

FL 508
Dr. Fischer
4/3/2008

Reflection: Global Simulation by Levine

I immediately sympathized with Levine's sentiment regarding the current state of intermediate language courses as simply providing a review of what has already been learned in the first year. In that regard he adequately highlights the need for a different approach to foreign language instruction at the intermediate level; however, there are several questions that arise with his presentation of the global simulation as a potential replacement of the current approach.

I agree that from a pedagogical perspective it is very beneficial to take a step back and analyze student needs. Far too often instructors will forge ahead with a curriculum that fits their personal goals in terms of what elements of language should be included in a particular class, without assessing the needs of the clients they are attempting to serve. The global simulation experience described by Levine is, "a language learning experience more deeply rooted in the humanistic endeavor" which is essentially focused on the practical needs of individual learners. The direction of the course is consequently more dependant on the learners' desires rather than those of the teacher, which poses a few potential issues.

First, at an institution where several departments require a foreign language component, the student population of a given language class has a wide variety of needs and as well as motivation levels. It is highly unlikely that students who are not intending to further their language studies would be interested by a curriculum of this design. Their intentions for taking language would not be conducive to the level of motivation that would be required to maintain a simulation activity of this scale. A needs analysis of language learners would be of utmost necessity to determine whether this style of curriculum would truly serve the needs of the majority of students.

In an ideal setting where students are all self-motivated and interested in the particular topic of the simulation the value of the learning environment and the information the students could potentially absorb would be remarkable. For this to work efficiently, it would take a great amount of will-power from the instructor to simply remain the 'guide on the side' rather than the 'sage on the stage'. As instructors we all have our beliefs about what elements of language should be incorporated in the intermediate language classroom, and it while it would still be possible to steer the simulation in such a way as to achieve those goals, it would be very difficult to ensure that students implicitly acquire this knowledge. Furthermore, since the course objectives would inherently be somewhat malleable, the assessment of student learning in this setting would also prove to be rather difficult. Without a direct focus on grammatical principles and other language structures, it becomes more difficult to test students on the material that they learn throughout the term.

A global simulation certainly provides a holistic approach to language instruction and allows students the opportunity to actively engage in authentic situations using the target language. I certainly hope that further empirical research will also demonstrate improved proficiency outcomes as a result of this approach. In the mean time, since language instruction doesn't lend itself well to the scientific approach, I am interested to see how much ground content based instruction can gain, and how it is perceived by other academic departments in achieving their goals as well.

Dr. Fischer
April 3rd, 2008
Writing Assignment

Reflection on: "Global Simulation: A Student-Centered, Task-Based Format for Intermediate Foreign Language Courses" by Glenn S. Levine.

Levine's article provided me with a new approach of teaching foreign languages which I had never thought about before. As stated by the author, it provides an alternative curriculum to teaching by moving away from the formulating approach to learning about the target language and cultures. I was able to identify further with the article since the GS course is targeting 2nd year college/university level students, which is what I teach here at PSU (in Spanish). Learning styles vary from student to student and therefore, I find the GS course encouraging to those learners for whom this method learning approach might be helpful in reaching the target language goals.

I found many positive aspects of the GS Course, but at the same time I uncovered some uncertainties and stumbled on few phases which were unclear to me. I would like to begin first with some of the constructive features. First of all is very crucial to acknowledge that the GS course takes a great deal of preparation of supportive materials for the course. I agree with Jones that students "must stop thinking of themselves as students and avoid standing one step away from their own activities." In other words students cannot feel that they are playacting instead, thinking and behaving as they would in the world outside the classroom. This task base approach of various projects such as the Film Festival, Virtual Museum of German culture etc is important for the communicative language classroom, because it keeps away not from mechanical practice.

The article reveals that GS should be based upon a single situation or premise. I consent that this certain situation or premise be related to a cultural specific way as culture is very vital to student's motivation and learning in the classroom; however, I wonder how student's progress is measured and evaluated during these 12 weeks period based upon one situation or premise topic. The author describes that student's work is evaluated upon their writing assignments such as portfolios and weekly reports turned in, but on the other side grammar and reading seems to be limited along with the vocabulary. For example, the vocabulary introduced to the students is only applicable and limited to that particular situation or premise for a full 12 weeks program. With regards to grammar, I am unsure of the author's statement of "the GS format is an ideal context for a great deal of focus-on-form or consciousness-raising instruction that does not interfere with classroom discourse". I feel that this statement needs to be further elaborated for clearer understanding. However, the other approach to ensure grammar comprehension, such as the instructor implementing in the curriculum "grammar days only" might be helpful to many students' learning and correct way of expression.

