



Chapter 2

THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE WORLD LANGUAGE PROGRAM



LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR ALL STUDENTS

The term “all students” includes students who are college-bound, career-bound, academically talented, those whose native language is not English, those with disabilities, students with learning deficits, and students from diverse socioeconomic (disadvantaged or advantaged) backgrounds. It conveys a commitment that male and female students will achieve at comparable levels across all areas. For certain profoundly handicapped students, few if any of these standards will apply. However, the majority of special needs students should have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that is linked to the curriculum standards. They may address the core curriculum at different levels of depth and may complete the core curriculum according to different timetables. In addition, those students who can do more than achieve this set of expectations must be afforded the opportunity and encouraged to do so.

(The New Jersey Department of Education, 1996, p. v)

An increasing amount of research is being done that justifies the inclusion of **all** students in world language classrooms. Findings indicate **that all students can benefit from learning another language and culture** when instruction is based on second language acquisition theories and appropriate methodology and materials are used.

Gahala (1993) and Heining-Boynton (1994) maintain that effective techniques which emphasize teaching through more than one modality enable handicapped and at-risk students to experience success as language learners. Heining-Boynton emphasizes that language learning practices which are successful with at-risk students are the same practices that current research on language acquisition is advocating as sound instructional techniques for all students. Traditional methods fail with these students because they exploit areas such as memory work, language out of context, and teaching abstract rules.

Andrade, Kretschmer, and Kretschmer (1989) discuss their personal experiences with students with disabilities as well as research done by Bruck (1987) on language-disabled children. They conclude that the majority of children with disabilities can benefit from studying another language and culture and should take part in elementary and middle school world language programs. They further recommend that successful second language instruction for learning disabled students be a meaningful, interactive (rather than structured, passive) learning experience.

Justification that all students, including those with below-average abilities, can benefit from learning a world language has been shown in studies of at-risk learners in French immersion programs. Genessee (1992) found that although these students did not perform as well as above-average students on reading and writing tests, they did score *at the same level* as the higher-ability students on listening comprehension and speaking tests.

Goodlad and Oakes's (1988) research on individual learning differences shows that grouping and tracking are a generally ineffective means for addressing individual differences. They advocate the mainstreaming of students with disabilities and/or low academic achievement.

The Ohio Department of Education (1996) states that "language learning is an innate human capacity. All children can develop functional proficiency in listening and speaking. Most will also develop functional proficiency in the literacy skills equal to their first language abilities" (p. 127).

Barnett (1988) commented that "the new total foreign language package of different training, different experiences, and most of all different GOALS is exactly what will enable us to realize success with ALL students" (p. 1).

COMMUNICATIVE PROFICIENCY: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFICIENCY-BASED INSTRUCTION

Proficiency-based instruction focuses on **what students can do with language** (i.e., functional language use) rather than what they know about language. It involves **meaningful use of language for "real" communicative purposes**. Proficiency-based instruction:

- is gained through a spiraling and recursive process—it requires repeated exposure and opportunities to practice new skills, receive feedback, and apply skills in more sophisticated contexts with increasing accuracy of expression;
- takes into account how learners acquire language at different rates—for example, it does not rely on "covering the textbook" or on hours of seat time accumulated;
- integrates content and language—linguistic elements that make up a language emerge naturally from the content domain and are understood within the context of that content;
- integrates language and culture: Culture is viewed as an inseparable entity from language teaching;
- integrates language with other disciplines: Language experiences are organized around curricular topics or themes that become progressively and sequentially more difficult;
- has implications for design and organization of courses, instructional methodology, and assessment; and
- is based on the philosophy of outcomes-based education. It is inclusive; it views the learner as a performer, an initiator, and a user of language; it views the teacher as a facilitator who takes into consideration students' learning styles while fostering communicative language use.

