

Global Simulation: A Student-Centered, Task-Based Format for Intermediate Foreign Language Courses

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Abstract: *This paper describes a student-centered, task-based alternative to published, mainstream curricula for intermediate university-level (second-year) foreign language courses: global simulation. The course format requires students to collaboratively complete a long-term task organized around a single premise or scenario. In the process, they learn about particular aspects of the target culture and language, similarly to a traditional content course. Yet the objective is to make use of the content knowledge in functioning within and completing the simulation. Three example German courses are presented, followed by specific guidelines for designing a global simulation course.*

Introduction

In recent years, many instructors of second-year, university-level foreign language courses have sought to provide students with a language-learning experience more deeply rooted in the humanistic endeavor, one that moves beyond survival skills, beyond a simple review of first-year grammar, and most importantly, beyond “culture” based on a series of preselected, edited, glossed readings (see Maxim, 2000; Weber, 2000).¹ This trend has been fueled in part by the shift in focus away from language learning as the acquisition of a set of skills toward the acquisition of cultural literacy and communicative competence in the foreign language (Byrnes, 2001; Eigler, 2002; Kern, 2000; Kramsch, 1997; Lange, 1994; Maxim, 2000; Swaffar, 1993; Weber, 2000); these ideas have been codified as well in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1999; henceforth *Standards*).

Amidst these exciting trends, the challenge for many foreign language instructors has been to find effective means of facilitating cultural literacy and communicative competence with a dearth of mainstream curricular materials to support the endeavor. Many published second-year university materials, despite the ubiquitous claim of a communicative and well-balanced approach to the target culture, appear to be built upon the persistent assumption that the acquisition of a foreign language and its culture means studying discrete grammatical structures, vocabulary lists, and pieces of information. Additionally, these materials tend to offer one author’s or group of authors’ interpretations of particular aspects of the target culture. This sort of learning may fail to spark students’ imagination and enthusiasm if only because culture learned in this way can appear as a sort of *fait accompli*, and some students may feel that they are just “going through the motions.”

To meet the challenge of facilitating not only cultural literacy but also the acquisition of communicative competence in ways that accommodate dynamic and varied student interests and

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