
Advances in the Intermediate Level Language Curriculum: The Role of the Standards at the College Level'

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Introduction

Language programs in recent years have experienced an immense growth in the number of students studying a foreign language, particularly Spanish (Brod & Welles, 2000). Apart from the commonly-required language courses, there is a growing interest by an increasing number of students to pursue language study beyond the beginning level in order to obtain functional proficiency in the language. These students often fulfill a need for proficient bilinguals in the job market and in the global economy. Consequently, the intermediate level (IL) curriculum is crucial to students' development both linguistically and culturally and plays a pivotal role in preparing students to bridge the gap between beginning foreign language courses and advanced content area courses.

The student body at the IL presents a unique challenge for instructors because of students' diverse interests and varying language abilities. The student population consists primarily of prospective language majors, minors, graduate students, heritage speakers, and non-majors in areas such as International Business, International Studies, and Communication Studies. Therefore, what teachers face is an immense, heterogeneous group with varied needs and a wide range of language proficiency. As Rava (2000) states, "forging an effective classroom community is one of the major challenges for intermediate instructors" (p. 343).

The movement to develop standards for foreign language learning has provided a long-needed theoretical and operational framework to guide pedagogical practices at various levels of instruction. In terms of the IL curriculum at the college level, the standards have yet to be adopted and implemented through concrete curricular goals, objectives, and pedagogical content in most institutions of higher learning (James, 1998). Many language and literature faculty members in institutions of higher learning are not familiar with

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the standards, nor do they understand their impact and implications for preparing linguistically and culturally proficient language learners. Standards are currently playing a major role at the elementary and secondary level. Hence, it is vital that college faculty in the languages and literatures departments become knowledgeable about the impact of standards-based teaching on students entering language programs at the college level. As James (1998) rightly states, “The emerging truth is that unless we change our way of going about things at the colleges, the main impact that the standards will have on higher education is that fewer and fewer students who have learned languages in elementary and secondary schools will want to take courses in our departments when they come to college” (p. 13).

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The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (SFL) (1999) provide a theoretically and pedagogically sound framework to guide instructional practice at the IL. It is the most comprehensive document on foreign language learning to date. It includes general curricular goals for students from K-16 (see Appendix A). Instruction based on SFL is a viable framework for several reasons.

(1) The standards are multidimensional. Various dimensions of communication and culture are explored so that students are able to participate in one-to-one interaction and verbal exchange (interpersonal communication). They can interpret written and spoken messages on a variety of topics (interpretive communication), and make meaningful written and spoken presentations to their peers on academic topics and current topics of interest (presentational communication). Similarly, the concept of culture is expanded to include curricular goals such as understanding the relationship between the perspectives (beliefs system, cultural attitudes, etc.) and cultural products (artifacts, literature, art, etc.) and between cultural perspectives and practices (customs, habits, behaviors, etc.) of the target culture so that students can gain a more thorough insight of a particular group of people. An additional goal focuses on having students compare features of their culture and language with that of the target culture and language (Comparisons) so that they can develop a deeper understanding of cultural and linguistic differences between the native and target language and culture to build up awareness and sensitivity towards languages and cultures different from their own.

The pedagogical content based on the standards is rich because it incorporates content matter from other disciplines (geography, social studies, economy, biology, history, etc.) to broaden students' knowledge base in the target language by providing them with the opportunity to make connections with other subject areas (Connections). The different subject areas in turn provide the basis to develop students' content knowledge as well as linguistic skills in the target language.

The multidimensional aspect of the standards is further elucidated through the Communities goal. Students are able to explore language and content beyond the classroom setting by utilizing technology and community resources to enhance their

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linguistic and cultural experience. They have access to a body of information available in the target language to read, analyze, and interpret that requires not only linguistic skill, but also cultural sensitivity.

(2) The standards provide a general curricular framework of what students should know and be able to do with the target language, which allows them to develop language skills more suited to real-life functions in a multicultural and multilingual society. Content knowledge is crucial for the implementation of the five broad curricular goals — Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities — in combination with knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. In the curricular weave of the five Cs, students are trained to utilize and develop critical thinking skills, communication strategies and learning strategies, and to use technology to access sources of information in the target language. Training in the use of critical thinking skills empowers students to progress from performing simple tasks in the target language, such as organizing information, to more complex tasks of evaluating and problem solving. Instruction in using communication strategies (circumlocution, inferencing, asking for clarification, etc.) helps students bridge gaps in their developing linguistic system through compensatory strategies for more effective communication. Additionally, students are instructed in the use of learning strategies (organizing, planning, using background knowledge, using cognates, imagery, etc.) to become better language learners.

