

Project-based learning in an intercultural context

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Abstract: Pupils from Kirkwall Grammar School (KGS) and Stromness Academy (SA) created a supplement for the Orkney Island's newspaper *The Orcadian*, which invited readers to an armchair tour of Germany. The pull-out supplement, entitled *Deutschland Today* and published on 9 June 2011, gives insights into German politics, art, literature, film, sports as well as other aspects of German culture such as food, humour and music. The approach adopted was pluralistic not only in terms of participants, but also in terms of aspects that were dealt with throughout the project. It was a key issue to sensitise pupils to the intercultural dimension of foreign language learning (German) while getting insights into journalism. The present article reviews and evaluates this newspaper project.

Keywords: German as a foreign language, newspaper project, intercultural learning, global citizen, authentic learning situations

Oh hid's grand tae be in Orkney here
Amang me kith and kin
Juist suroounded bae some watter
And the shore that haads me in.

[...]

For we all hiv shores around us
That restrict us every day
So whar's yer shoreline at juist noo?
Gey near or far away?
(Orkney poet Harvey Johnston, 2011)

1. Introduction: Themes and Intentions

In Johnston's poem "The shore that haads me in" (2011) every man is metaphorically restricted to an island. But within the limits of our island we can— as Johnston writes in the last stanza of his poem – be "contented" with our island and "free within hids confines roam". We can increase the quality of life by making our island wide and open. Extending the "shores that haads me in" (ibid.) means looking beyond one's limited perspective, breaking out, discovering the unfamiliar or in other words opening horizons. This was attempted during an intercultural newspaper project carried out in Orkney and dealt with in the present paper.

During the newspaper project pupils from Kirkwall Grammar School (KGS) and Stromness Academy (SA) created a supplement for the Orkney Island's newspaper, *The*

Orcadian, which invited readers to an armchair tour of Germany. In the role of a foreign language assistant I had the chance to carry out the project which was inspired by German Honorary Consul Sinclair Robertson. Creating a supplement for an actual publication provided an authentic context which gave rise to meaningful and relevant actions. Pupils had the chance to decide what they wanted to include in the supplement, they worked both independently and in a team, got an insight into journalism, discovered certain aspects of Germany and also established contacts with native speakers. The eight-page supplement appeared 9 June 2011 and can be viewed by clicking on the following link: <http://tiny.cc/DeutschlandToday2011>.

In the following sections I demonstrate how two theoretical concepts – intercultural learning and project-based learning – were combined and dealt with in a real context with real pupils. After providing a glance at the theoretical framework (2), I look at the project in more (3): context, objectives, description of the project phases and a snapshot of the end product. Taking the theoretical framework into account the project is critically evaluated, i.e. dealing with both positive and problematic aspects (4). The paper finishes with a short concluding remark on project-based learning (5).

2. A Glance at the Theoretical Framework

This section gives a rough outline of two didactic concepts - ‘project work’ and ‘intercultural learning’. The first has been under discussion for over a hundred years and still it seems that project-based learning is not satisfactorily commonplace in schools (cf. Kieweg, 1999; Ahrend, 1999; Emer, 2008). Surprisingly this is despite the fact that benefits are well known and widely accepted: action-orientation, learner-centeredness, self-directed and autonomous learning, relevant and meaningful tasks in a rich and authentic learning environment, possibility to break down the classroom boundaries, interdisciplinary learning, communication and management skills and many more (cf. e.g. the systematic list by Kieweg, 1999, 6-7). The second – intercultural learning – came into being in the context of an increasing globalisation and is now of high priority in the school curricula and frames of reference. Intercultural competence is a main goal in foreign language teaching. However, the term is often criticised for being very shadowy defined and especially questions about assessing intercultural competence remain to be solved (cf. e.g. Göbel, 2007).

Still, because we are living in a shrinking world that is becoming more and more interdependent it makes sense to approach foreign language teaching in an intercultural manner. The goal of language learning is not to produce native-level speakers, but “intercultural speakers” who are able “to see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cultural beliefs, behaviours and meanings [...] and those of their interlocutors” (Byram, 1997:12). Intercultural competence – the main goal of intercultural learning – is the ability to act and communicate appropriately and effectively in various cultural contexts. It is about (cultural) relationships and solidarity and about taking the other seriously. The key components of intercultural competence are knowledge (about other cultures, nations, behaviours etc.), some special attitudes (like openness, curiosity, empathy), cultural identity (knowledge about one’s own

culture) and self-confidence (knowing who I am). Intercultural aspects can be found everywhere in our daily life which shows that intercultural learning does not depend on a particular subject. In order to encourage pupils to engage with a different culture and raise curiosity for it, it is necessary to create holistic learning experiences (cf. Kippel, 1991:19). In other words, only if the whole personality of the learner is involved will learners succeed in understanding the value and benefits of diversity, reflecting their own biographical, social and cultural background in a critical way, developing an openness and sensitivity towards other cultures and possibly changing beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. When it comes to intercultural learning, project work seems to be an ideal activity as it takes the whole learner into account. It clearly has a holistic dimension that is important in order to sensitise pupils to cultural differences and have them develop a cultural awareness.

