

## **Bringing The Standards into the Classroom: A Teacher's Guide, second edition**

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The initial plans for this guide were developed in the summer of 1996 at the Curriculum Institute of the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center, held at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. Leaders of this institute were Helena Curtain, Carol Ann Bjornstad Pesola, and Myriam Met. Participants included: Marty Abbott, Peggy Boyles, Christine Brown, Nancy Gadbois, Janice Gullickson, Rita Gullickson, Wilson Kerby, Kathleen Mellor, Genelle Morain, and Deborah Parks.

This guide was written at a four-day workshop held in March 1997, in Rockville, Maryland. The leader of this workshop was Myriam Met. Participants included Marty Abbott, Christine Brown, Nancy Gadbois, Eileen Lorenz, Genelle Morain, Deborah Parks, and Nancy Rhodes. Special thanks to Genelle Morain for her contribution of Appendix C: A Perspective on the Cultural Perspectives.

In the summer of 1997, the guide was piloted at the three institutes of the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa: Performance Assessment Institute, Teacher Educator Partnership Institute, and New Technologies Institute. It was also piloted in the summer of 1997 at the Invitational Workshop of the National Network for Early Language Learning held at Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

We wish to thank the many educators who helped to envision, design, write, and pilot this guide and to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages for its encouragement throughout the process.

Marcia Harmon Rosenbusch  
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# Standards for Foreign Language Learning

## *Communication*

*Communicate in Languages Other Than English*

**Standard 1.1:** Students engage in conversation, 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 life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment and standards for foreign language learning.



# Bringing the Standards into the Classroom: The Teacher's Guide

## Vision

The development of national standards for student learning of foreign languages is unprecedented in this country. Representatives from all teaching levels in the foreign language profession—elementary, secondary, and postsecondary—have come to a consensus on a vision for the field through the process of standards development. This vision is of a long, uninterrupted sequence of foreign language instruction that leads to high levels of proficiency. Essential to this vision is a sequence of foreign language instruction that begins as early as kindergarten and continues through grade twelve and beyond.

In the 1993 legislation *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, the discipline of foreign languages was named a core curricular area together with English, mathematics, science, civics and government, economics, arts, history, and geography. As have these other fields, the foreign language profession developed standards for student learning for kindergarten through twelfth grade. This process was led by a task force representing all levels of foreign language instruction K-16, and included an advisory council made up of members from the profession, business, and the community, and a board of reviewers. Besides the input from the more than 200 official feedback partners, input was also sought from foreign language educators throughout the country during the three-year process.

The national standards are voluntary, but their impact in the field is already beginning to be felt. Many states and national language-specific organizations are in the process of developing their own standards or frameworks to encourage their teachers to implement the national standards.

All classroom teachers are encouraged to integrate the national standards into their teaching and to take an integral part in the historic experience that will evolve during the next decade. The standards provide the profession with a

unique opportunity to prepare students with the knowledge and skills in foreign languages they will need to participate fully in the 21st century. The national standards help the profession build on its past and reach towards the future.

## **Purpose and Use of this Guide**

The purpose of this document is to assist teachers in aligning their present foreign language curriculum with the national standards for student learning. This guide will enable teachers to identify which aspects of their current curriculum fit with the standards and how these can be extended and adapted to address the new dimensions of the standards. Teachers will also learn how they can address each of the five goal areas of the standards in their curriculum.

This document is designed to be used in varied teaching environments from kindergarten through grade twelve. The document is not intended to substitute for guides on how to write curriculum—instead, its purpose is to assist teachers in linking their existing curriculum with the standards and in planning for future curriculum work.

While the primary purpose of this document is to assist classroom teachers, this guide will be useful to foreign language district supervisors, state supervisors, and teacher educators at colleges and universities. Because of the work they do with in-service and pre-service teachers, they play a key role in the transition of the profession to standards-oriented instruction.

This guide is divided into three main sections. Each of these sections is relevant to all teachers since the concepts developed in them will enrich classroom teaching at all levels. The first section addresses developing foreign language curriculum. The second and third sections are designed to meet the needs that are most common today at the grade levels indicated.

The first section, **Linking Standards to the Curriculum Development Process**, speaks to both those who are developing foreign language curriculum individually, such as the sole high school teacher in a small rural school who develops an instructional program for his or her own use, and for those who are working in a team charged with developing a formal curriculum for a school

district. This section is relevant to both types of situations because the instructional program is the de facto curriculum in districts where there is no formal curriculum.

The second section, **Connecting Thematic Units to the Standards at the K-8 Level**, describes the uniquely powerful ways in which thematic instruction can address the standards in the foreign language curriculum. This section provides practical information on how to develop a standards-based foreign language curriculum by using themes from the existing school curricula, such as math, science, reading, and language arts. Examples of thematic units from two levels, grades three and eight, are provided.

The third section, **How to Teach Foreign Language in Secondary School Programs Using the Standards**, is designed to help teachers who use a textbook align their teaching with the national standards. Practical suggestions are provided to help teachers inventory their textbook and the supporting resources they use in the classroom to find connections with the standards and to identify areas they can develop more fully to further align their curriculum with the standards.

## **Becoming Familiar with the National Standards**

To align their curriculum with the standards, teachers will want to become very familiar with the national standards document. For those who have not yet had the opportunity to study the standards document, Appendix A:

**Familiarization Guide to the National Standards** has been included in this guide to assist them in:

- exploring the standards document and identifying the key concepts presented
- reflecting on the significance of the standards for their classroom teaching
- identifying what they have always done that fits with the standards
- envisioning ways they can extend and adapt their successful practices to address the new dimensions of the standards.

In this appendix, key questions are posed followed by a list of the pages in the



standards document that address the questions.

