

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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learning styles, an alternative format to mainstream second-year university curricula was developed in the German Department at the University of California, Irvine. This course format is called global simulation (GS). It is simultaneously an approach, a set of classroom techniques, and the conceptual framework for a syllabus. As an approach and set of techniques it has been around for some time (see Crookall & Oxford, 1990; Jones, 1984; van Ments, 1994) and scholarly interest certainly has increased in recent years (see Caré, 1995; Cheval, 1995; García-Carbonell, Rising, Montero, & Watts, 2001; Jones, 1984; Kovalik & Kovalik, 2002; Magnin, 2002; van Ments, 1994; Yaiche, 1998). However, with regard to simulation as a tool for language learning, to date it appears to have found infrequent application in university-level foreign language classes in the United States. Yet the format deserves consideration because, in addition to addressing many of the tenets detailed in the Standards, it accords well with several prevailing models of L2 acquisition and foreign language pedagogy. For example, GS facilitates extensive, meaningful classroom interaction and negotiated communication (see Ellis, 1999; Long, 1996; Long & Porter, 1985; Mackey, 1999) and provides frequent opportunities for interactionally modified input, negotiation, and peer scaffolding in the Vygotskian framework (see Antón & DiCamilla, 1999; Brooks & Donato, 1994; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Ohta, 1995; Pica, 1996). Additionally, the format lends itself well to integrated focus-on-form instruction as advocated by Doughty and Williams (1998), and Swain (1998). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, rather than imposing constraints on different learners to conform to the course, the course format itself accommodates the variety of interests, personality types, and learning styles in any given group of learners. It validates their sense of self in the process of cultural exploration and, importantly, allows their cultural and linguistic learning to proceed primarily experientially in ways that approximate life in study/work-abroad situations. For many students, this sort of language learning experience facilitates higher motivation than do other types of language courses.

At the University of California, Irvine we have run a GS course entitled “www.technomode.de” (described later in this article) in the winter quarter of three consecutive years, 2001 to 2003. In each section of the course, we received very positive feedback from most students on course evaluations, along with many constructive comments and suggestions for improving the course. (Many of these suggestions have been incorporated into the course descriptions in this article.) To date, no data has been collected pertaining to student proficiency gains in this course format compared with other sorts of courses at the same level. It was important first to work out the various features of the GS course, as presented here, before engaging in empirical research on the format.

In the following, I present simulation and GS and their fundamental characteristics. Thereafter, three example German courses are described that follow the GS format. As mentioned, the first of the courses described, www.technomode.de, has been offered in my department over the last three years; the other two example courses are in the design stage and will be offered at the same institution in the next few years. Because the main goal here is to detail the GS format in a broad sense, a detailed report on the specific courses offered in the German Department would exceed the scope of this article. Following the description of the three example GS courses, several guidelines are put forward for the design of an intermediate GS course.

Definition and Characteristics of GS in the Foreign Language Class

In some regards, all language learning involves a level of simulation, with a continuum from extremely artificial to fairly “realistic” (Gardner & Lalonde, 1990). In this paper, simulation is understood in terms of the framework for language class simulation offered by Jones (1984). Jones stated that “a simulation is reality of function in a simulated and structured environment” (p. 5). Admittedly, the author’s guidelines represent more a prescription than a definition. Yet in conceptualizing a course based on global simulation, Jones’s precise guidelines proved more useful than other extant definitions of the term, such as that offered by Crookall and Oxford (1990). Therefore, the working definition of simulation in this paper should not imply that it is the only or the best one.

Jones’s (1984) conceptualization of simulation comprised three essential elements: (1) reality of function, (2) simulated environment, and (3) structure. To this definition I add that it must be task based, it must contain a briefing and debriefing phase (Jones also included this point in his treatment of simulation), and it must be based on a single situation or premise. In the following, each element is examined in turn.

Reality of Function

Reality of function means that while the simulation itself is not reality, the participants must behave and act within the simulation as if it were. Jones (1984) stated that participants “must stop thinking of themselves as students, and avoid standing one step away from their own activities” (p. 4). Further, reality of function “rules out play-acting, or playing games, or playing to please (or provoke) the teacher. There is no play—either in a theatrical or in a gaming sense—in a simulation, and if there were, then it would stop being a simulation” (p. 4). Reality of function also means that the instructor (Jones refers to this person as the controller) is prohibited from problem solving or decision making for the participants. In this sense, the controller “is not a teacher in a simulation activity; there is no teacher in

the cabinet office, the news room, or on the shop floor” (p. 4).