To conclude, the GS course objectives such as the communicative approach through much oral practice and implementing cultural literacy are my favorite aspects of this Intermediate Foreign Language teaching and learning. In addition, the fact that the instructor is the facilitator and the course is student-centered makes it more appealing.

Dr. Fischer
April 3, 2008

Reflection on the article "Full-Scale Theatre Production and Foreign Language Learning"
by Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo

Italian Theatre Workshop (ITW) is a foreign language learning program based on immersion learning, which I consider a highly effective way of achieving fluency. From my personal experience of learning several foreign languages precisely by immersion but also from the results showed by Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo, it is evident that foreign language learners benefit from immersion experiences. This type of experience leads students to learn the language and culture on an "unconscious level", meaning, when they are not focused on learning those aspects as they prepare a theatre production in the target language. However, they achieve results due to a comfortable and enjoyable atmosphere, in which they build even more confidence in using the target language.

Even though ITW program showed successful results in improving participants' level of communicative competence in the target language, I have concerns in terms of participants' usage of their L1 in the process of preparation for the production, which the authors call "preproduction." The study does not explain how the participants behaved when faced with new and unknown words in the foreign language. Thus, I am curious to know if participants used their L1 in those situations. I believe that it would be useful to include in the assessment of participants a measure in percentage of time how much participants used their L1 to communicate and explain unknown concepts and phrases to each other.

It is important to point out the fact that the program includes both acting as well as non-acting positions for students. Moreover, the non-acting positions show a success in improvement in language competence. Ryan-Scheutz and Colangelo state that "non-actors (designers and stage managers) scored highest on the translation of idiomatic expressions in the posttest (381)." Therefore this study points out the importance of accommodating different types of learning styles, such as extroverted and introverted.

It is interesting to highlight that the program required only two semesters of prior experience in the target language. In this way, ITW exemplifies the CBI principle that content mastery and linguistic mastery are achieved in a parallel way instead of a strictly sequential order. Linguistic mastery is not required from students to participate in this program. Instead the authors point out benefits of having participants with heterogeneous levels of proficiency. The authors suppose a more experienced students are used as models for less experienced students.

One of the major advantages of the ITW program is the motivation level of students involved in it. In contrast to a regular foreign language classroom, ITW students do not have motivational problems because they are engaged in the learning process through their common interest, which is the theatre.

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FL508 CBI
April 3, 2008

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

Several things about this article jumped out for me right off the bat, including in particular one of the author's first sentences, wherein he describes the current desire at second-year university level for a curriculum based more on "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" (Levine 26). I thought this passage was key for me as a description of CBI framework not just as a way to better or more efficiently learn the language, but as a completely altered approach. I particularly appreciated the words "humanistic endeavor", which brought to mind the notion that these students would be learning the language with more interaction-based, real-life usage objectives in mind.

One thing that I noted about this article was the rather extensive citation of major research in the field of language pedagogy. On a personal note, I was impressed to see that (particularly on page 27, during the introduction to the article) Levine cites a good portion of the major research that I have been introduced to in my last two years of teacher-training classes. It reinforces for me the notion that these ideas and articles are pertinent, are out there in the field at large, and are being read and used in further research. I found this both reassuring (as a validation) and also inspiring, to see that what little knowledge I have been exposed to has been in many ways some of the more important foundational material of the field.

This article did raise several questions for me, particularly in its definition of certain components to a Global Simulation course. For instance, how important is the "reality of function", and where is the research to support this? Also, if the teacher is the "controller" of the simulation, rather than "a teacher in a simulation activity" (27), what exactly is their role in the class? Levine states on page 29 that in this type of environment, the teacher becomes freer to act as a "resource person", resident culture/language expert, walking dictionary and "language paramedic", but I wonder how he sees this as actually different from the normal role. Also, I was curious as to the idea of a task-based approach, and wondered whether this in fact limits this type/s of learning that occur, or if there are ways in which one could target specific grammatical structures and functions, while keeping to the simulation environment.

Overall, I find the concept of this type of learning/teaching to be very promising. I think that the idea of getting second-year students away from reading the same overused texts (essentially relearning all of the grammatical structures that they learned in their first-year classrooms) is a necessary shift. I will say that not only do I fully agree with Levine's own conclusion that empirical research on this type of class is needed, I almost feel that the article itself in fact suffers as a consequence. I was not much persuaded by Levine's admission in the introduction that "to date, no data has been collected pertaining to student proficiency gains in this course format compared with other sorts of courses at the

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same level" (27). For me as a teacher this article seems somewhat preemptive, in that it would make a much more successful and convincing argument if it were able to demonstrate to me what pedagogical benefits there are to be gained, or at the very least be able to demonstrate that there was no loss between this and a typical second-year curriculum. Levine raises several interesting issues, but I feel that the best support for this type of program lies in being able to prove its value with the proper empirical evidence as support.