(3) Instruction based on the standards is learner-centered rather than teacher-centered, therefore having pedagogical appeal for students as well as for teachers. The basic premise of the standards is for students to be life-long learners of the target language. Standards-based teaching provides the impetus to accomplish this goal by training students in the use of critical thinking skills, communication strategies, and learning strategies so that they become more sophisticated learners. Classroom activities based on standards emphasize working in pairs and in small groups, giving oral and written presentations, accessing information about topics of personal interest to students, undertaking cultural projects, and other meaningful activities. The teacher serves as a guide and facilitator to assist students in discovering their unique learning style.

(4) Instruction based on the standards could be a good means to address some of the problems of articulation between first-year beginning language courses to advanced language and content courses. First-year beginning language courses tend to be predominantly “skill-getting” where students learn basic thematic vocabulary and grammar of the target language to develop interpersonal skill. There is very little content infused in the curriculum on a consistent basis. At the IL, students continue to build on vocabulary, more complex grammar, and more abstract communication. Likewise, a great deal of emphasis is placed on exposure to literary and cultural content in preparation for the advanced-level courses. Consequently, the leap from first-year language courses (skill-getting) to content-based courses at the IL and beyond creates a huge chasm for students both linguistically and cognitively. Standards-based instruction provides common goals for students from incipient stages of language

learning to more advanced stages. An articulated sequence of foreign language courses at the college level based on the standards could provide more curricular uniformity by developing the five Cs of language learning throughout the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. Beginning-level classes based on the five Cs could perhaps better prepare students both in terms of language and content, because the emphasis will not be exclusively on language but a combination of both. In sum, the IL curriculum can greatly improve its foundation by utilizing and implementing the guidelines offered by the National Standards.

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Identifying Curricular Goals for Intermediate Level Language Instruction

Of utmost importance for IL language instruction is the identification of curricular goals, content, and objectives that will better prepare students to become functionally proficient in the target language and culture. Harlow and Muyskens (1994) investigated the most important goals and objectives for university-level intermediate French and Spanish language students, and the mechanisms necessary to help them achieve these goals. To this end, they surveyed over thirteen hundred students of Spanish and French and fifty-nine instructors from twelve universities. Surprisingly, the students and instructors did not differ markedly with respect to their views concerning IL language instruction. Speaking and listening skills as well as vocabulary development were placed as top priorities by both instructors and students, followed by reading non-literary materials, knowledge of grammar, and writing, as secondary goals. On the contrary, the authors found that instructors viewed cultural knowledge as a more important component of language learning than students did.

Martin and Laurie (1993) explored students' and teachers' perceptions of the value of culture and literature for language learning at the IL. Their study was designed to elicit students' learning goals in intermediate French, particularly in relation to their motivation for FL study, their expectations about improving their abilities in the four skills, and their perceptions of the importance of literature and cultural studies. Students' responses on a survey indicated that their interest was more linguistic (improving their speaking and understanding skills in the target language) than cultural. For the majority of students, knowledge of culture and literature ranked well below the development of language skills. Students rated the study of popular culture as more relevant to their language learning experience than literature. The teachers' overall perceptions were that IL students “were not ready to read literature, either linguistically or culturally” (p. 201).

Antes (1999) conducted a survey of 358 university students to determine their perceptions of the importance of a variety of FL skills in Spanish and French. Respondents were enrolled in first- and second-semester Spanish and French courses from four different geographical areas of the United States. The results of the

survey revealed that the overwhelming majority of students indicated that the acquisition of conversational skills was their primary interest in learning a FL. The acquisition of grammatical knowledge was ranked second in terms of interest, and cultural knowledge occupied a lower-than-expected ranking. Additionally, a large number of respondents indicated the usefulness of knowing a FL, especially Spanish, for professional advancement.