Appendix B: **Exploring the Learning Scenarios** provides teachers with a form to help them expand their understanding of the standards as they analyze one of their current classroom activities. The first part of the form is designed to help teachers identify the standards they are already meeting with the activity. The second part will help them reflect on changes they could make in the activity to target additional standards.

Appendix C: **A Perspective on the Cultural Perspectives** is included to help teachers understand the challenge inherent in meeting the standards goal of *Cultures: Gain knowledge and understanding of other cultures*. The standards no longer primarily represent culture by the little "c" (daily life patterns of the people) and big "C" (their historic and aesthetic contributions). Rather, the focus is on the interdependence and interaction of perspectives, products, and practices.

## Accessing Curriculum Documents

As teachers work with this guide, they will want to have available for reference the curriculum documents designed to guide instruction in their teaching situation. All teachers will use the national standards for foreign languages—*Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century*. (To order a copy contact: National Standards Report, PO Box 1897, Lawrence, KS 66044; Telephone: 785-843-1221; Fax: 785-843-1274. Cost is \$25.)

In the 1999 edition of the national standards document, language-specific standards are included for the following languages: Chinese, Classical Languages, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. In addition to the national standards document and a language specific document, should one be available, the other documents teachers will use will vary from situation to situation. These documents may include: a local district curriculum, a state foreign language framework or standards document, and a language-specific document. To access their state foreign language framework or standards document, teachers should contact their state department of

education.

### **Sharing Teachers' Experiences**

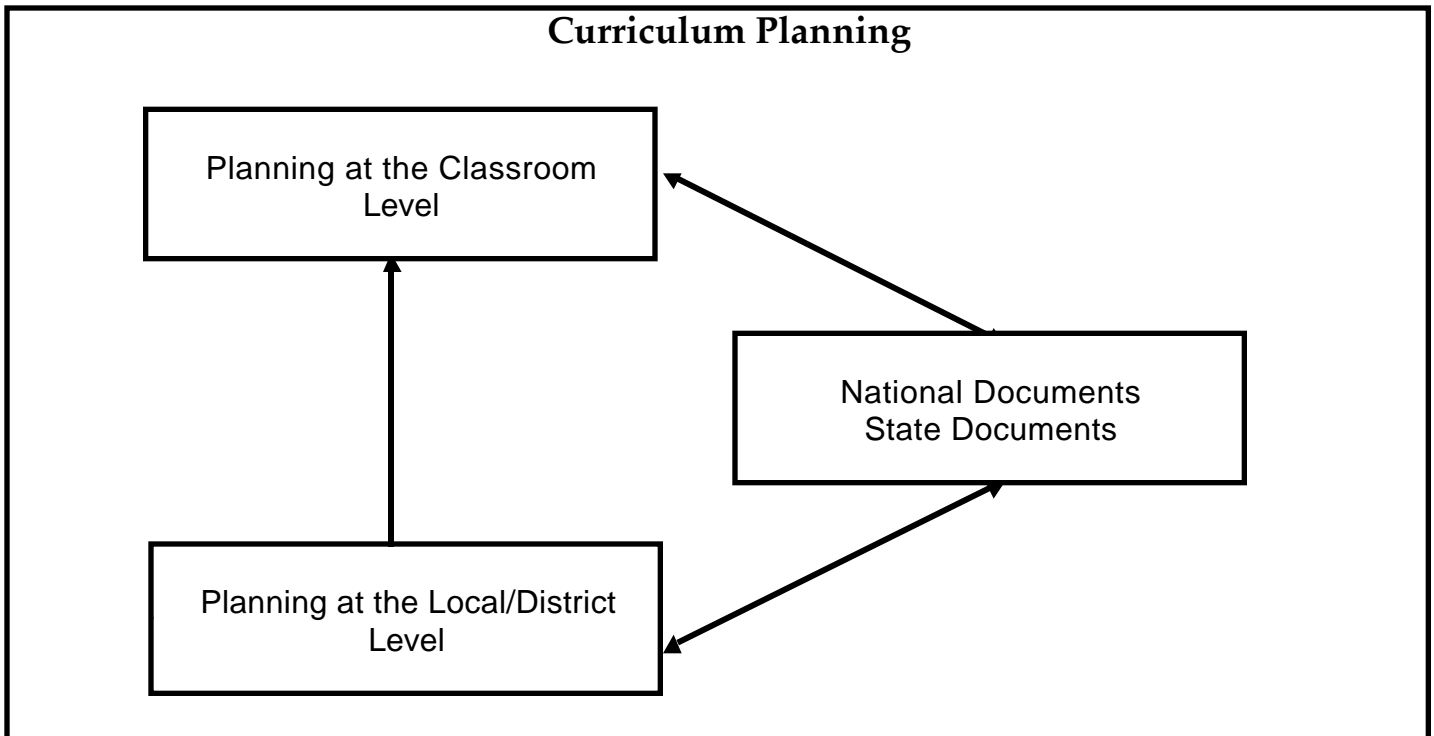
Plans are underway to publish teachers' stories about their experiences as they change their classroom teaching to reflect the national standards. These stories can help others as they too begin to align their curriculum with the standards. Teachers are asked to share their successes as they teach revised or new standards-based lessons and units, and are also asked to give feedback on this guide. Teachers should contact the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center, N131 Lagomarcino Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011; E-mail: [nflrc@iastate.edu](mailto:nflrc@iastate.edu); Telephone: 515-294-6699; Fax: 515-294-2776; Web site: [www.educ.iastate.edu/nflrc](http://www.educ.iastate.edu/nflrc).

## **Linking Standards to the Curriculum Development Process**

The national standards provide goals of unprecedented breadth and depth for foreign language instruction. Classroom teachers in school districts across the country are encouraged to systematically integrate these goals into their instruction so that all students in the United States will benefit from a foreign language program that better prepares them for the future. An essential first step in implementing these goals in the classroom is linking the standards to the curriculum development process.