Petilliot-Becker (2003:73-74) defines project-based learning in an educational setting by four aspects. First, project-based learning is need-oriented, which means that the initiative, theme or content is brought forward by people who share a common interest and feel the need to take action. Project-based learning puts the learner in the centre and connects him/her with the real world. Second, project work is process-oriented. The process is considered equally important as the result. Third, it is goal-oriented. Participants pursue specific goals which structure the learning process. Fourth, a project aims at a tangible result which is presented at the end. These four characteristics clearly show that project-based learning is learner-centred. It takes pupils' interests, needs and abilities into account, especially by providing real problem-solving tasks in a context that goes beyond the classroom (cf. e.g. Kieweg, 1999a, 1999b; Arendt, 1999; Hallet, 2006:60-63; Petilliot-Becker, 2003:73-74). Projects open up the classroom because of their interdisciplinary nature. However, whilst the end product is usually quite clear, authentic and explicit, the process is rather vague and uncertain as it is up to the participants to decide, negotiate and come up with ideas. In this way, pupils' life worlds and frames of reference are brought into the project. Many opportunities for self-directed group and individual work are provided. Concluding his reflections on project-based learning, Leupold sees benefits in four areas – knowledge, learning, personality and actions (1999:6). It has been shown above that intercultural learning draws on these four areas as well.

3. The Project: *Deutschland Today*

3.1. Context

With a circulation of more than 9,000 among a population of about 20,000 *The Orcadian* newspaper plays a central role in spreading information and forming public opinion. Indeed, many Orcadians study it very thoroughly from start to finish in order to keep up-to-date with all sorts of Orkney-related news that will become an essential part of daily conversation throughout the week. For the pupils from Kirkwall Grammar School (KGS) and Stromness Academy (SA) who signed up to the project it meant taking on a great deal of responsibility, which in turn made the tasks to come highly motivating and

challenging. When advertising the project in the German classes the question of whether it would really go into *The Orcadian* was repeatedly addressed. The project stretched over a period of about eight months. Pupils from SA as well as KGS and the FLA met once a week during lunch break (45 minutes) and a few times after school.

The group of participants was diverse in terms of age (S1 – S5), ability (e.g. reading and writing skills in German and English), interests, prior-knowledge and experiences (with regard to journalism, article-writing and knowledge of German-speaking countries). Some pupils primarily participated because they were interested in the German language and culture, while others were rather keen on getting an insight into journalism. Only two pupils had already been to Germany and five to another foreign country. Many pupils were keen to visit Germany in the future and were interested in a German pen pal. All pupils showed a certain curiosity and openness about Germany which is a fundamental requirement when approaching another culture (cf. above).

However, several challenges had to be taken into account: Firstly, a geographical and linguistic distance makes Germany appear far away, out of reach and therefore unimportant as far as pupils' everyday life is concerned. Secondly, stereotypes and prejudices might have shaped pupils' image of Germany. In terms of prior knowledge of newspapers as a medium, the elder pupils had an advantage. They came across newspaper articles in class; many read *The Orcadian* quite regularly and a few were reading a national newspaper or online newspapers.

Since the project was open to everyone (no year restrictions or entry requirements) the building up of a heterogeneous group was possible. Heterogeneity – often experienced as an obstacle in the (foreign language) classroom – was not considered as a disadvantage here. On the contrary: It was assumed that this would suit the project. For one thing it could be vital during the collaborative phases to have different perspectives and ideas, and for another it could be enriching for the end product to have “experts” in various fields (art, literature, music, Germany, current affairs etc.). The newspaper – a heterogeneous medium itself (cf. e.g. Falkner, 2004) – requires diversity and a wide range of topics.

3.2. Objectives

The project intended to use journalistic tasks to pave the way for an intercultural study of Germany and other German-speaking countries, culminating in the production of a newspaper supplement to be published in *The Orcadian*. The result is tangible but the task complex and wide-ranging. Trying to reduce one country (not to mention the six countries in which German is spoken) onto eight (originally only four!) newspaper pages is of course impossible. Therefore, careful choices of aspects by pupils according to needs, interests and abilities were necessary. I therefore decided to concentrate on specific topics that would illustrate and exemplify a general idea, thereby highlighting cultural richness and diversity. Simply accumulating facts about Germany would have been neither motivating for pupils nor produced any long-lasting knowledge. The development of a cultural awareness, knowledge and understanding of cultural

phenomena of one's own society as much as those of German-speaking countries were central to the project. In this context it is important to differentiate between a specific approach that is connected to a particular country (Germany) and an approach that does not relate to a particular culture, but focuses on a general understanding of cultural notions (cf. Denzel de Tirado, 2007, p.13). The newspaper project tried to combine both, addressing various aspects directly or indirectly: cultural identity, cultural exchange, stereotypes and prejudices, globalisation, freedom (of the press, of opinion), tolerance and critical thinking. The project thus offered experiences that help transform pupils into "responsible citizens, who have a growing awareness of life in another society and of the issues facing citizens in the countries where their new language is spoken" (Scottish Executive, 2004:1). The principles and objectives of the projects can be briefly summarised as follows:

- By stimulating intercultural and interdisciplinary reflections the project helps pupils to understand the complexity of our global world and to become global citizens.
- Learners experience German culture and journalism through an intercultural, holistic and action-oriented approach.
- Tasks are carried out both in cooperation and independently to train social skills and give pupils the chance to develop their full potential.
- The project makes a contribution to pupils' media literacy.
- The German language plays an important role (many authentic sources are in German and when contacting native speakers the German language is used), but is subordinate to these main aims.

3.3. The Project Phases

- 1. Initiation:** Before starting the project I took a few preliminary steps. These included generating publicity and advertising the project (through posters in the corridors [cf. appendix I], the pupil bulletin, presentations in class, spreading the word in the staff room). I also suggested a first organisational meeting with interested pupils. During this meeting we agreed on time and place to meet up and decided on means of communication (e-mail). In order to set a motivational basis for the team I tried to clearly describe the purpose of the project in an action-oriented and learner-centred way that would encourage active participation and enable pupils to identify with possible topics. I also handed out a short questionnaire covering name, year, hobbies and interests, experiences with German-speaking countries and other foreign countries, expectations, suggestions or ideas for the project and the question of whether they would like to have an e-mail contact in Germany (which was arranged for those interested).
- 2. Preparation of the newspaper:** The phase of preparation included two components: Discovering German-speaking countries on the one hand and gaining insights into journalism, especially article writing and writing strategies, on the other. At the

beginning pupils brainstormed possible sections and topics which the newspaper could cover. The brainstorming was carried out based on a variety of German and English newspapers and magazines to obtain broad categories. Besides the selection of newspapers a number of items relating to Germany (such as films, books, music, postcards, pictures, board games and food) were also exhibited. The initial list produced served as a starting point but was constantly up-dated throughout the project (cf. appendix II). The authentic material used for the brainstorming was kept in the language base which was always accessible to participants. On the basis of the interests mentioned in the questionnaire, the brainstorming ideas and inputs from discussions during the meetings we covered topics as diverse as German films, games, music, current affairs, food, and e-mail contacts with German pupils. During this phase pupils also examined prominent newspapers to find criteria that make a good newspaper. They developed guidelines that would help them write articles (cf. appendix III) and discussed issues concerning the whole supplement and further procedures.

- 3. Newspaper creation or researching and writing:** During this phase pupils had to take responsibility for their own learning and develop a sense of ownership towards the project. They worked independently and did research, planned, discussed, wrote and rewrote (lengthened, shortened, proof-read) their articles and produced or selected other material to go into the paper (pictures, jokes, interviews, puzzles, cartoons, questions for the opinion section etc.). Project work can be more effective when the teacher relaxes control. However, the teacher should not ignore the pupils' need for help. Support was provided if required during office hours, other arranged meetings or via e-mail. Finding the proper balance between teacher guidance and pupil autonomy and engagement was important and challenging for me. During this phase we also established a contact with possible German writers to enrich our newspaper with new perspectives, topics and first-hand information.
- 4. Visiting the Print Centre:** Two visits to the print centre of *The Orcadian* were part of the project. We were shown the print rooms, the pre-press computers, scanners and image setters and followed how the pages of our supplement were constructed. The day before the publication we saw the printing of the pages. We had the chance to interview different people who worked for *The Orcadian* and were given answers to all our questions. Throughout the project we kept *The Orcadian* informed about our progress and were always offered help in return, which we accepted gladly.
- 5. Presentation and feedback:** Learners need to feel that their work is valued. Pupils received a positive feedback from the experts working at *The Orcadian*. After our visit we were given a large number of supplements to take home (even one day before the official publication). Every participant got a few copies to keep or pass on and we also displayed copies in the language department, the library, the staff room and in a showcase in the entrance hall. The pupils' work was appreciated by the whole local community, as was the usefulness of the project.

3.4. Short Snapshot of the Newspaper Supplement *Deutschland Today*

The supplement represents the end product of the project. *Deutschland Today* is an intercultural, interdisciplinary and collaborative body of work. A wide range of topics from different areas are addressed: A taste of Germany's political system, Germany facing Energy Crisis and Climate Change, modern Germany and the Enlightenment, Orkney's German connections (an article highlighting the long tradition of the relationship, an interview with former German assistant teachers in Orkney, an interview with folk musician Jennifer Wrigley who toured Germany, experiences from an Orcadian teacher who lived in Germany, an article on the Orkney scouts going to Austria), humour, food (tea culture in East Frisia, German bread, Black Forest Gateau, Berliner, a menu in German), opinions (on plagiarism, nuclear energy, school uniforms), the Strandkorb (beach basket) as an interesting object in the North Sea area, art (Georg Baselitz), film and book reviews (*Inkheart*, *Lola runs*, *The Neverending Story*), music (an article on singer Lena, a detailed study of Germany's music scene and global influence since the 1950s, a German folk song), inventions and discoveries (Einstein, x-ray, the tea bag, the telephone, the mouth organ), cartoons (Uli Stein and Loriot), (language) games (a tongue twister, idiomatic expressions, a word search, guess: where is the picture taken – in Scotland or in Germany?), two travel reports (Munich and Berlin), reports on a pen pal e-mail exchange, sports (the German football team), letters from Germany (from a pupil, a teacher, students and a Scottish lady living in Germany). A closer look at the individual pieces of work reveals that pupils often drew a comparison between Germany and their own cultural background. For example: “[the position of the Bundespräsident] is largely ceremonial, similar to the Queen” (p.1), “*Strandkörbe* have similar aspects to Orkney chairs” (p.2), “[East Frisians drink] 300 litres of tea per person per year (230 litres in Great Britain)” (p.4), “[the mouth organ] is very important in Scottish folk music and surprisingly it was developed in Germany” (p.5). Pupils proved in their articles that they had reached a stage of cultural awareness at which they were ready to contrast peculiarities of Scotland and Germany. A cultural awareness can also be spotted in the interview questions: “What was it like touring in Germany (was it different from the UK)?” (p.6), “Every country has its own customs [...] Did you face any cultural differences between Orkney and Germany?” (p.7). Stereotypes are dealt with explicitly in the article on German and British humour: “[...] Germans have been stereotyped as serious, meticulous and even pedantic.” Real intercultural encounters and an attitude of openness and curiosity demonstrate two first year pupils when talking about their German pen pals (cf. p.6). When pupils write about Germany they always refer to modern Germany and try to be up-to-date. “There is a goal to have cut greenhouse gas emissions by 95% before 2050” (p.1), “Reading this essay [Answering the question: What is Enlightenment?] in 2011, it is startling how current many of Kant's ideas remain.” (p.2), “The women's national football team won two World Cup titles [...] and will try to make it three this year! Where? At home in Germany.” (p.8). Not only in the opinion section pupils gave their personal view, but also in many other contributions they positioned themselves and critically evaluated the material they analysed: “Personally, I would attribute three out of five stars to the film.” (p.3), “Ich denke, die Geschichte ist ein großartiges Buch und ein toller Film für die ganze Familie.” (p.3)¹

¹ Translation: I think the story is a great book and it's a fantastic film for the whole family.

4. Evaluation

As highlighted in the theoretical framework, successful project-based learning focuses on real-world subject matter and requires pupil autonomy and independence. This applies to the newspaper project. Putting together and publishing a supplement in the local newspaper was exciting as it created a meaningful situation linking school and reality. The context was authentic and motivating for pupils (Amor [1999] and Reisener [1999] stress the importance of authenticity to increase motivation). Tasks and interactions were relevant because they were not artificial, but real. It was not necessary to simulate, pretend or construct something. In fact, pupils were journalists, researchers, writers, editors, photographers and made connections with experts of the local community. They contacted German native speakers to carry out interviews, delegate articles or receive necessary information for their articles. The school became a microcosm of an actual workplace, the editorial offices of a newspaper, where pupils faced complex and interdisciplinary real-world problems that required individual solutions. Success was not guaranteed and could only be achieved in collaboration. There was a real need to communicate in the group and to use (esp. read) German from time to time as well. Visiting the print-centre of the newspaper at the end of the project also helped to shrink the distance between school and 'real life' as it took learners beyond the boundaries of the classroom. The thematic content of the project – Germany Today – was meaningful to pupils. They were all learning German and they could choose their own focus which means that they were interested in what they wrote about. Topics addressed were German-related and exemplified global and intercultural issues. The authentic, open and wide-ranging learning environment provided holistic and long-lasting experiences.

The authentic context made a contribution to pupils' media education which is becoming more and more important in our media-dominated society (cf. Brunold, 2000). Pupils made use of the medium in a passive and active way. In order to write articles pupils used various information technologies and applied research and writing strategies that helped tackle the overwhelming flood of information available. Overcoming disorientation and frustration were two challenges to tackle. When putting out their own newspaper, they saw and experienced the value of a newspaper and might be encouraged to make use of the medium more frequently. Pupils also noticed that selecting, eliminating, and highlighting certain aspects are part of a newspaper creation and that these choices are subjective. The Germany they presented was only a selective version of the country. Pupils made a participation in the cultural life of the local community and got a lot of reactions as well. Not only classmates, teachers and parents gave their feedback, but also non-school related readers such as for example the local celebrity Gregor Lamb who wrote a letter for the postbag (cf. Appendix VI). Furthermore, the whole supplement is a persistent documentation of the pupils' learning process and pupils can keep the newspaper as a souvenir of learning German in school.

Creating and publishing a newspaper was a collaborative project that included autonomous actions and responsibilities of each participant. On the one hand pupils worked in a team, interacted, communicated with each other and coordinated their tasks. The result and the standard of the newspaper depended on all participants or rather decisions based on negotiations within the group. On the other hand pupils worked autonomously when producing their own contribution. They took on full responsibility for their piece of work. During the whole project I tried to stay in the background and took on various roles depending on the situation: initiator at the beginning, facilitator and motivator during group discussions or office hours, guide and sometimes expert (e.g. when talking about Germany). I showed presence when starting the project and tried to progressively fade out as the project moved on, intervened only if necessary and very cautiously, and tried to provide an impetus or an idea without forestalling reactions of the pupils. This gradually increased and fostered learners' independence (as far as the team and the individual learner is concerned). The mixture of collaborative and autonomous learning allowed for differentiation during the project so that every pupil had the chance to discover his/her own resources and abilities. But the individual work was one piece of the collaborative whole and only appreciated if it fitted in well.

The case study took place in an educational setting and intends to provide some information about the limitations and achievements of the project as well. In retrospect, the project required some time to take shape, develop and grow. At the beginning it was difficult to motivate enough pupils to take part in their free time. Orcadian pupils are very much involved in extracurricular activities, especially in music and sports, so that it was not easy to find a time that suited everyone. We ended up meeting once a week during lunchtime and occasionally after school. However, there is not a lot of time during the lunch break (only 45 minutes, sometimes even less) and it is the time of the day when pupils are supposed to recover, eat and relax. Therefore, lunchtime activities had to be short, reasonably demanding and enjoyable. The short duration of the breaks in which the project usually took place and the fact that pupils came in their free time meant that the objectives and activities could not be too ambitious. Sometimes the time clashed with other events or types of obstacles such as for example lunchtime concerts or school closures due to the weather. Maintaining consistency was therefore particularly challenging at those times. As pupils participated on a voluntary basis I never knew who and how many pupils would turn up. In Stromness Academy the situation was very tricky because some pupils were on what is called "early lunch" and others on "late lunch". Fortunately we could integrate parts of the project into class time. Offering the newspaper project as an extracurricular activity meant that participating pupils were keen. However, the project had to compete with other hobbies. Alternatively an implementation of the project into the regular German lessons would be possible. The chances are the following: pupils who are usually not so much interested in the subject would be reached as well, the work could be organised in a more systematic, reflective and coordinated way and the use of the German language could be increased (e.g. including phases where German as a means of communication

is obligatory). Including both schools (KGS and SA) had various advantages: more ideas, more participants and more articles. However, the only time all participants met face to face was at the end when visiting the newspaper. If the schools had not been so far from each other more exchanges between the two schools might have taken place. Some pupils, especially the younger ones, were not used to consulting their e-mail accounts regularly which made communication very difficult. If I had the chance to do a similar extracurricular project again, I would also introduce a persistent notice board as a platform for communication and documentation of the work (e.g. noting down where we are and what happens next, to-do lists, time-frames, suggestions, etc.). This visualisation would create more transparency.

Despite these difficulties encountered, the execution and the outcome of the project were positive. The project was especially successful in that it confronted pupils with an authentic context of real-life conditions full of intercultural, interdisciplinary and interactive learning potentials. Overall pupils were enthusiastic about the project and felt that they feel they gained something from taking part (cf. Appendix IV). Second year SA pupil Alistair Hibbert said:

I enjoyed writing the article for The Orcadian. I could use my imagination and creativity in something lots of people could see. I liked the visit to The Orcadian offices and watching it being printed. I learned interesting things about German food – my favourite topic of course!

Pupils became especially interested in the particular subject they wrote about and remained informed even after having submitted their article. At the end of the project pupils felt a sense of achievement and received plenty of praise as a reward from the local and even wider community: a whole article in *The Orcadian* announced the supplement (cf. Appendix V), which was also announced in the local radio. German Consul General Wolfgang Mössinger described the newspaper as “a stunning and exciting piece of journalism”, retired teacher Gregor Lamb praised “the wonderful insert”, and another reader was pleased to know that “people are studying that country, and its language, so comprehensively” (cf. Appendix VI). Through these and other reactions pupils gained a positive feedback as well as a greater awareness of the role of media in society. The local community in turn was not only offered insights into Germany and into pupils’ views and interpretations, but also into the school and especially into the German department. The newspaper project thus connected the school with the local community and vice versa.