Simulated Environment

Perhaps stating the obvious, Jones (1984) wrote that “the environment must be simulated, otherwise it is not a simulation” (p. 4). Put another way, a simulation must proceed absolutely safely; there can be no effects on the outside world or real influence from it (Crookall & Oxford, 1990, p. 21; Jones, 1984, p. 5). Hence, “although the functions of the participants are real, the world outside the classroom is, paradoxically, imaginary” (Jones, 1984, p. 5).

Structure

Most crucially for the intermediate-level foreign language course, a simulation must have structure. The structure must be “built around a problem or set of problems, and the structure must be sufficiently explicit to preserve reality of function . . . [The simulation] can be thought of as a case study, but with the participants on the inside, having the power and responsibility to shape the event and tackle the problem” (Jones, 1984, p. 5). Similarly to the flight simulator used to train pilots, the student pilot is not expected to first design and build the simulator, rather she or he is shown how it works and is then expected to function within it.

While Jones also acknowledged, in accord with Crookall and Oxford (1990), that role playing, insofar as it involves reality of function, can be part of simulation, the distinction between simulation and role play should be clear; in a simulation, participants most often are asked to think and behave as they might in the world outside the classroom. In this sense, they do not have to act (as in play-act) or invent behavior that is unnatural to them. Playacting might actually undermine reality of function.

Task-Based Approach

An additional characteristic of language class simulation is that it must be fundamentally task based. Task-based instruction is important for the communicative language classroom, for it keeps the focus away from rote or mechanical practice and on meaningful interaction (see Skehan, 1998; Lee, 2000). At the intermediate level, conversational negotiation also is crucial for carrying out tasks, as skills in both conversational repair and general discourse strategies seriously affect students’ success. Yet while tasks invariably involve negotiation, negotiation is more than repair. According to Lee (2000), negotiation “consists of interactions during which speakers come to terms, reach an agreement, make arrangements, resolve a problem, or settle an issue by conferring or discussing; the purpose of language use is to accomplish some task rather than to practice any particular language forms” (p. 9).

The intense orientation toward tasks in a GS course offers participants an environment in which the simulation

becomes its own reality, in which communication can proceed in the second language in ways that may still be structurally different from native speaker norms but which are more natural and “real” than in many other foreign language classroom situations.

Briefing and Debriefing

Integral parts of simulations, and of GS courses, are the briefing and debriefing phases, which at one end provide students with the content information, grammatical knowledge, and vocabulary necessary to complete the simulation, and at the other end help put events and the learning process in focus, identify what was learned, and what was not (Bullard, 1990, p. 56). With regard to the briefing phase, Jones (1984) warned against overdoing the language briefing/preparation in particular, for it may “make students too inhibited to say anything rather than deviate from the forms and patterns of speech practiced in the language briefing” (p. 38). He reiterated that “[i]f they think of themselves as being students, then it will not be a genuine simulation” (p. 38). I agree with Jones that briefing should be approached in a minimalist way, and language briefing can be regarded as a separate activity altogether, divorced to some extent from the simulation (e.g., by conducting it on separate class days). The instructor should always keep in mind that “the aim of the simulation is not to produce the correct words, grammar and pronunciation, but to communicate effectively according to roles, functions, and duties” (Jones, 1984, p. 38).

The debriefing phase involves some sort of analysis of the simulation, either by the instructor or (preferably) by the participants themselves, as well as some amount of introspective self-assessment by individuals or groups (i.e., students critique their own performance in the GS). Examples of debriefing are offered later on in this paper.

Single Situation or Premise

Moving beyond the characteristics of simulation described in the preceding sections, the GS also should be based upon a single situation or premise, for example a particular business, organization, or group (newspaper, retail company, museum, hotel, chancellor’s cabinet, town, etc.). The situation should be closely related to the target language in some culture-specific way (Ruben & Lederman, 1990), that is, the things that participants discover as they carry out the simulation should not come under the heading of things common to many or most cultures, rather of things uniquely part of the target culture(s) and its people.

Why Global Simulation?