**COMPARISON OF TRADITIONAL AND STANDARDS-BASED
(PROFICIENCY-BASED) APPROACHES TO
WORLD LANGUAGE TEACHING**

TRADITIONAL	STANDARDS-BASED
Units are organized by grammar topics.	Units are organized by themes.
Learning the language is the only goal.	Using the language to learn subject matter is a goal.
Middle and high school curricula are generally the same.	Curriculum varies by grade to coordinate with studies at Grades K-12.
Units are organized around grammar.	Units are organized around situations and scenarios that can be applied to real life.
Grades are almost exclusively based on paper-and-pencil tests.	Grades are based on performance and production of materials as well as paper-and-pencil tests.

Note. This chart was developed by A. Lubiner and E. Lubiner (personal communication, April 1998).

ARTICULATION: THE K-12 CONTINUUM

The New Jersey World Languages Curriculum Framework recommends a sequentially, articulated world language program from elementary through secondary levels. **Implementation of a world language program in a modified form will result in a lesser degree of language proficiency and understanding.** Expectancies and performance tasks will also be limited accordingly. A language experience of two years—regardless of when it occurs—will not enable students to reach beyond the beginning levels of proficiency. According to Met (1989),

One or two years of study can bring students no closer to competence in those languages than 1st and 2nd grade mathematics instruction can prepare students for careers in engineering. When initiating language programs, schools, therefore, should consider level-to-level articulation. An elementary school foreign language program should logically lead to continued articulated study at the middle school, high school, and college. (p. 57)

A quality program builds upon each preceding level of instruction, according to Curtain and Pesola (1988, p. 52). The middle school program for continuing FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) students should be substantially different from the program for students who are beginning language study at that level. Districts should establish a separate track for continuing FLES students. As students reach the high school level with extensive backgrounds in world languages, curriculum at that level must also change in significant ways. Successful articulation can only be accomplished with the full participation of elementary, middle school, and high school teachers in planning the program to assure continuous development of language skills.

It is important to reemphasize that a **student's level of language proficiency is dependent on both the length of instruction and the quality of instruction**, that is, time spent in meaningful communication on topics that are relevant to a student's cognitive level and interest level. This may extend to language experiences occurring in an informal environment, which should then be integrated into the school setting.

THE STUDENT-CENTERED, AUTHENTIC CLASSROOM

“The orientation toward communication places language learners in a living laboratory, in which process is the primary focus of planning and instruction” (Curtain & Pesola, 1994, p. 97). The student-centered reform model of language instruction focuses on authentic, challenging tasks that provide meaningful learning experiences. These relevant experiences lead students to understand broad concepts and to develop strategies for analyzing these concepts across disciplines.

The student-centered world language classroom is characterized by students working collaboratively in pairs or in small groups. The teacher acts as a guide during interactive modes of instruction. Students typically work in extended blocks of time on authentic and multidisciplinary work.

Students are engaged in tasks designed to incorporate the problems and solution strategies that they would use in real-life settings. Ideally, projects include an integrative approach and seek a high level of competence, offering the opportunity for demonstration of students’ thought processes and revision of their work.

Assessments are performance-based and include both *formative* (ongoing evaluation of student progress during a learning activity) and *summative* (evaluation of the end product of student learning activities) components. These assessments facilitate student reflection on the learning process and the improvement of learning.

In the student-centered, authentic classroom, students become independent thinkers, question posers, problem solvers, and discoverers in the context of a cooperative environment where a world language is used as the vehicle to seek and acquire knowledge.

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTION

One of the guiding principles in the introduction of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* is that world languages connect with other disciplines: “Successful language learning activities are interdisciplinary. World languages have more meaning and purpose when tasks are a natural outgrowth of school life and emerge from the content area of other disciplines” (New Jersey Department of Education, 1996, p. 7-3). The academic content in the school curriculum provides a meaningful basis for language learning, and interesting content provides a purposeful and motivating context for learning the communicative functions of a second language. According to Met (1998b), “integrating language and content . . . is not just consistent with communicative language teaching; it is likely to promote the development of communicative competence.”

Research has confirmed that time spent in experiencing the second language as the medium of instruction is more effective in producing language proficiency than time spent in direct language instruction alone (Curtain & Pesola, 1994). Integrated instruction is also a vehicle for promoting higher-order thinking skills. Class activities are cognitively demanding as they go beyond mere description and identification. Language functions such as explaining, classifying, comparing, and evaluating are used consistently in content-based methodology as students communicate about thoughts, not just words.

