

reading expository text in these areas requires a very different set of strategies from those used for narrative text or even expository text in the social sciences and humanities (Reehm and Long 1996). Similarly, the range of high-frequency vocabulary useful beyond the school setting that can be developed in the social sciences and humanities may be greater than in certain aspects of mathematics and science, where highly specific terminology may be restricted to these disciplines (e.g., *variables*, *pupa*, *anemometer*).

### **Standard 3.2: Acquire Information**

Under Standard 3.2, students use the foreign language to acquire information and insights uniquely accessed through the language. Unlike Standard 3.1 (connections with other disciplines), the fields students may explore may not necessarily be tied to what they are learning in other subjects. An important feature of Standard 3.2 is the extensive flexibility inherent in the instructional experiences that may address this standard. The student may be a significant decision maker in determining what kinds of information to pursue, when, and how. And not all students have to make the same connections or acquire the same information: these may be driven as much by student choice as teacher decisions. In many cases, the information acquired will likely be applied beyond what occurs in formal schooling (Sandrock, personal communication). In this standard, a broader definition of content—that is, “anything of interest to the learner” (Genesee 1994)—may prevail, so that content may be academic content if that is what the student chooses, or it may reflect personal interests beyond academics. However, in keeping with the earlier definition proposed for content, the information students acquire and the fields in which it is pursued must be engaging to learners (which it is likely to be if chosen by the learners themselves) and represent some degree of cognitive demand.

In acquiring information that reflects students’ personal academic or nonacademic interests, it is likely that students will make connections beyond the foreign language teacher’s expertise, and new strategies for guiding and assessing student work may be required. Yet, even when teachers themselves are not knowledgeable in the arenas in which students actively acquire information, the classroom can provide students with the linguistic tools and strategies to access resources independently beyond the classroom walls.

Not only is there flexibility in the information students acquire and how they acquire it, but such flexibility allows for variation in the language outcomes that result from independent student work. Clearly, different students

with different pursuits will come away with knowledge in differing lexical domains, grammar skills, or sophistication in expressing given language functions. And not all students may benefit equally in terms of the modes of communication or the traditional four skill areas. For many students, information may be acquired solely through the interpretive mode: some may only read and others may use only video to access information. And, within the interpretive mode, not all students will read the same kinds of material: some may read magazine articles and others access the electronic media. Some students may develop greater interpersonal communication skills than interpretive ones if they pursue personal interests through community outreach activities such as volunteer work or conducting telephone surveys on behalf of political candidates.

### **Standard 3.2: Connections to Goals and Standards**

If the rationale for Goal 3: *Connections* reflects the goals of communicative language instruction, i.e., preparing students to function in the settings and topics they are most likely to encounter, then Standard 3.2 is a powerful mechanism for enabling students to do so. This standard clearly addresses the individual communicative needs of learners, and therefore also ties nicely to the standards in Goal 5: *Communities* (5.1: *Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting*; 5.2: *Students show evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment*).

Perhaps one of the more appealing aspects of Standard 3.2 is inherent in the notion of perspectives. As the wording of the standard indicates, “*Students . . . recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.*” As such, this standard can provide an effective channel for also attaining Goal 2: *Cultures*. As students use their language to recognize the distinctive viewpoints of the target culture, they acquire insights into the cultural perspectives that relate to a culture’s products and practices. And just as students may pursue personal interests that lie beyond the expertise of the teacher, so too may students discover aspects of cultural perspectives unknown to the teacher. While many teachers are knowledgeable of cultural products and practices, the perspectives that drive them many not be as well known. Indeed, cultural perspectives have received insufficient attention in language teaching or in language teacher preparation in recent decades, so it is not surprising that less is known about them. Engaging students in discovering cultural perspectives as they acquire information and recognize viewpoints uniquely accessible through the language

will strengthen attainment of both Goals 2 and 3. Cultural knowledge is important in reading academic texts. Students will need background knowledge to make appropriate inferences regarding the meaning of texts. Therefore, the tools teachers provide students as they prepare to pursue individual interests also promote Goal 2.

Students can also move toward attainment of Goal 4: *Comparisons* as they learn about the distinctive viewpoints of the target culture. Students deeply interested in sports might choose to read the sports section of a target language newspaper. They can observe which sports receive the most attention, and compare that to the sports section of the local paper. Other students might be interested in teen magazines or in polls and surveys conducted in the target culture. These provide unique access to the thinking of people in a given target culture locale. For example, high school students were given an article reporting the results of responses to the survey question, “What would you do with a million pesetas?” Students were able to compare the priorities of the Spaniards who responded to those in their local community. Teen magazines, which are often replete with such surveys, give students interesting ways to access the distinct viewpoints of their peers elsewhere.