Most simulations designed for language classes are intended to be completed in a single class day or a few class days. Global simulation, borrowing and expanding the French term *simulation globale* (Caré, 1995; Cheval, 1995; Yaiche, 1998) involves engagement in a long-term, *global* project,

one that treats a variety of aspects of the particular premise or scenario.² A long-term simulation, as opposed to periodic, brief simulations that are integrated into an otherwise conventional curriculum, offers several advantages at the intermediate university level. First, students can engage in language learning in ways that allow them more or less to forget that they are doing so; for many participants the experience comes to be defined by the simulation project itself, rather than by the language learning. Crookall and Oxford (1990) wrote that for participants the simulation becomes very “real” because they are personally involved in it, and they “do not continually ask themselves ‘What does this represent?’ in terms of the real (non-simulation) world” (p. 15). Second, with regard to meaningful cultural learning, participants have the opportunity to spend adequate time exploring (often self-selected) topics or themes that are of interest to them while working toward the simulation’s goals. Fourth, the instructor, who normally might spend a great deal of time designing a series of unrelated tasks or other sorts of activities, has the time in a GS class to be truly a “resource person” for students (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992), a resident expert on the target language and culture(s), a walking dictionary, and “language paramedic” who aids participants in fulfilling their assigned functions and achieving their stated goals.

Three Example Global Simulation Courses

In the following, three example GS German courses are detailed. For the sake of brevity, only a synopsis of the course premise, goals, and basic structure are presented here. Consideration of written assignments, assessment instruments, and grammar and vocabulary instruction are provided in the next section of this article. Each of these courses presented could be adapted to either the quarter or the semester system. In my institution, GS courses are placed in the fifth quarter of the six-quarter, lower-division sequence; in other words, after the completion of the introductory language curriculum. Naturally, any of the example courses described in the following could be adapted to the fourth-year high school level, as well as to the third or fourth-year university levels. In all three of the courses described, maximal target-language use (by instructor and students) is assumed.

An additional word about the placement of the GS course at my own institution is called for before proceeding. From the beginning of the introductory German language course we adopt a strong task-based, student-centered approach. We also institute a fairly intensive target-language-use practice in the classroom, supported by explicit ground rules and strategies for codeswitching and English use (see Belz, 2003; Levine, 2003; Macaro, 2001). Through this principled approach to task-based learning and to target-language use, by the time our students reach the fifth quarter most feel comfortable with the communicative demands of the GS course. In essence, just as a

successful simulation depends on adequate briefing of participants, so too does the success of the GS course rely on extensive language “briefing” in the form of this sort of advance preparation.

www.technomode.de

In this global simulation, students conceptualized and designed an Internet-based retail company. The structure of the simulation was provided to the students in the basic characteristics of the company, called *www.technomode.de*. The structure, or scaffold, was established ahead of time: It was based in Germany and sold its products primarily to members of several German youth subcultures (see Prokjektgruppe Jugendkulturen, 1999). Its product lines included fashion items and/or fashion accessories (participants were free to implement changes in the scaffold, though, for instance by selling alternative items). The final project, which took place some time during the last week of the term, entailed “pitching” the company to potential investors in the hope of receiving their entrepreneurial support.³

The course was divided into four parts. The first week or so of the term, which acted as the briefing phase of the simulation, resembled somewhat a first-year course, for it began with more instructor-fronted lessons in which the goals and characteristics of the simulation were presented and explained. Students also received strategies instruction in methods of negotiating meaning, codeswitching, and vocabulary building.

The second phase asked students to engage in diverse tasks. First, they investigated several regions of Germany in order to select a headquarters for their company. This collaborative project, which made heavy use of Internet resources, resembled many of the cultural scavenger-hunt-type of activities common in the first year of instruction, but prompted students to interact, debate, and discuss issues that were personally interesting and important. In this way, the students were eased into the more open-ended, learner-centered activities to come.

Second, in order to facilitate cross-cultural communication (see Jogan, Heredia, & Aguilera, 2001; Liaw & Johnson, 2001), and to prevent the course from remaining too insular in its approach to the simulation, each participant was asked to make contact with an e-mail pen friend in a German-speaking country. At intervals throughout the remainder of the course, the students were asked to bring into class the viewpoints, questions, or comments of these overseas “consultants.”

During the third phase, the students learned some necessary terminology for discussing a retail Internet company, without having the course digress into a business German course. The class identified what roles various departments of a typical company perform (e.g., product design and development, marketing, advertising) and decided which departments should be represented in the

simulation (remember that a simulation is not “reality,” rather reality of function, allowing participants to choose which elements to include or exclude). At this stage each person (more or less) self-selected which departments she or he would like to work with.

