

work, individual tasks, creative work, portfolios) and performance outcomes (real-life speaking situations and a focus on writing for a purpose).

According to Lewelling and Rennie (1998), teachers should emphasize the process of learning and offer students a variety of options in performing tasks. They state, "... given the wide variation among foreign language students, teachers, courses, and contexts, an assessment tool or procedure that works well in one situation may be totally inappropriate in another" (p. 30).

A View Inside a Foreign Language Classroom in the Twenty-First Century

Having explored student diversity, instructors, the organization of the school day, and curriculum that underscore the twenty-first-century foreign language classroom, it is now time to step back and observe the reality of the situation. The classroom description that follows illustrates elements of classes and planning lessons that could be located anywhere in the United States today. It by no means indicates that all classrooms are the same. Quite the contrary. It serves merely to point out the challenges facing foreign language students and their teachers in classrooms here at the start of a new century.

In Ms. Garcia's level-one Spanish high school class are twenty-four students ranging in age from thirteen to seventeen. Due to larger sections of Spanish than expected at the middle school, several seventh and eighth graders walk over to take the class with the ninth–twelfth graders who make up the rest of the class. The students include one hearing-impaired student, four students identified as Gifted and Talented (GT)—the middle school students, several identified as "at-risk," and three seniors known throughout the school for their disruptive behavior and poor attendance. The ethnic make-up of the class includes three distinct groups: Latin Americans, African-Americans, and European Americans. The school has just gone to an alternating-day block schedule with this class meeting at the seventh period or last block on odd days to accommodate the four middle school students. This is Ms. Garcia's fifth year of teaching. She teaches four other classes, including two other level ones and two level threes.

During the previous year in preparation for implementing block scheduling, Ms. Garcia along with teachers at both the middle and high schools had several staff-development sessions. All teachers had read literature

about teaching on the block and had accessed Internet sites to read comments posted by teachers prior to staff development. Ms. Garcia along with Mrs. Brown, who is also to teach level-one Spanish, decide to plan units together to make the best use of time and materials. Both are apprehensive but feel that the administration has helped them prepare more than some as indicated by numerous negative statements on several web sites.

Ms. Garcia and Mrs. Brown plan to begin the year with a unit on "Family Life." Both have found in the past that this is a great way to get students to share and begin conversing in the language. Both simply rework their previous lesson plans to accommodate the ninety-minute blocks now in effect. However, when Ms. Garcia reports for the teacher-prep week at the end of summer break and receives her class rolls, the diversity of the students in the seventh period class causes her to rethink her plans. Never before has she had middle schoolers and high schoolers in the same class. While ethnic diversity is not as new to her, the blend of ability levels and age groups, and especially the addition of a hearing-impaired student, create a new challenge for her school year.

Ms. Garcia looks at different ways to introduce her unit on family life. She decides not to rely on the text as she and Mrs. Brown had planned. She suspects that the term "family life" has several different meanings for the students she will have in this class. Not every student in her seventh-period class will be looking at family or home from the same perspective. If this unit is to be a springboard to a year in which the class acts as a team, she must be mindful of the real-world setting of her room and must make everyone feel comfortable within the framework of his/her own experiences as quickly as possible.

Ms. Garcia and Mrs. Brown agree to revise the unit introduction and activities. First, they look at what performances and skills must be assessed during and at the end of this unit. This helps them determine how many blocks the unit will take as well. Rather than begin with the textbook directive for students to list their own family members, they decide to have each student create an imaginary family using characters from sports or entertainment, for example. Students will be asked to use first names only and to determine the number and variety of family members they wish. Included in these activities will be information such as where the family lives and what type of housing they occupy. The teachers reason that this approach will be less threatening for all abilities and ethnic groups represented in their classes but will allow for the target language vocabulary, simple expressions/directions, and the use of descriptive ad-

jectives, colors, and numbers that form the essential skills and knowledge on which they wish to focus.

As each teacher plans the strategies and activities for her level-one classes, she addresses the diversities represented in the make-up of her population. Ms. Garcia realizes that until the results of the learning styles inventory (an activity she uses at the first class meeting of each year) are assessed, she will not have a clear picture at the onset of which learning styles are favored by which students in her class. By having a variety of activities planned for the first class and by utilizing groups set up in a variety of ways she can use her observations to validate the results of that inventory and will quickly determine the group dynamics of her class. She plans to randomly assign groups for the activity in which students will be cutting up magazines to illustrate their family members. She will then group students by ability when they work on Spanish vocabulary acquisition. During a later period she will design the teams across the spectrum of diversities represented as they role-play in Spanish by telling others about their "family." The variety will appeal to the middle schoolers and will also allow her to address discipline issues by constantly moving among the smaller groups of students.

