

Literature Class Meets Creativity

Raising the Curtain for Creative Tasks versus More Traditional Assignments

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ABSTRACT

It is a commonly accepted truth that creatively engaging with language leads to better learning outcomes. Yet still, when it comes to teaching literature, we see very traditional approaches dominate or at least play an important role in Austrian tertiary education. Some assessment types such as the term paper have survived the centuries almost untouched, have certainly not gone with the times and seem somewhat outdated if used as the sole or major assessment method. In 2023, a teaching project saw the revamping of an introductory literature class (*Understanding Drama and Film*) from a term paper-based course to one that focusses strongly on student-centred creative tasks such as an introduction to drama pedagogy, hands-on film workshops, screenplay-writing and the creation of a collaborative film project based on the play chosen for this class, Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*. Due to the success of the first course, the following semester saw the continuation of the project. The students' progress was assessed and feedback collected with the help of open and multiple-choice questionnaires. Improved self-confidence in using the foreign language, a more relaxed and learner-friendly atmosphere, and an overall increased understanding of the topic areas (drama and film) as well as heightened awareness of the benefits of drama-based pedagogy are the biggest benefits of this way of teaching. The call from the student body for more creative tasks that break down the old-ways of teaching literature to be included not just in tertiary education but also in school classrooms is supported by the findings of this study and should lead to more room for drama-based pedagogy in Austrian classrooms and more hands-on creative tasks.

KEYWORDS drama-based pedagogy, drama teaching, film workshop, creative literature class

1. Introduction

Collaboration, communication and creativity represent core principles in modern language teaching in Austrian schools as well as in tertiary education. These are, however, in direct opposition to academic term papers and with a course to teach that focuses on giving budding teachers an introduction to the world of drama and film, the traditional assessment structure provided room for discussion. For hundreds of years, written university assignments served as the go-to tool to allow students to demonstrate “that they understand the subject matter they are being taught [and] to gain feedback from their tutors on their understanding and use of course content” (Open University, 2014). Well-designed assignments, however, not only serve the purpose to reflect the students’ level of gained knowledge but also to support the students’ learning process itself. With the materiality of paper, the nature of assessments at university level changed, and as Ben Wilbrink (2017) outlines in his paper on the history of assessments, it is astonishing how old and relatively unchanged some forms of assessment have remained to this day. Written assignments such as essays and term papers originated in the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, where the then common oral examinations were replaced with written assignments from the late 18th century onwards. As Wilbrink correctly stresses, “our assignment culture is, for better or for worse, the legacy of societies long since gone” (Wilbrink, 1997, p. 43), and there is a palpable desire among university lecturers to move away from term papers and other more traditional forms of assessment, especially now in light of the advances of AI and the range of plagiarism and cheating opportunities it offers. How universities manage the use of AI applications such as ChatGPT in assessments is constantly changing but often feels a step behind.

Whereas term papers allow to show off critical thinking skills, they leave little room for creativity and collaboration and are far removed from forms of assessment teachers give at school level. According to the Austrian National Curriculum for Mittelschule¹, the core principles of education shall be communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking and special emphasis is given to the idea that “Lernen mehr ist als die individuelle Aneignung und Reproduktion von kognitiven Lerninhalten²” (BMBWF, 2012). The question arises why – if learning is really more than studying and then reproducing input – we still see many courses in teacher training programmes with an assignment structure that focuses predominantly on a major written piece and does not reflect what is nowadays fortunately common

1 The Mittelschule curriculum was selected as graduation from Cluster Mitte universities qualifies teacher trainees to teach at said level.

2 English, translated by the author: “Learning is more than the individual acquisition and reproduction of cognitive content”.

practice in schools and what trainee teachers are taught to do in their pedagogy classes. Given that academic papers still dominate seminars in teacher training colleges and universities, the admonition *Do as I say not as I do* comes to mind.

A teaching approach that incorporates authentic materials (these are materials used in real-life contexts and not specifically created for the language classroom) and tasks for working with drama and film can enhance the learners' understanding of the subject, benefit their foreign language skills and facilitate reflection of cultural and social norms. In this article, the term drama is meant to include not only the actual performances of plays, but also, or predominantly, drama activities, games, and theatre techniques. Early research into the benefits of drama-based teaching approaches emphasizes the positive aspects of using authentic language in a stress-reduced environment (Duff & Maley, 1984). An added bonus is that some of the artificiality that is often engrained in language tasks is removed. By facilitating a more realistic and meaningful learning environment (Brash & Warnecke, 2009), drama-pedagogy has also shown to lead to raised levels of motivation (Hulse & Owens, 2019), which can have a positive effect on language learning overall. Gill (2013) stresses that in language classes where drama-based approaches are applied, language is understood as a piece of the puzzle of communication rather than the removed items otherwise often seen in language classes that have lost touch with the use of language in real life. Drama-pedagogy focusses on the message and also on how the message can be amended and even changed by slightly turning the wheels of prosody, without even mentioning the whole world of gestures, facial expressions etc. This results in an awareness of aspects of communication that go beyond the mere level of words. In their meta-analysis of research into the use of drama-based pedagogy (DBP), Kiger Lee et al. (2015, p. 3) found this teaching approach to have "a positive, significant impact on achievement outcomes in educational settings", especially if it is integrated into the curriculum rather than as a one-off activity. Steward (2015, p. 17) also calls for the integration of DBP within the curricula of teacher training institutions as it "creates opportunities for the versatile teaching required to meet the demands of teaching toward multiple goals", and emphasises the positive effects drama activities can have in preparing budding teachers for the complexity of their profession.