Once the students joined their respective company departments, they began to lay out plans for their portion of the final presentation. This included scripting and creating a short video clip that could be accessible on the company’s Web site (if the company so chose). To help the students quickly and easily create Web content, the group received a day or two of training in the use of a Web template software program (e.g., Netscape Composer), obviating the need to be experts in Web design. Throughout, the instructor stressed that it was content more than appearance that would determine the quality of the final product.

Lastly, during the middle weeks of the course the students collaboratively developed a detailed statement of the company’s philosophy, including its position on environmental and labor issues. To facilitate these discussions, the instructor brought to class “memoranda” at irregular, unannounced intervals (e.g., a newspaper item revealing that one of the company’s suppliers of raw material employs small children in its factories under abysmal working conditions). The group had to agree on a press statement in response to the revelation, as well as on a plan of action for the company.

The fourth phase of the course was occupied with preparation of the material for the final project and, of course, the final project itself. Students determined the exact form of the presentation. Following the presentation, the instructor planned for a class day or two for “debriefing,” and the students assessed their own performance in the final project, discussed and identified strengths and weaknesses of the entire simulation, and articulated what they gained from it as well as what they believed was left unexplored.

Virtual Museum of German Cultures

This course (still in design stage) would allow the students to explore as many aspects of the cultures of German-speaking countries as they choose from as many different points of view as they choose, employing in the process as many sorts of materials and media as are available. The collaborative project requires students to investigate aspects of German culture(s) of interest to them, and then design and present their “virtual museum” exhibits on a Web site. This course is divided into three main phases, beginning with briefing, which consists of four components. First, the students are informed about the GS format and their roles in it and receive the aforementioned communication and vocabulary-building strategies instruction. Next, through a simple multimedia presentation prepared by the instructor, they are shown that *culture* can mean many different things, and that their project may take them through history, art,

literature, biography, sports, music, film, television, cuisine, etc. In the process, they spend several class days determining for themselves the parameters of the term *culture*. Third, they work through several prepared texts and materials pertaining to aspects of German, Austrian, and Swiss culture. These texts are meant not so much as material for the museum to be created (for these texts have been selected by the instructor and not the students), rather as food for thought in subsequent investigation of cultural topics. Lastly, at this early stage the students also explore many German-language museum Web sites and discuss what sorts of media and means of presentation they find interesting, effective, and most importantly, useful for their own final project.

In the second phase of the course, the students decide together which aspects of the cultures (or subcultures) of the German-speaking countries they wish to include in their virtual museum. In order to decide this, groups of students complete small-scale investigations of topics under consideration and make arguments for or against each.

During this second phase of the course, the students also make contact with German-speaking e-mail pen friends (as in the www.technomode.de course), for the purpose of meaningful cross-cultural communication.

The third phase of the course involves actually creating the virtual museum exhibits. With the guidance of the instructor, the students create or select appropriate images, and write text to accompany images.⁴ Each group is also encouraged to create and narrate video and/or audio clips for inclusion in the virtual museum. As with the www.technomode.de course, one or two class days are devoted to training students in the use of Web template software.

At the end of the course, the students present their creation to the public and/or invited guests (e.g., the German faculty and students in other German classes). The creators of each component of the virtual museum present their work to the visitors, describe in their own words its content (and perhaps what was most rewarding or interesting in studying these topics), and of course, field questions about it. Finally, the instructor plans a class day or two for “debriefing” as described earlier, in which the students discuss and identify strengths and weaknesses of the project, articulate what they gained from it, as well as what they believe was left unexplored.

German Language Film Festival

While this course (also in design) would be similar to the www.technomode.de course in its narrower focus (than the virtual museum course), the content of the films viewed, discussed, and screened in fact greatly expands the range of topics that can be covered during the project. In this course, the students study German language cinema by watching and discussing films and reading materials about German films, directors, and prominent actors. For the

final project, participants conceptualize, organize, and host their own German film festival, complete with guest lecture(s) and panel discussion. In multisection courses, instructors coordinate the film festival such that each class contributes its component to a single festival.⁵

The main goals are for students to develop a basic knowledge of the full range of German cinema (from *Metropolis* to the present) and to gain insights into the ways German (and Austrian and Swiss) filmmakers interpret the world, people, and events (especially in comparison with the ways U.S. filmmakers do the same). Of course, the students' communicative competence and cultural literacy should also develop.

