospect, we can conclude that all the problems that the participants of the ENGZINE project encountered arose from the lack of experience with project work, which in turn resulted in inadequate preparation.

4.2 Survival Guide Brochure

In the Survival Guide project students experienced some problems similar to the ones in the ENGZINE project (problems with peer-reviewing) but also some which were unique (problems with cooperation within groups and problems with IT literacy).

Just as in the ENGZINE project, the only visible decline in the whole work on the brochure was the peer-reviewing sessions, where students had to make comments and give suggestions on the translation done by their peers in terms of the appropriateness of the source text, accuracy of translation, relevance of the information and the like. The students usually did not come prepared to these workshops and only had general comments, such as: "it's good", "it's maybe too long" but had no direct and concrete remarks. At the same time, they were more interested in hearing the instructor's point of view and her comments on the work – not only about the appropriateness of the chosen material, but also about grammatical accuracy, style and layout. This experience proves once again that students have to be prepared for peer-reading before being assigned the task.

Another challenge that awaited the students, which did not appear among the students on the ENGZINE project, was group work, since the tasks were usually assigned to groups of three to four students. While the initial groups (composed of the students who socialise outside the faculty) worked and cooperated well (they had their own dynamics of work sharing, respected the choices made by every member, etc.), the final regrouping of the students created problems.

This problem was not apparent during the workshops but it figured high on the challenges list in the feedback. So, although team-work was not a problem *per se*, cooperation among the students who were not friends was. The positive outcome was, however, that after the project the students were aware that cooperation asked for more skill than they had previously thought.

One unforeseen problem was the students' lack of computer skills, which cropped up during the project since the whole work had been designed for electronic use. Students had to deal with browsers, tables, different file formats and conversion from one format into another as well as using Google Groups to exchange their material. In practice, only those more tech-savvy made a more regular use of Google Groups, while the majority was more in favour of printed copies of drafts and texts. However, it is worth noting that although the students did not use the possibilities of file sharing and commenting on Google Groups, they were positive about the tool. The feedback even showed that some students were more satisfied with their own computer skills after they had done the work in the project.

In the end, judging from the work on the Survival Guide project, we can only emphasise that, aside from some common problems which may arise during working on a project – such as students' lack of knowledge about peer-reviewing – instructors should be prepared to deal with other, language-unrelated problems, such as cooperation among participants and lack of computer skills.

5. Assessment

Finally, the greatest and most serious challenge for the instructors during the projects was assessing students' work. They certainly had created certain impressions about each student, but they felt, being novices to the area, that they would be more confident when assessing the students' work if they could develop a more objective marking system.

The reviewed literature was not helpful since the authors generally do not refer to assessment criteria. Foss et al. (2007) mention marking their students' work and assigning credits, but they do not give details. Slater, Becker and Auderhaar (2006) think that “project work needs to be evaluated holistically through sound research-based assessment models... appropriate for age and context as well as transparent for teachers, students, and parents” (Slater, Becker, and Auderhaar 2006, 257), but they refer to the use of project work in content-based teaching. In their opinion, providing students with formative assessment guidelines (part of Project Diary) can be

a valuable tool to the students to guide the formative assessment of their own learning of [content, language and skills development]. This use, in turn, offers the teachers a perspective other than their own to enhance the reliability of their summative evaluation and therefore helps to make the assessment of the curricular goals of content, language and skill through projects more transparent for students and parents alike. (Slater, Becker and Auderhaar 2006, 245–6)

However, since the instructors did not introduce the diary on time, it could not be used in this case. After weeks of conversation and discussion, the instructors finally decided to apply analytic scoring since it was always more useful than holistic scoring for beginner teachers (Hughes, 1989). They decided to divide students' work into three different segments.

Thus, the maximum of 20 points for the ENGZINE project was assigned in the following manner:

- research (interviews, searching the net, newspaper and magazine articles, books...) – 6 pts;
- writing the article (clear idea of the purpose and audience of the article, number of drafts, innovation and creativity in rewriting, Instructor's help, ...) – 6 pts;
- workshop activities (attending workshops, involvement in the work, helping peers, exhibiting creativity and cooperativeness, commitment to the project and the team-mates...) – 8 pts.

On the other hand, the work on the Survival Guide Brochure was graded according to:

- choice and amount of the text for translation – 6 pts;
- translating (the number of the drafts that the students had to make, including the accuracy of the work and the inclusion of the suggestions the peers had made) – 6 pts;
- active participation in workshops (discussion, giving suggestions to the colleagues, sharing one's point of view, taking initiative, completing all the assigned tasks on time) – 8 pts.

This kind of assessment presented a few challenges especially for the Survival Guide project instructor since all translation work was done through team or pair work and it was difficult to assess individual achievement. Therefore, the active participation in workshop discussions and peer reading seemed to gain an overriding influence.