Ideally, the responsibility for curriculum development and implementation is equally shared by the classroom teacher and the school and/or district administrators. Each learning activity in the teacher's daily lesson plan should lead toward achievement of the goals of the foreign language curriculum, as well as the broad education goals at the local level. In developing or evaluating the local curriculum, the program goals of the curriculum should align with local goals, the state framework or standards, and national standards documents.

In this section, considerations for the curriculum development process are identified in relationship to the context in which the curriculum decisions are made. As illustrated in the following diagram, classroom instruction is guided by the local curriculum as well as by state and national documents.



## State and National Documents

In whatever context the local curriculum is being developed or evaluated, the following documents generated at the state and national levels should be considered:

- state curriculum frameworks or standards
  - language-specific standards from national language-specific organizations
  - *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century.*
1. Within the parameters of these documents, the following questions need to be addressed:
    - a. Are the expectations for students set forth in the state and national documents consistent with those in the local curriculum?
    - b. Is there evidence of curricular focus on each of the five goals (*Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities*) and the eleven standards at every grade level of instruction in the K-12 curriculum?

*If the answer is no to either question, what additions need to be made to the curriculum being developed or evaluated?*

2. Are school or district assessment practices aligned with the state and national standards?

*If the answer is no, what changes should be proposed to the school or district assessment practices?*

### **School or District Context**

If the curriculum at the local level is being developed or evaluated, the following information relevant to the individual school or school district also should be considered:

- school or district mission statement or philosophy
- school board goals
- goals of the foreign language program
- student, parent, and community expectations
- student body profile data.

3. Within the parameters of the sources of information listed above, the following

questions need to be addressed:

- a. How does foreign language study fit into the school context? (Are there language requirements for all students? What languages are offered? What considerations are needed for vertical articulation K-16?)
- b. What should students know and be able to do at the end of each level of instruction and at national and state benchmark levels (grade clusters 4, 8, and 12)?
- c. How will the school district know that students have met these standards and how will this be communicated to the students and their parents? (What kinds of assessment will be required? What kinds of training will be provided for teachers to ensure consistent and fair

assessment practices across the program/school/district?)

- d. What specific program considerations need to be made in light of student body profile data and/or community demographics and student, parent, and community expectations?

*Do the practices and expectations discovered correlate with national standards, language-specific standards, and the state framework or standards? If not, what changes are needed to align the curriculum with these documents?*

## **Classroom Context**

When correlating classroom goals with the goals of the national standards, the following should be considered:

- textbook
- curriculum previously developed or adapted
- supplementary materials
- available technology
- student profile
- community resources
- colleagues as resources.

4. In regards to the classroom context, the following questions need to be addressed (each question is followed by the national standards goal to which it most closely relates):
  - a. What opportunities do students have to participate in face-to-face interaction, interpret written and spoken messages, and make meaningful written and spoken presentations that are appropriate to their language proficiency? (Goal 1: *Communication*)
  - b. How is culture presented so that students understand the relationships between perspectives and products and between perspectives and practices? (Goal 2: *Cultures*)
  - c. What opportunities are provided for students to access current

- information available in the target language? (Goal 3: *Connections*)
- d. How does interaction with colleagues in other disciplines enhance the language learning experience for students by making connections to other subject areas? (Goal 3: *Connections*)
  - e. What experiences are provided for students to analyze and compare linguistic and cultural features of the native and target language environments? (Goals 2 & 4: *Cultures and Comparisons*)
  - f. What opportunities are provided for students to use the language beyond the classroom setting? (Goal 5: *Communities*)
  - g. What community resources are brought into the classroom to enrich the language and cultural experiences for students? (Goal 5: *Communities*)
  - h. In what ways is available technology used to facilitate communication of students beyond the classroom walls? (Goal 5: *Communities*)

*Do classroom practices and expectations correlate with national standards, language-specific standards, and the state framework or standards? If not, what changes are needed to align the curriculum with these documents?*

*What information and resources would be helpful in carrying out these changes?  
From what sources could this support be obtained?*

## **Interrelationships Across Levels**

The diagram that follows illustrates the interrelationships in the curriculum development process among the national standards, the state curriculum framework, the district curriculum, the unit, the lesson, and the classroom activity itself. The arrows indicate that each element in this diagram influences and informs the others.

In the diagram, the national standards goals of *Communication* and *Communities* are addressed through a classroom activity in a unit on Health and

Physical Well Being. This classroom activity addresses both standards 1.3 and 5.1 as students use the language to prepare posters on physical well-being to be placed in the school health office.

The posters meet the two objectives of this lesson, which are to describe activities people do to become physically fit and attitudes toward fitness in the target culture. The lesson objectives address the following goal of the district curriculum: students use the target language to discuss health and fitness practices in the U.S. and the target culture. This classroom activity is related to two goals of the state curriculum framework: 1) students communicate on a variety of familiar topics of personal interest and 2) students compare and contrast cultural characteristics, identifying similarities and differences. The state curriculum framework relates to the national standards for foreign language learning through standard 1.3 of the goal *Communication* and standard 5.1 of the goal *Communities*:

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

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



## From National Standards to Classroom Activity: The Interrelationships

**Communication**

Cultures

Connections

Comparisons

**Communities**



State Curriculum Framework

Students communicate on a variety of familiar topics of personal interest. Students compare and contrast cultural characteristics, identifying similarities and differences.



District Curriculum

Students will use the target language to discuss health and fitness practices in the U.S. and the target culture.