This course is comprised of four phases. In the first phase, as in the other two example courses, the students are informed about the GS format and their roles in it, and the project is described. In these first weeks, they view several films (preferably outside of class time if feasible) selected by the instructor to exemplify particular periods or genres of German film. These films are accompanied by vocabulary-building activities and discussion.

During the second phase of the course, the students identify periods, directors, and film genres that are of particular interest to them personally. They divide into groups in accord with these interests (e.g., a Wim Wenders group, a comedy group, a Nazi film group). During this phase, instructors of multisection courses coordinate the project such that each class works on complementary aspects of German-language film. Each group in the class is then responsible for the part of the film festival it has selected. While the groups spend some portion of each week in discussion with the entire class, much of the remaining class time in this phase is devoted to group work. Each group views and selects films in its area, presenting and justifying to the class its final selection(s) for the film festival. For each selection, students write prose texts (in German, of course) about the films, the director(s), etc. that can be presented in paper, poster, or digital form (e.g., Power Point, Web page) at the film festival.

As with the other two example courses, participants are also asked to initiate relationships with German speakers via e-mail and share the comments and questions of these people during classroom discussions.

Once the films to be presented in the festival have been selected, the class may opt to locate an expert on one of the genres or topics, such as a university faculty member in film studies, history, or a related area. If they are unable to locate someone locally, they also would have the option of corresponding with an expert via e-mail, Internet chat room, or—old-fashioned as it is—telephone. In the case of a local expert, the students collaborate on the invitation letter to this person, asking him or her to make a brief formal presentation at the film festival (preferably in German, or perhaps in both German and English). Additionally, the class selects a second of the genres/topics and begins to

plan a panel discussion to take place during the film festival (e.g., *Filmische Darstellungen der DDR und der deutschen Wiedervereinigung/Cinematic Representations of the GDR and the German Reunification*). For this, students also may choose to invite guests (e.g., a university faculty member) or conduct the discussion themselves (or both).

The third phase of the course involves students planning each part of the film festival, working out the details, ordering the films (video or 16mm), and preparing materials such as exhibits, posters, informational brochures, and flyers. Here, too, one of the instructor's jobs is to coordinate the schedule in multisection courses.⁶

The last phase of course is the film festival itself, and here is where the usual schedule constraints of the typical language course become problematic. Ideally, the screenings and other events will take place in the late afternoon or evening, and/or on the weekend. If this is not possible, then the festival can remain "internal" to the multisection course, allowing the screening to cross class periods. Because of the length of feature films and students' differing schedules, however, this option is not ideal. Finally, the instructor plans a day or two following the close of the film festival for debriefing, as with the other two example courses.

Guidelines for Designing a GS Course

In the following discussion, examples of guidelines are drawn from the three example courses.

Identify a Premise or Scenario

In light of the limited number of contact hours of the typical language course in U.S. universities, the premise or scenario should be conceptually accessible to students; if it is too complicated or far-removed from students' experiences, then they may need more time understanding the premise than would be expedient.⁷ For each of the example courses described above, students enter with their own frame of reference. Indeed, part of the appeal for some students in these simulations is to compare and contrast their current knowledge and experiences of the situation with those of people in German-speaking countries. Simulations that would be further from students' immediate experience would also be workable, but ideally only in academic terms longer than 12 weeks.⁸

Identify the Final Project and Course Milestones

Following logically from the scenario, the designer of the GS should have an idea of what the culminating task or project of the course looks like. Describing such a project for students is important for them to maintain a sense of direction. In this way, a GS is itself a simulation of many professional workplace situations in which employees collaboratively work toward the completion of various projects. In conceptualizing the final project, it is important to keep in mind that it may change, either by the unplanned

direction the simulation itself takes, or by the conscious decision of the participants.

In order to help students achieve the course goals and ensure the success of the GS final project, the designer of the GS also should identify in advance the major components of the GS—the scaffold on which the students construct the simulation. In each of the example courses, these milestones are identifiable by the major phases of the course. In all three courses, the first weeks largely resemble “standard” content courses, in that students familiarize themselves with the scenario through prepared readings, viewing films, discussion, and so forth. This is the briefing phase, in which requisite prior knowledge is activated and new knowledge of the topic is gained. In each course, too, the middle part is taken up with students identifying what is most interesting to them, selecting the narrower focus of individual groups, and dividing into groups in preparation for the final project. The last phase of each is characterized by detailed collaborative preparations for the final project. It is in this phase that students, assuming they conduct most interactions in the target language, most often forget that they are part of a language class at all. It is also in this phase that instructors may notice the greatest advances in students’ abilities to negotiate interaction and complete tasks in the target language.

