

Title: Planning for Assessment in Curriculum Construction: Issues at the Micro to Macro Levels
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A widely assumed goal of the undergraduate program in foreign languages at the college and university level is to develop students with “advanced” abilities in the language studied. Whether “advanced” is defined exactly according to ACTFL’s Proficiency Guidelines or in more generic terms (Byrnes, et al.), this goal tasks language program coordinators with a very heavy responsibility, especially in the less commonly taught languages like Russian, since the quantity of available instructional hours falls far short of the estimated time needed to develop such skills. The FSI data indicate roughly 700 hours for a language like Russian, when the typical US undergraduate program has roughly 400 available (Liskin-Gasparro cited in Hadley 1993, p. 28), and Rifkin (2005) finds approximately 600 hours required to reach the level for Russian.

Given this gap between an available instructional resource (time) and the desired outcome, how do language coordinators build a program that prepares students to attain this ultimate level? How does one create interesting and engaging sequences of content that simultaneously allow for the students’ language development in a principled and manageable way? And efforts to shape curriculum solely by selecting materials and formulating effective classroom and homework tasks may still not achieve these learner outcomes if the curriculum planning does not include explicit considerations of student outcomes and plans for task-based and content-based assessment.

While Blaz (2001) lays out practical consideration for creating assessments, Byrnes (2002) describes the processes (and pitfalls) of developing such assessments for the whole of a German undergraduate curriculum. The presentation will look at an ongoing attempt to shape a Russian language program’s curriculum by implementing task-based outcomes assessments. The presenter will share outcomes statements, task descriptions, grading rubrics, and the sequencing of the materials from the micro-level (a content unit assessment) to the macro-level (end of course).

References

Blaz, Deborah. 2001. *A Collection of Performance Tasks and Rubrics: Foreign Languages*. NY, NY: Eye on Education.

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Hadley, Alice Omaggio. 1993. *Teaching language in Context*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Rifkin, Benjamin. 2005. A Ceiling Effect in Traditional Classroom Foreign Language Instruction: Data from Russian. *The Modern Language Journal* 89.1: 3-18.