Unit

Health and Physical Well Being



Lesson

Objectives:

- To describe activities people do to become physically fit
- To describe attitudes toward fitness in the target culture



Classroom  
Activity

Sample classroom activity: students prepare a poster in the language on health and physical well-being to post in the school health office. (Standards 1.3 and 5.1)

## Conclusion

Participating in the process of curriculum development or evaluation can be an empowering experience. It is a process that, if shared among classroom teachers across levels in the school or district, is likely to enhance the sequence of instruction from level to level, in addition to improving the over-all instruction.

Because the school and/or district administrators also share in the responsibility for curriculum development and implementation, teachers will want to inform them about the national foreign language standards and of their goal to align the foreign language curriculum with the standards. Teachers also will want to explore with them ways that the administrators can be involved in and supportive of teachers in this endeavor.

If significant support among colleagues or administrators in the school or district can not be found, the process can still proceed by linking the national standards to classroom teaching. To deal with feelings of isolation, whether working alone or on a team, teachers are encouraged to communicate with other teachers in the state, region, and nation to learn how they are addressing these issues. Mutual support while aligning curriculum with the standards can be beneficial. Professional conferences allow teachers to meet with colleagues face-to-face, while professional newsletters and journals, electronic mail, video conferencing and the telephone can all be effective means of communicating across distances.

Throughout the process of curriculum development the significance of this historic moment should be kept in mind, especially at those times when progress may seem slow and unrewarding. This is a unique opportunity for classroom teachers to contribute to important changes in foreign language education in this country. Our children deserve a quality education, including the right to study foreign languages, as the majority of their peers around the world now do — even those in developing nations.

Having looked at the big picture, the unit of instruction in the classroom will now be addressed. Although the following two sections are designed to meet the needs most common in a designated range of grade levels, teachers are

encouraged to examine both sections, since concepts developed in each will enrich teaching at all levels.

## Connecting Thematic Units to the Standards at the K-8 Level

The thematic unit is an effective means of instructional organization that is increasingly used by elementary, middle school, and some high school foreign language teachers to organize and develop their language curriculum. Some teachers have found thematic units especially helpful in organizing units around materials from the target cultures that are of high interest to students, such as stories or folk tales. Others focus their thematic units on subject matter content taught in other areas of the school curriculum.

Thematic units are an integrated approach to teaching. Because the standards themselves are designed to be used in an integrated manner, focusing teaching on the standards is an important step teachers take towards establishing an integrated approach to the teaching of foreign languages. Thematic planning is an excellent point of departure for the implementation of national and state foreign language standards.

In analyzing the thematic units currently in use, it is likely to be found that these units already reflect some of the goals and standards outlined in the standards document. With simple modifications or elaboration, these thematic units can be expanded to include an even stronger standards-based focus. For the learning experiences to be rich and complete, the five goals and eleven standards should be carefully integrated into the thematic plan and lesson strategies.

If teachers consider the development of a thematic unit derived from a standards-based approach as a journey, the point of departure for the journey could be Goal 3, *Connections*, and Standard 3.1: *Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language*. This journey would not be complete, however, without the integration of the other goals that serve to define what students know and are able to do—*Communication, Cultures, Comparisons*, and *Communities*. The goal of participating in multilingual

communities at home and around the world (Goal 5 - *Communities*) should be viewed as the final destination of the journey, because in activities related to this goal, students use their language in real settings for personal enjoyment and/or enrichment.

### **Identifying a Theme for the Unit**

Thematic instruction is a helpful way to implement the third goal of the standards document: *Connections - Connect with other disciplines and acquire information*. To implement this goal, teachers begin by organizing foreign language instruction around a central theme present in existing school curricula in science, social studies, reading and language arts, the arts, or health and physical education at the grade level targeted. The following, for example, are some frequently used science themes in the elementary grades that have served as the basis for thematic units in the foreign language classroom: ecosystems, life-cycles, wellness, physical environments, architecture, weather, and the solar system.

To clarify the richness of the connections possible between the foreign language standards, the foreign language, and the other core curriculum areas, the following graphic depicts some of the connections made in the eighth grade thematic unit focusing on the theme of “wellness.” This graphic also clarifies the central role of the standards goal of *Connections* in thematic instruction. The unit on which this graphic is based was developed cooperatively by middle school teachers in Glastonbury, Connecticut, for use at the eighth grade.

**Communication**

- 1.2 Interpret written and spoken language about wellness.  
Body parts and sports or exercise activities.
- 1.3 Present skit to students in upper level classes on a visit to the nurse.  
Language related to health and well-being.  
Names of disease and remedies.

**Cultures**

- 3.2 Acquire information and recognize distinctive viewpoints only available through the target language and cultures.  
Read copies of newspaper ads from target culture related to wellness
- 4.1 Demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparison or the target language and their own.  
Compare ads from target culture to those common in their culture.
- 2.1 Demonstrate understanding of relationship between practices and perspectives of culture studied.  
Consider cultural perspectives as wellness practices are identified.
- 2.2 Demonstrate understanding of relationship between products and perspectives of culture studied.  
Consider cultural perspectives as health products from the Culture are identified.  
Explore cultural perspectives of eating practices, as symbolized in culturally-based food pyramids.
- 5.1 Use the language beyond the school setting.  
Use technology to communicate with students in target culture and inquire about popular sports and attitudes toward exercise.

**Connections**

- 3.1 Math - graph class heart rates. Survey and compile results of health and well being.  
Social Studies - log what student eats. Relate to food pyramid of U.S. and target culture. Identify popular sports in target culture.  
Science - Identify ways to remain healthy.  
Language arts - Learn terms for body parts, sports, exercise, diseases and remedies. Compare terms in second language with those in first.  
Prepare skit in target language on visit to the nurse.
- 3.2 Acquire information and recognize distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the target language and cultures.  
Identify similarities and differences between attitudes and health and well being in target culture and their own through examination of wellness ads.

