

0288-1

Just what I was looking for —  
some serious professional thought,  
Might as well start while you're  
still young.

Reflection #1 *about*  
Schulz, "Changing Perspectives"  
(#002, FCA 2002)

I think the metaphor of the half-empty or half-full glass of water most aptly outlines the situation present in the world of foreign languages: the future is in the eye of the beholder. As I read this article, at times I felt as if I were being measured for my coffin at my graduation, an expectation of a grim tomorrow. But Schulz stays positive, even if her conclusions are extremely open-ended. She, like other non-strategic language teachers including myself, has a vested interest in remaining positive about the future of the profession. I get the impression that the attitude is and has to be thus: if we have to innovate and be creative in our approach to teaching a language whose demand is decreasing, so be it; at worst there will be more questions than answers, and at best we will adapt and evolve and remain dynamic out of sheer necessity.

*and after  
Schulz I  
gave you  
Ryder!*

*Some, however,  
must die.*

If I were to put my own positive spin on the situation facing us now, I would rather be a part of an ongoing, dynamic uncertainty than a static, institutionalized methodology. By ongoing uncertainty I mean the ever-shifting focus of language teaching. It is no secret: there is no consensus. The history of language teaching has circumnavigated the sphere of possibility through and through, each pole effective in its own way, yet each anathema to the other. An impossibility must be made possible, which of course means it was never impossible, merely unknown. I recently read in a textbook about a method designed to combine the formal and experimental modes of teaching foreign languages for the purposes of taking the best of what both have to offer. That is precisely the point. Consensus hasn't been reached and won't be as long as the endless polemic debate about which is better, this or that, continues. Perhaps that is the biggest need of our time in the language-teaching world: a synthesis of extremes, the combined approach of structural and communicative elements.

*and yet, there  
has been a  
certain  
direction.*

*I don't know  
when how I'll  
feel if I were  
in a static...  
Probably happy.  
And then there  
are those who  
think they're  
in one.*

*Maybe we can  
get somewhere  
by asking  
"better for  
whats?"  
rather than  
just "better."*

Reflecting on the title of the journal article for a moment: Where do we come from? Where are we going? As a novice teacher, my knowledge of where we came from is very limited, and comes mainly from my experience as a student. I began to learn German at the tail end of the audio-lingual revolution, when it was still present if not all the rage. I came in during what seems now like a transitional phase: too late for the

0288-2

audio-lingual experience, yet too early for an education founded entirely in communicative competence, although that was the trend. So I have the good fortune not to be institutionalized, so to speak, bound to old ways that are quickly being left behind. I, like my contemporaries, have the advantage of viewing from a distance the practices, successes, and failures of the old methodology without having become overly accustomed to it, allowing me to take from it what is useful and leave the rest behind.

Where are we going? Perhaps it must be that this question is always on the minds of those invested in any endeavor. Everything seems to be in constant flux, living proof of evolution, whether it is biology or language teaching. Being that this is a reflective piece of writing, I don't dare offer any hypothesis, but rather my opinion on a matter. I venture to say that things should always be in flux because no matter what, the moment consensus is reached, another question arises, another disagreement, another item comes up for interpretation. With so much uncertainty in the field, what more can be done than to realize the progress that has been made so far on many fronts with many ideologies in mind and to take the best of what they have to offer? Schulz uses the analogy of the half-empty or half-full glass of water. We must remain positive about the future, we must see the glass as half-full and become synthesizers of information, of theory, of practice in order to become and in order to remain teachers of foreign languages. The formal structure of a language is useless in itself. It needs to be aligned with the ability to communicate coherently and meaningfully so as not to be confined to dry, grammatical parameters. As teachers, we need to be excited about this blending of styles and be open to the multitudes of possibilities once thought unthinkable.

Why,  
you  
Hegelian!