Identify the Pedagogical Goals

As with any course, everything that occurs should be oriented toward achieving identifiable goals. Therefore, the designer of the GS should be able to list cultural and linguistic goals for the course. For example, in our *www.technomode.de* course, there were two main goals for the sort of cultural learning in which students were expected to engage. First, at the broadest level it was desired that students achieve an appreciation for the complexity of contemporary German pop culture and move beyond the view of German culture as the fairly monolithic entity represented in many textbooks. The second goal of our course was for students to gain an understanding of some aspects of German youth subcultures, including the values, music, and fashions of some of these groups (e.g., “punk,” “sprayer,” “skater”). Crucially, in all three example courses, what is learned is expected to be different for different class members. This variable knowledge at each stage of the course provides the fuel for much of the verbal interaction; different students know different things and themselves recognize when it is appropriate or important to share what they know with others toward the completion of the simulation.

As with cultural learning goals, linguistic goals also are rather “global” and individualized. Students are expected to improve their abilities in the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) and their knowledge of target-language grammar, but this learning proceeds differently for different individuals. One student may improve greatly in

writing, but less so in reading; another may improve markedly in verbal interaction skills, but less in writing. Yet, even with this somewhat open-ended expression of language goals, the instructor should articulate them in advance, in part in order to devise ways of assessing the students’ progress.

Obviously, one central linguistic goal for any GS course at this level is to help learners progress in verbal interaction skills to the point that they can ask questions, express opinions, debate specific points, narrate appropriately in different contexts, etc. Therefore, early in the course the instructor should provide students with the tools necessary to meet this challenge. This can be accomplished by (1) displaying in the classroom frequently-used expressions for the negotiation of meaning (which also should be familiar to students from their previous courses); (2) discussing strategies for negotiating meaning; and (3) establishing together with students several ground rules for classroom codeswitching.⁹ In addition to extensive verbal interaction, the reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary practice students engage in serves to support cultural learning, as well as skills development in reading and writing itself. But because the GS format tends to place more emphasis on verbal interaction overall, opportunities to develop reading and writing skills and expand grammatical and lexical knowledge must be built into the course by the designer. In the three example courses, students engage both in extensive writing, usually in the form of weekly reports about the student’s or group’s activities and plans, and in intensive writing, manifested in assignments in which students must write specific questions or statements for classmates.

With respect to reading skills development, although the GS course is not a content course as such, the briefing phase resembles one. Considering students’ still limited language abilities at the second-year university level, as well as the goal that they should come to converse easily about the topic of the simulation, it is important that authentic core readings, those preselected by the GS designer, are accessible to students. Hence, pre, during, and postreading activities should be developed that facilitate comprehension and purposeful discussion. In the example courses, the secondary goal of these guided readings is also to ease the transition for students to the substantial amount of unguided (largely Internet-based) reading they engage in during the subsequent weeks of the course.

Explicit grammar instruction can take two forms that do not disrupt reality of function in the simulation. First, 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 (see Doughty & Williams, 1998; Sharwood Smith, 1981). This sort of instruction can be considered responsive rather than programmatic or proactive (i.e., the instructor has not decided in advance what structures or patterns should be dealt with). Instructors also can ask students to intentionally

include target structures into writing assignments, or locate target structures in their readings.

A second means of dealing with grammar is also responsive (to identified needs), but involves more explicit and thorough treatment of particular topics. Instructors can opt to spend particular class days as “grammar days,” on which the simulation is not considered; such class days can be regarded as strategic digressions from the simulation, yet ones that contribute directly to students’ ability to carry it out.

Lastly, goals for vocabulary development should be considered in advance. In the example courses, several approaches are employed. The students are provided with a limited course lexicon on a Web site or handout, one that instructor and students may continuously expand together. Class time is also spent teaching students effective ways of using their dictionaries, and they are encouraged to keep personal vocabulary lists. Still, it is not expected that students simply memorize word lists, rather each person builds a reference vocabulary in a cumulative way. In addition to these resources, vocabulary-building exercises are included in the prepared reading activities. Lastly, on grammar days instructors spend time in each course segment leading semantic-field or similar activities designed to help students make connections among words and types of words, and different sorts of expressions.