**Communities**

- 1.1 Provide and obtain information and discuss opinions  
Discuss and develop a simple survey about health Attitudes and practices.
- 5.1 Use language within and beyond school setting.  
Conduct survey of students in own class, advanced level classes and community members.
- 3.1 Reinforce and further knowledge of other disciplines.  
Math: Compile the results of the survey.
- 1.1 Present information to an audience of listeners.  
Language Arts: Present results of survey to upper level students in written newsletter article.

**Comparisons**

- 4.1 Compare the language studied and their own.  
Compare similarities and differences in terms for food, sports, and exercise
- 4.2 Compare target cultures and their own.  
Develop survey on attitudes toward exercise and transmit through technological means (e-mail) to respondents in the target culture and their own.

The process of developing a standards-based thematic unit should include the careful review of two very important sets of curricular documents or objectives. First, the local school district's articulated scope and sequence of foreign language objectives (vocabulary, structures, functions, and cultural concepts) need to be reviewed in light of state and national standards to identify the standards addressed by these objectives. The cultural objectives in the district's program, for example, may address all or part of Goal 2 - *Cultures*, or they may address some aspect of each of the five goals. Next, the grade-level curricular objectives for the school need to be reviewed, and potential thematic topics identified as a way of addressing Goal 3 - *Connections*. These might include core themes from the following:

- *Reading and language arts.* Present-day English language arts programs are increasingly using authentic literature translated from other cultures and countries to explore core themes appropriate to each grade level. Foreign language teachers have a wonderful opportunity to make a natural connection to the language arts curriculum by exploring these same themes through the literature of the target culture, such as children's folk tales. At the same time they can also incorporate into the theme standards from *Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, and Communities*.
- *Social studies.* The social studies curriculum presents a rich array of possible thematic topics from which foreign language teachers may identify central themes for organizing standards-based units. Regular classroom teachers commonly make connections between their reading and language arts program and social studies through literature, student writing, community resources, and other media. The possibilities for themes are numerous and may include: myself and others, local communities, state history, and regions of the world, to name a few.
- *Science.* Standards-based thematic units that either focus on or include objectives from the science curriculum have the advantage of being rich in hands-on, concrete activities. A thematic unit on Mexico, for example, could certainly include a focus on the life cycle of the monarch butterfly

and the importance of the butterfly's journey to and sojourn in a specific region of Mexico.

## **Defining the Second Language Objectives**

An important step in the development of a standards-based thematic unit is the teacher's or curricular team's reflection on the second language objectives that result from the particular theme. Themes that focus exclusively on one academic area leading to students' familiarization and use of a very specialized language may not be the best path to follow. For example, students who are studying butterflies in science in the native language classroom, need to know and learn specialized language in the target language such as proboscis, chrysalis, and cocoon. Immersion students learn this language because it is an integral part of the local district's curricular objectives. In a less intensive program, however, such specialized terms learned in the second language may not be meaningful or useful outside of the environment of the foreign language classroom. Rather, identification of language related to butterflies that may be more generalizable is likely to be more meaningful to students, such as wings, types of habitats, and description of weather and seasonal impact of the life cycle of the butterfly. Students would still make the connections with learning in science, and would have access to the basic language needed to communicate electronically with peers in other countries about butterflies.

## **Addressing Key Questions**

There are a number of key questions to consider when reviewing already developed thematic units and when identifying, selecting, or developing new thematic units:

- Is the thematic unit complex enough to allow incorporation of standards from goal areas besides Goal 3 - *Connections*?
- Is the central topic of the thematic unit broad enough to promote the development of generalizable vocabulary, language structures, and functions?
-



- Can the language learning objectives of the thematic unit be articulated to the foreign language program objectives and to broader-based school goals and objectives?
- Is there enough available material in the second language to support the thematic unit? If not, are there adequate time and resources available to develop high-quality instructional materials?
- Will the students at this level find the thematic unit interesting and challenging?
- Does the thematic unit lend itself to the development of engaging activities for students?
- Can the goals and objectives of this unit be assessed?

### **Benefits from Thematic Units**

There are many benefits to be derived from standards-based thematic units. Students, parents, classroom teachers, and administrators recognize that using an integrated approach makes the second language a tool by which regular classroom learning can be strengthened. An added benefit to using an integrated approach is that the foreign language becomes an integral part of the local school district curriculum, placing foreign language study on the same level as the other core curricular subjects, such as math, reading, science, and social studies. Also, with an integrated approach, students in the foreign language classroom have the opportunity to respond to cognitive challenges appropriate to their level of development.

A standards-based thematic approach opens the door to many areas of student and teacher interest that previously may have been excluded from foreign language classrooms, simply because they were not viewed as relevant to the second language curriculum. Students' background knowledge and prior experiences can be tapped and expanded in most thematic units.

The use of thematic units as the organizing force of instruction puts students studying languages in the U.S. in touch with topics frequently studied in other countries. For example, geography and ecology are common topics for discussion with other students around the world that can be pursued via

electronic communications. Possible choices of potential authentic instructional materials, manipulatives, and realia become vastly increased when developing a thematic unit. Identification and acquisition of such materials may not be easy, but a greater pool of choices is available.

In summary, standards-based thematic units can promote the development of broad-based vocabulary, concepts, skills, and language that become a part of what students learn and know how to say and do. Units incorporate materials from the target cultures and offer settings for learning in which students can relate more easily to topics that are of common interest, relate to prior knowledge, and which are cognitively challenging.