These findings clearly indicate that students perceive the value of communication skills as a priority for their language development, while they view culture as a less important component. Even though students place a less significant value on gaining cultural knowledge, it is necessary to find ways to incorporate culture at the IL in a manner that will be appealing and useful to students. What needs to be determined is the type of curriculum that incorporates culturally relevant information and course content that is of high interest to students. To accomplish this goal, each of the five Cs of the standards could be incorporated so that students develop oral communication skills in the three communicative modes, i.e., interpersonal, interpretive, presentational while being exposed to a wide range of culturally rich content that taps into the products, practices, and perspectives of the target language. Additionally, students should make connections to other disciplines through content that is of relevance to them and have opportunities to interact directly or indirectly with members of the target-language communities. Finally, through the knowledge gained by being exposed to the language and culture of the target language, students should make valid, well-informed comparisons of both languages and ways of behaving and knowing that are different to theirs so that they can arrive at legitimate conclusions.

Thus, in order to determine whether current pedagogical practices at the IL are in tune with the standards, two key issues need to be addressed. The first is to find out whether attention is being given throughout the IL curriculum to each of the five goal areas: Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities. The second is to determine what current practices in the IL curriculum are consonant with the standards.

Instructional Practices at the Intermediate Level

IL instruction has been considered “one of the more neglected areas of research in the foreign language curriculum” (Harlow & Muyskens, p. 141). There has been very little discussion on what the goals of instruction should be at this level. The IL is a bridge to advanced courses, yet there is still a great deal of confusion in terms of its curricular content. IL students have not yet fully mastered basic grammar covered in the first year of language study. Their vocabulary knowledge is limited to the concrete, personal type, and they are not fully prepared to read cultural and literary content. The curriculum for the IL is dictated by the selection of the language textbook and on the individual instructor’s teaching philosophy. Most textbooks for IL are thematically arranged and the pedagogical focus is on refinement of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). There is usually a review or expansion of basic grammar covered in the first-year, and vocabulary development is more complex and abstract. Thematic content is further extended to include cultural readings, literary

excerpts, or videos of cultural nature. Additionally, culture in the IL curriculum has centered on teaching big C culture, i.e., the products and practices of the culture, primarily its patterns of social interactions, literature, geography, history, art, music, politics, etc., with the objective of expanding students' factual knowledge. Consequently, culture is primarily treated as knowledge or facts conveyed through reading passages presented in the textbooks or through videos.

To this effect, Young (1997) analyzed a random sample of first- and second-year Spanish textbooks (10 first-year books and 9 second-year books ranging from 1991-1997) and found that although each textbook included at least one section of culture related to the theme of the chapter, the proportion of cultural information presented in textbooks was relatively minor when compared to the grammar and vocabulary content. Very little emphasis was given to exposing students to cultural elements of everyday life or aspects of lifestyles (i.e., small c culture) and to the attitudes, beliefs, meaning, values (perspectives) associated to the products and practices of the culture. Likewise, Jernigan and Moore (1997), in their classroom observations of the teaching of Brazilian culture at the IL, found "very little evidence of planned structured cultural instruction on cultural perspectives and no evidence of cultural evaluation" (p. 837).

Aligning the Intermediate Level Curriculum with Standards-based Instruction²

I. Standards-based curricula center on communication. The development of communication skills has been an objective of the IL curriculum for at least a decade and has been identified as one of the main priorities for IL students (Harlow & Muyskens, 1994). However, for the IL curriculum the concept of communication should be expanded so that students develop communication skills in the interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes within the framework of the standards. The interpersonal mode of communication refers to direct oral and written communication between individuals. The interpretive mode deals with receptive communication of oral and written messages via print or non-print materials and allows the reader or listener to interpret messages beyond its literal sense. The presentational mode, on the other hand, is productive communication through oral and written language for a particular audience (SFLL, 1999).