The list of papers paying testament to the benefits of tailored DBP in language teaching is long (Bora, 2021; Cannon, 2017; Jany, 2015; Korkut & Celik, 2018; Nguyen, 2016; Schenker, 2017; Schewe, 2013). That being the case, it is not surprising that drama has "important roots in UK schools as a pedagogical tool" (Robinson, 2021, p. 90). Its techniques constitute some of the core principles of the English curriculum even at primary (key stage) level in England: "All pupils should be enabled to

participate in and gain knowledge, skills and understanding associated with the artistic practice of drama” (Education, 2014). The benefits are further highlighted in the individual skills sections of said curriculum, and the curriculum furthermore draws particular attention to the way DBP can aid pupil’s writing skills but also how “[r]eading, re-reading, and rehearsing poems and plays for presentation and performance give pupils opportunities to discuss language, including vocabulary, extending their interest in the meaning and origin of words” (Education, 2014). With these clear words in mind, it is especially interesting to note that the Austrian Mittelschule curriculum mentions drama-based activities as an educational tool only in passing, referring to drama mostly as literary text in reference to reading skills in the pupils’ first language. Elements of DBP are only mentioned fleetingly in the addendum for pupils in special courses for German as a foreign language (BMBWF, 2012). While in England, drama can be studied as a subject for GCSE exams and Theatre Studies for A-Levels, the Austrian Oberstufen (GCSE to A-Levels equivalent) curriculum merely refers to theatre in relation to knowledge about Greek Theatre in German lessons or fleetingly in its foreign language section, where it calls for creative tasks in the foreign language (FL) classroom and theatre gets a mention (BMBWF, 2023). Due to the strong focus on drama-based teaching approaches in the UK, it would be a rather difficult steeple chase race to make it through school there without ever having experimented with language in a drama setting. Anecdotally, the effects of this could be observed by the author during her years teaching German at a British university, where British students seemed to be much less inhibited by drama activities and the offer of improvisation activities in the FL classroom compared to their Austrian counterparts. While Austrian students need careful, step by step approaches in order not to overwhelm them with the creative spark of DBP, English students appeared to be able to build on their existing drama skills.

In contrast to DBP and to a slightly lesser extent theatre productions, Austrian students of all levels are avid consumers of digital technologies. Visual is their culture, be it with memes, shorts on TikTok or snapchat. A 2023 poll of 500 Upper Austrian teenagers aged between 11 and 18 years of age shows that 63 % rate social media interactions as one of their favourite past times, only surpassed by meeting friends at 69 % (Edugroup, 2023, p.9). Even though this generation grows up consuming these predominantly visual media, the move from passive consumer to active producer (Jany, 2015) is in line with current research on how learner-centeredness facilitates active involvement of the students and thus – again – may improve ownership of students’ learning. Filming clips can “initiate a fusion of linguistic, social and digital competencies” (Jany, 2015, p.245) and these benefits were also seen in an innovative teaching approach started in 2010 for a German FL

class at the university of Bristol. It aimed at utilising the spheres offered by filming and media to respect the students' different learning styles and learning histories in an open educational resources project. The involved students, who had to film a short, educative clip about a grammar topic, overwhelmingly reported that their oral skills had improved (67 %) as well as their overall understanding of German grammar (Kreutner, 2015). Jany (2015, pp. 249–250) reports that her digital video FL learning project gave students the “opportunity to become actively involved in the learning process by combining language, technology and creative thinking” as well as automatically working on their team-playing skills whilst using the target language. Such projects exemplify how several learning outcomes can be combined. In the following, the author is going to show how a change of course and assessment structure has also led to achieving the intended learning outcomes via the implementation of DBP and the use of a portfolio-based film project.

What should not go unmentioned is the impact that enjoyment of an activity can bring to the world of learning. It is commonly accepted that motivation is a crucial factor in positive learning outcomes but also the terms *interest* (Krapp & Weidenmann, 2006; Pfeffer & Göppner-Pfeffer, 2005), *curiosity* (Mietzel, 1998), and *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, 2005) are now widely used in pedagogy research. The role *fun* plays in learning has been repeatedly emphasized in the international discourse, especially in its relation to learning. According to Brandmayr (2016), any measurable, materialized learning achievement can be experienced as joyful and fun. Bialecky (in scoyo, 2013) ultimately defines fun in learning as motivation and enthusiasm. With research backing up the common understanding that learning success is higher when students enjoy the learning process (e.g., scoyo, 2013), the enjoyment factor should not be disregarded in lesson design.