## **Implementation**

Experience has shown that there are three viable ways to coordinate the teaching of a particular theme in the foreign language classroom with instruction in the regular classroom. Selection of one approach rather than another requires a review of factors such as schedules, availability of materials, and individual classroom teacher preferences. The language teacher, in consultation with the classroom teacher, can choose to follow one of the following formats for the organization and presentation of standards-related thematic units:

- *Early introduction* – The foreign language teacher introduces concepts or themes to the student before they are introduced in the regular classroom.
- *Simultaneous introduction* – The classroom teacher and the foreign language teacher introduce concepts or themes at the same time but in situations that keep the two languages separate.
- *Post-presentation* – The foreign language teacher reviews concepts from themes previously introduced by the classroom teacher.

In the example below, an elementary school Spanish teacher explores how to reinforce and further her students' knowledge of both Spanish and selected core curricular areas. The actions she takes to establish support for this collaborative unit among the third grade teachers, to determine the theme for

the unit, and to develop the unit and align it with the standards, are shared as an example of how a thematic unit is developed.

### **Scenario of Teacher Developing a Thematic Unit**

After attending a conference session describing and demonstrating the use of thematic units, Spanish teacher Holly Kaptain is convinced that through standards-based thematic instruction she can better engage her students in language learning through the use of cognitively challenging material related to the grade level curriculum. Although her school, Edmunds Fine Arts Academy in Des Moines, Iowa, is supportive of the early language program, she believes that thematic instruction may also be useful in furthering the support for foreign language learning of the teachers and administrators at her elementary school.

Holly teaches students in first through sixth grade in daily 30 minute classes. She begins the development of her unit by laying the groundwork. She talks individually with the first through third grade teachers to tell them what she has learned about teaching thematically and to encourage them to be supportive of the changes she would like to make in her curriculum. Some teachers are more open to the idea than others, and she finds that the three third grade teachers are the most interested in the concept of foreign languages enriching the teaching of the grade level curriculum.

Together they decide that reading and language arts might be a good curriculum area to focus on in the foreign language classroom because students will soon be working on biographies of well-known people. Grade three classroom teachers suggest that Holly might focus on a well-known individual from Mexico since students study Mexico during social studies. Holly prepares a list of names of famous individuals from Mexico.

The third grade teachers lend her a copy of their curriculum materials so that she can examine the themes and objectives related to biographies. The teachers have agreed to meet with her to review her ideas, and to collaborate by providing input on the development of the unit. Holly recognizes that it is best to have their support in developing the unit, so she is pleased that they are willing to work with her. She remembers the story one teacher told at the

conference about her first thematic unit. This teacher related how she had neglected to work with the classroom teachers and one of these teachers had been very upset to find that she was using materials that the classroom teacher planned to use three weeks later.

After Holly has identified several famous Mexicans in whom she is interested and for whom biographical texts may be readily available, she discusses with the teachers ways in which she might organize these themes in the foreign language classes. The team examines the possibilities, shares materials, and agrees that she could enhance the theme of biographies by developing a standards-related thematic unit about the life of Diego Rivera. They agree that Holly will develop a unit that will connect Spanish, art, reading and language arts, and geography.

To develop the unit, Holly, who is already very familiar with the national goals and standards, follows these steps:

- Explores the school's grade level social studies, art, and reading and language arts objectives with grade level colleagues;
- Brainstorms possible instructional activities that might be used to support the unit by webbing and/or outlining these ideas;
- Considers the five goal areas of the standards and selects objectives that target specific standards that could be met in this unit in light of students' language ability, time in the classroom, and available resources;
- Makes a list of available resources in the language that support the objectives and researches additional resources by talking with colleagues and exploring the library and professional catalogues;
- Defines key activities of the unit and sequences them;
- Plans assessments and post-unit evaluation by students and herself as teacher; and
- Prepares a checklist for keeping track of the standards addressed throughout the year.

Since this initial, and very positive experience in thematic instruction, Holly's classroom instruction has been based on thematic units. Both she and the classroom teachers have been very pleased with this integrative approach to teaching the foreign language.

Holly has found, however, that as she seeks advice from the classroom teachers, she needs to be sure that she makes the final decisions on what material to include in the units. At one point, she realized that if she used all the resources that the teachers had recommended, she would be ignoring the resources that reflect the cultures of Spanish-speaking countries. Holly has now established a balance between the goals of *Connections* and *Cultures* and has helped the classroom teachers recognize and appreciate the importance of this balance.

# How to Teach Foreign Language in Secondary School Programs Using the Standards

Most secondary school teachers have a clear idea of their instructional program at the levels they teach. Often the instructional program may rely on a textbook. How much of the instructional program is determined by the text and its ancillaries varies among teachers and schools. Despite this variation, a significant number of teachers find that their textbook is an important vehicle in their teaching. For some teachers, a textbook chapter is only a small part of a unit. For still others, a textbook chapter equals an instructional unit.

Ensuring that students are able to meet national standards does not mean abandoning successful instructional programs and practices. It does require, however, a careful examination of the instructional program to ensure that it is both comprehensive and standards-based. The result of this examination may mean complementing or supplementing what is already in place. It may also mean that program content that is less essential, from a standards-based perspective, may need to be discarded in order to allow for the introduction of new materials and learning experiences.

In the example below, a veteran French teacher undertakes the process of reflecting upon her existing program in light of the standards. It is important to note that this description reflects the process for a single unit of instruction. It is assumed, however, that this single unit is part of a carefully thought-out, year-long program of instruction that reflects local and state curriculum documents, and that the units of instruction in this program build upon one another to lead students toward the meeting of clearly identified, desired objectives.

## **Aligning Curriculum with Standards: An Example**

Nancy Gadbois, a high school French teacher in the High School of Science and Technology in Springfield, Massachusetts, is examining a unit she commonly

teaches in order to determine to what degree it is aligned with the national standards.

