

'Circle Games' for teaching German

"It's either masochism, dedication, or digging a hole and having to crawl out of it," Clyde Smith says about his three-year German textbook project. Smith, 37, (Ph. D. German literature from UCLA) is teaching a University SEARCH course called "German Circle Games."

The two classes he teaches are an important part of the development of his system. "The biggest hurdle a student faces in learning a new language," Smith says, "is the transition from passive knowledge to active usage." "German Circle Games" attacks the problem directly by making the learning process active.

The idea first came to Smith when he was teaching an accelerated German class at the University of California at Hayward. He was dissatisfied with the text, so he wrote his own, handing it out on mimeographed sheets. Instead of sending the students to lab he had them meet in groups. He then began thinking about teaching with games.

games. In the reality of the classroom he found many of the games deficient and spent much of his time in revision. He found the classroom an indispensable sounding board in the process of refining the games.

The idea, according to Smith, is to present a mini-situation where the student has the opportunity to see, touch and feel what he is doing. Each game is focused on a particular aspect of German grammar. The students ask each other questions or describe drawings in German. It is a theater of education where the audience and actors are one and the same.

"Every game has to have very secure, well defined limits," he says. "Freedom is available through organization of energy." The games are an experiment in democracy because the students are expected to correct one another, not in a holier-than-thou manner, but in a helpful, kind way. The corrector has as much to learn as the corrected. Sometimes it goes to two or three people, the correctors finding that

"Ideally you would have five students of equal ability and you'd whip around the circle and really get a lot done, but things don't work that way," he says. "The games are better for all students."

Smith will teach his course spring term with the Division of Continuing Education. There will be two classes: one at 7:30 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays, for people with two or more quarters of German and recommended for advanced students and teachers; the other course, for people with one quarter or less, will meet at 7:30 p.m., Monday and Wednesday, and is recommended for teachers of other foreign languages and those interested in group learning.

By GARY NEWMAN
Of the Emerald

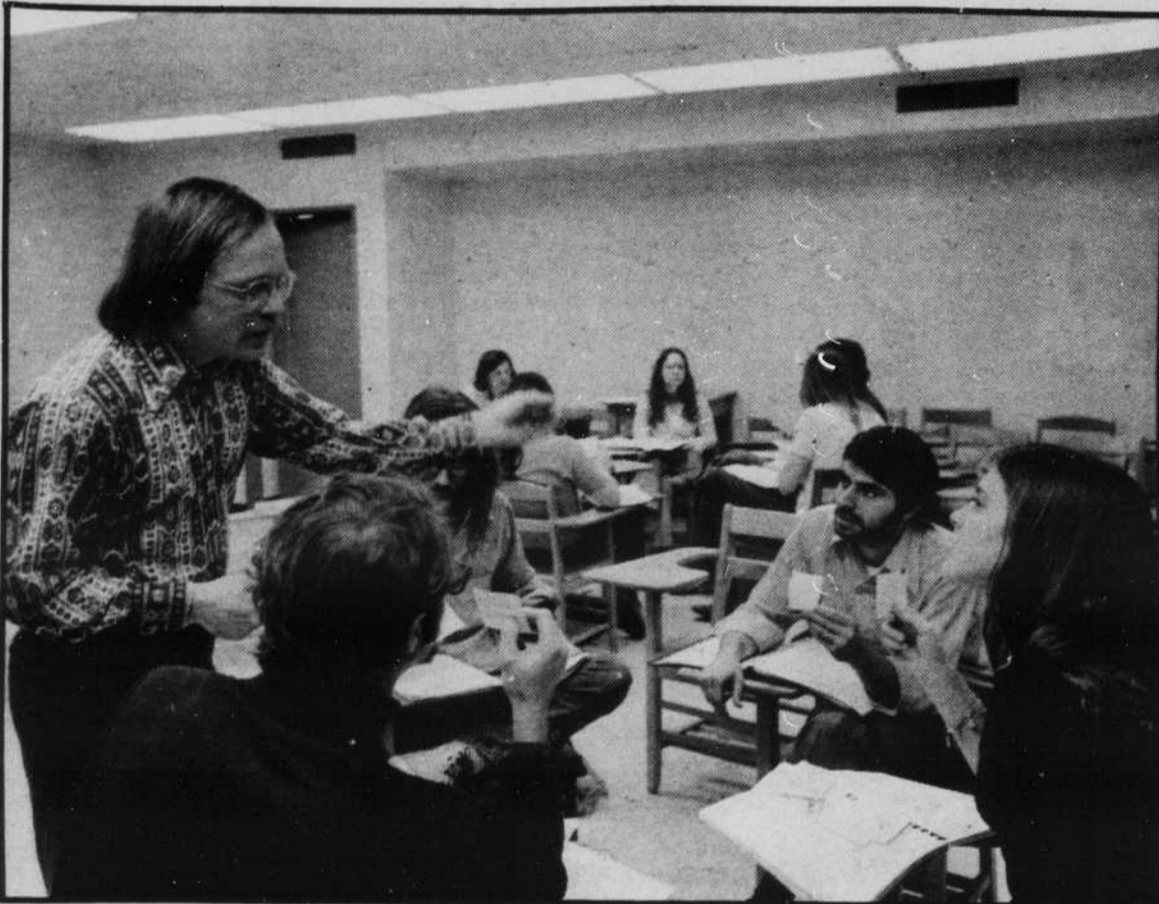


Photo by John Johns

Clyde Smith talks about his new spring term SEARCH class, "German Circle Games."

A sense of dissatisfaction about how language is being taught brought him to start creating the games. He also wanted to redistribute the power structure of the classroom. "The teacher is a resource and guide," he says. "The students must do it themselves. The teacher is to provide a way for the student's energy to be manifested."

In the summer of 1972 he moved to Eugene, and living off his savings and unemployment he began to compose the games. In spring 1973 he started teaching a University SEARCH course to test the nucleus of 24

they too were wrong, Smith explains.

Students who have had no German fit into the system best, according to Smith. Experienced German students tend to correct each other less and have to overcome previous conditioning. "The traditional classroom format tends to cause more of a feeling of individual isolation, competitiveness, anxiety and lack of co-operation among students," he explains. He adds that the slower student retards the fast student, but the faster student has the benefit of explaining, thus seating the information more firmly in his mind.

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