2. Background on the Course

The course in the limelight here is the pro-seminar *Understanding Drama and Film*, which is part of the module *E B 10: Literary Studies I* in the English curriculum in the Cluster Mitte universities in Upper Austria/Salzburg, Austria. The intended learning outcomes of said module, which also includes a sister pro-seminar focussed on fiction and poetry, include, amongst others, the ability to

- work with, analyse, and interpret English literary texts in their various forms.
- answer subject-specific questions in team or group work settings and present findings in an adequate manner (Curriculum Bachelor Lehramt, 2021).

Both courses carry 3 ECTS, are introductory courses marked using continuous assessment, and are prerequisites for later seminars. Historically, these courses

were assessed with a term paper and an exam as the core/sole components of the mark, but the Linz universities of the Cluster Mitte introduced group projects and smaller text-based assignments to complement the 3000-word term paper in 2020. With the rapid advent of AI-based writing software, the team behind the literature courses taught in Linz decided to trial an assessment structure that did not include a term paper but allowed the students to delve deep into the field of drama studies by actively engaging with the material via a selection of various creative tasks that are followed up with written reflection pieces.

The students are now required to write a portfolio, complete two short (15 mins) exams in class to test their understanding of drama and film terminology, to participate actively in class, and to present their findings of a My-Play Expo (see Table 1). The My-Play Expo was created with the intention of introducing the students to poster presentations as they might encounter them at symposia or conferences as well as having them actively analyse a drama production and then present their findings in said poster presentation to the rest of the group. In teams of 4 to 5 students, they are asked to watch either the recording of The Old Vic 2019 production of the course play *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller or the production of this play recorded at London's Apollo Theatre. Both are available online and the students are asked to apply the analytical strategies learned in the course about stage design, props and costumes, lighting and on background music and sounds, analysing their effects on the general performance.

TABLE 1 Assessment Structure in Percentages

Individual Parts	Percentage of Overall Mark
Two written exams (15 % each)	30 %
Active participation	10 %
My-Play Expo	20 %
Portfolio	40 %

The portfolio manifests the biggest share of the workload for this course as it includes these tasks:

- a 300-word critical self-reflection on their My-Play Expo experience
- a detailed storyboard for their scene of *All My Sons* (see next task)
- in groups of 3–4, the students first need to decide on and select a suitable scene from *All My Sons*, think about aspects of cinematography, composition, framing etc., draw said storyboard, study the lines and film 3 minutes of an imagined complete production. Their clip then needs to be submitted to their tutor via a private link on YouTube. They are given specific instructions that there is no need for heavy investment in costumes or camera equipment

but that the project is graded according to apparent understanding of how the illusion of film is created and how much thought and dedication the students have put into their project. Previous such projects (Kreutner, 2015) have shown that first grade material can be produced with limited means but also that this needs to be communicated clearly in advance to fully inform the students about the criteria and pre-requisites.

- a 300-word personal reflection on the students' groupwork on the 3-minute clip, explaining what worked well, what they learned in the process, and what they would do differently in the future.

The students are guided by the lecturer throughout the course. The proseminar meetings cover an introduction to basic analytical skills, various theoretical approaches, and to technical terms required for theatre studies. Two sessions are set aside for practical drama activities. These are hands-on and allow the students – first via warm-up activities followed by improvisation techniques – to experiment with language and discover their artistic selves. The selection of activities is based on what they might be able to use in their own classrooms in their later teaching lives. Activities also include ones that will help them shake off any inhibitions they might have as drama-based teaching is such a rare occurrence in Austria and thus lesson plans need to be reflect the students' newness to DBP. These sessions are then followed up with a conversation about where the potential effects and benefits of the drama activities might lie, both immediately, and later in the students' own careers as teachers.

The second half of the semester is then dedicated to film studies, and one film, in this case Sam Mendes' *American Beauty*, serves as the example with which the theory then gets explored. With many creative in-class tasks such as casting activities or group work on the effects of editing choices, the students learn the necessary skills and methods for the analysis of film. They will become acquainted with filmic vocabulary concerning pre-production, production and post-production and come to understand film as a visual and verbal form of expression that uniquely combines sight, sound, and movement. These activities are also backed-up with short theory lectures, for the students need to be able to then put the newly acquired knowledge into practice with their portfolio storyboarding and film tasks.