First, Nancy makes a list of all the resources she uses to teach this unit. Next to each resource, she lists the numbers of all the standards reflected in it. She notes that of all the resources she has listed, it is a chapter in her textbook that determines the outline of her unit.

Next, she examines her textbook chapter to clarify the degree to which the standards are reflected in it. First, Nancy looks at the chapter objectives that are listed and considers the extent to which they reflect the standards. She then looks at the textbook activities and the materials that accompany the textbook and considers the extent to which they reflect the standards.

As in most new texts, it appears that the first two goals, *Communication* and *Cultures*, are extensively addressed. Upon further examination, however, she discovers that while her text provides solid cultural information, students are not asked to explore the cultural perspectives which give rise to products and practices.

She next examines her text for the treatment of goals three, four, and five, *Connections*, *Comparisons*, and *Communities*. She finds that these goals are not addressed adequately. She spends some time reflecting upon how full her curriculum already is, how important the standards are, and how these competing priorities might be reconciled.

Ultimately, Nancy decides to realign her classroom focus by carefully reviewing what she has usually taught in the past. In the process she discards some exercises or activities and keeps those most critical for student attainment of both chapter objectives and the standards.

She looks again at the list of resources that she has made for this unit and begins to ascertain the extent to which resources beyond the text can provide opportunities for students to explore those standards which are not addressed adequately.

At the next department meeting a lively discussion ensues regarding the program students are getting from other teachers at the same level as well as at the previous and the next levels. She raises the issue that in her unit not all

standards are addressed to the same breadth and depth. Some teachers point out that certain standards were already addressed in a unit at a previous level. One teacher notes that one of the other standards will be the focal point of an upcoming unit. The discussion focuses on ensuring that students are receiving a comprehensive standards-based program. They decide that they will each keep a checklist of the standards they address to ascertain whether students are indeed receiving a program that embraces all standards appropriately. They decide to meet again to share their checklists with each other and to continue their dialogue about standards-based instruction.

## **Conclusion**

Many interesting issues arise in the process of reflecting upon the existing program in light of the standards. In this example, Nancy Gadbois discovered that some standards may be addressed in the current program, but incompletely. This is particularly true in the case of Goal 2, *Cultures*. While cultural products and practices often receive a great deal of attention in high school textbooks, the relationships among cultural perspectives, products, and practices receive little or no attention. In addition, she discovers that some standards are addressed frequently and others hardly at all. She will have to decide whether a single high quality learning experience is sufficient, balancing questions of quantity and quality of experiences. Finally, in reflecting upon how her unit addresses the standards, she must determine whether there is a priority for some standards over others, whether all standards must receive equal attention in every unit, and whether standards-based instruction should be seen from a yearly or multi-year perspective.

Also important to note is that while some of Nancy's work is done independently and is based on individual reflection, an important aspect of her work involves collaboration with colleagues. Since most students will encounter several language teachers in the course of their foreign language learning career, programmatic consistency in terms of long-range goals, orientation to standards, and instructional philosophy is most likely to result in instructional experiences that are beneficial to student progress. Collaboration is key to successful



horizontal and vertical articulation—that is, among teachers teaching the same level and among teachers from level to level. Perhaps most importantly, collaboration among faculty is a key element in the professional development of veteran teachers, and thus, in aligning high school curriculum with the standards.

# Familiarization Guide to the National Standards

The following questions are designed to help teachers become familiar with the standards document by guiding their reading and reflection. Note: The page numbers cited are for the second edition (1999) of the standards document. The page numbers for the first edition of the standards document (1996) may also be viewed.

## A. Exploring the Background and Organization of the Standards Document

1. Why were the standards for foreign language learning developed for levels four, eight, and twelve?
  - Read *Frequently Asked Questions* on page 97.
2. What is the purpose of the standards?
  - Read *Introduction* on pages 11-15.
3. How were the standards developed and by whom?
  - Read *The Process* on page 13.
  - Skim the first, or title, page of the document; pages 5, 105-109; and the second page, *Endorsing Organizations*.
4. What beliefs about foreign language learning guide the standards?
  - Read *Statement of Philosophy* on page 7.
  - Read *Frequently Asked Questions* on page 98.
5. How are the standards organized?
  - Examine *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* on page 9.
  - Read *About Standards for Foreign Language Learning* on pages 27-29.

6. How are the standards intended to be used?
  - Read *How to Use Standards for Foreign Language Learning* on pages 28-29.
  - Read *Frequently Asked Questions* on page 97.
7. What is the purpose of the learning scenarios?
  - Read the introduction to *Learning Scenarios* on page 71.
8. What new ways of viewing foreign language education do the standards offer the profession?
  - Read *Organizing Principles* on pages 31-38.

#### **B. Exploring the Content of the Goals and Standards**

1. How is communication characterized in the standards document?
  - Read *The Framework of Communicative Modes* on pages 36-38.
2. What is the role of culture in language teaching?
  - Read *Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures* on pages 47-52.
3. What is the connection between foreign languages and other disciplines?
  - Read *Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information* on pages 53-56.
4. How is meaningful insight into the nature of language and culture developed?
  - Read *Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture* on pages 57-61.
5. How is the language made meaningful in the world beyond the classroom?
  - Read *Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World* on pages 63-67.

## Exploring the Learning Scenarios

An important step for teachers to take in making connections between their current teaching practices and the standards is to analyze several classroom activities in the same manner as the activities included in the learning scenarios. Much of what they are already doing is likely to support the standards. Exploring in greater depth areas proposed by the standards will also enhance their teaching. Teachers are encouraged to use the form that follows to analyze several classroom activities. Exchanging and discussing with colleagues the learning scenarios each has created will further expand teachers' understanding of the standards.

