

# A Spectrum of Situatedness for World Language Educators: A Self-assessment Tool<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

We believe that world language education at all levels of instruction in the United States is in crisis. In this article, we respond to this crisis by proposing a spectrum of situatedness and its relation to five distinct pedagogical approaches in world language education. We help to elucidate this spectrum with classroom vignettes, illustrating different scenarios in world language education and some of their curricular components. We then conclude the article with the presentation of a tool to aid the reader in self-guiding and self-directing their own pedagogical practices. This tool is not conceptualized as a prescriptive option but rather as an instrument to help guide us in our academic endeavors. Our hope is that this notion of a spectrum helps us find a more precise terminology for characterizing our classrooms and our practices. We are arguing for a more balanced and reflective view of curriculum development in which teachers' philosophies and pedagogic views are the major catalyst for programmatic development and change.

*Keywords:* pedagogy, situated language education, contextualized language instruction, service-learning, cooperative education

## Resumen

Creemos que la educación en el mundo del lenguaje, en todos los niveles de la enseñanza, en los Estados Unidos está en crisis. En este artículo respondemos a esta crisis mediante la propuesta de un modelo situacional y su relación con cinco diferentes enfoques pedagógicos existentes en la enseñanza de idiomas a nivel mundial. Esclareceremos este espectro con la ayuda de cuadros del salón de clases que ilustren diferentes escenarios en el mundo del lenguaje y algunos de sus componentes curriculares. Concluimos el artículo con la presentación de una herramienta que ayude al lector a orientar y direccionar sus propias prácticas pedagógicas. Esta herramienta no se debe concebir como una opción prescrita sino más bien como un instrumento para orientar y guiar nuestros esfuerzos académicos. Se espera que esta noción del modelo propuesto sea útil

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para encontrar una terminología más exacta para caracterizar nuestras aulas de clase y nuestras prácticas pedagógicas. Estamos abogando por una visión más equilibrada y reflexiva del desarrollo curricular, en el cual la filosofía de los docentes y sus puntos de vista pedagógicos sean los principales agentes para el desarrollo programático y el cambio.

*Palabras claves:* pedagogía, enseñanza situada, enseñanza contextualizada de las lenguas, aprendizaje-servicio, educación cooperativa

#### Resumo

Achamos que a educação no mundo da linguagem, em todos os níveis do ensino, nos Estados Unidos está em crise. Neste artigo respondemos a esta crise mediante a proposta de um modelo situacional e a sua relação com cinco diferentes enfoques pedagógicos existentes no ensino de idiomas a nível mundial. Esclareceremos este espectro com a ajuda de quadros da sala de aulas que ilustrem diferentes cenários no mundo da linguagem e alguns dos seus componentes curriculares. Concluimos o artigo com a apresentação de uma ferramenta que ajude o leitor a orientar e direcionar suas próprias práticas pedagógicas. Esta ferramenta não se deve conceber como uma opção prescrita senão mais bem como um instrumento para orientar e guiar os nossos esforços acadêmicos. Espera-se que esta noção do modelo proposto seja útil para encontrar uma terminologia mais exata para caracterizar as nossas salas de aula a nossas práticas pedagógicas. Estamos advogando por uma visão mais equilibrada e reflexiva do desenvolvimento curricular, no qual a filosofia dos docentes e seus pontos de vista pedagógicos sejam os principais agentes para o desenvolvimento programático e a mudança.

*Palavras chaves:* pedagogia, ensino situado, ensino contextualizado das línguas, aprendizagem-serviço, educação cooperativa

In the United States, world language education programs in various languages and contexts have failed to produce advanced language students (see Magnan, 1986; Rifkin, 2005; Robin, 2000; Tschirner, 1996). This may be due to the limited number of contact hours that students have with the target language, or it may be due to the language curricula as well. One way the language education community is currently addressing this issue is through examining and reconsidering the connections between language curricula and language learning outcomes, which is largely done through creating and implementing standards-based curricula (for examples, see Adair-Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender, & Sandroock, 2006; Cummins & Davesne, 2009; Glisan, Uribe, & Adair-Hauck, 2007; Little, 2005). We hope to participate in this process by presenting one possible solution. We have developed a

tool to help guide language educators develop a more or less situated approach to teaching world languages. The proposed tool should not be understood as a prescriptive method of teaching or curriculum development (Kumaravadivelu, 2003); rather, it should be understood as a means of self-assessment, used to assist teachers in analyzing their own practice in order to empower and guide them in their curriculum development practices. As with any spectrum, ours can be used as a guide for teachers and researchers to find their own stance in a wide variety of world language education practices and pedagogies. We also hope that the world language education community will find this evolving tool helpful in examining and redefining the pedagogical approaches we take in educating language students.

