Foreign Language Standards:

Linking Research, Theories, and Practices

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Standards for Foreign Language Learning

Communication

Communicate in Languages Other than English

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

Cultures

Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

Connections

Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information

Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

Comparisons

Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

Communities

Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World

Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Standards for Foreign Language Learning 1996: 9.

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Introduction

Standards for World Languages—
On a Firm Foundation*

June K. Phillips

Weber State University

From whence do standards come? In industry, when standards are used to assess product quality, precision may be established on features of measurement and accuracy, such as railroad gauges, chemical compounds, or wattage. The assessment of conformity to the standard rests on criteria upon which independent judges will universally agree. When standards are used to assess performance quality, competency may reflect variables that include artistry, functionality, audience or user response, and individuality. Judgment relies on agreed-upon interpretations and applications of criteria. In an endeavor such as playing the piano, progress toward a high performance standard counts for something, whereas a prescription drug that is a close approximation of the formula has no value at all. Quality assurance takes on a different dimension in car manufacturing than in education.

　　Content standards, upon which performance standards are assessed, lie at the heart of education reforms undertaken during these transitional years to the next century. The design of content standards for our discipline required that the profession articulate its best judgment of *what students should know*

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*See pages iv and v for a listing of the five goal areas and the eleven standards found in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (1996).

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and be able to do as a result of their study of world languages. Content standards, while not curriculum per se, do exert influence on the experiences students should have in the classroom and the pedagogical approaches their teachers employ. Content standards must become the basis for the new assessments that will judge student competencies in terms of quality and progress toward high and challenging performance standards.

The history of *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* and the national standards development process in world languages has been adequately documented elsewhere (see Phillips 1994; Phillips and Draper 1994; Phillips and Lafayette 1996). The professional consensus achieved with the publication of *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (1996) has been transformed into an energetic collaboration among eleven organizations, which are developing language-specific standards and which, as a collaborative project, are participating in teacher education standards development. The project has been accepted for membership in the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and will provide the financial support for sustaining that membership. Since the 1996 publication of the national standards, numerous states have begun the parallel process of designing state standards and the concomitant curricular frameworks. Virtually every state's standards strongly align with the national ones; most do so word for word, and others have slightly modified wording or organization.

During the standards development process, much effort had been aimed at achieving a strong national consensus. That challenge was successfully met as individuals from education, government, and business embraced the standards and over fifty professional and state organizations endorsed them officially. Certainly a primary reason for this consensus lies with the extensive dissemination activities that occurred as the standards were being drafted and with the subsequent familiarization workshops that have been conducted nationwide. Equally important, although not as uniformly established throughout the profession, another basis for consensus lies in the fact that the standards are grounded in a combination of solid research, strong and sequential curriculum, and effective instructional practices.

The student standards are challenging—as are the implied standards for teaching. At present, however, standards are too frequently being greeted with expressions of verification such as, "I do that" or "That is what I do with my students." Less often, one hears "That is what my students are doing or learning" or "My students perform those tasks at a high level of competency." More comments on the order of "I hadn't thought of learning that way" or "I see how I need to change what we do in class" would signify that

teachers have recognized and begun to struggle with the real challenges of the standards. The major shift inherent in the standards requires teachers to focus more on what students are learning than on what they are teaching— making output what counts rather than input. The reality is that these standards are based on a number of research and theoretical models that must provoke new thinking on the part of world languages teachers. To effectively make the myriad instructional decisions that standards-focused programs demand, teachers have to understand the premises and processes upon which the acquisition of linguistic, cultural, interdisciplinary, and comparative competencies lie. It is imperative that as teachers, we move from using the standards to verify present practice to using them to improve student performance. This volume is intended to facilitate that process by examining in depth the theories, models, and research that underlie the very different and challenging vision for learning the world languages embodied in the standards of Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.