3. Method

In order to gain better understanding of the applied changes to the structure of *Understanding Drama and Film* and gather feedback about the students' experien-

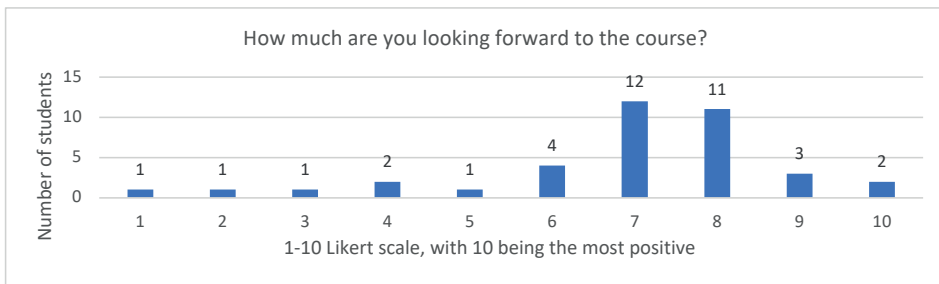
ce and understanding of the role DBP can play in the foreign language classroom, students of the 2023 summer and winter terms were given two questionnaires. The questions are based on aspects and concepts that are commonly associated with DBP and creative hands-on teaching approaches such as improvement of language skills, lowered anxiety, engagement, motivation and enjoyment. Class sizes in the summer term of 2023 were unusually small with only 12 and 5 students in the two offered courses. The two courses in the winter term were then at the normal class numbers of 19 and 20 students. Due to limitations in the research schedule, the summer term students were only given the post-course questionnaire whereas the winter term students received both the pre-course questionnaire and the main one. The first was given to the students after their first lesson, as it asked them about their expectations of the course, their previous theatre and drama activities experiences and their initial thoughts about portfolio work instead of a term paper. All students handed in their questionnaires ($N = 39$). The main course questionnaire was emailed to the student cohort of the 2023 summer term and handed out in class to the two bigger classes of the winter term. Due to a high number of students absent because of illness, the final number of filled-in main questionnaires was far less ($N = 33$). Both questionnaires included closed questions that asked the students for a rating on a 10-point Likert scale followed by space for comments and also open questions. The anonymous questionnaires were subsequently numbered, with the letter P assigned to the pre-course questionnaire and letter Q to the main questionnaire. Data was collected, amalgamated and subsequently analyzed using MS Excel.

4. Results

4.1 Anticipation and Previous Encounters with DBP

At the beginning of the newly designed course, only slightly less than a quarter (10) of the students showed to have had previous experience with drama activities but most were looking forward to getting an introduction (Figure 1) and the course itself. Out of 39 students, 28 are above the median of 6.2.

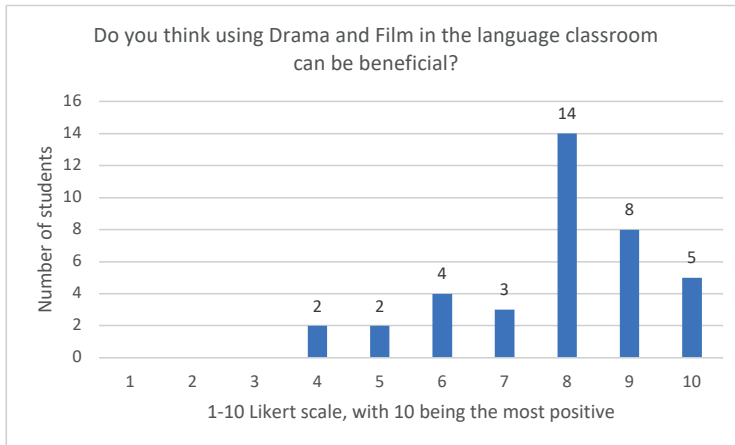
FIG. 1 How Much Students are Looking Forward to the Course



The comments section for the question how they feel about getting a hands-on introduction to theatre activities shows an overwhelming desire to try something new but paired with a certain nervousness due to the students' lack of previous exposure to such activities. Comments range from "Flabbergasted but excited" (P1) to "I am a bit worried as I have never done that before" (P26), but there is a lack of outright refusal or overwhelming rejection. Students who have had previous experience, however, do seem to show more unconcerned anticipation of what is to come.

Responses to the question whether the use of drama and film in the language classroom can be beneficial also show a strong preponderance towards the highly beneficial with more than two thirds (27) of the students clearly ranking it in the 8–10 range and no ratings of three or below (Figure 2).