Current practices at the IL foster interaction that is typical of the foreign language classroom in general, i.e., I-R-E (teacher initiation-student response-teacher evaluation). In essence, the teacher controls the discourse and the student's involvement is limited, curtailing development of real skills communication. For IL students to engage in meaningful face-to-face interaction, they should be active participants in the discourse. This requires that students and teachers depart from the traditional I-R-E patterns of interaction, and engage in more beneficial ways of communicating. Hall (1999) suggests using "Instructional Conversations (ICs)" for the purpose of developing students' communicative abilities in the classroom. ICs are "developmentally rich patterns of teacher-student interaction whose purpose is to assist students' understanding of and ability to communicate about concepts and ideas central to

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their learning” (p. 29). Instructional conversations focus on thematic content that is challenging and of high interest to teachers and students alike. They maximize interaction between the teacher and the students, where the teacher acts as the facilitator and students are highly encouraged to participate in the discussion, take turns, and use their prior knowledge to build upon and expand the topic (Goldenberg, 1999).

Within the framework of the standards, the interpretive mode of communication exposes students to authentic listening and reading materials of diverse nature. The goal of reading in the standards requires

that students read longer written text and cultural documents (Arens & Swaffar, 2000). Arens and Swaffar (2000) state: “Reading texts offer examples of the complex speech and language patterns of a culture and document its concerns, products, practices, and perspectives across age groups, sociolects, and historical eras” (p. 116).

Likewise, the presentational mode of communication is an appropriate avenue to have students share and present topics that are student-generated in which they are engaged in the selection, development, and implementation of the chosen topic individually or as a small group. For example, a talk show in the target language that explores topics of interest to students, or the creation of a commercial, a debate, etc., are appropriate activities for students at the IL where the presentational mode is further developed. The key factor is that students have the opportunity to utilize the presentational mode on a frequent basis to improve their oral and written competencies in the target language.

How then should the IL classroom be structured so that students engage in meaningful interactions, interpret written and oral texts, and make oral and written presentations? What content and activities are best suited to foster communication as defined by the standards? How can these activities be implemented in the classroom to maximize participation? A practical and concrete way to approach the structuring of the IL content is through the thematic unit and learning scenarios.³ The thematic unit has been successfully used in K-12 instruction to provide coherence, content, critical thinking, and meaningful activities for foreign language learners (Haas, 2000). The thematic unit offers several advantages for students to (1) acquire, communicate, and investigate worthwhile knowledge in depth; (2) integrate and enrich the language processes of reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking; (3) practice reading different kinds of materials for varied purposes; (4) use prior knowledge of the world and past experiences with language and

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text to create relationships among various sources of information; (5) make choices, interact, collaborate, and cooperate; (6) apply what they learn in meaningful and “real world” contexts (Vogt, 1997).

An example of a thematic unit for the IL is the general theme of physical and mental health which is usually of high interest to students. It could be implemented in the following manner to integrate the five Cs. in a meaningful way:

(a) Students start out by completing a survey in the target language for the purpose of having them think about their own health (interpretive communication). After completing the survey, they evaluate the overall status of their health and reach to some sort of conclusion or prediction (interpretive communication).

(b) They interview each other to discover whether their classmates have a healthy lifestyle or not. Students then brainstorm and write down a list of physical and health issues that are particular relevant to their generation (anorexia, bulimia, drug addiction, etc.) and state why these problems are so prevalent among young adults (interpersonal, interpretive communication).

(c) They present and discuss their views to the class (interpersonal, presentational). These activities could generate a high level of discussion along the lines of ICs. The instructor provides the guidelines, but the activities are predominantly learner-centered.

(d) The instructor assigns a topic to read (a video to view) in relation to the physical and mental health of youth of similar age in the target culture. For example, students of Spanish read an article titled *Un estudio alerta del alto porcentaje de fumadores entre los jóvenes europeos*⁴ (A study shows high percentages of smokers among European youth). Similar types of article can be found on the Internet for other languages. Before reading the article, the instructor activates background knowledge and designs pre-reading and post-reading activities. Students read the article to familiarize themselves with the main ideas, demonstrate comprehension of the text, and react to the text (interpretive communication).

(e) The text can be further explored to include cultural inferencing and comparisons. For instance, the students use the information from the text to illustrate and discuss whether there is a similar problem among North American youth and compare the problem with that of European youth. The teacher could guide the discussion by having students bring in examples of ads directed toward tobacco consumption in this country and in the target culture, information dealing with tobacco companies and public opinion of tobacco companies, or bans on smoking in public places in the U.S., to stimulate further discussion (Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Communities).