Eileen Lorenz and Pierre Verdaguer (1997) stress that interdisciplinary teaching goes beyond routine use of a single text or a program of study.

Foreign language teachers must examine what students are learning in other classes, decide which areas are relevant to learning and using a second language, and select areas that connect it in meaningful and interesting ways to language and cultures. The end result should be daily lessons in which language concepts and information are more understandable and easier to remember, as well as highly motivating for students. (p. 147)

In order to most effectively integrate content into world language programs, language objectives should be identified at a given level and content-based activities selected through which linguistic skills may be acquired or practiced.

At the elementary level, world language instruction can reinforce or enhance every subject taught in the mandated curriculum: visual and performing arts, comprehensive health and physical education, language arts literacy, mathematics, science, and social studies. The content and activities derived from these subjects are appropriate to the cognitive, affective, and linguistic needs of students and are consistent with the outcomes stated in the cumulative progress indicators across the seven content areas.

At the secondary level, one of the most effective ways to plan an interdisciplinary unit is to focus on creating a project that involves content from different subject areas. After selecting cumulative progress indicators from two or more content areas, an essential question or common element related to the cumulative progress indicators is identified. A product is then created that naturally integrates the cumulative progress indicators while fostering a transfer of learning and use of critical-thinking skills.

Met (1998b) offers the following suggestions for integrating mathematics and science into the world language curriculum:

CONNECTING WORLD LANGUAGES WITH MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

Mathematics provides many opportunities for connections. At the earliest levels of language proficiency, students can practice numbers in cognitively demanding tasks. Many of the major conceptual tools of mathematics can be applied to almost [any] topic, and as such, can fit well with the topics of the language classroom. For example, estimation and measurement can be used to predict and then calculate the size (height or weight) of classroom objects . . . or to calculate . . . ratio[s]. . . . Number use and number patterns work well with both younger and older learners. While young students can engage in simple arithmetic operations, older students can use numbers to complete challenging number patterns (e.g., 3-7-15-31-?). . . . The concept of percentages and the tool of graphing can be applied to the group work and class surveys that are common in communicative classrooms. Students can report the results of their surveys in percentages (e.g., 38% of our group and 67% of our class thinks the world will be a safer place in the year 2010). Survey results can also be graphed in various forms, both common and less common, such as bar and line graphs, pie graphs, or even box-and-whiskers or stem-and-leaf graphs.

Teachers can focus on specific language elements through connections with mathematics. Pair and group tasks can lead to reports that use the 1st person plural forms of verbs and adjectives (e.g., we found . . . , our banana weighed . . . , 75% of us like to . . .) or to the 3rd person plural of the past tense (e.g., 18% of students went to the movies last weekend). In recent years, heavy emphasis on pair work has meant that many students get more practice in using the singular verb forms than in the plural forms. Reporting survey results, or interpreting graphs and survey data can provide increased practice for needed forms.

Connections with science will depend on the grade level and topic. Some science topics work well for language learners, such as the migration of butterflies and weather/meteorology. Many students have a deep interest in the environment. Not only can students acquire language to describe the natural environment, they can also identify ways in which the environment can be protected, even in first-year classes at the secondary level. Natural phenomena (earthquakes, monsoons, tornadoes) can be linked to the language for identifying and describing geographic and topographic features. Grammatical skills and expression of language functions can be expanded through discussion of scientific phenomena. Students can describe (orally or in writing) the steps in an experiment (past tense), the reasons for the results (describing cause-and-effect relationships), or hypothesize using if/then constructions.

Note. From "Making Connections" by M. Met, 1998, in J. Phillips (Ed.), *Foreign language standards: Linking research, theories and practices* (The ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series), Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Company. Reprinted with permission.