5. A Concluding Remark: Bridging Gaps

Newspaper projects are not new (cf. e.g. Daemgen et al., 1989; Hüvelmeyer, 1996; Brunold, 2000; Iaconis et al., 2005.), but every newspaper project can be innovative. Many variables can be altered to suit different purposes, e.g. the readership (pupils, parents, teachers, local community or readers from abroad), the language (writing in the foreign language), the theme (e.g. local news, school news, themed-newspapers etc.), the team (restricting the project to a certain age group) or the place of publication

(local newspaper, school newspaper, online). It is also possible to take part in a competition (cf. e.g. Donath, 2004). The model dealt with here tried to combine journalism with an intercultural experience. Bridging gaps and opening horizons was the motto of the project. On a number of levels these gaps can be found: gaps between Orkney and Germany, between different subject areas, between collaborative and self-directed learning, between the school and reality and the school and the local community. Gaps are also elements of every learning process. They are the discrepancy between what is and what should be. However, this should be seen as a chance rather than a deficit. There were different kinds of gaps: lack of knowledge (factual knowledge about Germany), methodological gaps (in the process of gaining knowledge) and communication gaps (when communicating, presenting, writing, negotiating etc.). Through a number of methods (e.g. brainstorming, scanning, skimming, note-taking, mind-mapping) and classroom arrangements (individual work, pair work, group work), pupils were encouraged to independently deal with these gaps. The project work was more than a source of entertainment or a break from routine classroom activities. It gave pupils the opportunity to work independently and construct their learning process. And pupils' ability to learn by themselves is one of the most important aims in teaching. The end result was a newspaper supplement based on a holistic and authentic experience that brought Germany to Orkney and vice versa.

Projects offer enormous potentials when it comes to bridging gaps. Project work attempts to promote autonomous and cooperative learning (cf. Emer, 2008) in an authentic, intercultural and interdisciplinary learning environment that is learner-centred and links school with the outside world. The present case study tried to provide an example of one such attempt, which was about the creation of a newspaper on Germany and German-speaking countries. The effectiveness and various potentials of project-based learning could be confirmed here and hopefully this type of learning will settle comfortably and steadily as an integral part into the curriculums, school rhythms and foreign language classrooms!

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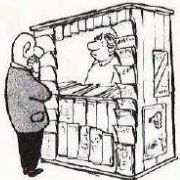
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Appendix I: Poster advertising the Newspaper Project

The Germany Today Newspaper Project

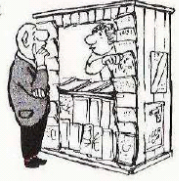
1



Are you interested in **Germany** as well as in **making a newspaper**?


If so, join the *Germany Today Newspaper Project*!

2




In this project we are going to produce a newspaper supplement for *The Orcadian*.

We will have the opportunity to...




3



Anybody welcome (German and non-German students alike)!

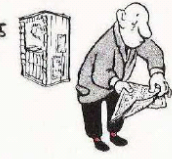
4



Meetings will be every **Friday** during **lunch break**
in the German department, **room 009**.

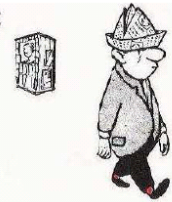
I am looking forward to seeing you!

5




Kirsten Liebke (German Language Assistant)
E-Mail: kirsten.liebke@stud.uni-goettingen.de