II. Standards-based curricula define culture as the relationship among perspectives, products, and practices. Culture as defined by SFL (1999) states that students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship among the products, practices, and perspectives of the cultures studied. The implications of these standards for the IL curriculum have a far-reaching effect. Currently, teaching culture in the IL curriculum has centered on teaching “big-C” culture, i.e., predominantly literature, history, art, music, politics, etc., of the target culture at the expense of “small-c”

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culture. The value of such a body of knowledge for IL level students available through big-C culture is certainly acknowledged. However, students do not place knowledge of culture (big-C) as a top priority (Antes, 1999; Harlow & Muyskens, 1994) nor do they view culture as having a firm legitimate place in the language classroom, and they have very different views of culture in relation to language learning (Chavez, 2002). Clearly, culture as it is currently being

taught at the IL needs to be expanded to include popular materials that will engage students' interest more significantly than traditional texts. This can be accomplished through the interweaving of the three aspects of culture as defined by SFL (1999), namely products, practices and perspectives, to develop understanding and awareness of culture.

Teaching about the products of the target culture has essentially dominated the IL curriculum whether through analyses of literary pieces, legends, works of art, or some other form of tangible cultural products (Jernigan & Moore, 1997; Young, 1997). In addition, practices of the target culture are also part of the traditional content of the IL curriculum and are evident in IL textbooks for students of Spanish. For example, some textbooks have included cultural practices like siestas, bullfighting, *El día de los muertos*, and *El carnaval*, among others as part of the cultural content. However, the perspectives of the target culture related to these practices are rarely apparent. Perspectives include meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas associated with the products and practices of the culture. To teach and learn about the perspectives of a particular culture is not an easy task because perspectives are not tangible and can be subject to misinterpretation, just as the products and practices of a culture can be subject to prejudice, too. Nonetheless, it is essential that IL students be prepared to discover not only their own perspectives associated with products and practices of their culture, but also of the target culture so as to dissipate stereotyping and misconceptions about cultural norms and practices that are different from their own.

Lange (1999) frames curricular questions related to the culture standards in this fashion: “What practices in the cultures should student learn? What perspectives will they have of these practices? Upon learning of these practices, how will their perspectives change? What products should students learn about? Upon learning of these products, how will their perspectives change? How are these practices, products, and perspectives related?” (p. 87). To align the IL curriculum to meet the culture goals of the standards, the above questions need to be considered to determine the relevant curricular goals, content, activities, and outcomes for students. The ultimate goal of foreign language learning is to make students culturally sensitive and aware of products, practices, and perspectives of the target culture to develop cross-cultural communication and understanding. Consequently, students must be equipped to deal with real-world opportunities for interaction and intercultural communication.

Students at the IL may at some point in their careers either encounter or interact with native speakers of the language or travel to the host country, given the grow-

ing trend of study abroad in the majority of foreign language departments in the U.S. (Open Doors, 2004). Therefore, general cultural themes such as immigration, bilingualism, transculturation, and diversity in society are suitable content areas for the IL. These themes could be interwoven throughout the curriculum in the form of literature, films, documentaries, music, presentations, guest speakers, Internet activities, and focused group discussion.

For instance, to build upon the topic of immigration of Spanish-speaking people to the U.S., which is a common topic in IL language textbooks, the following activities could be implemented that could allow students to explore their own beliefs and attitudes towards immigration of Spanish speaking people to the US and bilingualism in the US.

(a) Students obtain and synthesize information on immigration of Spanish-speaking people from different parts of Latin America and the Caribbean to the U.S. in recent years (interpretive communication).

(b) Students organize and present the information in charts, highlighting areas of geographical concentration in the U.S. of different Spanish-speaking immigrants (presentational communication).

(c) Students discuss the implications of immigration from the immigrant's perspective and the impact of immigration on U.S. society at large (interpersonal communication).

(d) Students read or view a video about *The English Only Movement* (interpretive communication) as a reaction against immigration and bilingualism in the U.S. (cultural perspective). They summarize the main arguments of the English Only Movement and of English Plus and discuss their own reactions and opinions (interpersonal, interpretive, communication, cultural perspective).

(e) Students interview heritage speakers or other members of the Hispanic communities in relation to language maintenance or language loss in the communities to discover their reactions towards the English Only Movement (interpersonal communication, Communities, Connections, Cultures).