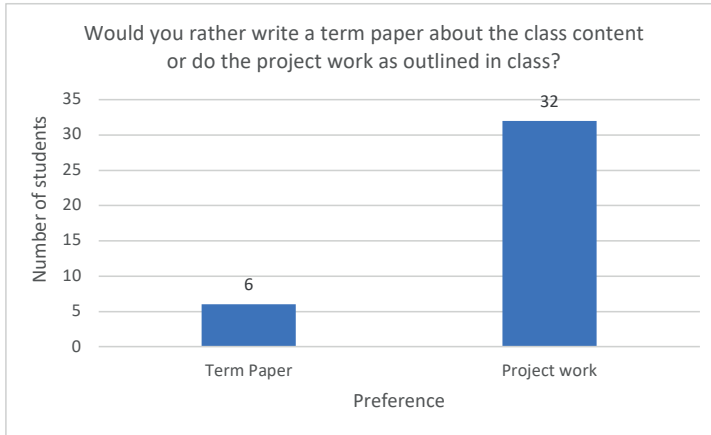
FIG. 2 *Level of Usefulness of Drama and Film in the Language Classroom*



The students' comments show awareness of the benefits of DBP with references in the comments to the positive effects on creativity (e.g., P9, P13, P14, P23), interaction (e.g., P9), self-confidence, authenticity of language exposure (e.g., P2, P28), critical thinking (e.g., P2, P9), and reduction of anxiety (e.g., P18, P19). "Drama and Film [sic] can help make the language classroom more interactive and it can make the language itself more vivid for the students" (P9), commented one student whilst another picked up on the disparity between the US/UK and Austria and the need to be familiar with the cultural aspects behind drama and film: "students of English should be [...] familiar with English[...] drama due to the fact that [it] is a crucial part in [the] UK's and US's culture[s]" (P6).

As displayed in Figure 3, a strong majority of students prefer the portfolio-based project work over the traditional term paper approach of assessment, only six out of 38 (one questionnaire lacked an answer) would rather write a term paper.

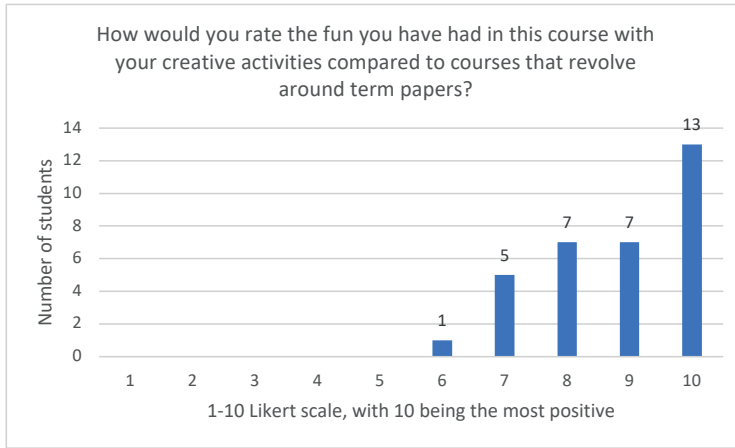
FIG. 3 *Preference of Main Assessment Method*



The reasons for their choice become apparent in the comments, with most students appreciating the offered variety (e.g., P11, P12), the higher level of creativity that can be expressed in the portfolio (e.g., P19), the positive aspects of teamwork (e.g., P2, P28, P39), as well as the benefits of continuous assessment compared with a single piece of work. They furthermore state that the portfolio work allows them to put into practice gained theoretical knowledge about drama and film (e.g., P23), as well as the bonus of increased motivation levels due to the more practical nature of the tasks (e.g., P4, P27). Those who ticked that they would prefer the term paper mostly listed challenging coordination efforts for the team tasks as well as an apparently higher workload with the portfolio as their reasons (e.g., P3, P12, P18).

4.2 *Looking Back at the Class and its New DPB Approach*

The first question asked about the level of fun the students felt they had in the more practical, portfolio-based class compared to similar, term paper-based classes. On the 10-point Likert scale, 1 represented much less fun and 10 much more. The answers were overwhelmingly positive with more than half of the students rating the course a 9 or 10, and only one a 6 (see Figure 4).

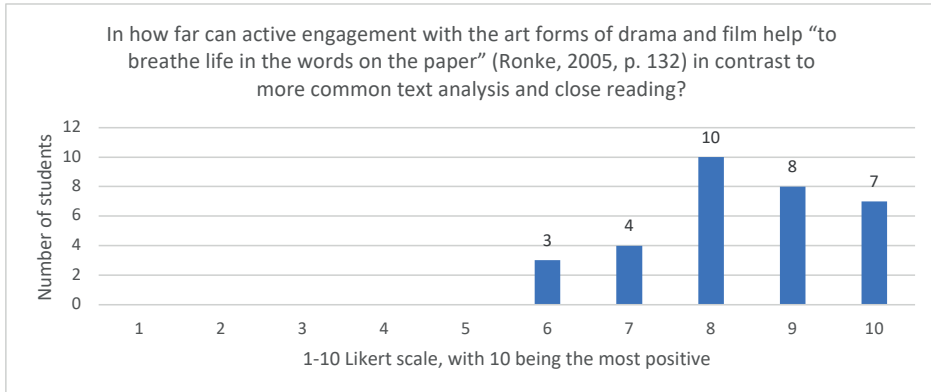
FIG. 4 *Level of Fun Compared to Traditional Class Structures*