Develop Materials

Based on the preceding, it should be clear that a good deal of preparation is necessary for any GS course. The instructor will require some amount of supportive materials, such as vocabulary and/or grammar worksheets, sets of Internet links, authentic readings, and of course, activities to accompany readings. In the film festival course, the instructor should select a small set of films (and develop accompanying activities) that introduces students to the medium and the topic. It is important, however, not to overplan the course, for the risk would be to undermine reality of function by providing learners with too much prepared material; I cite Jones (1984) again, who asserted that participants “must stop thinking of themselves as students, and avoid standing one step away from their own activities” (p. 4). In overpreparing course materials, the instructor risks providing continuous reminders that this is, after all, “just” a language course. Materials should be provided, then, when students likely could not succeed without them.

Develop Assessment Instruments

As pointed out by Littlejohn (1990), assessment of performance in a simulation is difficult, for the instructor should assess both the *product* (the measurable gains in knowledge and language skills gained), and the *process* (the quality of engagement in the simulation). In the example courses, the product can be evaluated through several means. First,

tests administered in class measure gains in knowledge about the course topics, as well as learning about the particular grammar/usage points dealt with (if it is desired that the latter be tested at all). At my institution, these tests comprised essay questions—open-ended tasks asking students to write about various aspects of the simulation—along with reading passages that resembled the texts read during class sessions. These reading texts were accompanied by both reading strategies and content tasks.

Additionally, regular writing assignments were designed to both monitor and assess student progress. For example, in the film festival course, students are asked to write a weekly film critique, a biography, or other prose text. Later in the course, they write weekly reports on the progress made by their group. Similarly, in both the virtual museum and the www.technomode.de courses, students write weekly reports on the progress made toward the final project.

Evaluation of the quality of engagement (process) can be accomplished in two ways. First, two or three times during the session, students turn in a portfolio to their instructor (see Delett, Barnhardt, & Kevorkian, 2001). This portfolio contains the student’s notes, vocabulary lists, self-selected reading texts, and of course, student-produced materials toward the final project. Specific criteria for the scoring of the portfolio are made explicit.¹⁰ Second, at around midterm and again in the last weeks of the course (three times in the semester-long course), students complete a self-evaluation of their participation and language development. They meet one-on-one with their instructor outside of class time. During these meetings, they present their self-evaluation to the instructor, and the instructor provides feedback on the same criteria. As with the portfolio, specific criteria for evaluation are provided in advance.¹¹

Develop Feedback Materials

In addition to evaluating student performance, it is important to devise means for the students to evaluate the instructor, the simulation, and the course at regular intervals. This feedback not only assists the instructor in improving future courses, but also in adjusting the course itself to better meet student needs and expectations. For while the GS is carried out within a designed structure, the instructor should be at all times prepared to change that structure to ensure students’ success. Feedback can be obtained through several means, such as through anonymous classroom assessment techniques (CATs; see Angelo & Cross, 1993), Internet-based forms, or open forum discussions in class about the progress of the GS.

Conclusion and Directions for Empirical Research

In this paper, GS has been presented as an alternative to mainstream curricula at the intermediate university

level, one which moves away from a linear, sequential, formulaic approach to learning about the target language and cultures. The format responds to the tenets of the *Standards* by providing rich and varied opportunities for meaningful, task-oriented interaction and facilitating cultural learning that is individualized and purposeful.

While our success with the GS course at my institution—reinforced by the pedagogy literature on simulation in the language class (Caré, 1995; Cheval, 1995; Crookall & Oxford, Eds., 1990; García-Carbonell et al., 2001; Jones, 1984; Kovalik & Kovalik, 2002; Magnin, 1997, 2002; van Ments, 1994)—demonstrates many positive aspects of the course format, empirical research on long-term GS courses certainly is called for. This research would have pedagogical as well as second-language acquisition theoretical implications. In terms of pedagogy, longitudinal measurement of changes in learner language would serve to refine the course format and to better meet learner needs. Additionally, the frequent use of focus-on-form grammar instruction (Doughty & Williams, Eds., 1998) in the GS course presents many opportunities for investigation of the effectiveness of this approach to explicit grammar learning. Similarly, a study of incidental vocabulary learning likely also would yield interesting results.

In addition to the pedagogical insights that could be gained from empirical study of the GS format, longitudinal as well as cross-sectional investigation of students functioning within this intensely task- and interaction-based approach could contribute to our understanding of connections among verbal interaction, negotiated communication, and successful second language acquisition. Also, because the format accords well with the notion that L2 acquisition is an inherently complex phenomenon (as expressed recently by Antón & DiCamilla, 1999; Atkinson, 2002, among others), I believe that qualitative investigation of GS courses, such as discourse and/or interview data, would contribute to the growing body of research on L2 acquisition in the sociocultural framework.

