

1. Title of Project:

“Critical Thinking and Assessment in the Intermediate German Classroom:

Supplementary Materials for the Textbook Anders gedacht (Thinking Differently)”

Participants: Dr. Nadja Krämer and Dr. Cecilia Pick

2. Purpose:

The purpose of our joint project is to help students taking 2nd-year German make the transition from the introductory German language skills course sequence to the intermediate German content-based course sequence (GER 201/202). The interconnection between language and culture has to be made evident with supplementary instructional materials.

3. Results:

For this project, we applied Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomy of higher thinking as our critical thinking model: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.¹ To teach and practice critical thinking, we developed, implemented and assessed new, supplementary instructional materials for the intermediate German program. Applying Bloom’s taxonomy, for reading assignments, students read and quoted (knowledge), associated and summarized (comprehension), used information in new situations (application), compared and contrasted (analysis), discussed “what if” situations (synthesis), and assessed and made choices (evaluation). For writing assignments, students collected evidence from the text(s), identified patterns and

¹ Lamb, Annette. “Critical and Creative Thinking – Bloom’s Taxonomy.” 20 November 2006 <<http://eduscapes.com/tap/topic69.htm>>.

relationships in what they read, carefully inferred, formed opinions while keeping an open mind, and made arguments with the understanding that they did not have the final word.²

In the 2007-2008 academic year, in order to assess where we have come in our goal to help 2nd-year students make the transition to a content-based curriculum, we will measure student progress throughout the year. Student assignments will include worksheets and essays that revisit discussion points, midterm and final exams, and a cultural project that will allow students to access different resources used during the semester. Through a link between the course's home page and the Anders gedacht publisher's website, students will post peer-edited and revised portfolios.

4. Issues:

While the course textbook, Anders gedacht – Text and Context in the German-Speaking World, contains superior material for the development of critical thinking skills – the title itself translates as “thinking differently” – this material (vocabulary, readings, exercises) requires students to make a leap from introductory German.³ The book sets out to “encourage students to think differently – to change their point of view so as to engage in cross-cultural interpretation, analysis, and comparison.”⁴ The goals are critical thinking and the development of cultural intersubjectivity, which assumes common cultural background knowledge that native speakers of German have and use to communicate.

² Gocsik, Karen. “Teaching Critical Thinking.” 20 November 2006 <<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/faculty/pedagogies/thinking.shtml>>.

³ A review of Anders gedacht states that while it fills a market gap for an intermediate German textbook, some of its content is better suited for an advanced intermediate or advanced program. Boyd, Amanda Charitina. *Die Unterrichtspraxis*. No. 38.2 (Fall 2005). 210-11.

⁴ Motyl-Mudretzkyj, Irene, and Michaela Späinghaus. Anders gedacht. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. xvii.

The text however, does not introduce students in stages to these goals, but assumes already developed skill sets (especially linguistic proficiency, cultural background knowledge, and analytical reasoning). The book does not build critical thinking skills, but assumes them. Students are expected “to do it all” starting with the very first unit of the book.

Here is an example of how we addressed issues and challenges in a unit in GER 201 (Dr. Krämer) that dealt with fairy tales, poems and art of the 18th and 19th century and GER 202 (Dr. Pick) in a unit on German mythology in the art of Anselm Kiefer.

The Topic and Learning Outcomes:

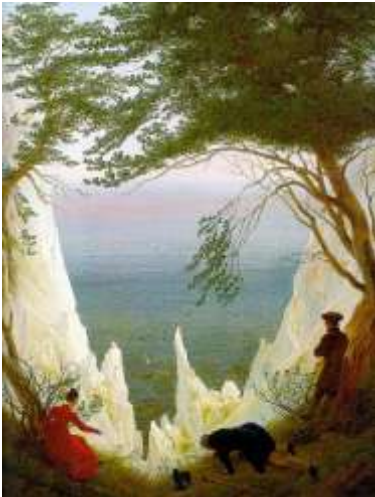
The focus was on the German painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), a painter of the Romantic period whose paintings concern themselves with the individual and his/her relation to nature and ultimately transcending that relationship into a deeply spiritual experience. Friedrich’s paintings suggest the independence and liberation of the individual through the infinite experience with nature and God. However, his settings are chosen to represent distinctly German landscapes and also entail patriotic leanings, especially during the Napoleonic Wars and their resistance to French occupation.

In GER 201, students develop the ability to describe and discuss paintings, and to give their opinion and impressions of a work of art (First Section). They are also able to look at a painting and make connections between its title, year and the interrelationship of objects, e.g. figures represented in the painting (Second Section). Combining these skills, students do a comparative analysis between two paintings of a similar subject, but with distinct differences. This analysis leads to the comparison of gender dynamics as well as

taking into account social, political and historical information in order to formulate an interpretative thesis and argument in speaking and writing (Third Section). The skills, knowledge and practice of closely observing and formulating thesis arguments that were acquired in this process serve as the foundation to making connections between Romantic paintings of Friedrich and the reaction to Romantic art by post-World War II artists such as Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945) in GER 202. Noting the gap between Friedrich's Romantic style and Kiefer's statement about fascism (mimicking the Nazi salute), students discuss "what if" situations regarding the figures in their respective socio-historical environments. While keeping an open mind, they assess, evaluate and form opinions of the painting and the photograph (Fourth Section).

The Objectives of the First Section are:

- introduce descriptive vocabulary (in order to describe the paintings)
- introduce vocabulary expressing beliefs, opinions and guesses and probability (in order to express opinions, likes/dislikes about the paintings)



Chalk Cliffs, Rügen (1818)



Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog (1817)



The Cross in the Mountains (1807)

The Objectives of the Second Section are:

- use descriptive vocabulary (in order to describe the painting)
- use vocabulary expressing beliefs, opinions and guesses and probability (in order to express opinions, likes/dislikes about the painting)
- make connections between the title of the painting, C.D. Friedrich's biography and the interrelationship between figures and ships in this natural setting.
- write an interpretative essay



Caspar David Friedrich: Stages of Life (1835)

The Objectives of the Third Section are:

- use descriptive vocabulary (in order to describe the paintings)
- use vocabulary expressing beliefs, opinions and guesses and probability (in order to express opinions, likes/dislikes about the paintings)
- make connections between the title of the paintings, C.D. Friedrich's biography and the interrelationship between figures and other natural elements in their setting.
- write an interpretative essay that compares and contrasts both paintings and synthesizes into a more complex argument



Two Men Contemplating the Moon (1819)



Man and Woman Contemplating the Moon (1830-35)

The Objectives of the Fourth Section are:

- use descriptive vocabulary (in order to describe the painting and photograph)
- use vocabulary expressing beliefs, opinions and guesses and probability (in order to express opinions, likes/dislikes about the painting and photograph)
- make connections between the title of the painting and the photograph, C.D. Friedrich's and Anselm Kiefer's biographies and the interrelationship between figures and other natural elements in their setting.
- write an interpretative essay that compares and contrasts the painting and photograph and synthesizes into a more complex argument
- discuss "what if" situations regarding the figures in their respective socio-historical environments
- assess, evaluate and form opinions of these two works in speaking and writing



Caspar David Friedrich,
Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog (1817)



Anselm Kiefer,
Occupations (1969)

The assessment of student progress in these learning outcomes is based on classroom discussions, essays and tests.

5. Project dissemination:

The IPESL website will present the project and its results to the MnSCU community and beyond. We will share our supplementary materials developed to accompany Anders gedacht with the German program at Chaska High School, which has a concurrent enrollment program with MSU, Mankato.