As a field, we often resort to simple dichotomies to describe language learning and teaching contexts such as contextualized/de-contextualized, authentic/inauthentic, communicative/non-communicative, etc. Our proposed spectrum attempts to portray a more complete and complex way to look at the many approaches we might take in our specific teaching and learning contexts.

“Situatenedness” typically refers to learning by doing; however, here we borrow from Lave and Wenger’s (1991) definition, which recognizes that learning cannot be separated from the social practices in which it occurs. In the context of language teaching, these social practices include practices in the classroom, which is a social structure itself, or practices within the target language community. However, we argue that more situated social practices would occur within more authentic settings, such as in interactions with members of the target language community. In this article, we present a rationale for the development of our spectrum, introduce the spectrum itself, exemplify the spectrum through vignettes of five pedagogical approaches, and close with a tool allowing the reader to self-assess his or her own pedagogical practices.

Note here that the spectrum we are proposing is based on situatedness rather than communicativeness (or lack of it) or authenticity (or lack of it). These latter terms have become en vogue in language teaching profession as describing “ideal” types of language programs, classrooms, or materials. However, the definitions of these terms often vary widely depending on the person using them.

We have observed many language classes labeled “communicative” and have noted that no two truly look alike. For example, we visited a “communicative” college-level Spanish class in which the instructor spent the majority of the class period on a teacher-centered lesson on grammar. At the end of the class period, students worked on an

information gap crossword puzzle, which most of them completed in English. This class is then contrasted with a “communicative” high school French class in which the instructor used a typical classroom discourse pattern of teacher-initiated questions, student responses, and teacher evaluations (Mehan, 1985) to discuss a culture lesson. This classroom discussion was followed by a teacher-assigned grammar practice in the textbook. These two classes both had teacher-centered lessons and some “communicative” interactions with the students, but that seemed to be where the similarities ended. In addition, neither followed the original tenets of communicative language teaching (Richards & Rogers, 1986). It is for the above-mentioned reasons that “authenticity” and “communicativeness” seem to have lost their meaning. We prefer the use of “situatedness” because, although well defined in other fields, it has not yet been extensively used in world language education. Moreover, it encapsulates and predicts certain conversations about language learning and teaching that could become crucial to help alleviate the current world language education crisis.

### **Why Do We Need a Spectrum?**

Before we present the spectrum in its entirety, we would like to address the following questions: Why do we need a new way to discuss pedagogical approaches to world language teaching? And whom does this discussion serve?

First, we believe that, as educators and researchers in the world language education field, we have become increasingly accustomed to using dichotomies to describe a variety of complex phenomena. For example, we typically discuss language classrooms as contextualized or decontextualized, as communicative or grammar translation, etc. Characterizing classrooms in this dichotomous manner typically connotes one label as inherently good or desirable while the other is bad or undesirable. However, if we suggest that a language classroom may have a mixture of the elements from each of these pedagogical approaches, it is labeled as “eclectic.” The eclectic label may be just as undesirable as “decontextualized” as it is often considered unprincipled (Richards & Rogers, 1986). By labeling themselves eclectic, teachers may be hiding a lack of theoretical understanding. Thus, the dichotomies that we have created in discussing what we do as world language educators can often lead to erroneous assumptions about the quality of education we provide our students. However, we still need some kind of language or tool to define our practice, to discuss our teaching within and outside of the profession, and to be accountable for what we do in the classroom. Here we are suggesting a new way of discussing both pedagogical approaches and curricular components (including

unit planning, students' needs, material development, audience, and assessment) with a spectrum. This spectrum represents a continuum of possibilities, but does not qualify them as inherently good or bad as some continua do. We propose a spectrum as a better way to discuss phenomena in world language education for two reasons: First, it allows for more variation of language classrooms and programs without stigmatizing them as unfocused or theoretically based, and second, teachers will be able to identify their practice with an appropriate term that could provide access to an already established knowledge base.