The strategies selected by the two teachers illustrate the differences in the make-up of their classroom. Ms. Garcia steers toward cooperative learning, think-pair-share, role-playing, and interviewing. The variety of abilities and ages in the class dictates a variety of strategies. Mrs. Brown uses similar strategies, but uses fewer per class since her students are less of the mix that Ms. Garcia has. Both expect to use technology at some point in the unit and decide to incorporate the talents of students in locating sites that will illustrate family life in Spanish-speaking countries.

By establishing initial plans with an understanding of the multiple realities in each of their classrooms, Ms. Garcia and Mrs. Brown begin to meet the challenges of their student populations, the scheduling model being utilized, and the curriculum framework that is in place. Both teachers go into the school year with a clearer picture of the uniqueness of the total situation. They analyze the needs of each student. They devise activities and learning strategies that mesh best with the needs of those students and the curriculum and classroom schedules at their school site. They realize along with other instructors throughout the nation that teaching has turned a corner. No longer will one look into the classroom and see a foreign language lesson being taught the same way it was taught during the last decade, the last year, or even the last month. The variety

of needs represented through the student enrollment within a classroom dictates differentiation in instructional methods and strategies based on the uniqueness of each child. The reality of teaching a second language to students today rests not only in offering real-world experiences to the learner but in addressing the realities of the educational setting through which teaching and learning originate.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, major organizations such as ACTFL, language-specific associations, foreign language centers, state foreign language associations, state departments of education, the major national resource centers, researchers, educators, and parents will be major forces changing the complex issues facing teachers and students in their classrooms. They will bring about possible changes due in part to the national foreign language standards which are unifying the profession around specific goals. These goals allow all students to study a foreign language, no matter what their ethnic heritage is or what their abilities or disabilities are. In prescribing solutions to problems, policy makers and stakeholders have collaborated on ways to continue uniting and supporting reform in foreign language education.

The realities of the classroom are the mirror images of a society that reflect good, bad, and indifference. Children and young adolescents who are enrolled in foreign language classes should expect their teachers to respect their cultures and differences in an inviting and positive manner. As students learn how to communicate in the target language of their choice it is essential that program planners include a performance-based curriculum that will include instructional units, themes, assessment, and strategies that will reach all students. Teachers, in turn, require similar attention to their needs. They should have frequent in-service training programs to help provide appropriate instruction and strategies in accommodating the needs and complexities of their learners. The multiple realities of the classroom require a strong team approach in providing a positive environment and a well articulated curriculum for the diverse learners in the classroom. The team should include the principal, who helps teachers in understanding the restructuring patterns for school environments. The school environment may include major changes such as integrated curricula, block scheduling, alternative assessment, state assessment, the

infusion of technology, and a variety of other initiatives. The future is bright; the foreign language profession has already recognized that in the twenty-first century, it is not a reflection of the “good old days” of homogeneity, it is the wonderful world of reality, plurality, and change. The profession is meeting the challenge.

Notes

¹1970 Northeast Conference and theme for the 1996 Northeast Conference.

²The two most prevalent block schedule patterns are 4 x 4 and A-B Alternating Block. Under a 4 x 4 plan a student takes four classes per semester, each meeting 90–100 minutes per day, every day. A course that traditionally would take one full year to complete now is completed in one semester. This allows a student to earn eight full credits over the space of one school year. Teachers teach three courses per semester, thus providing the district with six courses taught per teacher per school year. Under the A-B Alternating Block plan, a student has instruction in courses meeting 90–100 minutes every other day throughout the full school year. Under this scheduling set-up, a student will earn up to seven credits per school year and a teacher will teach up to five courses per year.

³Howard Gardner mentions in “Reflections on multiple intelligences” (1995), “... If I were to rewrite *Frames of Mind* today, I would probably add an eighth intelligence — the intelligence of the naturalist.... I have read in several secondary sources that there is a spiritual intelligence and, indeed, that I have endorsed a spiritual intelligence. That statement is not true” (p. 206). However, Gardner points out that he plans to write about the topic. In this chapter, the authors referred to his original seven intelligences.

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