Other topics of interest for IL students that could be fully explored to integrate several of the five Cs are drugs and alcoholism, sports, cross-cultural and cross-racial dating, marriage, education, changing roles of women in societies, the influence of rap music on youth worldwide, and ethnic diversity among others.⁵

III. Standards-based curricula apply language skills to the world beyond the classroom. The Communities standard as defined by the SFLL (1999) states that students use the language both within and beyond the school settings and that students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment. The goal of this standard is for students to communicate with target language speakers of the local or global communities in face-to-face interaction, through electronic means, or through print.

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With regard to the IL language curriculum, the standard could be implemented in several ways to provide students with opportunities to utilize their language beyond the classroom setting. One way is to connect students with the target language community provided that there is one in the region that is accessible to students. If so, students could participate voluntarily in assisting in programs designed to help members of the community such as in health fairs, relief efforts, and as translators so that they not only use their language skills but also develop better cultural understanding of the target population. Members of the communities could also be invited to the classroom as guest speakers, to engage students in cultural activities such as in plays, or in traditional dances or cultural festivals. Likewise, if there are heritage speakers in the classroom, they could serve as good sources of cultural information for non-heritage speakers. These activities have already been taking place in some language programs that have the advantage of being located near a large Spanish-speaking community.

Another avenue is by using the Internet as a way of bringing the target language community to the classroom by e-mails, chat rooms, newsgroups, and listservs that allow students to engage in activities for personal enjoyment and for career building (Gonglewski, 1999; McGee, 2001). Students at the IL must be encouraged to seek out opportunities to use the language beyond the classroom through available technology and mass media to provide enjoyment, access to knowledge not readily available in the classroom, and stimulation of their desire to continue with the language for personal fulfillment.

The Communities standard allows students to apply language skills as well as cultural knowledge within and beyond the classroom. In order that students at the IL derive maximum benefit, a myriad of activities could be utilized for its implementation in the classroom.⁶

The basic pen-pal correspondence with speakers of the target language has been successfully implemented with post-secondary students of Japanese to promote interpersonal communication and intercultural understanding. Yamada and Moeller (2001) examined the letter exchange among students of Japanese with native speakers of Japanese to determine the students' perceptions of the pen-pal project and their learning processes based on the five goals of the standards. The authors conclude "Persistence, independent practice, and critical thinking skills were used and developed by students to decipher the pen pal letters, ultimately promoting deeper understanding of the Japanese language and culture" (p. 33).

An additional way of implementing the Communities standard is through a discussion board using the entire class as a community of learners. The instructor poses a thought-provoking question in relation to the cultural content under discussion to the entire classroom. Students respond to the question and read other students' responses posted on the board. They then choose a response to refute or sustain in more detail. The activity is especially useful for films or discussion of a literary piece (Bueno, 2002).

Finally, access to the target language communities via the worldwide web is probably the most valuable means of gaining culturally relevant information for students

in general. Virtual magazines available in the target language could provide students with extensive topics that suit their interest. Online newspapers, live television, and radio could connect students with current issues in the target language community. A practical way of immersing students in these issues could be through cyber surveys. Cyber surveys are rich sources of information where students could explore problems pertaining to youths of the target culture that are similar in their own culture. For example, students analyze a survey in relation to drug use and alcoholism among youths of the target culture. They utilize the survey to synthesize information and draw conclusions based on the findings. The information can be further used to compare, contrast, and discuss this societal problem for youth worldwide from a cross-cultural perspective (Communication, Cultures, Communities).

“A practical way of immersing students in these issues could be through cyber surveys.”

IV. Standards-based curricula integrate content with language learning. Connections as defined by the SFLL (1999) state that students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language and that students acquire and recognize distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its culture.

The IL curriculum has generally been one of linguistic skill refinement beyond beginning-level language courses, vocabulary expansion, reading of cultural information, and reading and analysis of literary works (Rava, 2002). Standards-based instruction advocates the use of interdisciplinary content that expands students' knowledge of content matter that is linguistically and cognitively engaging. Consequently, the issue for instructors at the IL is to determine how to integrate language with interdisciplinary content to appeal to the diverse needs and interests of students.