**Learning Scenario**

1. Skim *Learning Scenarios* on pages 71-96 of the standards document.
2. Read closely those scenarios related to your level of instruction. Notice the targeted standards and how they are met in the activity.
3. Analyze one of your classroom activities using the following form.


Name:
School:
Language:
Program Type (Exploratory/Sequential):
Grade/s:
Topic/Theme:
Objective:
Activity Description:

**Targeted Standards**

4. Refer to the standards on page *ii* of this guide to identify the standards this activity meets. In the space provided below, briefly reflect on how these standards are addressed in the activity.

1.1	Interpersonal Communication:
1.2	Interpretive Communication:
1.3	Presentational Communication:
2.1	Practices of Culture:
2.2	Products of Culture:
3.1	Making Connections:
3.2	Acquiring Information:
4.1	Language Comparisons:
4.2	Cultural Comparisons:
5.1	School and Community:
5.2	Lifelong Learning:

5. Identify additional standards this activity could meet. In the space provided, describe the changes you could make in this activity to target each of these additional standards.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to question 5. The box is currently blank.

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## Goal 2: *Cultures*

### A Perspective on the Cultural Perspectives

*One of the intriguing aspects of the goal of Cultures is the relationships that are highlighted among cultural perspectives, practices, and products. In their classrooms, teachers may already address cultural practices and products but not consider the philosophical perspectives of culture. The following section is included to help teachers gain a better understanding of the three components of the Cultures goal.*

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the standards related to *Cultures*—and the most challenging as well—is the important role that cultural perspectives play in both *understanding* other cultures, and in *using* cultural knowledge in appropriate ways. In the document *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (pp. 43-48), the familiar division of culture into “Big C,” “little c” categories has been supplanted by a new tri-partite way of looking at culture. This new model designates the components of culture as perspectives, practices, and products. If students are to have the dimensional awareness of culture as conceived in the standards, it is important to help them understand each component of the new model.

Teachers and students alike have little difficulty in grasping the concept of products. They are aware that every culture has produced tangible products of lasting beauty and merit, such as the novel *Anna Karenina*, the painting *Mona Lisa*, and the poetic form known as haiku. They also recognize everyday items as cultural products: rolling pins, back hoes, wedding veils, and boiled peanuts. It is only one step further to understanding that products may also be intangible. Examples would include street raps, political systems, graveside eulogies, and the cousins’ unwritten rules for playing tag at the family reunion.

The second component of culture, practices, is also familiar to students. Teaching the accepted behaviors for interacting with other members of the foreign culture in given social situations is already a familiar classroom learning activity. Two examples from American culture of the practice of expressing congratulations would be slapping a teammate on the back after a winning touchdown, but shaking the minister’s hand after an excellent sermon.



Most of the time, teachers and students have little difficulty distinguishing between a product and a practice. Being able to talk about the connections between products and practices offers new cultural insights. There are times, however, when the distinction between a product and a practice may appear to be a fine one. The educational system of a country may be viewed as a product of that culture. At the same time, how people participate in the educational system involves a set of connected practices. Sometimes forcing a difficult distinction is unnecessary. Few native speakers will ever buttonhole a foreigner on the street and demand, "Tell me now! Is this a product or a practice?" If students can recognize a product and are aware of its role within the culture, and if students know the practice and can participate if necessary, they will be able to interact in a new culture with poise and confidence.

It is the third component of culture—the perspectives—which seems to pose the greatest difficulty in understanding. As defined by the standards document, the perspectives of a culture would include such hard-to-pinpoint aspects as the popular beliefs, the commonly held values, the folk ideas, the shared attitudes, and the widely held assumptions of members of the culture. All of these combined are sometimes said to comprise the "world view" of a culture. The complicating factor is that while native informants can easily describe a product or explain the correct procedures for a practice, most members of a culture, when asked point blank, find it impossible to give a succinct explanation of their world view. Certainly it is difficult to explain one's own culture to others. Many times values are never put into words, unstated assumptions are not recognized, and "shared cultural attitudes" are not analyzed. Reflecting upon perspectives is not an everyday occurrence; naturally, it is doubly difficult to speak with confidence about the perspectives of another's culture.

If ferreting out the perspectives of a culture is such an arduous task, why bother? The answer is simple: it is the perspectives of a culture which sanction the practices and create a need for the products. It is the perspectives which provide the reason for "why they do it *that way*" and the explanation for "how can they possibly think *that*?" Since practices and products not only derive from perspectives, but sometimes interact to change perspectives, it is critical that this elusive but fundamental component of culture not be ignored.

Teachers who are familiar with the standards document often report that they take immediate steps to introduce their students to the perspectives/

practices/products model. This gives their students ready access to a system for talking about the components of the target culture. Students soon become adept at recognizing products and practices; and many for the first time become aware of the existence—backstage—of cultural perspectives.

No one—teacher or student, native or non-native speaker—should feel embarrassed by being unable to easily identify an underlying perspective. Unfortunately, because few textbooks offer specific help in this regard, there is a temptation, when questioned, to concoct a perspective based on a personal experience, or to “discover” a perspective derived from a widely held stereotype. To do so is to risk accuracy for the sake of face-saving. When teachers and students are wondering about an underlying perspective, the best learning experience is to search for the answer together. This quest for giving shape and substance to the beliefs which provide context for practice or product becomes a satisfying intellectual challenge. Valuable resources might include print and non-print materials from the target culture (traditional literature, contemporary media, scholarly documents) as well as from research available in other disciplines in American culture. The search for perspectives also offers rich interpersonal experiences for teachers and students who seek answers through discussions with native speakers in the community.

It becomes clear that the new view of culture outlined in the standards —highlighting the interdependence of products, practices, and perspectives—offers intriguing possibilities for students to combine the goal area of *Cultures* with the other areas of *Communication*, *Connections*, *Comparisons*, and *Communities*.