All instructors have preferences and particular ways of running their classrooms, but what they may not realize is that their teaching style fits within an already existing pedagogy. For the interested teacher, this realization may lead to the exploration of the already existing literature that will further theoretical and practical understanding of his or her teaching style. The spectrum then can be used as a tool to empower world language educators by guiding them to find research that can help them expand their practice and deepen their understanding of their profession. Developing an appreciation for the reciprocity between practice and theory is of fundamental importance to educators, and the proposed spectrum can act as a go-between, allowing world language teachers to create a pedagogical approach that best suits their needs.

We also need to define the audience for this tool. The spectrum was developed to serve a wide range of audiences concerned with language education. We mean to engage policy-makers, program developers, curriculum developers, language teachers, and language researchers in this discussion, as we believe that the tool we have created can facilitate the discussion of language teaching at many levels. At the programmatic level, we encourage policy-makers and program and curriculum developers to use the spectrum to place their program within it. Using the spectrum as a tool may help focus and justify curricular choices. It also provides a more coherent and comprehensive way to discuss many aspects of world language education at this level and may facilitate dialogue between curriculum developers and language teachers. For language teachers, this spectrum may help them organize their classrooms on a more micro-level. It allows them to place assignments or activities on the spectrum to see if their classroom activities match their overall educational goals and philosophy. Finally, for world language researchers, it may allow us a more appropriate way to classify our observations and research in the world language classroom. It provides us with a more specific manner in discussing many aspects of the classroom without using dichotomous labels to describe a more complex classroom environment.

**A Spectrum of Situatedness for World Language Educators**

In order to illustrate the spectrum, we created one illustrative vignette for each approach. It is important to note here that each of these approaches are well known in their own right. However, they have never been placed in this particular order to reflect the situatedness of the approach. In this context, “situatedness” refers to “the idea that the development of individual intelligence requires a social (and cultural) embedding” (Lindblom & Ziemke, (2003), p. 79). The spectrum represents a range of pedagogical approaches. On the left side of the spectrum are approaches and curricular components that are less socially situated than the ones in the right side of the spectrum.

*Table 1*

Grammar-based	↔	Contextualized	↔	Situated	↔	Service	↔	Cooperative
Instruction		Instruction		Learning		Learning		Education

Again, we do not introduce this spectrum to suggest that it represents a range of ineffective to effective instructional practices; rather, we present it here to depict a range of pedagogical approaches and their situatedness in real-world contexts. Most world language teachers, researchers, curriculum developers and policy-makers might see themselves “living” in more than one of these categories at different times of the day or through different class activities or assignments. One class assignment might be placed in the left side of the spectrum followed by an activity that fits more in the right side of the spectrum.

We strongly believe that a more conscious effort to find the goal of our programmatic instruction is needed to solve our world language education crisis. In this article, we will describe this spectrum in detail through vignettes representing a color in the spectrum, including grammar-based language instruction, contextualized language instruction, situated learning, service-learning, and cooperative education. World language curricula internationally have already adopted many of these approaches, but are just beginning to explore others. Thus, some of the approaches we suggest do not yet have a strong history in the field of world language education.

**Definitions**

In order to explore these pedagogical approaches and their place in world language education, we need first to define them as related to the field. Each of the following definitions contains a description of the

pedagogical approach to instruction and a vignette depicting what a typical lesson using that approach might include.

### **Grammar-Based Language Instruction**

Grammar-based language instruction may be the most widespread form of language instruction currently present in secondary schools in the U.S., as well as in some university environments. This type of grammar instruction is based on the premise that explicit grammar instruction can help learners attend to and/or create form-meaning connections, and it has received considerable support from researchers working in second language acquisition (see Norris & Ortega, 2001). It breaks language into discrete facts or pieces of knowledge to attain and tends not to situate grammar or culture lessons in the world or experiences of its students. In this light, it is the least situated of the pedagogical approaches we explore here. Grammar-based language lessons typically are centered around grammatical concepts, vocabulary, or cultural facts rather than on thematic units. The five skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking, and culture) may also be taught in isolation of one another, rather than integrated into activities and assignments. Lessons tend to be teacher-centered with limited opportunity for student involvement. An example of a grammar-based language lesson could be as follows:

Mrs. Smith is starting a new unit on reflexive verbs and is helping her students learn a new phrase in Spanish: “me siento bien” (I feel good—a problematic structure in Spanish particularly for native English-speakers). First, she recites several phrases containing reflexive verbs that are listed on the blackboard and asks her students to repeat after her: “me siento bien, te sientes bien, se siente bien,” etc. Second, she reviews the conjugation rules for stem-changing and reflexive verbs like sentirse. Third, she provides the students with the conjugations for the different personal pronouns in Spanish, “yo: me siento, tú: te sientes, Usted/él/ella: se siente,” etc. Fourth, she assigns students to small groups and invites them to quiz each other using the exercises provided in the textbook. Finally, she provides them with a worksheet for homework that contains many reflexive verbs in Spanish. This worksheet will be assessed based on the students’ ability to conjugate and spell the verbs correctly. The portions for sentirse are as follows:

Fill in the blanks using the verb sentirse:

(Tú) \_\_\_\_\_ mal (te sientes mal)

(Él) \_\_\_\_\_ mejor (se siente mejor) etc.