To foster this experience, students could select reading materials in the target language that are engaging to them in their respective disciplines or in other areas of interest. Social studies topics are common in IL textbooks and provide a common reference point for students of all backgrounds. They could be utilized to stimulate critical thinking and to encourage the use of language to formulate opinions, make predictions, express agreement or disagreement, and discuss cultural perspectives. For example, a popular IL Spanish textbook incorporates a social studies topic dealing with street gangs in Dallas, Texas, as part of the reading comprehension material of the text.⁷ The ensuing activities center on literal comprehension of the text and expansion of the topic through activities that foster interpersonal communication. A standards-based approach to such a topic goes beyond these activities so that students develop a deeper understanding of the issue at hand. It will extend the topic to address areas goals (communication, culture, connections, communities, comparisons). Some of the suggested activities could be used for this purpose:

Students find information in relation to gang activity in the Dallas area and present their information to the class (interpretive and presentational communication).

(a) Students find information concerning the societal factors that influence gang

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membership and activity. They present this information to the class to stimulate discussion (interpretive, interpersonal, presentational communication).

(b) Students investigate what local communities are doing to prevent gang activity among disadvantaged youth and present the information to the class (Communication, Communities, Connections).

A unique aspect of the Connections standard is that students acquire and recognize distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its culture. In other words, the cultural perspective embedded in this standard could lead students to attain a better understanding of the products and practices of the culture (Met, 1999). For instance, themes about the environment, societal issues such as marriage and divorce or drugs and alcoholism, common in IL textbooks, are appropriate content matter that could be explored from a cross-cultural perspective.

The Internet provides a vast wealth of information where IL students could explore their own interests and make connections with other disciplines for completing individual research projects, giving presentations, and participating in classroom discussion. The challenge for instructors is to provide students with appropriate strategies to understand the content matter given the fact that some students may not be linguistically or culturally prepared for reading authentic materials in the target languages on the internet.

V. Standards-based curricula assist students in making meaningful comparisons. The Comparisons standard as defined by SFLL (1999) states that students demonstrate an understanding of the nature of the language and culture studied through comparisons with their own language and culture. The goal of this standard is for students to make meaningful comparisons among the patterns of language systems and cultures so that they become aware of cross-cultural similarities and differences.

Making comparisons whether across language systems or cultures has not played a prominent role in the majority of foreign language courses (Fantini, 1999). The exploration of the Comparisons standard for the IL language curriculum could be of great benefit to students because of its potential for developing intercultural learning and students’ understanding of cultural diversity. Fantini states: “Comparisons ensure the learner’s deepening of self-awareness, an often untapped potential arising from the provocativeness of intercultural comparisons, to which language contributes a major part” (p. 176). Consequently, IL students could gain deeper insights into their own culture and the target culture by not only engaging in comparisons, but also by acknowledging that no two systems or cultures are the same. Opportunities abound for engaging students in making comparisons in several domains in language and language usage such as in cognates, grammar, regional dialects, lexicon, gestures, and other forms of non-verbal communication.⁸

An area of comparison that could be extremely useful to IL students is that of cross-cultural gestures and the meanings that they convey. Tomalin & Stempleski (1993) suggest the following activity for language students to heighten their aware-

ness of cross-cultural gestures and their meanings. The teacher hands out twelve pictures showing gestures and then invites the students to discuss and answer some questions. Which gestures are different from those in the home culture? Which of the gestures shown would be used in different situations or even avoided in the home culture? (p. 117-119).