The students' assessment of the benefits of drama activities in the classroom remained consistently high with the most telling results revealed in the comments section. The students especially stressed how these tasks allowed for their creativity to come to the fore, built speaking confidence in particular and language confidence overall, and improved their understanding of the topic area. Example comments include "I became more confident and was able to discover a new side of language, arts and imagination" (Q33), "[i]nteracting and speaking was fun" (Q1), as well as "creativity tasks are really relaxing and fun, knowing that I am able to act boosted my self-esteem" (Q26), amongst others. Answers to the open question whether this course has changed their opinion about drama and using drama-based pedagogy in the classroom only received affirmative responses with several students emphasising the fact that they had previously known little to nothing about the possible applications of drama activities. Initial scepticism was – so the students said – quickly replaced with enthusiasm for the option to take a course with practical work on drama and film now available. Reactions span from "It is not just boring analysis but more of an interactive approach" (Q6) and "at school, I never got in contact with drama so [in this class] I really learned a lot" (Q29) to "[I am] willing to incorporate it into my future teaching now that I know how much fun it is" (Q15) and "I will definitely use it because it is a great way to motivate students and bring them together while doing something creative"(Q24).

The questioned students also underline the added value of active engagement with art forms in contrast to standard text analysis and close reading with 25 students rating it in the highest three categories and all of them above the mean (Figure 5). Not many used the comments option for this question, but statements include "it makes drama and film more tangible" (Q16) and "really doing somet-

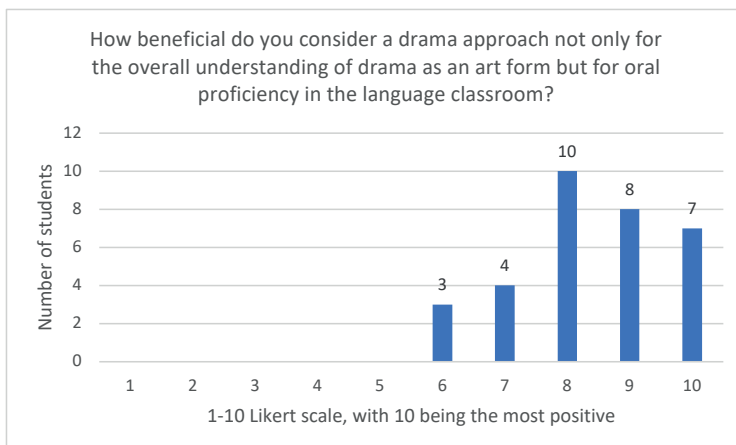
hing actively leads to better understanding” (Q9) as well as “showing what drama really is about will definitely help” (Q18).

FIG. 5 Active Engagement vs More Common Text Analysis and Close Reading



The next question added another dimension onto the previous about the value for the understanding of drama and film themselves by asking how actively engaging with these art forms can also be beneficial for oral proficiency and communication skills in the language classroom. All students agree that drama-based teaching is beneficial with an overwhelming three-quarter majority again ranking its usefulness in the highest three categories (Figure 6). The benefits explicitly mentioned by several students include anxiety reduction, understanding of theory, authentic speaking environment, improved self-confidence in speaking, and having fun speaking the foreign language (e.g., Q2, Q4, Q6, Q7, Q9, Q12, Q14, Q15, Q18, Q19, Q20, Q22, Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26, Q27, Q32).

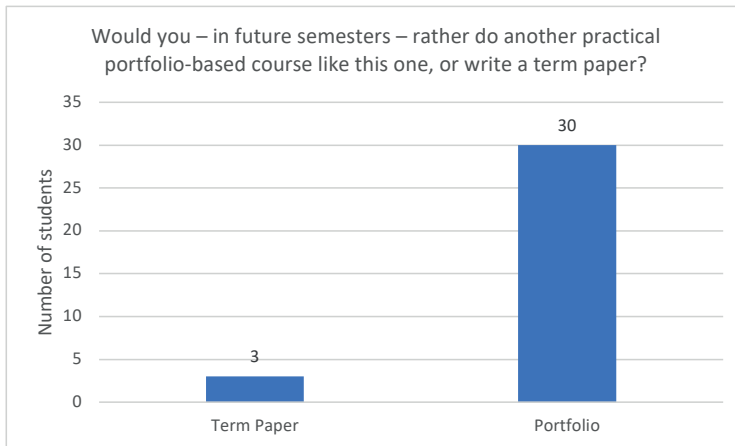
FIG. 6 How Beneficial do Students Consider a Drama-based Approach for Oral Proficiency