This vignette depicts a more updated version of a task within a grammar-based language classroom as there are different types of activities and classroom formats (a teacher-fronted lesson and a

group activity). Since it is a grammar-based lesson, its main purpose is a grammar point (sentir), and correctness and error correction are highly stressed. This environment is mostly teacher-centered and does not afford students opportunities to fulfill many personal language-learning objectives and/or life-long learning goals within the classroom environment. In terms of situatedness, the classroom is the only context for the language experience.

### **Contextualized Language Instruction**

Contextualized language instruction has become an extremely popular pedagogical approach to teaching language in the United States. Omaggio Hadley (2001) defines contextualized language teaching as instruction that presents new vocabulary and expressions meaningfully and thematically, in which students practice language in meaningful discourse, and in which the cultural connotation of words and/or expressions are understood and related to the native speakers of the target language. In contrast to grammar-based instruction, contextualized instruction bases lessons around thematic units rather than grammatical concepts (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). These thematic units will often integrate one or more of the five skills with the content to be learned. Although contextualized language instruction provides students with a theme for their learning, lessons may still be very teacher-centered, may provide limited student choice, and may not be grounded in real purposes. What follows is an example of a contextualized lesson:

Mrs. Smith is starting a new unit on health care and is helping her students learn a new phrase in Spanish: “me siento bien” (I feel good—a problematic structure in Spanish particularly for native English-speakers). She asks her students to silently read a short excerpt from the textbook in Spanish that uses this idiomatic phrase. She also presents an online video clip of a conversation between two native Spanish-speakers using this phrase (the video clip was provided as ancillary material for the textbook used in the class). Then, in small groups, she asks the students to create mini-conversations in which they use “me siento bien” in the context of an authentic exchange based on one of the situations depicted in their textbook. Each group presents their written and oral dialogues to the whole class. Mrs. Smith gives the students some corrective feedback at the end of each mini-conversation. Finally, she tests students’ performances by providing a fill in the blank test based on an authentic conversation used in their text.

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This is a contextualized classroom lesson since students are learning and practicing an authentic idiomatic phrase quite useful in the Spanish language. Students are also exposed to many concrete and culturally relevant examples in multimodal forms (writing, reading,



listening, and speaking), in-person and online sources of materials, and a variety of authentic situations. Students were also provided with both modeling of concrete examples and a few textbook-based choices in order to perform their dialogues. Moreover, students received both feedback and a classroom audience for which to perform their dialogues. Finally, the students' work was assessed based on their comprehension of an authentic conversation (via the fill in the blank quiz). We also suggest that this lesson is situated mostly within the classroom walls, with some input from other potential contexts such as videos and digital texts. Contextualized language instruction is by definition a pedagogical approach to language instruction that relates the language being learned to a specific authentic context or thematic unit. It focuses on the development of the five skills without isolating them from each other or a context. Moreover, as depicted in the vignette, its goal is teaching a grammar point (sentirse), only now it is complemented by a "real life" or more authentic situation. Correctness and error correction are still stressed, but within a more corrective feedback style. The environment is mostly teacher-centered and affords some textbook-based student choices that contribute to fulfill some personal goals and life-long learning opportunities within the classroom environment. In terms of situatedness, contextualized language instruction is still confined to the walls of the classroom, and the teacher largely determines the thematic unit, or the context itself.

### **Situated Language Learning**

Situated language learning is a relatively new approach to world language education that has not yet become widespread. It is based on general theory of learning that states that the process of learning itself cannot be separated from the social practice in which it occurs (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Thus, in situated language learning, learners must be involved in legitimate communication in the target language from the beginning of instruction (Hall, 2001). In situated language learning, context is not enough. The learning in class must match students' needs, interests, or purposes for language learning. Not only that, but the learner must also be aware of the overall purpose of an activity or lesson in order to be situated in the learning experience (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The act of language learning must also extend beyond the classroom by preparing learners for real communication, by inviting "experts" in the target language and culture to the classroom, and/or by using language for real purposes. For example:

Mrs. Smith is helping her students to define their own purposes for their Spanish language study. She asks the students for five places in the local community where they might be able to practice their Spanish.