Professionalization through Standards

Standards broadened the content range of language learning by venturing well beyond the traditional four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing and the occasional study of culture. The new frameworks for communication and culture in *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (1996) dramatically change the paradigms under which teachers have been operating even within traditional content areas (Communication and Cultures). The addition of goals and standards that encourage students to use new languages to explore interdisciplinary content (Connections), to develop insights into the very nature of language and culture as systems or patterns (Comparisons), and to search actively to test their new competencies in venues beyond the school (Communities) legitimize the occasional forays that foreign language classes took into these areas. The representation of all five goals as interlocking circles signifies that all should be systematically incorporated into language instruction at all levels.

To understand more fully the rationale for the Five Cs and how they play out in instruction, teachers must be willing to dedicate themselves to intensive work with the theoretical principles that form the basis for standards-driven learning. They must abandon the temptation to look only at the surface of activities and classroom scenarios. Given their busy schedules and the preponderance of short-term professional development workshops, it is not surprising that teachers gravitate toward the hands-on, practical kinds of

inservice programs. However, that level of professional development inadequately addresses the complexity of language and cultures learning that accompanies the longer sequences and the diverse students in today's—and tomorrow's—classrooms. At conferences, in workshops, in the articles in this volume, it may seem appealing to skip the expository information on models drawn from research in order to access the classroom examples more quickly. But I urge readers to take the time to delve into those theoretical principles, for that is the basis for the important instructional decisions that you will need to make for yourself and for your students.

At a recent education conference, Willis Hawley (1998) chided the profession for not having adequately built a research foundation for teaching and for relying less on systematic research than other professions do. He urged the use of standards, given their focus on student learning, to develop a new consensus promoting research that places the learner at the center and focuses on "solving authentic problems identified through systematic analysis of student learning." Hawley further expressed the challenge of professional development as one that is "not a question of what teachers *want* to know but of what they *need* to know" if they are to be effective leaders in today's classrooms.

This volume in The ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series seeks to enrich the knowledge base in support of the standards by examining what we know about student learning in the interlocking domains of communication, cultures, connections, and comparisons in particular so that students can use those competencies and contents effectively in communities. Before anticipating the topics authors will develop, this introduction will posit some of the other new areas that future standards-focused initiatives will have to address.

Longer Sequences for Learners

The great majority of articles in the professional literature for foreign language learning concentrates on first- and second-year programs, whether in schools or in higher education. Because most students in the United States have had limited opportunities for doing advanced work and because most teaching time has been spent on early stages of learning, neither theoretical nor classroom-action research has widely investigated advanced learning or learning over time, for example, from the elementary school through high school. Even those students who began foreign language learning at a younger age often found their study interrupted at some grade-level cluster—e.g., middle school—or they were recycled, with several "new beginnings" due to failures of articulation.

Earlier Starts for Language Instruction

A body of research on younger learners—i.e., elementary-age children—especially in immersion or partial immersion programs is beginning to accumulate. We are still a long way from knowing what levels of competency are being developed in elementary school programs with much less contact time; as new assessments appropriate to that age group provide evidence of performance, that knowledge gap may be at least partially filled (see Thompson 1995). The Younger Learner Project, sponsored by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), will soon release a draft version of proficiency guidelines that should be helpful as programs expand at this level of instruction. Some of the key research that must follow the implementation of programs in elementary schools revolves around articulation so that gains made in early learning programs are adequately assessed and more importantly, drawn upon at the subsequent levels of instruction to grow competencies sequentially.

The advocacy for an "early start" in the study of world languages that was embodied in the standards publication has resulted in numerous state actions to promote that undertaking. Within the past year, commissioners for education or state boards in Connecticut and New Jersey issued calls or mandates for instruction in elementary schools. Utah's state education commissioner wants to lengthen the school day to accommodate language study. The success of these initiatives rests on several factors: (1) a pool of competent teachers with elementary preparation, (2) wise choices of program models, (3) use of standards and assessments that communicate learning, and (4) willingness of teachers at the next level to articulate with programs. In the past, we have unfortunately seen resistance to articulation, which perpetuates the new beginner syndrome. As a unified profession interested in language learning, it behooves us to familiarize ourselves with learning at all levels so that we can properly embrace students who come to us from programs at younger levels. Adjustments will have to made for learners who are continuing with a single language and for those who begin a new language, i.e., who add a layer to their studies. Both are very different learners than are monolinguals with their first encounter with a new system.

