LESSONS FROM A STUDENT PROGRAM: SHARING RESEARCH FINDINGS AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Adriana Melnyk Brandt, Dixie State University
Overview of Presentation
During this presentation, you will:

- Explore how one student STARTALK program served as a laboratory for research on second language teaching and learning.
- Consider and discuss resultant study implications as they pertain to:
  - Curricular foci of STARTALK programs.
  - Teacher professional development and training
  - Future second language research within STARTALK programs
Study Details
Need for the Study: Gaps

K-12 student voice

Learning process

Intercultural pedagogical encounters (NS + NNS)

2014 STARTALK Fall Conference - A. Brandt
Research Questions

What are students’ perceptions of identity, curriculum, and pedagogy in an intensive, two-week summer residential Swahili language course?

• What is the nature of learner motivation to learn throughout this experience?
• What is the nature of student response to curricular tasks and teacher pedagogy throughout this experience?
• How is this two-week Swahili course situated with respect to a national framework for world learning learning?
Theoretical Framework

- Ethnocentrism (TAKE)
- Interculturally responsive learning experiences (LEARNER REFLECTION + PRAXIS)
- Intercultural self-efficacy (GIVE + TAKE)
Study Logistics: Methodology

- Nested qualitative case study
- 7 student participants
  - 50% of consenting participants
  - 33% of overall participants
- My role: semi-participant
Study Logistics: Data points

Key data:

- Individual entrance essays
- Field notes & classroom recordings
- Individual semi-structured interviews
Study Logistics: Data Analysis

Gee’s (2011) critical discourse analysis

- Micro-level interpersonal context
- Macro-level political context
Key Findings and Implications
Finding #1

Most learners were drawn to the STARTALK Swahili program due to a desire to explore something exotic or “other”
Finding #1

Knowing
(subjective; give-and-take)

vs.

Knowing about
(objective; take)

(Green, Sonn and Matsebula, 2007)
Finding #1

To me, learning a language isn’t simply about recognizing the way my tongue has to twist and turn to make sounds that are linguistically coherent; it’s also about understanding the cultural significance of those words. In order to truly connect with one another, individuals have to first understand each other. I would love nothing more than to take that first step of understanding the world I live in by seizing this phenomenal opportunity to learn another language. 

(Mufasa, initial entrance essay)
Finding #1

Being a Yugoslav refugee has provided me with a differing perspective than my peers, as I have witnessed the effects of bigotry, lack of education and intolerance. As a bilingual individual I appreciate the benefits of communication in bridging gaps among cultures, and I wish to have the ability to truly bridge the gap amid the East African and American cultures by dismissing stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings.

(Zawadi, initial entrance essay)
Finding #1

It was Roger Bacon that said, ‘The conquest of learning is achieved through the knowledge of languages.’ In a global society, additional languages give you a competitive edge when competing for various employment opportunities

(Akida, initial entrance essay)
Finding #2

Learners used the learning of Swahili to augment their English-based identities.
Finding #2

Develop and maintain social relationships
Finding #2

Claim outsider status
Finding #3

The degree to which learners developed relationships with teachers influenced learners’ perceptions of pedagogical effectiveness.
Finding #3

Hamida: And [African culture teacher is] talking to me as if I’m her African child. Like, that’s the way that she’s speaking to me. Like, ‘You need to respect me, you need to listen, you don’t talk back, this is what you do, it’s a lot, but I expect that of you, because that’s on your plate.’ But, I’m not her African kid. I’m mostly American. That’s not comfortable for me, or anyone else, but because of the culture, I can’t really do anything, because that’s, like, disrespecting…

(from personal interview)
So what?

Conclusions and Implications
Meeting Program Goals: Factors

- Individual motivations and identities of the learners who enrolled in the program
- Curriculum’s role in contributing to learners’ respective senses of sociolinguistic agency
- Extent to which teachers and learners worked across cultural frames of reference to negotiate effective pedagogical relationships
Conclusions: Identity + Pedagogy

Learners need spaces within which they can unpack and re-situate their evolving intercultural identities.

- Moving away from othering & working through tension
- Need for sociolinguistic agency as proficiency grows
Conclusions: Curriculum + Identity

A meaningful curriculum (to learners) should correspond to their intercultural identity needs.
Implications for Curriculum

- Exploration of topics more closely linked to learners’ everyday realities, and their quests to build relationships with one another
- Emphasis on current instead of future
Implications for Teacher Preparation

In absence of intercultural support from teachers...

- Learners’ sense of self-efficacy in participating in intercultural social interactions is compromised

- Learners retreat into home culture relationships as a shield against pedagogical discomfort
Implications for Teacher Training

Teachers must be prepared to help students unpack the roots of their feelings of dissonance so that they can situate themselves within new cultural boundaries

- Links to 10%?
Implications for Research

- More focus on process (of learning, of program implementation) in STARTALK programs
- Longer term studies (e.g. of returning participants, of participants in a longer program)
Questions for the Field

What are world language educators doing or saying (implicitly or explicitly) that:

- Causes learners to view target language speakers as belonging to an “other” group?
- Causes learners to view language learning primarily in terms of return on investment?
- Silences learners’ very real experiences of cultural dissonance?
Questions for me?

My contact information:

Adriana Melnyk Brandt

abrandt@dixie.edu

435-879-4327