Some students discover a local community-based clinic that provides health services to low income families in the area. They find out that one of the major problems for the clinic is interviewing their patients in Spanish. Thus, the class creates a long-term project, which will result in producing a five-question, bilingual form for the nurses at the clinic to use as well as a few student-produced videos of interviews for the nurses and doctors in the clinic to use as a reference.

One of the phrases needed in Spanish for this project is “¿Cómo se siente? Me siento bien” (How do you feel? I feel good—a problematic structure in Spanish particularly for native English-speakers). Mrs. Smith asks her students to silently read a short excerpt from the textbook in Spanish that uses this idiomatic phrase. She also provides the students with online video-clips of several conversations from a range of dialect variations of native Spanish-speakers using this phrase. Then, in small groups, she invites the students to create mini-conversations in which they use “me siento bien” in the context of the clinic some of them visited. Each group presents their written and oral dialogues to the teacher. She gives them some corrective feedback. Finally, each group performs the actual dialogues for the community-based clinic’s personnel. The students also provide the clinic with written copies of the interview guides, the video of sample interviews, and some practice worksheets. The teacher asks the students to videotape the exchange for documentation and alternative evaluation purposes.

In a situated learning lesson, students have an authentic context for language use—the field of health care—but language learning is also extended beyond the classroom to become a socially situated practice. One of the goals of such a class is to help students in the world language class become more aware of the social purposes for their language use. They are able to practice interactions in the target language in the safety of their language classroom; however, their language production has a real purpose within the social context of the community-based clinic. The situated learning class not only impacts students’ language skills in a particular context, but also helps them develop a sociopolitical awareness and some of the social implications for their language learning in the context of their own communities.

### **Service-learning<sup>1</sup>**

Dewey (1938) defined educative experiences as those that not only generate knowledge but also encourage students to continue expanding on these experiences outside of the classroom. Following this definition, many educators look to provide students with educative experiences outside of the classroom that they can incorporate into the classroom. Thus, models of experiential learning flow from

Dewey's definition of experience in education. Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning includes a cyclical relationship between students' concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. This model has been used as a basis for the development of service-learning approaches to instruction. A service-learning approach to world language education is typically an offered or required component of an individual language course. The course assignments and discussions often reflect the students' experiences in the service component. Morris (2001) defines service-learning as requiring "learners to provide various forms of social services to individuals in their local communities. For example, learners might teach ESL, serve as interpreters, and act as counsellors at women's shelters, day cares, law firms, and employment agencies" (p. 245). Service-learning of this type is currently explored primarily at the university level and within intermediate or advanced language courses (for examples, see Hellebrandt & Varona, 1999; Long, 2003; Morris, 2001; Overfield, 1997a, 1997b; Weldon & Trautmann, 2003). An example of a service-learning lesson might be as follows:

Before classes started, Mrs. Smith contacted the local community-based clinic that provides health services to low-income families in the area. She spoke to the head nurse at the clinic and found that a major problem for the clinic is interviewing their patients in Spanish. She also contacted the local bilingual school and she discovered that the school nurse needed help serving children that only speak Spanish. Mrs. Smith proposed that the students in her class provide some basic Spanish-language services to both of these organizations throughout the semester. Once the semester starts, Mrs. Smith and the students negotiate their service-learning project outcomes including developing a five-question, bilingual interview form for use at both sites. Students also agree to be on-site on a rotating basis to help the nurses with the interview process. Mrs. Smith provides the students with a few videotaped interviews for them to model and to practice in class.

A vocabulary phrase needed in Spanish is "¿Cómo se siente? (for an adult) ¿Cómo te sientes? (for a child) Me siento bien" (How do you feel? I feel good—a problematic structure in Spanish particularly for native English-speakers). Mrs. Smith asks her students to silently read a short excerpt from the textbook in Spanish that uses this idiomatic phrase. She also provides them with online video clips of several conversations from a range of dialect variations of native Spanish-speakers using this phrase. Then, in two groups (one for the students going to the community clinic and one for the students going to the school), she invites them to create interview scenarios in which they use "me siento bien" in the context of the clinic or the school. Each group presents their written and orally performed dialogues to the teacher. She gives them some corrective feedback. Finally, each group member

performs the actual interviews during the coming weeks. Insights based on their performance are utilized during class time to fine-tune students' performance at the different sites with different audiences. Strategies that worked or did not work are reflected upon in student-composed reflections on their interviews and then exchanged during class time. The teacher asks them to videotape three exchanges for documentation and alternative evaluation purposes: one at the beginning of the semester, one at the middle, and one at the end.