Advanced-Level Programs

Just as research has been sparse with younger learners so has it been with advanced learners in classroom settings. The implied promise in a commitment to longer sequences of study would be learners who communicate more

proficiently in a range of tasks and who interact more adeptly in the culture. The old paradigm of learning language to learn literature after having learned language (defined as a certain number of lower-division courses) with relatively little overlap reflects an insufficient view of either domain. In Byrnes's (1998) work restructuring the undergraduate curriculum at Georgetown with her colleagues, the byword is "literature from the beginning, language through the end." This conceptualization meets quite fully the spirit of the standards, which emphasizes children's and adolescent literature in early grades and achievements in a wide range of content areas for advanced students. Many have decried the curricular rift that faces advancing learners in colleges and universities—and that is sometimes replicated in high schools when the only option for advanced study may be Advanced Placement Literature—when faculty have not collaborated for compatible missions. Bernhardt (1997) predicts that

> Programs that hold to the illusion of a two-year language program that brings about linguistic accuracy and then leads to some sort of "real language use" will go the way of the other dinosaurs. Language and literature departments must begin to accept the reality of length of learning time; that reality entails a knowledge of second language acquisition, which tells us to expect a developmental progression in accuracy and knowledge in students. Further, language departments must begin to communicate to the rest of the university what the students can and cannot do after each level of the curriculum. Students can do a lot of things with the language that we have given them over a year or two. But they cannot do everything linguistically or conceptually that upper-level study demands. They must continue to refine their language skills, if they didn't have to do so, there would be no need for the so-called upper-level curriculum (16).

While the national standards were developed under a federal program for K–12, all but two of the language-specific collaborating organizations[1] have subsequently adopted them as guidelines for K–16. Dissemination efforts into college and university departments of languages and literatures must be increased so that the seamless curriculum called for in the standards becomes a reality for learners. To further improve advanced level instruction, research into how learners do indeed refine skills, expand vocabulary, develop more discourse styles, and deal with nuance and abstract ideas must be undertaken. Many of the instructional approaches that are effective for beginning learners are not suitable for advanced learners, and a documented teaching repertoire at those higher levels is meager.

New Paradigms for Familiar Goals

In anticipation of the chapters in this volume by Hall and by Lange, it might be useful to set the stage for the standards frameworks that these authors explicate in terms of research, conceptual models, and classroom practices. From the outset, the National Standards Task Force,[2] knew that there would be standards that encompassed communication and culture as a minimum. In the course of the drafting, it became obvious that the traditional way of thinking about four separate and separated skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing did not reflect how learners learn or how people communicate. Even with the methodological changes of past decades, this basic skill paradigm had held. Most recently, as functional or communicative language and proficiency guidelines emerged as curricular influences and moved the profession to value more highly real-world language and authentic tasks, we still clung to a skill-based paradigm.

If one looks at all the discipline-based standards publications, certain cross-disciplinary concepts become apparent. Many documents contain a standard or standards that address "communication"—for example, mathematics as communication. The foreign language group also examined the discipline of communication, and that study convinced it to consider more fully the context and cognitive demands of communication rather than designation by skill. The resulting "Framework of Communicative Modes" (see *SFLL* 1996:33) forms the foundation for three standards that describe learning performances as Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational. Hall prefers to label these as "domains" in her chapter. The key concept that requires teachers to restructure their curriculum, their pedagogy, and their assessment practices lies in the fact that listening is not done in a vacuum. Listening is either part of an interpersonal mode where negotiated meaning with an individual is occurring, or it is an interpretive task performed from live or recorded audio, or audiovisual materials, where the cognitive strategies to make meaning without the ability to get clarification from the presenter determines the learning task. The other skills likewise each exist in two modes, and the marked difference resides in the opportunity to negotiate meaning through two-way interpersonal exchanges or through one-way negotiation with text (interpretive) or one-way expression of content and perspective (presentational). This slight but consequential shift pushes the researchers and the practitioners to think differently—to think modes or domains, not skills. Words like "reading" or "speaking" can no longer stand alone; they must be accompanied by the idea of reading to interpret fixed text or reading as an interpersonal enterprise, where the writer can be contacted as to meaning.