## Learning from Experience

As the language teaching profession increasingly aligns classroom instruction and learning experiences to the National Standards, new questions and challenges are bound to arise. Some will surprise us; others we may already have begun to anticipate. A few of the many questions that we will want to explore are briefly suggested below.

- How can language programs, particularly those in K–12 settings, continue to address articulation issues in order to work toward a seamless progression of knowledge and skills and yet still be responsive to learner interests? As already noted, most likely there will be variations in aspects of the language proficiency students acquire in addressing Standard 3.2. We will need to find ways to move away from some traditional foreign language curricula with their lockstep expectations for student achievement from level to level. That is, we will need to find ways to focus more on student proficiency than on achievement of specific language items, and recognize that proficiency may be demonstrated in different ways and using differing contents.
- How can students be assessed equitably in tasks and activities related to the Connections goal? To what degree should content knowledge be part of the assessment? Since one cannot communicate effectively without something to communicate about, surely topic knowledge will interact

with communicative proficiency. What criteria should teachers use to assess students and what relative weights should be given to those criteria? And how can teachers facilitate student learning in areas outside their own expertise and still effectively assess students?

- What models can be developed that allow teachers to work collaboratively with colleagues from other disciplines, given the constraints of schools (time available, number of students shared)? How can current collaborative models be expanded, and if necessary modified, to meet the needs of teachers in a range of grade levels and school organizational patterns? How can collaboration between content and language teachers be extended to shared approaches to student assessment?
- Given the many priorities for teacher professional development, how can teachers gain both confidence and increased competence in integrating content from other disciplines into their instructional program? Teachers will need to learn more about other disciplines so that rich and deep connections can be made. They will also find that teaching the content of other disciplines to learners with nonnative proficiency is facilitated by appropriate instructional strategies (Cloud 1998; Lorenz and Met 1988; Met 1994; Met 1989; Majhanovich and Fish 1988; Short 1997; Snow 1997; Snow 1987; Stole 1997). Snow (1998) suggests that integrating language and content learning expands teachers' instructional repertoire to include strategies for making content accessible. These strategies, in turn, facilitate language acquisition by making input comprehensible.
- What evidence can be marshaled to support the Connections goal? As is the case with many aspects of foreign language teaching in the United States, data derived from quantitative and qualitative research are needed to support the theoretical basis for integrating language and content instruction and for using language to acquire information. Genesee (1998) has suggested that there are compelling arguments to support the idea that content-based approaches to language teaching enhance student learning, but supporting research evidence is scarce to date.

## Conclusion

National Standards for foreign language learning build on sound theory and practice both within and beyond the foreign language field. This chapter has examined how the Connections goal, in particular, is consonant with current theories about learning. Connecting across disciplines is not a goal unique to the language profession. Indeed, national standards in other disciplines, such

as those in mathematics, include a similar goal. Interdisciplinary instruction and integrated curriculum have been the hallmarks of educational reform in schools across America. Notably absent from the discussions, unfortunately, have been foreign language educators, primarily because of the mistaken but common view that foreign languages are not part of the core curriculum. By making valid, rich, and multiple connections, language educators can increase their visibility and participation in the daily life of schools.

Beyond the theoretical bases for making connections, there are sound practical reasons as well. The Connections goal suggests an important role for using the foreign language to acquire information and gain access to the unique viewpoints of the language and culture. Within the field of language education, this aspect of the Connections goal provides important support for the other goals of the national standards for foreign language learning. Students gain communication skills, they gain insight into cultural perspectives, they can compare the viewpoints they encounter with their own, and they use language for personal enrichment both within and beyond the school setting. Thus, while aspects of the Connections goal may represent some new directions for language teaching, the two standards in this goal play an important role in the broader context of all five goals.

Foreign language study is an important and worthwhile endeavor for all America's students, regardless of age, ability, or geographic location. Languages should be worth learning as an academic pursuit in their own right as well as for their usefulness beyond academia. By working toward attainment of both standards in the Connections goal, language learners can address both of these worthy purposes. That is, the Connections goal promotes the intellectual development of learners. And because students use language to acquire information, particularly in areas of personal interest (whether vocational, avocational, or academic), making connections helps give the lie to the age-old plaint of language learners: *But I'm never going to use it!*

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