Additionally, IL students could benefit from activities designed to compare and contrast how social stratification is played out in their culture and in the target culture so that they develop an understanding of the broader factors that influence social stratification. As a starting point, the topic of social stratification can be explored through images of women and minority ethnic groups in their own culture presented in the mass media such as in magazine, television, or videos. Students explore the initial concepts associated with these images. For example, the concepts associated with women could be mother, wife, housewife, executive, senator, single woman, etc. The instructor could have students discuss choices that women in their society have in modern times and then compare them with the choices that their mothers had while growing up. The discussion could be further extended to include other minority groups in their culture as portrayed in the media. Once students have gained insights into the practices and perspectives of their culture in relation to social stratification, the instructor could expand the topic to include social stratification in the target culture. Students could compare and contrast aspects such as gender roles across cultures, opportunities for social mobility in relation to gender and ethnicity, and other important issues. IL students could pursue comparative work in other content areas that are appropriate for exploring similarities and differences between cultures. For example, sociocultural behavior such as greetings, handshaking, personal space, eye contact, level of formality in addressing people and turn-taking, are culturally based, and miscommunication can ensue if students do not understand the appropriate behavior associated with the practices. Other areas appropriate for comparisons are societal and religious practices that can be misconstrued if students are not made aware of how they are played out in a particular society.⁹ For instance, the concept of marriage is similar in many societies. Yet, the practices and perspectives associated with marriage may be different or similar across cultures. In sum, the Comparisons standard used effectively could provide IL students with the tools to understand language and cultural diversity and instill in them a sense of tolerance.

Conclusion

The IL curriculum plays a pivotal role in preparing students to achieve communicative and intercultural competence in the foreign language. As such, the curriculum has to be grounded in organizing principles

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and teaching practices that support the five general goals of the standards. To do so, college faculty of foreign languages should become familiar with the standards and their overall implications for post-secondary students entering language programs. Students trained with standards-based instruction in K-12 will be better prepared overall for more challenging academic work in foreign languages and will perhaps enter language programs beyond the basic language sequence. Consequently, the IL curriculum must be designed to appeal to these students in terms of cognitively engaging content, materials, and activities along the lines of standards-based instruction.

Standards-based instruction is viable, but its implementation will require that college faculty rethink what is taught in terms of content, and also how and why it is taught. If the general goal for IL students is the attainment of functional fluency and intercultural competence to survive in the target culture, then the curriculum has to reflect this goal. Thus, the standards could be used as the organizing principle to assist IL instructors in establishing general and specific objectives and outcomes for students. Moreover, cultural instruction at the IL should have, as one of its central goals, the imparting of knowledge that will allow students to become more aware of cross-cultural differences, to heighten their perceptions of the target culture and to appreciate cultural diversity.

IL instruction is generally organized around a textbook. Therefore, the choice of an appropriate standards-based text is essential to ensure pedagogically sound content and cognitively challenging activities for students. As more IL textbooks become appealing in their content and tasks for students, instructors could incorporate culturally based activities and subject matter suitable for their students' needs.

To align the IL curriculum with the goals of the standards will require an examination of current teaching practices and an effort to change practices so that attention is given throughout the curriculum to reflect the five area goals: Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities.

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Notes

1. A version of this paper was presented at SCOLT 2004, Charlotte, NC. The examples presented are pertinent primarily to students of Spanish, but can be applied to other languages as well. Where applicable, sample activities are provided for IL students of other languages.
2. For a summary of standards-based instruction see National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center - Iowa: *A guide to aligning curriculum with the standards*. Retrieved on June 21, from [<http://www.educ.iastate.edu/nflrc/pubs/standards/guideStd.html>]. The summary was utilized in this paper to explain standards-based instruction as it pertains to the college level.
3. See Shrum & Glisan (2005, p. 54) for an example of a learning scenario based on travel for IL students of Spanish.
4. Diario Salud. saludalia.com
5. For an excellent example of a learning scenario titled *Changing family values* for IL students of French see Smith, (1999, Spring). See DidactiRed Centro Virtuales Cervantes for a description of a teaching unit on the family in Spain. See *Diversidad Juvenil en España* for a website that could be used for an activity on the topic of diversity. (<http://www.diversidadjuvenil.org>)
6. See Warschauer, M. (Ed.). (1995) for a rich variety of online activities for connecting students to the target language communities on the internet.
7. Zayas-Bazan, E., Bacon, S. M., & García, D. M. (2002). *Conexiones: Comunicación y cultura*. (2nd ed). Prentice Hall.
8. For a discussion of making comparisons for students of Russian, see Gettys, S. (2003, summer).
9. See Jernigan & Moore (1997) for a cultural lesson plan for students of Portuguese on the Orixá religion of Bahia, Brasil.

Appendix A Standards for Foreign Language Learning

COMMUNICATION

Communicate in Languages Other than English

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

Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language in 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 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 culture.

COMPARISONS

Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

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

Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate an 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.

Source: Standard for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century, p. 9.