Framework for the Study of Culture

The National Standards Task Force felt that, as with communication, the time was right to take a fresh look at how culture had been treated in foreign language classrooms. In spite of much lip service over the years, culture remained at the periphery of instruction, most frequently referred to as a fifth skill, a capsule, a cultural note at the bottom of a textbook page, or a Friday "fun" activity. To categorize the field in some way, the terms "big C" and "little c" had been devised to signify the great works of civilization in contrast to daily patterns of life. Teachers taught the culture as they knew it; students learned items randomly, not as connected threads or themes. In most courses no systemic process was visible that enabled students to observe cultural manifestations; to analyze the patterns of behavior; to hypothesize about origins, usage, or context; and to understand the perspectives of the people in the target cultures. In sum, most cultural content learned was fact or act in isolation from how it related to the values and attitudes of a person or a people.

The new framework for culture adopts a stance more reflective of the anthropologist. By envisioning the study of cultures as one that examines *products* and *practices* in order to gain insights into *perspectives,* the task force hopes to focus attention on important and defining issues. A society may produce items and behave in ways that are incidental to its real values; too often this kind of material was the focus of cultural content. The result was that students learned trivialized aspects of cultures, which tend to accentuate the differences, not the similarities. But societies do hold dear essential perspectives that are manifested in their tangible and intangible products and in the practices of individuals and groups. Fantini's chapter on cross-cultural comparisons provides us with a more positive approach to leading students to think about the target cultures and their own. Teachers are encouraged to work with the full triangular model so that students examine the linkages among the three categories. Another advantage of this framework is that it does not make teachers responsible for knowing everything there is to know about a given culture. Instead, teachers can promote the process of observing and withholding judgments until perspectives can be confirmed; in turn, that will lead students toward more divergent and critical thinking as well as more tolerant and accepting attitudes toward other cultures. Because the foreign language profession had not fully integrated culture into its teaching, it relied more on lists of features for instruction than on models for learning generated by the research.

The Curricular Weave: Whys and Wherefores

For the most meaningful reading of this volume, educators should be familiar with *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century* (1996). This publication illustrates the relationship among the goals expressed by the Five Cs, the eleven standards themselves, and the curricular experiences that enable students to achieve at a high level of performance. The authors of this ACTFL volume were not asked to address explicitly the elements of the weave, yet as they synthesized research and provided classroom examples, these elements can easily be discerned. The curricular weave (*SFLL:* 29) identifies both content and processes that undergird the standards and goals, as well as the role of technology.

- Content areas include the language system, cultural knowledge, and content from other school disciplines.
- Processes include communication strategies, learning strategies, and critical thinking skills.
- Technology includes a system for direct communication with language users, a source of materials, and an instructional delivery system.

As learners work with standards, they will be drawing on many of these areas simultaneously. Their experiences in these areas should always have a clear standards focus, for the performance assessments measure progress toward the standard. The teacher may also choose to evaluate the curricular underpinnings as part of diagnosing student progress.

Following is an example of the curricular weave linked with standards-based assessment.

> **Standards: Interpersonal, Interpretive, Presentational, Cultural Practices, Making Connections, Acquiring New Information**
>
> Intermediate-level students have been asked to search the Internet (technology) for information on the Maurice Papon trial (cultural, current events, and historical content), which took place in 1997–1998 in France. First, they shared in class information they knew about war crimes from World War II and some of the issues involved. Students scanned documents to find those they self-assessed as being in their range of comprehensibility (learning strategy, language system). Actual documents they used were historical time lines, short journalistic reports of the AFP-type (*Agence France Presse*). In small groups, students selected documents to read; they summarized their understandings in a journal and noted places where they had only part of the message so that the teacher could direct their inquiry. From the summaries, they prepared a synopsis—oral, visual, written—for the class;

groups worked with topics that covered the history, the individual, the justice system in France, and the witnesses. The final activity was a minitrial (language system, cultural content, communication strategies, critical thinking) and judgment. In their journals, individuals reflected on the issue of punishing war criminals (critical thinking, language system).

In this example, there are multiple opportunities for assessment based on the standards: the quality of the *interpretation* of the documents from the Web; the *presentation* of information to classmates; the *cultural practices* in terms of the conduct of justice; the *connections* to history and current events *knowledge* gained; and the effectiveness of the *interpersonal* communication in the mock trial.

As readers think about the research, theories, and practices provided by the authors in this volume, they will also want to draw upon elements in the curricular weave as they implement standards in classrooms. These elements, it must be remembered, are means to standards, not ends in themselves.

On the Horizon: New Assessments

It comes as no surprise that a variety of new assessments will be required to transform content standards to performance standards that answer the question, "How good is good enough?" These new assessments will have to be designed, piloted, reviewed, and revised many times, given the changing psychometrics that must be adapted. Assessments will not be primarily of the forced-choice design that lends itself so readily to statistical analysis and traditional measures of reliability and validity. Wiggins (1993, 1998) and Wiggins and Kline (1998) have set out the challenge for the profession, and multiple efforts are under way. ACTFL has a task force investigating assessments appropriate to standards operating under the title, *Beyond the OPI*.[3] While the national standards project was charged solely with developing content standards, many of the state standards-setting efforts are also responsible for performance standards and recommendations for testing. Communication among these projects could ease the burden of unnecessary replication of effort in the expectation that useful and usable assessments would arise that would measure the standards that are common to all.

In their chapters, where appropriate, the authors have shared their thinking on directions that assessments might take in the goal areas about which they write. Assessment will be a continuing topic as the profession moves forward with student standards as well as with standards for entry-level and for experienced teachers.

World Languages for *ALL* Students? What Does That Mean?

The Statement of Philosophy that opens the standards document clearly confirms that "ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical." The philosophy statement elaborates the conditions that would render language learning achievable by all students by proposing that:

All students can be successful language and culture learners, and they

- must have access to language and culture study that is integrated into the entire school experience,
- benefit from the development and maintenance of proficiency in more than one language,
- learn in a variety of ways and settings, and
- acquire proficiency at varied rates. (*SFLL:* 7)

Many teachers will find it much easier to embrace this philosophy in thought than in deed. Most teachers were trained to teach students who fit the mold of the ideal, although the last decades have already provided a more diverse student body, especially with programs in elementary and middle schools. Lindquist and Rosen (1997:5) remind us of the exclusiveness of our discipline and theirs that went on for many years: "It has almost become a cliché that mathematics is for all students, but, as with foreign languages, this has not always been true. Instead, for centuries, mathematics was the province of the intellectual elite." Likewise, foreign languages was once the domain of the college preparatory curriculum or open to students with "good grades" in English. If our profession truly believes that all students should experience the study of another language throughout their school years, then we must accept the challenge of teaching them for success, not dooming them to failure.

As we work with students who have physical and learning challenges, who come from a variety of ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds, who possess different learning styles, talents, and interests, we will need to create more research to help us help them be successful language learners. No one chapter, no one book can capture the essence of all this diversity; this body of information will have to accumulate bit by bit over time. In this volume, Lyman-Hager and Burnett examine one small piece of the giant puzzle, readers using computer-generated texts so that teachers can gain insights into how they learn to interpret. Language learning has always been complex—as it expands in school programs, layers of complexity will be added.