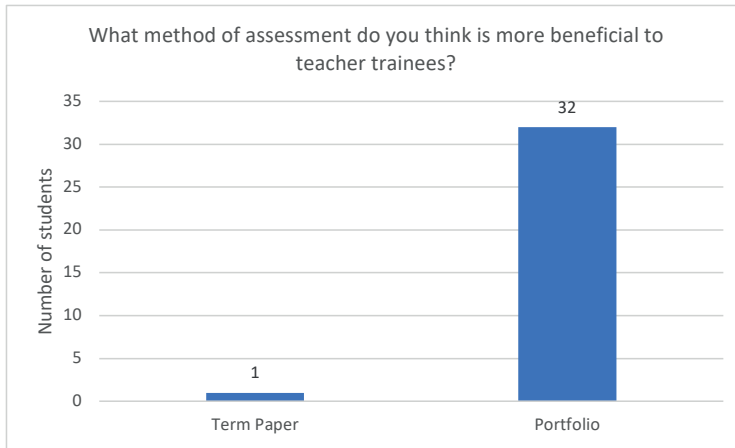
The portfolio work required as part of the overall assessment element of the course in question included many facets and one question aimed at getting feedback on what the students particularly enjoy. Being creative and working together in a team scored highest with 29 and 25 students out of 33 ticking it respectively. Teamwork is very popular, but comments also focus on less positive aspects of collaboration with some students referring to the logistical challenges of meeting up outside of class time for portfolio assignments (e.g., Q14, Q29,). Of the 33-strong cohort of students, 22 thought learning on the job how films are created was enjoyable, and 21 regarded working on their films' storyboards as fun. The possibility of applying their newly gained knowledge in an actual project was appreciated by 20 students, whereas acting (8) and using film equipment (5) is apparently nothing they were particularly passionate about.

In order to allow direct comparison with the students' opinions before and at the end of the course, they were again asked whether they prefer portfolios over term papers. Three students would opt for the term paper and 30 would vote for the portfolio approach to course assessment (Figure 7).

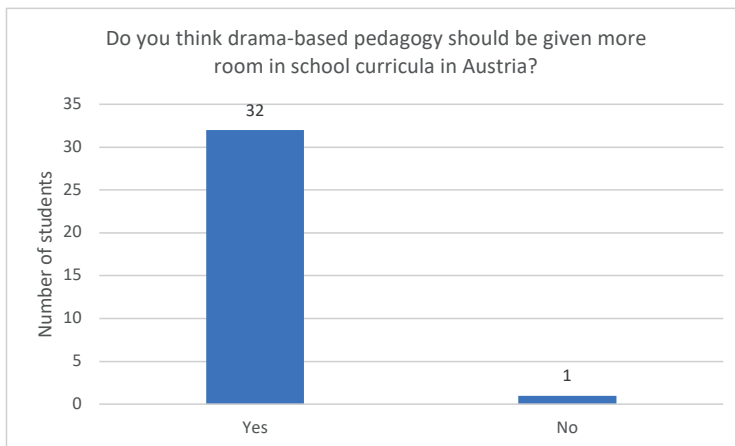
FIG. 7 *Students' Preference of Assessment Method*



To shed more light on the above question, they were then also asked to answer the question from the point of view of a budding teacher and only one student said that term paper-based assessment is more beneficial to teacher trainees (Figure 8). Even though there was no specific comments section supplied, a considerable number of students added exclamation marks to their ticks in the portfolio box or added comments at the side, reading “portfolio work is more personal/insightful” (Q4), “term papers do not help me in any way” (Q5) “definitely portfolio, especially in the AI era” (Q25).

FIG. 8 *Students' Assessment of Suitability for Trainee Teachers*

As Austrian students are less often exposed to drama-based pedagogy than their counterparts in the US or UK, the last question aimed at finding out their thoughts on whether this teaching approach should be given more room in the Austrian curriculum. With 32 students in favour and only one speaking out against more emphasis on DBP, their preference is clear (Figure 9).

FIG. 9 *Students' Assessment of Whether DBP Should be Given More Room in Austrian Curricula*

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the questionnaires clearly show that the students place little value on the term paper approach to assessment. These findings are in line with in-class observations made from the perspective of the lecturer of the above trial course.

Students' comments on the sterility and old-fashioned touch of term papers correspond with Wilbrink's statement that they are indeed "the legacy of societies long since gone" (Wilbrink, 1997, p. 43). Legacies are often hard to remove because of the pillar-like societal regard for them and the resulting tendency not to question them. The advent of AI has certainly set in motion a certain process of rethinking the suitability of assessment types and even though the pillars are being gnawed at not because of their inherent lack of pedagogical usefulness but because of the threat of cheating, this change is nonetheless welcomed not only by the students but to a certain extent also by the teachers. Students openly mention AI in the comments section of the questionnaire and how it renders term papers unsuitable. In conversation with the lecturer, they furthermore expressed their discontent with classes that still allow for computer-generated texts to be handed in and graded. The results of the questionnaires also substantiate the students' openness towards new forms of assessment. Comparing the pre-course answers to the main questionnaire's, the number of students who prefer term-papers over portfolio-based assessment went down from 6 out of 39 to 1 out of 33. Even though the portfolio had previously already seen overwhelming popularity, the comparison shows that seeing it in action has shifted opinion further. Combined with the comments, not just those added to this specific question but to others as well, it becomes clear that more realistic, authentic forms of assessment are the preferred option. Observations made during class underline this as motivation levels seemed tangibly higher and students appeared to be more engaged in their studies.

