

"The limits of my language are the limits of my world."

Ludwig Wittgenstein
Austrian Philosopher

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Purpose Of A Guide To K-12 Program Development In World Languages¹

The *Guide to K-12 Program Development in World Languages* provides a road map for school districts in Connecticut as they develop and implement a world languages program appropriate for the 21st century. In an increasingly interdependent world, education for all children clearly must include learning languages other than English and understanding cultures other than that of "mainstream" U.S.A.

How is this guide different from those offered in the past? First, it appears at a moment full of promise and possibility, when research on language acquisition has given educators new perspectives on language learning. Second, it appears in a context of national education reform, as Goals 2000 and national standards movements challenge educators, students and parents to raise their expectations for student achievement. Third, it appears when Connecticut residents, like others in the United States, are realizing that they are increasingly part of an economic, political and cultural global network. Finally, it appears as new technologies make communication with other linguistic and cultural communities quicker and easier than ever before.

This guide describes what students should know and be able to do at various grade levels and stages of language learning. It is not intended to be prescriptive, but rather to illustrate, suggest and stimulate creative teaching and learning. This guide introduces new concepts in this regard, particularly in the realm of extending world languages instruction to the elementary grades. It also emphasizes connections with other disciplines and linguistic communities through technological as well as traditional means.

Development Of This Guide

The goals and standards of the *Guide to K-12 Program Development in World Languages* are based on the 1996 publication *Standards of Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, a collaborative effort of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, the American Association of Teachers of French, the American Association of Teachers of German and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese.² These national standards subsequently were endorsed by more than 45 teachers' associations (including the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers, or CT COLT) representing a wide range of languages and all regions of the United States.

The Connecticut guide has been developed under the direction of the state foreign language consultant, now called the state world languages consultant. A

group of experienced language educators from the K-16 continuum was convened and met regularly over a three-year period. This volunteer group sought to integrate national-level goals for student language learning with those embedded in *Connecticut's Common Core of Learning*. Subcommittees developed various sections of the document and solicited examples of learning activities, assessments and authentic student work from Connecticut language teachers. The document was then distributed to educators throughout the state for feedback in order to reflect a broad consensus. Ultimately, two out-of-state experts with national status reviewed the work.

Definition Of Content Domain: Rationale

This guide deals with the teaching and learning of a second or additional languages. This is the domain traditionally known as "foreign languages." The Connecticut guide breaks with tradition and departs from the national *Standards of Foreign Language Learning* in choosing to call this curricular area "world languages."

Over the last decade, language teachers have increasingly questioned the description of their subject as "foreign" language. They find the word "foreign" both inaccurate and counterproductive, since it evokes a sense of "other," and too often "otherness" is associated with that which is strange. Thus the Connecticut guide talks about "world languages," that is, languages that are spoken all over the world, as well as within the borders of the United States.

Ancient and classical languages also are included in the designation "world languages." In the words of the national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, "study of classical languages offers students the same benefits as the study of other languages, except that the emphasis on using the language for oral communication is not as significant. The insights into language development, the interaction with ancient civilizations through their literature, and the cross-cultural understanding that results from the study of these languages are all compelling reasons for the inclusion of (classical) language instruction in the curricula of our schools."³

¹ Formerly known as foreign languages

² National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. 1996. *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*. Yonkers, NY: National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. Parts of this chapter are adapted with permission from the *Standards'* statement of philosophy (7), introduction (11-15) and a chapter titled "Language Study in the United States" (7-21). See Appendix A for chart: *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*.

³ *Standards*, 18. See Appendix A: Chart from *Standards for Classical Language Learning*, a project of the American Classical League and the American Philological Association Taskforce on Standards, June 1997.

Today, as new technologies make global communication more accessible, it is essential for all U.S. students to become linguistically equipped to function in many different cultural settings. This means all students should develop and maintain proficiency not only in English, but also in at least one other language. Moreover, students who come from homes where a language other than English is spoken should have the opportunity to maintain their first language, perfect their command of English and have the chance to study a third language if they wish.

Philosophy

Connecticut educators affirm that language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. From the moment of birth, the child begins to interact with the immediate world through sounds and language.⁴ As the child matures and communication broadens through reading and writing, language takes on more complex functions.

This guide reflects the belief that education in world languages and cultures provides unique benefits: It broadens intellectual perspectives, increases awareness of self and others and encourages participation in a wider community. Second, this guide assumes that **all** students can be successful learners of languages and cultures, if they are given the following opportunities: programs that are integrated into the entire school experience; instructional approaches and strategies that address a variety of learning styles and needs; and expectations that are flexible and appropriate. Finally, the guide assumes that language and culture must be an integral part of the core curriculum, not a marginal subject or elective option.

In addition to these assumptions about language learning, this guide reflects current thinking in Connecticut and the United States. Specifically, effective language instruction is influenced by the length and design of programs, the quality of assessment, the amount of technological support and the resources devoted to programs.

The Nature Of Learning And Teaching

This guide shares the view held by contemporary educators that students learn most effectively when they (1) are actively engaged, (2) can manipulate materials themselves, (3) apply previous knowledge, (4) ask questions and (5) draw their own conclusions. The guide also recognizes that students bring multiple intelligences and learning styles to the classroom. Native speakers, for example, will have different needs and abilities than second-language learners. Students will also bring different levels of cognitive knowledge, motivation and linguistic

experience into the classroom; they will begin studying world languages at various ages and will develop varying proficiencies over time.

This guide acknowledges that language learning is in some ways unique. Language can be learned naturally, that is, without conscious effort and without formal instruction, as in the case of young children at home. Moreover, the national *Standards of Foreign Language Learning* point out, "There are plentiful examples of children learning a second language through exposure and use far outside of school environments — residence in the country of the language learned being a typical case."⁵ To acquire an effective level of communicative competence demands more than a sequential learning of grammar and vocabulary. Students must **use** the language itself to communicate; that is, to speak and understand, to read and comprehend and to acquire complex concepts related to culture and communication.

The national *Standards of Foreign Language Learning* document sets forth a new meaning of "communication." Listening to, speaking, reading and writing another language and the links to its underlying culture(s) are embedded in three distinct communicative modes: **interpersonal**, **interpretive** and **presentational**. The first, interpersonal, uses direct oral or written communication (listen, speak, read, write with personal contact between individuals). The second mode, interpretive, focuses on receptive communication of oral or written messages (listen, read, view print or non-print materials with no personal contact between individuals). The presentational mode uses oral or written language in a "one-to-many mode" (speak, write, show oral or written language for an audience with no immediate personal contact).⁶ Awareness and use of these three modes refine to a greater degree our understanding of what it means to communicate and enhance the entire communicative process that is the essence of world languages study.

Finally, the guide's focus on communicative tasks is compatible with educational trends toward student-centered, active learning. It reinforces the teacher's primary role as a coach and facilitator in addition to being a teacher and presenter of knowledge.

The Nature of Curriculum

Curriculums in the United States strive for balance and compromise. They reflect the tensions among state requirements and local preferences, the needs of regional work forces and the demands of the future. The writers of this guide acknowledge that Connecticut boasts many

⁴ See a report of the latest research in "Fertile Mind," *TIME*, February 3, 1997, 49-56.

⁵ *Standards*, 21.

⁶ *Standards*, 32-34.

outstanding world languages programs. The new challenges and innovative approaches to language instruction presented in this guide are intended to provide stimulation and guidance. Individual school districts must decide how to address the standards and at what rate to implement change.

The Role Of Assessment

Assessment plays an indispensable role in curriculum and instruction. The types of assessment used should match the goals of the program, e.g., a proficiency-based communicative program should include assessment of oral and listening skills as well as the traditional skills of reading and writing, particularly as they have evolved and are now presented in the national standards document.⁷ A variety of assessments reflecting individual learning styles, multiple intelligences⁸ and peer and self-assessments also should be included.⁹ For students and teachers, such a range provides broader feedback, helping them to identify strong points in performance and enabling them to work on weak points as well. Assessment also is an important tool for program improvement. In the years to come, the challenge will be to integrate the nature of language learning into the design of good assessment.¹⁰

Relationship Of The Guide To The Common Core Of Learning

In addition to drawing on the philosophy of the national standards and current thinking in the wider educational community, this guide embodies the values and goals of *Connecticut's Common Core of Learning*. The Common Core stresses (1) foundational skills and competencies; (2) understandings and applications (discipline based and interdisciplinary skills); and (3) aspects of character that cut across the entire K-12 continuum. See footnote #9 for more information.

The study of another language and culture strengthens intellectual skills such as critical thinking and the ability to see connections between the various disciplines. Since the content of world languages courses addresses history, geography, social studies, science, mathematics and the fine arts, students can easily develop an interdisciplinary perspective while they gain intercultural understanding. Moreover, language pedagogy routinely makes use of such varied approaches as (1) images and items from real life that can sharpen perception; (2) physical activities and games that reinforce lessons kinesthetically; (3) role plays and dramatic activities; (4) music in both receptive and participatory modes; and (5) a range of tasks that require sequencing, memorizing, problem solving and inductive as well as deduc-

tive reasoning. In addition, this broad range of instructional strategies addresses a variety of learning styles and expands learners' awareness of the many dimensions of their own intelligence.

World languages instruction also is particularly suited to teach the important lesson that learning can and should take place beyond the classroom. It equips students for lifelong learning, for both personal interest and demands of the workplace.

Critical Directions For Change

This guide does not repudiate earlier language teaching practices, but represents an evolution beyond traditional practice. Changing social and economic needs, as well as more recent insights into the nature and use of language and the ways in which it is most effectively acquired, have necessitated new methods.

How do the recommendations of this guide differ from past practice? First, their collective vision is emphatically inclusive. The guide assumes that all students – including those who plan to work immediately after high school or attend vocational/technical institutions, and those who may be struggling academically – can benefit from language instruction. Second, the guide recommends that language instruction start very early, preferably in kindergarten or the early elementary grades, and continue for longer periods of time. Developing real proficiency requires far more time and effort than we traditionally have devoted to language learning. Furthermore, this guide recommends that elementary school language instruction become the rule rather than the exception, and that school districts move toward long-term, coherent sequences of language instruction which provide adequate time for skill development. Thus the guide provides descriptors of skill levels for elementary and middle as well as high school students.

⁷ See Appendix A for chart: "Framework of Communicative Modes" from *Standards*, 33.

⁸ See Appendix A for chart: "49 MI (multiple intelligences) Assessment Contexts from *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* by Thomas Armstrong, 1994. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia, 126.

⁹ For more information on assessment strategies, holistic scoring, rubrics and portfolio assessment, see *Articulation & Achievement: Connecting Standards, Performance and Assessment in Foreign Languages*, 29-40.

¹⁰ See Chapter 5, which discusses the relationship between the study of world languages and performance on other assessments, such as the Connecticut Mastery Test, the Connecticut Academic Performance Test and other standardized tests. See Appendix A for (1) *Connections* and (2) *Foreign Language Department Connecticut Academic Performance Test Action Plan*.

Beyond that, what does the guide propose that is new? In some cases, the differences are obvious; in others, more subtle. As in the national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, Program Goal #1 in this guide states that students will learn to "communicate in at least one language other than English." The key word here is "communicate." Development of skills in listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing alone is insufficient; students must be able to use those skills for communication in three distinct modes (interpersonal, interpretive, presentational), in a wide variety of contexts, and in culturally appropriate ways.

The executive summary of the national document *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* advocates teaching that leads to "knowing how, when and why to say what to whom."¹¹ Formerly, world languages teaching concentrated on the "how" of grammar and the "what" of vocabulary. While these components continue to be important, the overarching goal of world languages study is communication. Communication requires equally close attention to the "why," the "who" and the "when" of linguistic interactions.

Program Goal #2 calls for students to "gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures." The innovation here becomes apparent in what the program goal defines as "culture." In addition to a more conservative concept of culture, including art, music and literature, the expanded notion of "culture" now includes aspects of daily living, e.g., beliefs, customs and behaviors. In other words, the program goal aims for an anthropological definition of culture that includes cognitive knowledge. It challenges students' power of understanding, analysis and judgment.

Program Goal #3 is a significant departure from traditional language instruction. It asks students to "make connections with other areas of study and acquire information." It challenges students to use world languages to access information that enhances their study of other subjects which, in turn, reinforces language learning.

This notion of interdisciplinary connection is, in part, the result of a growing movement for "language across the curriculum." It is based on the assumption that hard-won language skills cannot be developed and maintained in curricular isolation. They require repeated application in a range of disciplines. Beyond that, the idea of linking language study with other realms of knowledge is also the consequence of new communication technologies that make information immediate and accessible in many languages.

Program Goal #4 challenges students to "understand the nature of languages and cultures through comparisons." Students develop greater insights into the nature of the English language and United States culture by comparing and contrasting them with other world languages and cultures.

Program Goal #5 calls for students to "participate in multilingual communities within a variety of contexts." The activities that support this goal reinforce and refine classroom learning. Students use the language in authentic situations, such as traveling abroad, shopping or watching a film. They learn to accept languages other than English as part of everyday life, which can lead to a lifetime of learning, broader interests and greater cultural sensitivity.

Organization Of The Curriculum Guide

After this introduction, which is **Chapter 1**, the guide contains four additional chapters and six appendices. **Chapter 2** represents the heart and soul of this guide. It is the longest and most complex chapter, and it provides an understanding of the individual components of the world languages standards: program goals, K-12 content standards, performance standards, illustrative learning activities, prototype assessments and exemplars of student work.

Chapter 3 discusses the elements of an effective program, such as instructional materials, instructional time, technology and professional development. It provides guidelines for implementing a high-performance world languages program.

Chapter 4 suggests steps a school district might follow in developing its language program. It discusses such key considerations as available resources, issues and trends in world languages education, district needs and development of a program philosophy.

Chapter 5 outlines issues and questions in contemporary world languages instruction. It begins with a discussion of (1) the gap between the optimal time for language acquisition, which research indicates is the early elementary grades, and when most Connecticut children begin to study a second language, and (2) the gap between high expectations for student achievement and low investment in language instruction. It goes on to examine other major issues, such as testing and accountability, definitions of student proficiency and progress, and equitable access to quality instruction and new technologies. Although no definitive answers are given for the questions raised in this section, an awareness of these issues may help school districts to clarify their own thinking regarding world languages instruction.

¹¹ Standards, 11.

Technology

This guide, like the national *Standards of Foreign Language Learning*, does not contain a separate program goal for technology. Instead, the goals, standards, activities and assessments assume that teachers and students will become technologically literate and will integrate audio, video, multimedia and computer technology into world languages instruction.

Conclusion

The *Guide to K-12 Program Development in World Languages* is intended to be a resource for school districts as they establish high standards for world languages programs in the next century. Its writers and contributors re-emphasize that it contains suggestions and illustrations, not prescriptions. While this document does not reflect all current world languages program configurations in the state, it is designed to allow programs with multiple or different entry points to extract activities that are adaptable for students at various levels of proficiency.

Consideration of the guide's goals, standards, activities and assessments, as well as discussions of critical issues, is a first step for Connecticut communities as they design their own high-quality language programs for all students.