6




Appendix II: Brainstorming list



Newspaper Project *Deutschland Today*

**List with possible topics
(based on our brainstorming sessions)**



- **Germans in Orkney:** Who is German in Orkney (tourists, people who moved to Orkney...)? Where do they come from? Why do they come to Orkney? What do they do in Orkney? What strikes them about Orkney? Interview Germans who lived in Orkney (e.g. e-mail some former assistant teachers and interview them).
- What are **people from Orkney** interested in knowing about Germany? What do they know about Germany? etc. Carry out interviews/polls with Orcadians...
- **German history**
- **German food:** Try out recipes and choose good ones for the newspaper...
- **Current affairs:** What are important current affairs issues in Germany at the moment? Bring Scottish readers up to date with what Germans are concerned with today...
- **German literature:** Present an important writer (e.g. Goethe and Schiller, Kafka, Mann, Wilhelm Bush [Max and Moritz], Cornelia Funke [who wrote *Inkheart*], Erich Kästner, Herta Müller...), write a book review.
- **Personal opinions:** On current affairs or the German language (Why is it useful to learn German?).
- **German music:** present a German group, singer or musician (e.g. Wise Guys, Sportfreunde Stiller, Die Ärzte, Herbert Grönemeyer, Nena..., David Garrett [the world's fastest violin player?], classical music, German folk..., Scottish folk music in Germany – is it popular and if so why?), Choose some German sheet music.
- **German art:** present a German artist and choose a famous painting (e.g. Albrecht Dürer, Caspar David Friedrich, Karl Spitzweg, August Macke, Emil Nolde, Georg Baselitz [everything is upside down...].)
- **German film:** write a review about a film (e.g. *Das Leben der anderen*, *Tintenherz/Inkheart*, *Krabat*, *Goodbye Lenin*, *Lola rennt*...)
- **Environment:** recycling, renewable energy [might be particularly interesting for Orkney readers...], wind-turbines in the North Sea, organic food...
- Write about **your E-Mail contacts in Germany:** present your partner, write about where they come from, their school days etc. Maybe we can even put some e-mail exchanges in the newspaper!?
- **Advertisement:** advertise German products...
- **German customs and traditions** (Christmas, *Dinner for one*, Karneval, games...)
- **Sports section:** football world cup for women this year in Germany
- **Games, crossword puzzles, quizzes etc.:** Do we want to create our own one? Can people send their answers to us and we give out prizes?
- **Travel section:** present an area in Germany (that one of us has already visited or would like to visit, e.g. Berlin, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, Bavaria, the North Sea...), choose pictures of the area...
- Would you like to **design the newspaper?** Choose pictures, arrange the articles etc.
- **Humour:** choose jokes/cartoons (in German and translate them...), write about German humour, “Dinner for one”, German comedians...
- **German media:** television, newspapers, radio...

Appendix III: Guidelines for article writing developed during the project

Writing an article – some guidelines...

1. Do research and gather information

Sources: Internet, the language base, library... (more information see next page).
While researching write down aspects you consider important and where you got the aspects from.

2. Plan your article

Which topic and aspects do you want to write about (take notes)? Find a focus.
How can you structure your article (do a mind-map to organise your ideas...)?

3. Write the article and include

TITLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TITLE that grabs the reader’s attention (you can save this for last)
LEAD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LEAD (optional): pull the reader into your article; a phrase or a few sentences that announce the main ideas / an overview of the article.
BYLINE XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX .	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> This tells who wrote the article (your name)
Main body (divided into paragraphs)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> First paragraph: introduce your topic
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Main Body (divided into paragraphs): give facts, background, explanations, opinions etc.
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Last paragraph: try to round off your article (quote, catchy phrase...)

Use your own words! Never copy and paste information!

4. Revise your article

5. Decide if you want to have illustrations/pictures in connection to your article!

Appendix IV: Pupils' statements

Alistair Hibbert, 2nd year: "I enjoyed writing the article for *The Orcadian*. I could use my imagination and creativity in something lots of people could see. I liked the visit to *The Orcadian* offices and watching it being printed. I learned interesting things about German food-my favourite topic of course!"

Anna Rothnie, 2nd year: "I found the trip to the newspaper very interesting. It was good to find out how the newspapers were put together and printed."

Alasdair Flett, 2nd year: "I learnt about how newspapers are put together and about German music. It was a good experience and I hope to use the skills I have gained in the future."

Edwina Castree, 2nd year: "I enjoyed learning about German culture."

Alice Flett, 2nd year: "It made me realize how much work goes into the newspaper."

Helen McElroy, 2nd year: "I was really interested in learning more about German music artists."

Alison Crichton, 2nd year: "The trip to the newspaper was educational and warm."

Craig Sutherland, 3rd year: "I chose to do my article about Georg Baselitz, a German artist. I really enjoyed writing the article and found it interesting finding out about why his paintings are upside-down. I chose to do the article on an artist because I like art and I like finding out about different styles of art."

Appendix V: Newspaper article in *The Orcadian*

The Orcadian, 9 June, 2011, p.6.

Orkney pupils' invitation to an 'armchair tour of Germany'

CHERYL GOULD

A group of Orkney's secondary school pupils are inviting readers of *The Orcadian* to join them on an "armchair tour of Germany" this week.

Included in your paper today, Thursday, is the *Deutschland Today* publication, which was created by a team of young journalists from Stromness Academy and Kirkwall Grammar School, all eager to tell you all about the issues and interests of the European country, as well as its links with Orkney.

Those involved in the production also included former school pupils, teachers and assistant teachers.

Contained within the many interesting and informative articles are pieces on music, sports, travel, food, literature and humour, so there should be something for everyone.

Kirkwall-based honorary consul of the Federal Republic of Germany, and managing director of Orkney Media Group, Sinclair Robertson, explained how the publication came about.

"I wanted to find a challenge that involved the pupils of the secondary schools in a German-related project; using *The Orcadian* as the vehicle seemed a natural solution."