Service-learning lessons tend to involve experiences outside of the classroom and the use of language in real life for authentic purposes. In addition, the students have very diverse and personal purposes. Service-learning classes may include a textbook as well as grammar and culture lessons. However, these lessons are situated within many different learning experiences as they either occur preemptively, preparing students for their service experiences, or reactionary, supporting students' language learning concerns or needs that have arisen through service experiences. Regardless, service-learning lessons are tied to a variety of students' real-world language learning needs. Some level of coordination between students' goals and service-learning opportunities are crucial in this type of lesson.

### **Cooperative Education**

Cooperative education is a pedagogical approach to career preparation and education with a long history in various fields of study including nursing, technology, science, teacher education, etc. (World Association for Cooperative Education, 2000). Although research in the cooperative education literature has discussed issues of language and culture (see Newell & Tyon, 1989; Sachtleben, 2002), cooperative education itself has rarely been used in the field of language education (see Brown & Ayres, 2006, for an exception). Cooperative education pairs students with a business, community agency, hospital, etc., in the local community, and students complete an apprenticeship for a designated amount of time. Thus, collaboration between schools and employers and/or organizations in the local community is vital. This approach has been used in high schools and post-secondary institutions internationally to prepare students for entering the working world (for examples, see Brown & Ayres, 2006; Chin, Steiner Bell, Munby, & Hutchinson, 2004; Eames & Coll, 2006; Nasr, Pennington, & Andres, 2004). These experiences are sometimes devalued as educative experiences as they have a vocational association and take time away from classroom learning (Crow, 1997). When combined with classroom curricula, however, the cooperative experience could be a valuable

language learning experience for world language students. In world language education, this pedagogical approach could be used to create a true immersion experience outside the language classroom. The students would use the target language for real purposes as well as practice their language to learn a trade. The advantage of this pedagogical approach over service-learning may be in students' attitudes. Overfield (1997a) notes, "For some individuals, the idea of providing 'service' may cause them to feel superior in some way, thus leading to patronizing attitudes or an exclusive sense of 'us' and 'them'" (p. 13). Creating an atmosphere of apprenticeship may eliminate the permeation of these social imbalances, especially with university-level students. In addition, in a service-learning situation, students are often working within English-speaking organizations aiding non-native English speakers. So although they are speaking the target language with those they are serving, they are typically speaking English with coworkers. In cooperative education experiences, the supervisors mentor the students through the target language. An example of a cooperative education lesson might be as follows:

Before classes started, Mrs. Smith, the Spanish as a second language teacher and consultant for the nursing school, contacted a local community-based clinic that provides health services to low-income families in the area. She talked to the head nurse at the clinic and discovered that interviewing their Spanish-speaking clients is a challenge. She also learned that there are four nurses in the clinic who are bilingual, and these nurses, if available, perform the majority of the interviews in Spanish. Mrs. Smith proposes that her university-level nursing students help out at the clinic every Monday from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. (the busiest day in the clinic and one of the three required contact hours for the Spanish class). The students in the class will be required to be in the clinic on Monday mornings instead of coming to the university. Students will create a five-question, bilingual questionnaire for use with patients at the local clinic; they may also develop other needed resources for the clinic. The bilingual nurses will help students develop not only their Spanish language proficiency, but also their nursing knowledge.

A vocabulary phrase needed in Spanish is "¿Cómo se siente? (for an adult) ¿Cómo te sientes? (for a child) Me siento bien" (How do you feel? I feel good—a problematic structure in Spanish particularly for English speakers). In class, Mrs. Smith asks her students to silently read an excerpt from the textbook in Spanish that uses this idiomatic phrase. She also provides them with an online video clip of several nurses interviewing patients in a range of dialect variations of Spanish using this phrase. Then, under the guidance of the bilingual nurses, she invites them to recreate interview scenarios in which they use "me siento bien" in the context of their weekly practice. Each group presents their

written and orally performed dialogues to the teacher, and she gives them some corrective feedback. Finally, each group member performs the actual interview during the next weeks at the clinic. Insights based on their performance are utilized during class time to fine-tune students' performance with the different audiences. Strategies that worked or did not work are exchanged during class time. The teacher asks the students to videotape three exchanges for documentation and alternative evaluation purposes: one at the beginning of the semester, one at the middle, and one at the end.

