Designing a book project

Esther Muskal

Introduction
Alternative assessment, as opposed to traditional testing, is an on-going strategy which not only monitors pupils’ learning, but which also involves pupils in decision making about the degree to which their performance matches their ability. Therefore, assessment should be viewed as an interactive process that engages both teacher and pupil in monitoring the latter’s performance. This leads to the need for authentic assessment, in which the criteria and standards are made clear to pupils. Since both purpose and context influence language use, it is important to provide pupils with varied opportunities for flexible and frequent practice.

This paper describes a performance-based task, within real life and work contexts, structured specially for a ninth grade class. It was used as an alternative assessment of the acquisition and application of English studied as a foreign language in Israeli schools.

Task design
The book project was designed using the steps detailed below:
1. Focus: The task focused on the creative writing abilities of the pupil, what s/he should know and be able to do. A performance task assessment list was drawn up with the help of the pupils, which made clear to them what they were responsible for.
2. Context: A context was created by discussing different types of genres in literature, after which pupils chose a context meaningful to them. Developing a context for the task is important because it explains why the task is worth doing.
3. Directions: The directions were explained clearly to pupils and a detailed assessment list was given them. Pupils then decided on a genre, a literary voice and appropriate language. They discussed their idea with a friend or parent and wrote a first draft, which was corrected by the teacher, returned for further revision and corrected again until the final product was reached. The work was then edited, bound and “published.”
4. Audience: The audience was a class of sixth graders who read the books and provided the “authors” with literary criticism and a creative response.
5. Scoring: The scoring guide consisted of writing criteria that were used for assessment by the pupils themselves, their peers and the teacher. There were 20 items, each worth five points; theoretically, even a weak pupil could receive a grade of 100, providing s/he fulfilled all the necessary criteria.
6. Review: Task review indicated that pupils required more practical experience with computers in order to meet the desired standard.

Procedure
Pupils were given instruction on creative writing and exposed to different genres (ghost stories, romance, mysteries and legends), after which they wrote their first draft. Teacher-pupil dialogues ensued so that pupils could identify and correct their errors. Between three and five dialogues were held, depending on the level of the pupil.

Final product
The edited books were typed and bound. The title, the author’s name and a picture appeared on the front cover. Inside was a dedication, and on the back cover, information about the author and a photo, if available. The whole process took about four months and culminated in a festive celebration where the ninth grade authors met with the sixth grade critics.

Conclusion
Pupils enjoyed doing the book project. They reported that the writing skills learned and the on-going teacher-
pupil contact were of great importance. They indicated the need for more practical computer help. This project was as fulfilling for me, the teacher, as it was for my pupils. Their enjoyment and increased self-esteem testify to the value of the project.

APPENDIX A

Performance task assessment list
(Maximum of five points for each item)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Peer</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author’s name and name of the story appear on the front cover</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Story is bound and typed</td>
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<tr>
<td>A well-designed cover</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A written dedication</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Information about the author</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Story has beginning, middle and end</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story was brainstormed and researched</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Author discussed idea with a parent or friend</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work was revised</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Work was edited and checked for spelling, punctuation and grammar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of foreshadowing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of suspense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of weather to express situations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of the five senses</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Characters are real</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of much detail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story title captures the reader’s interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main idea of the story is clear</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of pictures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of a literary “voice”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comments: __________________________

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English Teachers’ Journal  ■  June 2002  ■  41
Focus on Projects

APPENDIX B
Book project reflection

1. I enjoyed/didn’t enjoy doing the book project because

2. The most important thing I learned while doing this project was

3. What helped me most was

4. I could have improved my story writing if I had:
   a. had more time
   b. had more help from the teacher
   c. brainstormed
   d. written an outline (most important points of the story) as a story guide before writing the story
   e. had technical help with the computer
   f. other

5. I would recommend doing this project again next year with the improvement

APPENDIX C
Assessment sheet for readers
(designed by W. Wildawski, sixth grade teacher, Rigler High School)

APPENDIX D
Assessment sheet for sixth graders
(designed by W. Wildawski)

Book Title:

The Author:

My Name:

Judging a book by its cover…

- The cover design is attractive. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
- The letter fonts used are easy to read. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
- The author’s name and book title are clear. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
- The title caught my interest. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
- Pictures are nicely used in the book. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

Judging the book by its content…

- The story has a beginning, middle and end. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
- The characters are real and believable. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
- The story is logical and easy to follow. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
- The main idea of the story is understood. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
- There are few spelling and grammar mistakes. 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

My overall opinion of the book:

5 stars  I couldn’t put it down!  It was so good!

4 stars  It was pretty good!  I wish the book didn’t end so soon.

3 stars  I really enjoyed it but parts of it could have been better.