After working to get the ball rolling, Mr Robertson located the KGS and Stromness Academy German language student, Kirsten Liebke, who soon had the students on board.

He said: "The task not only affords the pupils time to research Germany but also allows them to see how a newspaper is printed from start to finish. Kirsten has been the catalyst for the whole project.

"It gets the pupils involved with journalism and media design as well as enabling the people of Orkney to learn about different aspects of Germany. For me, it's a holistic project."

From taking part in producing their paper, those involved have gained valuable knowledge.

Mr Robertson explained: "They get a great reward from seeing their work printed and I hope that it encourages everyone to consider Germany as an option in their lives."

Initially, the paper was to be four pages, but after a lot of hard work and interest from those involved, the final piece is double the size.

"It's something that the pupils can be proud of," Mr Robertson said. "It's a credit to them."

He added: "Hopefully, this will become an initiative for other honorary consuls across Britain, and it is already being recognised in Edinburgh, London and Berlin, so it's created quite a stir."

Consul General of the Federal Republic of Germany, Wolfgang Mössinger, praised the special supplement.

He said: "The pupils have created a stunning and exciting



piece of journalism. Please take the time to read the array of articles on Scotland's fourth biggest trading partner and the powerhouse of the European economy.

"I congratulate all the contributors, the writers and those who supported them.

"This supplement will certainly serve as evidence of the extraordinary contribution foreign language assistance can make by encouraging a motivated group of pupils.

"We will proudly present these articles across Scotland, as an example of successful cross-curricular learning, with a particular focus on German and German-speaking countries."

Deutschland Today
can be found in the
centre of this week's
The Orcadian

Appendix VI: Letters in the postbag

The Orcadian 9 June 2011 p11

The Orcadian 9 June 2011 p. 31

The Orcadian 9 June 2011 p. 16

Deutschland Today

☒ During the past few months, pupils from Kirkwall Grammar School and Stromness Academy have been busy researching aspects of German culture and language.

The success of their endeavour is now for all to see, in the form of a supplement in today's *The Orcadian*.

The pupils have created a stunning and exciting piece of journalism.

Please take the time to read the array of articles on Scotland's fourth biggest trading partner and the powerhouse of the European economy.

You will learn a great deal about the nation at the heart of Europe, from a recipe for Black Forest Gateaux to how Germany plans to tackle climate change.

Furthermore, you will gain a fascinating insight into the thoughts and observations of Scots currently residing in Germany.

I am extremely indebted to the publishers of *The Orcadian* for giving their support to this innovative project, which allowed the gifted pupils of Kirkwall Grammar School and of Stromness Academy to exercise their curiosity and skill and create an informative body of work about my home country.

I would also like to thank Kirsten Liebke, the German foreign language assistant at the two schools, under whose leadership the project, initiated by German Honorary Consul, Sinclair Robertson, took shape.

I congratulate all the contributors, the writers and those who supported them.

This supplement will certainly serve as evidence of the extraordinary contribution foreign language assistance can make by encouraging a motivated group of pupils.

We will proudly present these articles across Scotland as an example of successful cross-curricular learning, with a particular focus on German and German-speaking countries.

WOLFGANG MÖSSINGER

Consul General of the
Federal Republic of Germany
16 Eglinton Crescent,
Edinburgh.

Praise for Deutschland Today

☒ May I congratulate the students, teachers and all others who helped in the production of the insert in *The Orcadian* (June 9).

It is good to know that people are studying that country, and its language, so comprehensively.

Perhaps the next edition will be "auf Deutsch"?

Also, it has made me wonder if there are other like-minded individuals, of a more mature age, who are learning the German language, or who may already be fluent, who would welcome the opportunity to improve, or practise, their knowledge by meeting occasionally for conversation.

I am aware that there are formal courses at Orkney College, but I am thinking of something informal, without the pressure of working towards a qualification.

If anyone is interested please contact me.

DEREK BRISTOW

Stucar,
Tankerness.

Deutschland Today praise

☒ I'd like to congratulate the pupils, staff and assistants of the German department of Kirkwall Grammar and Stromness Academy on the production of the wonderful insert *Deutschland Today* in a recent edition of *The Orcadian*.

What an excellent idea – and it was so well presented. I had the good fortune to study German at Stromness Academy, under Margaret Calder, in the 1950s and we still correspond!

She was a brilliant teacher, and my love of the German language and Germany never waned.

As a young teacher, in Birmingham, I shared a flat with German assistants, and we regularly meet up every other year – I think I must have visited Germany at least twenty times. There is no doubt that it is my favourite country.

When I retired, I went back to the classroom again studying 'A' Level German!

I sincerely hope that *Deutschland Today* will encourage other young Orcadians to follow in the footsteps of their seniors and opt for this language, which will open up, for them, so many possibilities, in both cultural and scientific fields.

GREGOR LAMB

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Italy.