CROSS-CONTENT WORKPLACE READINESS AND SYSTEMS THINKING

To help prepare students for a rapidly changing world, the State Board of Education adopted five workplace readiness standards to be integrated with the seven academic standards. These workplace readiness standards define the skills that students need as they pursue college, careers, and adult responsibilities as citizens. The cross-content workplace readiness standards include career planning and workplace skills; use of technology, information, and other tools; critical thinking, decision making and problem solving; self-management; and safety principles.

Unlike the cumulative progress indicators for the other content areas, the workplace readiness indicators are not organized by grade-level clusters because (in addition to crossing all content areas) they also cross grade levels. Teachers and counselors should integrate these concepts into all programs in content-specific and developmentally appropriate ways. To strengthen the linkages between the content area and cross-content workplace readiness standards, the scenarios in this *Framework* include interdisciplinary approaches to workplace readiness.

As society becomes more complex, “traditional” education becomes less relevant due to its fragmentary nature. **A more effective approach to education—an interdisciplinary, systems thinking approach—is needed to provide cohesion and foster the development of workplace readiness skills.** This approach is experiential—students learn by doing. They select and design projects, research possible solutions to problems, present their work to review panels, and evaluate it using a variety of authentic forms of assessment. Academic content is integrated into all of these activities so that students meet and sometimes surpass the outcomes indicated in the standards.

Today, systems thinking is needed more than ever because we are becoming overwhelmed by complexity. Perhaps for the first time in history, humankind has the capacity to create far more information that anyone can absorb, to foster far greater interdependency than anyone can manage, and to accelerate change faster than anyone's ability to keep pace. . . . Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static “snapshots.”

(Senge, 1990, pp. 68-69)

Interdisciplinary, systems thinking education is effective because it is meaningful for students. They can see its relevance both in school and for their future careers. Students are motivated and challenged by projects in which they play key decision-making roles. They learn to communicate, create, “think on their feet,” and meet timelines. They learn how to work on a team, how to be responsible leaders and good listeners, and how to carefully consider the ideas of others. Throughout the process, students gain self-satisfaction, earn respect from peers and adults, and grow in self confidence.

Consider the following example in the Grades 5-8 learning scenario, “Say It With a Card.” Students are engaged in a multistep, experiential project to design and market a line of target-language greeting cards for the international division of an American card company. They interpret and analyze data obtained about the card market in the target culture and use problem-solving skills to create an orig-

inal line of cards that satisfies the needs of the target-culture market. An important real-life application of this scenario is the students' ability to use persuasive language to "sell" the new card line to an employer and to creatively market the product. The card line is both self and peer assessed and is then used as part of a community service project to send cards to native-language speakers in hospitals or nursing homes. Interdisciplinary connections abound in the visual and performing arts, language arts literacy, and workplace readiness. Students use artistic skills, oral and written communication skills, and problem-solving skills while working on a team to design and effectively market a "real-life" product.

The use of the systems thinking approach and the value of experiential learning are fully endorsed by the New Jersey World Language Standards and *Curriculum Framework* and are enmeshed into each of the essential components of an effective world language program (as discussed in this chapter). Communicative-based language instruction emphasizes what students can do with a language in culturally authentic settings. It engages students in multistage tasks and problem solving in the real-life contexts facing adult citizens, workers, professionals, and consumers. Consequently, the interdisciplinary, systems thinking approach and workplace readiness skills have been incorporated into the learning scenarios in chapter 10 at all benchmark levels. See Appendix G for further illustration of the interdisciplinary, systems thinking approach.

SUMMARY OF THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE NEW JERSEY WORLD LANGUAGE PROGRAM

An effective world language program:

- embraces the belief that language learning is an innate human capacity and that all students who speak one language can successfully learn another;
- focuses on meaningful communication with increasing accuracy of expression in an authentic, real-life context;
- is available to all students as part of the core curriculum in a K-12 articulated sequence;
- is delivered in a student-centered curriculum based on inquiry, problem solving, and application of concepts;
- explores themes and issues across content areas and makes connections to the multicultural world of the 21st century, thereby fostering a greater understanding of and appreciation for world cultures; and
- supports the systems thinking approach to learning while integrating the skills outlined in the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards.