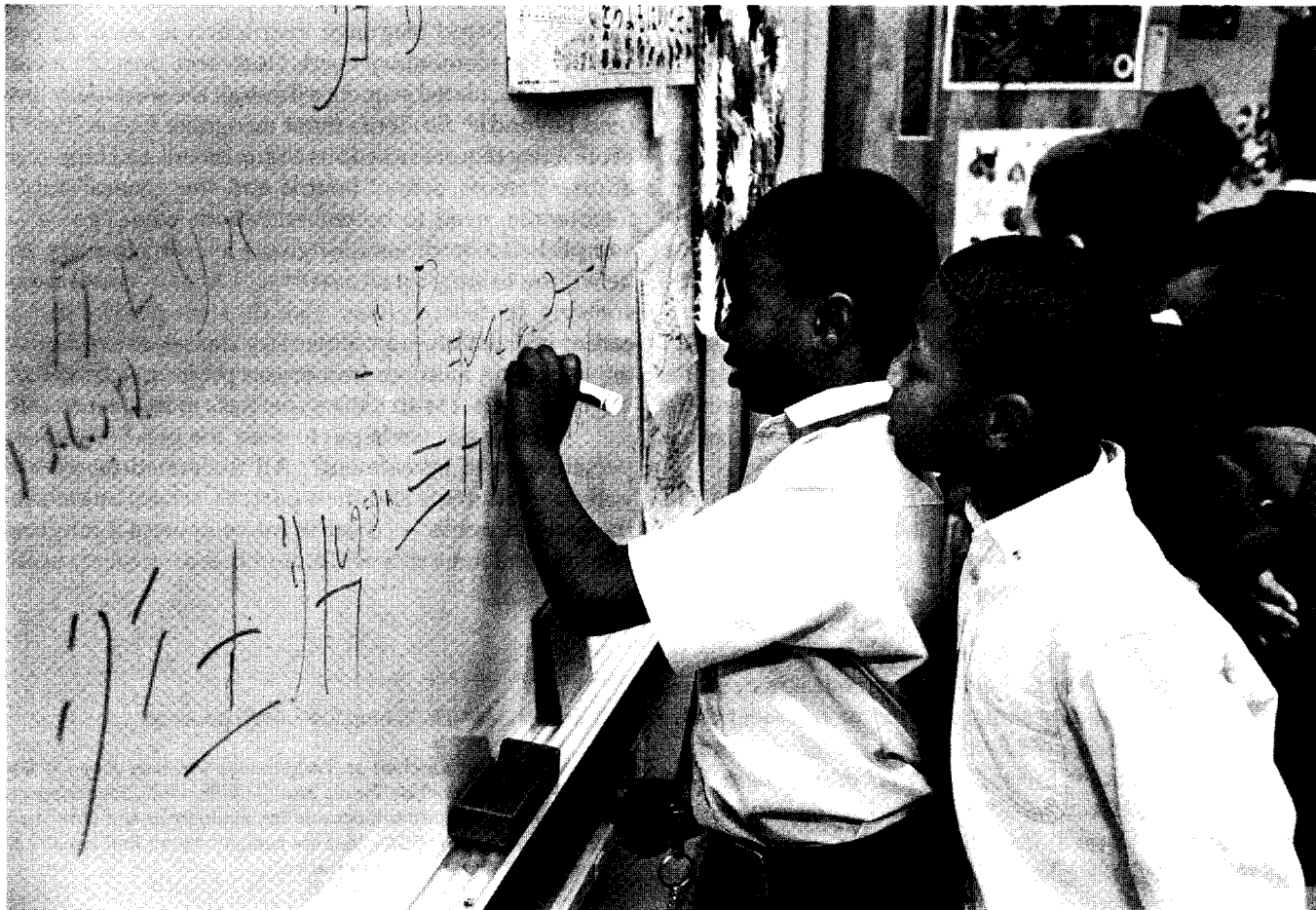


*"To build citizens for the 21st century, we must continuously strive to offer instruction that helps students learn to see through the eyes, minds, and hearts of others."*

Siegfried Ramler, Chair  
ASCD Commission For Global/International Education

The Gap Between Expectations And Investment  
The Gap Between Research Findings And The Onset Of Language Study  
Accountability And The Improvement Of Student Performance In World Languages And The Broader Curriculum  
Proficiency-Based Expectations  
Parents And The Community As Partners  
Supportive School Environments  
Equity And Diversity  
The Role Of New Technologies In Teaching And Learning  
Scheduling  
Articulation  
The New World Languages Learner  
Developing New Models: Dual Language And Immersion Programs



World languages instruction shares many of the challenges faced by other subject areas as we work to raise the overall quality of primary and secondary education in the United States. At the same time, however, languages face particular problems related to the special nature of language learning, the lack of emphasis on world languages instruction in many United States curriculums, and changing demographics both within schools and the larger community. This chapter explores two kinds of issues: those that are specific to world languages and those that have been identified as critical for United States education as a whole but have special implications for world languages instruction.

These issues include the following: (1) the gap between expectations for language and culture proficiency on one hand and investment of time and money on the other; (2) the gap between what research says is the optimum language-learning age and the time when most children begin their language study; (3) accountability and improvement of student performance; (4) proficiency-based expectations; (5) the role of parents and the community; (6) supportive school environments; (7) equity and diversity; (8) the role of new technologies; (9) scheduling; (10) articulation from level to level; (11) the changing profile of the world languages learner; and (12) developing new models.

### The Gap Between Expectations And Investment

United States education has been widely criticized for not setting high enough standards. Yet, in world languages instruction, the problem has perhaps not been a lack of high standards on the part of teachers nor an absence of ambition on the part of language learners. Rather, the problem is a discrepancy between ambitious goals for language learning and what can realistically be achieved, given the time, energy and resources districts have typically been willing to invest in language learning.

If one surveys a class to find out which of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) students would most like to develop, the majority will unhesitatingly answer "speaking." Certainly, being able to communicate directly with a person from another country in that person's language is an exciting and gratifying experience, but language teachers know that of the four skills, speaking is by far the most difficult, requiring more time and effort to develop than any other skill. Through the work of the United States Foreign Service Institute, the Educational Testing Service and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), we know that the typical Connecticut

student who begins studying a world language in Grade 7 or 9 is exposed to only a fraction of the contact hours required to achieve a high level of proficiency in a second language.

Clearly, then, there is a serious contradiction between the requirements for true, functional proficiency and what individuals and schools currently invest in language learning.

### The Gap Between Research Findings And The Onset Of Language Study

The latest neurolinguistic research<sup>1</sup> indicates that the ability to acquire proficiency in another language may begin to diminish after the age of 6. This new research is compelling for its reinforcement of the importance of introducing world languages in the primary grades, not only to build language proficiency, but also to enhance the cognitive development of the young child's brain. Yet, most Connecticut children begin the study of another language well past the age of 6 and in many districts as late as 14 or 15 years old, which may negatively affect students' level of proficiency and their feelings toward the language learning process.

If students are to achieve proficiency, school districts must begin language instruction as early as possible in the elementary curriculum and provide a continuous, articulated sequence through the secondary level (and beyond).<sup>2</sup> Students must recognize that achieving proficiency requires a serious commitment and long-term effort. Parents, school boards and the general public, meanwhile, need to be realistic about what can be accomplished in traditional language-learning formats, and be willing to support alternatives. Other avenues for increasing proficiency may include such possibilities as earlier instruction, supplementary classes after school or on weekends, summer immersion programs, travel and ongoing contact with native speakers in the community.

How can we begin to close the gap between expectations and investment? All the constituencies involved — students and their parents, school boards and the general public — need to move beyond a language requirement mentality and accept that proficiency in lan-

<sup>1</sup> "Fertile Minds." TIME, February 3, 1997, pp. 49-56.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for chart on *Early Foreign Language Program Goals* (Rhodes, as adapted by Pesola and Curtain, 1993) describing programs that are sequential, cumulative, continuous and part of a K-12 sequence vs. programs that are noncontinuous and usually not part of an integrated K-12 sequence.

guges other than English is a necessity. In other words, learning another language is not just a meaningless hoop that schools force students to jump through; rather, the experience provides essential preparation for a successful professional and personal life in the decades to come. As the Connecticut State Board of Education stated in October 1996: *Individuals who are competent in more than one language and are knowledgeable about more than one culture are an essential asset to the state's schools, communities, workforce and the national and international marketplace . . . (and) . . . will be among those best suited to assume leadership and other important positions in the national and international marketplace.*<sup>3</sup>

### Accountability And The Improvement Of Student Performance In World Languages And The Broader Curriculum

If we value world languages and want students to study them seriously, and if school districts are to be motivated to provide high-quality language instruction, it follows that world languages should be appropriately represented in testing programs at all levels. Appropriate tests already exist; they include the Advanced Placement (AP) Examinations for languages; Scholastic Assessment Tests (SAT), including SAT 2 with Listening; the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI); and the Connecticut Assessment of Educational Progress (CAEP) for French, German, Italian, Latin and Spanish, an innovative, ground-breaking test that was piloted in 1987 but never fully implemented.

Students who study world languages also benefit when taking other formal tests. Study of a world language reinforces both language arts objectives and mathematical concepts. That is, world languages instruction, like English language arts, develops student competency in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Moreover, world languages teachers use strategies that reinforce the language arts embedded in the five strands of the Connecticut Mastery Test: "greater reading comprehension, higher degrees of reading power, more direct assessment of writing, stronger written communication and sharper listening comprehension." In mathematics, world languages teachers use approaches and activities such as money and time, measurement, the metric system, map skills, pattern awareness, story problems and notation which directly reinforce concepts tested in the Connecticut Mastery Test.<sup>4</sup>

The kinds of skills and cognitive learning that students acquire in the language classroom are also eminently transferable to other disciplines. For example, in world languages classrooms, students learn to process, organize and follow directions; they analyze and integrate information from a variety of disciplines and sources; and they use the language they are learning to

construct an understanding of another social reality. Thus they learn to view the world from a variety of perspectives. Moreover, such information and skills can and should be assessed in the context of other subjects, for example, history and the social sciences. The study of documents in other world languages besides English can complement and enhance students' preparation for the critical thinking and interdisciplinary components of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT).<sup>5</sup> Such study has the virtue of authenticity and can give students of world languages a legitimate advantage on these and other standardized tests.

At the elementary level, content-based world languages instruction reinforces children's developing knowledge and basic skills in English and other subject areas, effectively laying a sound foundation for future scholastic achievement. At all levels, language learning can stimulate the development of critical thinking skills. Moreover, linking languages with other disciplines reinforces both language and other disciplinary learning.

### Proficiency-Based Expectations

Schools and colleges must move from a course-based to a proficiency-based definition of world languages requirements. Traditionally, academic requirements have been defined in terms of numbers of courses or years of time to be devoted to learning a particular subject matter. Yet in language, at least (and arguably in other disciplines as well), what matters is not so much the time invested as the result: what students can actually do with the language.

If our students are to achieve a particular level of proficiency, we must define that level of proficiency, then supply enough appropriate learning activities to allow the student to achieve or surpass the minimum requirement. We should describe language learners not as "first-year" or "second-year" students, but rather as

<sup>3</sup> *Position Statement on the Education of Students Acquiring English as a Second Language*, Connecticut State Board of Education, Hartford, Connecticut, October 2, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A for *Connections: World Languages and Language Arts, World Languages and Mathematics*.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix A for *Foreign Language Department Connecticut Academic Performance Test Action Plan: Current Strategies and Techniques and Plans for Improvements at Enfield High School and Enrico Fermi High School* prepared by Donna Lyons, Enfield High School, Enfield, Connecticut.

students who have acquired, say, a novice or intermediate level of proficiency. Appropriate materials need to be available to help students move from one skill level to the next; the length of time a student needs to meet the requirement should be a secondary consideration. Thus, two or three versions of learning materials should be available for students who may need two or three years to progress from novice to intermediate. For those who are able to progress more rapidly, advanced materials should be available as well. In general, world languages curriculums must become more fluid and flexible, and less constrained by traditional administrative devices such as semesters, courses or credits.

Moving to a proficiency-based definition of language achievement also means acknowledging language skills acquired in nontraditional ways, e.g., through travel, residence in another country or interaction with family members who speak the language. It also implies an equitable way of assessing those skills in students of different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Significant work to implement articulated, proficiency-based world languages curriculums has been supported since the early 1990s by the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), The College Board, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the New England Network of Academic Alliances in Foreign Languages and Literatures. The recent book *Articulation & Achievement: Connecting Standards, Performance, and Assessment in Foreign Language*<sup>6</sup> includes definitions of proficiency and benchmarks for learners which provide a useful framework for any district interested in moving to a proficiency-based world languages program.<sup>7</sup>

## Parents And The Community As Partners

Engaging parents and the community as partners to support world languages instruction for all students is essential. However, some parents' lack of familiarity with their child's target language, a negative experience with language learning in high school, or skepticism about the value of world languages study must be addressed. Creative activities such as immersion experiences, exchanges or workshops that include the parent(s) as well as the student can increase parents' comfort levels with world languages learning, and make it easier to obtain parental cooperation in making language learning part of the everyday life of the household (as when common objects around the house or food items are labeled with their name in the target language).

Other community-outreach strategies may include building relationships with target-language speakers in the local community; for example, native speakers can become involved in mentoring students in person or via E-mail. While supporting students as they gain skills

in their new language, such relationships also can help to create and sustain community support for language programs.

These relationships also have the advantage of providing authentic target-language experiences. In general, if we are serious about helping language learners to develop communicative competence, we must work to provide them with a wider range of authentic experiences with the language.

## Supportive School Environments

The physical plant should support world languages learning by providing appropriately equipped multimedia language and computer labs, world languages resource rooms, world languages library and video resources, and international food choices in the cafeteria. The availability of these resources sends a clear message to the community of learners, including other faculty members and administrators, that international perspectives and languages are valued.

Simultaneously, world languages instruction can contribute to a more constructive learning environment by exposing young people to alternative models for youth/adult interaction and alternative means of socialization through the example of other cultures. These include, for example, the view, common in other countries, that children must be protected, nurtured and disciplined by the whole community, not just the immediate family; the greater degree of intergenerational contact and learning in other cultures; and the perception in other cultures that adults in general, and teachers in particular, are figures worthy of special respect.

## Equity And Diversity

More than any other discipline, world languages contribute to students' knowledge about and appreciation for diverse cultural experiences and perspectives. From the idiosyncrasies of grammar, vocabulary and syntax to particular facts about the culture, economics or history of the target-language countries, world languages instruction is infused with the message of serious and respectful interest in those who are different from us.

<sup>6</sup> *Articulation & Achievement: Connecting Standards, Performance, and Assessment in Foreign Language*. New York: The College Board, 1996.

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix A for the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the Five Stages of the Language Learning Continuum with Rubrics for Holistic Scoring from *Articulation & Achievement*.

Given that respect and interest, equity considerations should be especially pervasive in world languages. In hiring, it is important to broaden the pool of language teachers by recruiting individuals from a wider diversity of backgrounds, including native speakers of world languages. Student recruitment must reflect the conviction that languages are not just for the college bound or liberal arts majors, who have been the traditional students of languages. Efforts must be made to debunk the myths and stereotypes about various languages and the kinds of people who take them, e.g., Spanish is “easy,” German is for budding chemists. In thinking about the range of languages that deserve serious study, planning and course offerings must move away from a Eurocentric focus to promote non-European languages as well. At the same time, curriculum and instruction must reflect and honor the fact that, for example, French is spoken not only in France but in Canada, the Caribbean, Asia and Africa.

Not least of all, language instruction should try, to the extent possible, to support the native language needs of emerging English speakers. Their heritage languages can be an enormous asset to the United States, if their skills (particularly reading and writing) are developed and thus made available to the United States culture and marketplace.

### The Role Of New Technologies In Teaching And Learning

The availability of an astonishing range of technologies (from tape recorders, videos, television broadcasts and computer-assisted learning to linked communication systems such as the World Wide Web) has had an enormous beneficial impact on world languages instruction. Students and teachers alike have been freed from total dependence on the textbook and the written word; they have come closer and closer, through sound, then image, then spontaneous communication, to authentic communication in the target language. Students today have more opportunities than ever before to see environments, hear accents and learn information about the target language and culture(s), thereby acquiring language in more efficient and meaningful ways.

In using technology, several issues need to be considered.

- The linguistic difficulty and/or cultural sophistication of some authentic language materials may mean that while such resources are theoretically available, in practical terms they are inaccessible to students. The availability of materials does not neces-

sarily mean that they will be viable for instruction or students’ self-directed learning.

- In order for Internet use to be most effective, world languages teachers urgently need opportunities to learn how to access the Internet, and, more important, to learn how to develop appropriate classroom applications of both the Internet and other newly available resources.
- Copyright questions will need to be addressed with increasing frequency as materials accessed through the Internet or other technologically advanced means are used in world languages classrooms and shared with other teachers and programs.
- Parental or school-defined policies and controls on Internet use may limit teachers’ or students’ access to the Internet.
- Issues of censorship may arise, particularly given the varying levels of tolerance in different cultures for materials that may be perceived as violent, sexually explicit, or critical of religion, politics, education or other social institutions.
- Equipment availability may be limited if world languages classes are forced to compete with other subject areas for access to equipment. In such competition, because world languages classes are likely to have lower student enrollments than disciplines such as English or history, their claims for access may be given lower priority.
- School districts and world languages programs will have to strike a balance between the use of new technologies and competing demands on teacher or classroom time.
- The costs and benefits – or dangers – of investing in new technologies (sometimes to the detriment of personnel, textbooks or more traditional equipment needs) should be weighed carefully.

At the same time, we need to recognize that for all their power and potential, new technologies cannot replace teacher-student or student-student interactions. This is even more true for languages than it is for any other subject, for the basic purpose of languages is to facilitate human interaction. Nor is there any fully satisfactory technological substitute for the nonverbal aspects of human communication, including body language, facial expressions, eye contact, etc.

Distance learning, too, presents a special case for language instructors. It promises an economical, flexible way to provide instruction in a variety of languages to a widely dispersed audience of learners. However,

policies are needed to protect existing traditional language programs and to ensure that distance learning does not replace such programs. For example, policies can be devised to ensure that money saved in one part of a language program is reinvested or earmarked for another area of the program, e.g., materials acquisition or an advanced class, and not withdrawn from the language program. Another important fiscal as well as educational consideration is the fact that teachers should receive special training before they can be expected to provide high-quality distance instruction. Distance instruction also requires more time for class preparation — by some conservative estimates, as much as three times the normal preparation time, given the technical and practical demands of the distance course, coordination with on-site aides, the need to fax assignments and return homework, etc. No school district should be under the impression that distance language instruction is merely “business as usual” in front of a camera.

In general, this should be the guiding principle: Technology used for world languages instruction will enrich the curriculum; it should not serve as a means to reduce the district’s academic or financial commitment to language programs. If, however, through the cooperation of school districts, distance learning can provide access to a longer sequence of study or a wider choice of languages for students, then this vehicle of study should be pursued.

## Scheduling

Variations in scheduling have become one of the latest reforms in United States schooling. Schedule changes have definite implications, positive and negative alike, for world languages instruction.

“Block” scheduling, a term which covers a variety of options, is based on the assumption that if students study fewer subjects for a longer period of time, their learning will be enhanced and problems such as low motivation, disinterest and lack of individualized attention will be reduced. Structuring the school day to provide fewer periods that are nearly double the length of the normal instructional period (for example, 90 minutes instead of 50) should allow teachers to deal with fewer students per day, thus cutting paperwork and increasing the attention available to individual students; moreover, it should give teachers the opportunity to create more coherent lessons using more interactive methods and activities.

In-depth study is just as desirable in world languages as it is in other disciplines. In fact, longer class periods can include more communication-based activities (which often require more time than a traditional 45- or 50- minute period can provide), thereby reinforcing language acquisition. Because of the interactive, collabo-

rative nature of language use itself, world language teachers have been among the earliest and most enthusiastic advocates of collaborative or team-based activities; and world languages instruction can be greatly enhanced when there is time for videos, the language laboratory or E-mail with a partner halfway around the globe.

Language teachers generally concur, however, that shorter, repeated exposures to the language are more beneficial than longer, less frequent exposures, particularly for beginning students. In addition, because language acquisition includes a skill component as well as cognitive learning, long lapses between language use have a particularly negative effect on retention. In any reorganization of scheduling, therefore, teachers should ask for ‘daily classes, if possible, or for classes on alternating days (the “rotating block” model). World languages programs should avoid scheduling that requires students to “sit out” a semester or year before they can resume language study, and support alternatives which allow students to continue sequential courses through successive semesters. A compromise in which some subjects are taught in blocks while others are taught in the traditional format may work for languages, but districts need to ensure that language classes do not become marginalized as a result.

## Articulation

From kindergarten, primary, middle and high school through community college and the bachelor’s degree level, language instruction urgently needs to be articulated: that is, there must be a systematic sequence of age-appropriate learning developed and coordinated to provide students with the most appropriate learning experiences at every level and to avoid duplication of effort and waste of time or resources. Another area for close monitoring, adjustment and coordination is secondary-level programs (middle or high school) which receive students from a variety of schools within the same community or from different towns in which students may have begun study in different grades and/or had different programs. Ongoing communication among all the staff members involved at all levels under the direction of a systemwide department leader can provide the kind of support that produces a cohesive, well-defined program.

## The New World Languages Learner

World languages are for everyone. Too often world languages study has been considered appropriate only for the college-bound student. This makes little sense for the 21st century, given that the skills and insight that result from studying a world language will be needed by

all students, who must be prepared to live and work in a world that demands international interaction. Today, students who plan to end their academic studies with high school or pursue a technical education are enrolling in world languages classes. For language teachers these are "new" students.

The backgrounds of students in world languages classes will vary. Some may have learning disabilities, receive services under an individualized education program (IEP), or have learning styles that have been incompatible with traditional academic instruction. Many of these students may be involved in remedial English or mathematics programs. These students should not be excluded from world languages classes.<sup>8</sup>

One reason some children experience academic difficulty is their lack of exposure to the same English-language experiences as other children. In a study of partial immersion students studying science in French, Holobow, et al., determined that because the medium of instruction was previously unfamiliar to all participants, the traditional relationship between subject-area achievement and characteristics such as race, ethnicity and socioeconomic class was weakened.<sup>9</sup>

If the new student is aware of being in a more equitable or competitive position and experiences success, the study of a world language may enable that child to encounter similar successes in other subjects as well. This phenomenon has been documented in studies of Washington, D.C. programs in which Latin was offered to elementary-school inner-city children (LeBovit, 1976).<sup>10</sup> Not only did the students prove themselves capable of learning Latin, they also experienced an increase in their achievement in other curricular areas as well.

**Students With Home Backgrounds Other Than English.** One type of "new" student in Connecticut classrooms increasingly is a non-native speaker of English. These students obviously require an adjusted program of language study. Where feasible, they deserve access to knowledge through the native language while they are learning English. In addition, they should be able to build and expand upon their native language proficiency in classes geared to the native speaker. For some students, this may mean becoming literate in the native language which they speak and comprehend. For others, it may mean enhancing their existing literacy with advanced study of their language or their culture's literature.

A strong English as a Second Language program is critical for students with a home background in languages other than English to ensure their academic, social and economic survival in the United States. Many of the goals, content standards and performance standards in Connecticut's *Guide to K-12 Program Development in World Languages* also apply to English as a Second Language programs. The existing transitional bilingual edu-

cation programs that move students into English and "away from" a native language such as Spanish overlook the outstanding advantages of being bilingual and bicultural. Many other countries take for granted that a person has multiple language abilities. That person is still the exception rather than the rule in the United States, despite increasing numbers of immigrants and increased ties abroad.

One of the advantages of being bilingual, apart from the functional ones, is the related cognitive boost. In his book *Mirror of Language: The Debate on Bilingualism*,<sup>11</sup> Kenji Hakuta cites numerous studies that highlight the positive effects of bilingualism. Hakuta's own contribution was studies of "cognitive flexibility," which he found to be a stronger characteristic of bilinguals than of monolinguals. Much of Hakuta's research was conducted in Connecticut.

The actual choices regarding language programs for students from other language backgrounds will be shaped by many factors, including the number of students in a district or school speaking the same language, their levels of proficiency in that language and in English, and available funds. In general, students who are still acquiring the English they need to succeed in school will not benefit from the study of a third language. However, once these students do have sufficient English, they are often superior third-language learners. They should have the option to choose among the same languages as native speakers of English, or to enhance their native language skills, if their district offers such a program.

<sup>8</sup> See The University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities, 1990. *The Strategic Instruction Model*. Lawrence, KS.

<sup>9</sup> Holobow, N.E., et al. (1991). "The Effectiveness of a Foreign Language Immersion Program for Children from Different Ethnic and Social Class Backgrounds: Report 2." *Applied Psycholinguistics* 12, no. 2: 179-198.

<sup>10</sup> LeBovit, Judith B. *The Teaching of Latin in the Elementary and Secondary School*. A Handbook for Educators and Administrators. 1976, 63.

<sup>11</sup> Hakuta, Kenji (1986). *Mirror of Language: The Debate on Bilingualism*. New York: Basic Books, 34-36.

## Developing New Models: Dual Language And Immersion Programs

Speakers of other languages are wonderful examples for English-speaking students studying those languages. Some instructional models, such as dual-language or two-way bilingual programs, take advantage of the tremendous asset students bring to these programs when they serve as language “teachers” for each other. In these programs, students spend part of the day learning content in English and part of the day learning content in another language. If the opportunity continues for a number of years, the students can become proficient in both languages. Another model, the immersion program (in which all content is given in a language other than English), recognizes that being truly bilingual is a tremendous advantage, and surrounds the student with the language in order to promote proficiency. The student in this model must negotiate, interact and learn content material exclusively in the second language.<sup>12</sup>

Providing a flexible program to meet the needs of diverse students is one of the top priorities to be addressed in districts across the state and the nation. With this guide as a primary resource, local districts can define a sequential differentiated program for all of their students.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix A for a chart by Nancy Rhodes (as adapted by Pesola and Curtain, 1993), “Early Foreign Language Program Goals.”

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix C for a list of Connecticut programs and other world languages data.