The language class itself is situated within a school of nursing and/or the local hospital where the nursing students have their field experiences. Thus, the class has a natural partnership with a specific employer in the community (i.e., the community clinic). Like the service-learning example, the language class is also inextricably tied to the students' real-world experiences at the clinic in which they serve. The difference here is that the students are increasing their language proficiency while engaging in an activity that they find beneficial to their future career. This lesson has increased its "situatedness" by incorporating students' needs outside of the language classroom, which is why this lesson represents the most situated in the spectrum. Classes labeled as "Spanish for nurses," "Spanish for the health professions," or "Spanish for the professions" are all differently situated even under this same label of cooperative education. For example, students enrolled in the last class would most likely be placed in a variety of apprenticeships, thus the classroom would not reflect all of the students' needs and the purposes of their apprenticeships.

The five lessons described here depict five different stages along the spectrum of language approaches. The context of instruction, as well as the instruction itself, determines the place of each approach on the spectrum. We realize that these approaches and vignettes depict a very broad view of all of the curricular components that comprise a language program or classroom. In the next section, we intend to narrow this view slightly by providing a tool that language educators and researchers can use to situate the components of their own practice.

### **Self-Assessment Tool**

As we wish to devote part of this theoretical discussion to practice itself, here we provide a self-assessment tool developed to help principled practitioners situate their curricular practices. As teachers, many times we "know what we do," but are not always very clear as

to why we do it. We are asserting that principled practitioners should create color palettes to self-assess their practices and share their successes and challenges with others. In order to self-assess your own pedagogical practices, you must first create a situation in which this assessment is possible. That is, you may want to partner with a fellow colleague at your institution to discuss programmatic change, explore curriculum development, and/or observe each other teaching. You might also share a few of your curricular tools, such as syllabi, assessment tools, assignments, etc. This more collaborative approach may seem to undermine the very notion of self-assessment; however, we recognize that principled practitioners at every level of instruction operate within an institution and the policies and needs of that institution often guide any curricular change.

The self-assessment tool we present here (see Appendix 1) is a three-tiered approach to analyzing one's practice. First, we ask ourselves what our current classroom practices are; we then ask ourselves why we engage in them; and finally, we ask how we would label our current practices.

The use of the self-assessment tool is illustrated in the following vignette based on Mrs. Smith's analysis of her unit plan on health care:

Mrs. Smith has been asked to share her unit plan on health care with new Spanish instructors at the university as a model for them to follow. In order to best describe her unit plan, she refers to the self-assessment tool. She notes first what her unit plan includes. The unit plan includes an introduction to new vocabulary including health-care professionals, body parts, illnesses, and symptoms. The new grammar points include reflexive verbs and formal commands. There is also a cultural component with readings describing health-care practices common in the Spanish-speaking world. Her materials include the textbook, some teacher-created worksheets, teacher-created video clips, and some health-related websites from various Spanish-speaking countries. Finally, the students are assessed based on a written test of grammar and vocabulary and an oral exam in which two students are given a health-care-related scenario and they must spontaneously role-play the scenario for the teacher.

Next, Mrs. Smith thinks about why she includes the materials she does and how she came up with the unit plan she currently uses. Mrs. Smith first consults her textbook. She notes that she includes the vocabulary and grammar points in this unit that the textbook suggests. However, she does not present the grammar in the same way as the book. For example, the book presents a list of verbs common in health-care contexts, and then presents the rules for conjugating these verbs to the formal command form. Then, it presents several written conjugation activities for the students to complete. Mrs. Smith, however, first introduces these

commands through the use of short, teacher-created video clips that she recorded with the assistance of a Spanish-speaking nurse. Then she has the students analyze the verbs used and figure out how the forms are different. Thus, the students are responsible for determining the rules of conjugation. She presents the grammar this way based on a unit on inductive practice she recalls from her teaching methods class. Likewise, the written test she uses is based on the textbook, but the oral exam she developed based on a unit on the assessment of oral skills presented in her methods class. So, she decides that her approach to this unit is based on both the textbook and her knowledge of form-focused instruction.