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and “experimental” and whose energetic participation and final creations exceeded our expectations.

Notes

1. For the sake of simplicity of expression, in this paper “second-year, university-level foreign language” courses are referred to as “intermediate foreign language” courses. The term is not used in connection with the OPI or other language proficiency scale. The course format as described here could be adapted, however, to the fourth-year high school level, and of course could be applied with ease at the third or fourth-year university levels. The main point for us at the University of California, Irvine was to create an environment for the sort of learning facilitated by simulation as early as possible in the language-program sequence. Therefore, many of the activities students engaged in before our fifth quarter (the quarter in which we place the simulation course) prepare the ground, as it were. In these earlier courses (first through fourth quarters) we take a strong task-based approach to classroom activities, and we develop—primarily through strategies instruction—students’ ability to compensate for gaps in their interlanguage.

2. This definition of GS differs somewhat from that offered by Magnin (1997, p. 55), for whom GS “allows students to encounter situations that include love, life, and death.” In her conceptualization, a GS does not need to be a long-term simulation, as is the case in the GS format described in this article.

3. In our courses, the roles of the investors were superbly played by several German faculty members and graduate students.

4. The students are of course informed of the importance of respecting copyrights. To this end, the instructor assists them in formally requesting permission of copyright holders (in the target language, when appropriate) to use material they wish to include in their virtual museum.

5. It is recommended that the instructor reserves appropriate space and necessary equipment for the film screenings, presentations, and panel discussions at the earliest possible date. Additionally, it is recommended that the instructor borrow, purchase, or otherwise make available to students as many German-language films as possible in advance of the beginning of the term. Waiting for films to arrive could negatively affect the success of the simulation.

6. In these middle weeks of the course, the instructor should anticipate difficulties keeping students’ discourse in the target language, for their preoccupation with the project may prompt frequent discourse switches to English. It is advisable to provide students with some strategies instruction in effective codeswitching practices, as well as with explicit instruction in pertinent discourse gambits and vocabulary items.

7. Apart from the three courses presented here, other possible scenarios include the German Chancellor’s cabinet (requiring students to follow closely current events in the media), a television or radio station, or a cultural or news magazine.

8. One example is a medieval German village (or a German village in some other period). A course based on this sort of simulation would entail extensive advance learning (briefing) about the history and culture of the period. Essentially, it would be two courses in one: a content course on the period followed by a GS allowing students to apply that knowledge.

9. For example, in the GS courses that were conducted at my institution, students were told that they could switch to English if they felt it was necessary, but only with the explicit permission of an interlocutor. Also, they were allowed (and even encouraged) to insert into their German discourse English words, especially nouns, for the sake of maintaining the flow of a class or group discussion. Instructors then often would add the German for frequently used, codeswitched words to the class vocabulary Web site. It was felt that allowing this sort of switching both emulated the sort of switching that occurs naturally in German–English bilingual situations, as well as served to keep students' discourse in German.

10. In the German GS courses at the University of California, Irvine, students are required to rewrite extensive-writing texts, based on the instructor's corrections and comments, before submitting their portfolios. In this way, the portfolio gives the student credit for the process of revision. The criteria used for evaluating portfolios in our courses are as follows:

- Completeness of the portfolio (writing texts, vocabulary-learning materials, class notes, other material produced for the simulation)
- Corrections and improvements made to written texts and grammar worksheets
- Adequate class notes
- Evidence of regular, self-guided vocabulary learning

11. This form asks the instructor to evaluate, and asks the student to self-evaluate, spoken discourse abilities along the following criteria:

- Fluency (To what extent does the student speak at a "normal" tempo, accessing vocabulary and grammar efficiently enough to not impede communication?)
- Discourse routines (How well/frequently does the student employ negotiation strategies and patterns in order to make himself/herself understood, and to ensure that he/she understands interlocutors?)
- Listening comprehension (How well does the student come to terms with authentic target-language discourse, for example teacher talk, broadcasts?)
- Active vocabulary (How well does the student demonstrate use of current active vocabulary?)
- Grammatical accuracy (How well does the student's use of language accord with accepted grammatical and idiomatic norms?)

Students and instructor also may write open-ended comments about progress in spoken discourse.

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