Collaboration, communication, creativity and critical thinking are listed as core principles in the Austrian National Curriculum (BMBWF, 2012) and three of these aspects are mentioned repeatedly in the students' responses to the open questions and in the comments sections. They appear to show great awareness of the room for creativity these projects give them and also frequently refer to the positive aspects of working together in a team, even listing it as an aspect they particularly enjoyed. Moreover, whereas joy and fun were long not associated with academic achievement, it is nowadays fortunately widely understood that we learn better when stress levels are reduced and an element of fun is introduced.

A high level of reflection on the students' part also becomes apparent when looking at the answers the students give to questions relating to the potential benefits of DBP in the language classroom. Even though the questioned students are usually freshers or in the second year of their studies with their pedagogical training in its infant steps, their responses show an understanding of the benefits of DBP. Their comments highlight that they are aware of the advantages of using authentic language in a stress-reduced environment (Duff & Maley, 1984), the following student comment shall be exemplary for many similar ones: "[these activ-

ities] reduce anxiety and make the learning environment more inviting” (Q25). By making the message the focus, these activities allow the students to experiment with language and draw attention not only to vocabulary and slight variations of it but also to prosody. Very few other tools available to teachers can facilitate the latter in a realistic environment and it was positively surprising to see the students so actively understanding the process and what they were learning. An example from one of the lessons highlights the above specifically and was also an aspect the students returned to repeatedly in the comments sections of the main questionnaire as well as in oral and email conversations with their lecturer: In one of the hands-on drama classes that were part of this course, they were handed 4-liners from well-known works of literature to work with. These included, amongst others, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* or the Arthur Miller play *Death of a Salesman*. The students, most of them unaware of the famous sources of the 4-liners, were and asked to act out their lines; all had been given different situations in which these lines were uttered though. In the reflection phase that followed the staging of these little productions, the students remarked how it taught them how little meaning is in the words themselves and how easily the words can be manipulated by prosody, gestures, facial expressions, or how simple pauses can significantly influence meaning. This understanding of communication aspects, a growing awareness of meaning that goes beyond the level of the word, is certainly one of the biggest learning outcomes of the above-mentioned exercise and outstripped what the originally intended learning outcome was. Another benefit of DBP is its multi-faceted nature and its wide applicability. The findings of this study are an attestation of the research that has preceded it (Bora, 2021; Cannon, 2017; Jany, 2015; Korkut & Celik, 2018; Nguyen, 2016; Schenker, 2017; Schewe, 2013;) and the students’ clear answer to the question whether or not tailored DBP should be included as a pedagogical tool in Austrian schools as it has long been in the UK, leaves little room for discussion. It clearly shows that the questioned cohort could see through their own experiences what benefits could be unlocked using DBP and project work.

With the assets and potential gains now clearly outlined above, it is also important to stress the potential pitfalls and points that need to be considered. DBP cannot simply be embedded without thorough training of the lecturers/teachers. Austrian students come with the discussed lack of previous exposure to drama activities and thus need a much more thoughtful and considerate introduction, which has also been shown by the responses given in the questionnaire. Many students commented initially that they were worried and slightly anxious but willing to give it a try. A carefully selected and sufficient number of warm-up and introductory exercises allowed the students to cast aside their worries and engage

in their drama-based tasks with what they would later refer to as anxiety-free enthusiasm for talking and experimenting with language. Even though DBP offers so many possibilities, it can also close doors if mis-applied and requires high levels of experience with the matter as well as people-reading skills and empathy on the side of the teacher. Encouragement and the creation of a stress-reduced environment should be the core principles for anyone trying to venture into DBP.

Working with authentic tasks in the world of drama and film education also needs to take into consideration that the students not only need sufficient guidance carefully supplied without hindering their creative freedom but also a workable timeframe. The first cohort of students in the summer term of 2022 commented on the pressure the portfolio film project involved towards the end of term and that they enjoyed the project less due to time-constraints and an overwhelming amount of work towards the end of term. Lessons learned from their feedback meant that in the following winter term, the course plan was amended to make room for more portfolio project-based teaching in class. This included referring to their projects directly in more theoretical parts of the class such as when teaching them about cinematography, mise-en-scene, storyboarding or editing techniques. Clear criteria and an unclouded and early-on communicated timeline further helped this project be a success.

Finishing with reference to Steward's statement on how DBP "creates opportunities for the versatile teaching required to meet the demands of teaching toward multiple goals" (2015, p. 170) and stressing how allowing students to experiment with their newly gained knowledge in a learner-centred, creative and collaborative learning environment helps their learning, trainee teachers in Austria can only benefit from a structured and careful move away from term paper based assessment methods and an introduction of DBP. This will not only improve teacher training but also create more authentic foreign language learning situations for generations of Austrian pupils as such an introduction will filter through into schools.

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