After the instructors divided the marks in this way, the students got the final marks, which basically coincided with the impressions the instructors initially had. This mark was added to the average, cumulative score of traditional tests (grammar, English-Serbian translation, Serbian-English translation, essay, dictation and oral) and generally increased the final average mark by 1. However, a portion of the English language chair, who did not really have a good insight into the students' effort, energy, creativity and time dedicated to the projects, objected to such high marks since they believed that the marks did not reflect these students' actual command of English. These objections bring us back to the question of the role of project-based instruction in EFL/ESL and, we would add, to our willingness and ability to change our deeply-rooted habits.

6. Conclusion

In the end, after a year of work on these semi-structured, productive projects, we can say that this work was a refreshing activity welcomed by both students and instructors for having a beneficial effect on the teaching/learning process. However, all the participants agreed that the work on the projects would have been more productive had this activity been incorporated in regular classes.

What these projects also showed was that the students on higher levels of language competence were perfectly capable of doing the linguistic preparation for the forthcoming steps on their own, though in the reviewed literature it is recommended that the instructor should ensure means for the constant monitoring of that work. One of the recommended ways to do this is by introducing the project diary, which will contain a record of students' work, offer students

the material to reflect on the previous steps and raise students' awareness of the role of this kind of learning, while at the same time it will help the instructor monitor, comment on and assess students' work.

When we refer to the problems encountered during the work, we can notice that we had to deal with both language-related and language-unrelated problems. The most important of these for the students was their lack of knowledge, training – and confidence to successfully perform peer-reading and peer-reviewing. Our projects proved once again that students should be prepared for this activity (through training sessions, guidance sheets, etc.) and taught how to develop the 'skill' of peer-reviewing. Other significant problems were students' reluctance to cooperate with the team-mates they usually do not socialize with and their lack of technological savvy to efficiently fulfil the assigned tasks. Since language teachers are usually focused on linguistic issues in their work, it is worth noting that teachers should be prepared to deal with these problems as well. Finally, the greatest problem for the instructors was how to assess the students' achievement in this loosely-structured activity. The suggested solution is far from perfect and it is certain that this area will attract the attention of practitioners in the future.

In the end, there is the question of whether project-based instruction is welcome in the local EFL environment or not. Without the answer to this question, individual initiative, motivation and ambition will remain fruitless. Since these projects met with a mixed reaction from the local educational environment, we feel that the answer has to be given not only by the educational institution in question but also by the country's policy- and decision-making bodies – even more so if the country is – just as Serbia is – at the outset of the 'Bologna-oriented' reform and has to take a number of measures which will place the student in the centre of the educational process.

Note:

The final products of these projects can be seen on:

<http://www.filfak.ni.ac.yu/nina/eng/index.html> - English version of the Survival guide brochure,

<http://www.filfak.ni.ac.yu/nina/srp/index.html> - Serbian version of the Survival guide brochure, and

<http://www.filfak.ni.ac.yu/ljilja/index.html> - ENGZINE.

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Appendix 1

ENGZINE project

Feedback Questionnaire

1. Why did you join this project (and not one of the other two)?
2. What were your expectations concerning the project at the beginning?
3. Which of your expectations have been met? Which have not?
4. How did you choose the topic for your article? Why?
5. What did you learn in the process of writing the article: a) about the topic of your article?
b) about writing a newspaper article?
6. How do you find the cooperation with your partner(s) (if you have any)?
7. How do you find the group work of all the members? Did you profit from the peer-reading sessions? Do you think that other mates have been honest and constructive in their approach? Any episodes to illustrate?
8. How do you find the work with the project coordinator? a) Any objections?
b) Any good points?
9. What do you think of this kind of extra-curricular activity (which can - & will - affect your regular mark – in a positive way)?
10. Any suggestions, comments or complains about the project(s) – anything that haven't been addressed in this questionnaire?
11. Any ideas for your ISSUE 2 article?

For more detailed answers, you can use the back of this sheet! Thnx!!!!

Appendix 2

Survival Guide Brochure

Feedback Questionnaire

1. Why did you choose this project over the other two?					
.....					
2. What did you expect?					
.....					
3. Were your expectations met?					
.....					
4. Rate the following from 1 to 5: 1 being the lowest, 5 the highest					
a) the organization of workshops	1	2	3	4	5
b) the usefulness of the project	1	2	3	4	5
c) the amount of the workload	1	2	3	4	5
d) the challenge of the team work	1	2	3	4	5
e) the work of the coordinator	1	2	3	4	5
5. Would you participate in other translation projects? Yes / No					
a) if yes – why yes?.....					
.....					
b) if no – why not?.....					
.....					
6. What have you learned during the project?					
.....					
.....					
7. How do you find the group work within the first grouping (that you chose) and the re-grouping.? Have other team members been constructive in their approach?					
.....					
.....					
8. What should be changed if future projects are organized?					
.....					
.....					
9. What was the biggest challenge?					
.....					
.....					
10. Anything else you would like to comment on?					
.....					
.....					

Thank you for your time and effort – keep up the good work 😊