Finally, looking at the different labels possible to describe her practice and reading the descriptions of each, she decides her unit best matches contextualized language instruction because she has provided the students with a thematic unit, all the vocabulary and grammar presented are related to that unit, and the assessment is contextualized as well. In addition, she realizes that the majority of her materials are teacher-created and that the lessons are a mix of teacher- and student centered. She notes that error correction is stressed in the formal written assessment, but that the formal oral assessment stresses overall communicative competence. She now can present a description of her unit, along with her rationale for why she does what she does in class.

For the purpose of this article, this vignette depicts the analysis of just one curricular component, unit planning. Conducting a more detailed analysis of her unit, Mrs. Smith may realize that the overall unit best represents contextualized language instruction, but that smaller elements, such as materials, reflect a different approach to language education.

Hopefully, in reflecting on your curricular components, you will find them well balanced and carefully crafted in all aspects of their situatedness. These questions can easily be catered to an array of curricular components in order to help practitioners gauge the degree of situatedness of their current practices as well as guide them towards change.

### Conclusions

Dichotomous vocabulary and classifications currently permeate the world language education field. In order to escape “black and white” analogies and move to a more complete and complex view of the field, we proposed here a spectrum to help guide our discussions within and about our field. We hope this spectrum provided practitioners within the field with more accurate vocabulary for describing the phenomena of the world language classroom. Our hope is that this notion of a



spectrum helps us find a more precise terminology for characterizing our classrooms and ourselves practices. We would like this tool to enable teachers, administrators, policy-makers, and researchers to completely redesign and redefine their own programs and practice. We are arguing for a more balanced and reflective view of curriculum development in which teachers' philosophies and pedagogic views are the major catalyst for programmatic development and change.

## Appendix 1. Self Assessment Tool

	What do I do?	Why do I do it?	How would I label it?
Unit planning	What types of material do my current unit plans cover (i.e., grammar points, cultural information, new vocabulary presentation, etc.)?	Why have I designed my unit plans to cover the material they cover in the order they cover it (i.e., is the way the textbook presents it, it follows my district's requirements, it is the way I learned a language, etc.)?	Which one of the following 5 options in the spectrum best describes my approach to unit planning?  1. Grammar-based 2. Contextualized 3. Situated learning 4. Service-learning 5. Cooperative education
Students' needs	What do I currently do in class to discover and to meet students' language learning needs and/or interests (i.e., survey of students' needs, perform midterm class evaluations, individualize instruction and/or assignments, etc.)? Am I currently meeting students' language learning needs?	Why have I implemented the strategies I use to meet students' language learning needs and/or interests? Are they working? How do I know?	Which one of the following 5 options in the spectrum best describes my approach to meeting students' language learning needs?  1. Grammar-based 2. Contextualized 3. Situated learning 4. Service-learning 5. Cooperative education
Materials	What types of materials do I currently use in my teaching/learning activities (i.e., publisher created materials, authentic materials, teacher-generated materials, student-generated materials, etc.)?	Why do I use the materials I currently use (i.e., because of school district mandates, because I have always used them, because my method's teacher suggested them, because the students' suggested them, etc.)?	Which one of the following 5 options in the spectrum best describes my approach to material development?  1. Grammar-based 2. Contextualized 3. Situated learning 4. Service-learning 5. Cooperative education
Audience	When my students work in the interpersonal and presentational modes, who are the intended audience (i.e., the teacher, their peers, a virtual "pen pal," native speakers in the community, etc.)?	Why do my students present to or communicate with this audience? Are the students aware of why they present to or communicate with this audience?	Which one of the following 5 options in the spectrum best describes my approach audience?  1. Grammar-based 2. Contextualized 3. Situated learning 4. Service-learning 5. Cooperative education
Assessment	How do I currently assess my students (i.e., discrete point quizzes, summative unit exams, written academic compositions, formative journal entries, oral presentations, etc.)? Do I use a variety of assessments?	Why do I use each assessment measure I use? What is it intended to measure? Does it measure what it is "supposed" to measure consistently? How do I know?	Which one of the following 5 options in the spectrum best describes my approach to language assessment?  1. Grammar-based 2. Contextualized 3. Situated learning 4. Service-learning 5. Cooperative education

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**Notes**

We use the term service-learning here to discuss programs described as service-learning or community-based learning. We acknowledge that these terms are often used to describe similar programs in the United States, but use service-learning here to distinguish these programs from community-based language programs that focus on educating community members within community agencies.

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