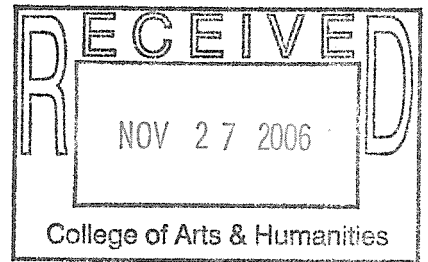


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IPESL Grant Application
(Initiative to Promote Excellence in Student Learning)
Minnesota State University, Mankato



PROPOSAL COVER PAGE

Title of Project: "Critical Thinking and Assessment in the Intermediate German Classroom: Supplementary Materials for the Textbook Anders gedacht (Thinking Differently)"

Names: Cecilia Pick and Nadja Krämer

Are you full-time faculty in 2006-2007? Yes No
(fixed-term faculty are not eligible to apply)

Do you plan to return to MSU in 2007-2008? Yes No

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Campus Phone: 389-5529 (Pick) 389-5531 (Krämer)

College: Arts and Humanities

Department: Modern Languages

Spring Semester Schedule:

List times when available to participate in Learning Communities and workshops.

Mondays: after 3:15 _____

Tuesdays: after 3:15 _____

Wednesdays: after 3:15 _____

Thursdays: after 3:15 _____

Fridays: _____

Cecilia Pick Nadja Krämer
Signatures of Applicants

Pat Wilcox Peterson
Signature of Department Chair/Director/Supervisor

Jane F. Earley (sao)
Signature of College Dean/Vice President

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Proposal Details

1. Title of Project:

“Critical Thinking and Assessment in the Intermediate German Classroom:
Supplementary Materials for the Textbook Anders gedacht (Thinking Differently)”

2. Purpose of project:

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). This content-based curriculum interconnects linguistic topics with cultural and historical contexts of German-speaking societies. As these two courses are offered and taught each semester, during the term of the grant we will have the opportunity to monitor and respond to the effectiveness of new instructional materials. Moreover, we perceive this project as a redesign of our intermediate course sequence with long-term benefits such as preparation for advanced study.

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.¹ The interconnection between language and culture has to be made evident with supplementary instructional materials. Further, the specific need at MSU is 1) to advance 1st-year

¹ 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.

students to the intermediate level and 2) to integrate new students who have acquired their skills at other institutions and have tested into the 2nd-year sequence.

With Anders gedacht, students not only confront complex issues, but are required to comprehend them in a foreign language. They have to assess the information presented to them, make connections, think creatively, and formulate perspectives. For this project, we will apply Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of higher thinking as our critical thinking model: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.²

3. Project description and how it enhances critical thinking:

Anders gedacht covers a variety of topics in German-speaking countries over 10 chapter units – from the German Romantic movement, the Third Reich and the Holocaust, to German unification. It continues on to current debates on citizenship and minorities, political parties, science, economics, and global perspectives of the German-speaking world. 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.”³ 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. 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

² Lamb, Annette. “Critical and Creative Thinking – Bloom’s Taxonomy.” 20 November 2006 <<http://eduscapes.com/tap/topic69.htm>>.

³ Motyl-Mudretzkyj, Irene, and Michaela Späinghaus. Anders gedacht. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005. xvii.

do it all” starting with the very first unit of the book. We need to help them build these critical thinking skills.

To teach and practice critical thinking, we will develop, implement and assess new, supplementary instructional materials for the intermediate German program. Applying Bloom’s taxonomy, for reading assignments, students will read and quote (knowledge), associate and summarize (comprehension), use information in new situations (application), compare and contrast (analysis), discuss “what if” situations (synthesis), and assess and make choices (evaluation). For writing assignments, students will collect evidence from the text(s), identify patterns and relationships in what they have read, carefully infer, form opinions while keeping an open mind, and make arguments with the understanding that they do not have the final word.⁴

4. Assessment of project:

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 semester. We will develop and implement assessment tools as presented in the handbook Classroom Assessment Techniques, particularly those related to 1) analysis and critical thinking, and 2) synthesis and creative thinking.⁵ These will focus on assessments of higher order thinking skills and of basic academic success skills as appropriate to the foreign language classroom (e.g. approximate analogies, one-sentence summary, and memory matrix). Student assignments will include worksheets and essays that revisit

⁴ Gocsik, Karen. “Teaching Critical Thinking.” 20 November 2006 <<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/faculty/pedagogies/thinking.shtml>>.

⁵ Angelo, Thomas, and K. Patricia Cross. Classroom Assessment Techniques. A Handbook for College Teachers. 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

discussion points, midterm and final exams, and possibly a take-home exam that will allow students to access different resources and discussion outcomes encountered during the semester. Students will go through a portfolio building process, and through a link between the course's home page and the Anders gedacht publisher's website, they will post their peer-edited and revised portfolios.

5. Project dissemination:

A Modern Languages department colloquium will be helpful to colleagues who also teach intermediate courses that transition students to a content-based curriculum. The IPESL website will present the project and its results to the MnSCU community and beyond. An audience that is especially concerned with the German text Anders gedacht will be reached via a joint presentation at the national conference of the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Thus, our project has the potential to impact students enrolled in intermediate German not only at MSU, but nationwide.

5. Department and university goals:

The 2nd-year language sequence fulfills Category 8, Global Perspectives, in the university's general education curriculum. With each teaching unit, student will be active learners and critical thinkers. Departmental goals for students of German are to strengthen retention and attract them to further study in upper-division German studies.