Designing World Languages Learning in MPS

From Beliefs to Practice

MPS World Languages Curriculum Advisory

Introduction:

The MPS World Languages Curriculum Advisory expressed the following beliefs and recommended the following practices to promote the vision and mission for teaching languages in our district.

MPS World Languages Mission:

To prepare all students to be multilingual, culturally competent, respectful and responsible citizens of an interconnected, more peaceful world.

MPS World Languages Vision for our students:

Our vision challenge question:

Imagine a graduating MPS student who exemplifies the desired skills and knowledge acquired from a K-12 experience of learning languages and cultures. What would that person be like?

Vision: Once you know other languages and other cultures, this knowledge becomes a part of you. You are a different person, more open to the world and more a part of it. Your life is richer, you are more open-minded – a lifelong learner. You thrive in your own community and in other communities where all languages and cultures are valued; this contributes to understanding and peace.

Our Beliefs

The committee elaborated on their beliefs about language learning – what it is, for whom, and why; examined research; and recommended practices to lead students through rigorous learning and to apprentice skillful, culturally competent, language users. They recommend that:

- All students can acquire high levels of proficiency in multiple languages and demonstrate intercultural competence through rigorous, interactive, and meaningful instruction (IFL-POLs: Learning as Apprenticeship; Academic Rigor).

- Learning multiple languages is an essential part of every student's K-12 education. It should begin early and continue through long-term sequences (IFL-POLs: Academic Rigor; Organizing for Effort).

- Students' home languages are valuable assets to be cultivated for personal, community, educational, and career benefits. Home language proficiency provides transferable background knowledge that aids in developing proficiency in multiple languages (IFL-POLs: Socialized Intelligence; Learning as Apprenticeship).

- Vigorously supporting learning of the languages of Minnesota's first peoples – Anishinaabe, Dakota – is vital to the survival and maintenance of these languages and cultures (IFL-POLs: Socialized Intelligence; Learning as Apprenticeship).

Our Essential questions:

What do this vision and our beliefs mean for our students? How do we apprentice skillful, culturally competent language users? Who should learn languages? Why? What does research say about the importance of learning languages for students, and what instructional practices lead them to rigorous learning?

Inclusion

Language learning is for every child. All children can be successful at learning languages, as in other subjects. Learning other languages is core learning, not just for those who "elect" it; it is not an "elitist" content area. Research shows that those who learn other languages become more flexible thinkers and more adaptive and responsive problem-solvers. These are important functions for real life, no matter what else one does with the language. All students should take a long sequence of language learning.

International Student Population: a Minneapolis Asset

Minneapolis Public Schools' strength comes from its intrinsic internationalism, a setting in which all of our students can gain global perspectives and can understand the value of our multilingual and multicultural community. We must recognize the assets that we have and build a vision of what could be for all of our students. All MPS students can build upon their experiences and graduate with a global perspective that embraces multiculturalism and multilingualism. They can become multilingual citizens who have developed proficiency in at least two or three languages. They may build proficiency in their home languages and add proficiency in more languages to become truly multicultural, global citizens.

When the school community demonstrates that it truly values diversity with this vision, we will meet the needs of all our students so that multilingualism will become an educational asset for all. We will create pathways that allow students to build on their native language proficiency to develop it as a useful and valuable resource in their lives, something to be retained and not given up in the pursuit of learning English.

Essential 21st Century Skills: Multilingualism and Cultural Competence

Learning other languages is essential for all students. It allows them to develop a mindset that values multilingualism and multiculturalism as they realize that these important skills are attainable, and as they

see the value of increased cognitive abilities and the opportunities for their own futures. Language learning is developmental, based on demonstrating proficiency and should be a core subject, like math or music. The benefit of increased cognitive abilities is greatest when students have the right learning experiences that allow them to think in more than one language and to do rigorous academic work in more than one language.

When society places importance on language learning, community members become more empathetic, more flexible thinkers, and better understand others' needs and perspectives. As Daniel Pink states, "Immersing yourself into someone else's world … is a great way to connect with others and gain insight into their lives."[1] This understanding not only serves oneself but can be used to serve others. Culturally competent people feel comfortable in new, less familiar situations; they are confident, able to take risks, and able to accept rather than fear differences. They care about and empathize with others, realize that others matter, and perceive their own responsibility to and in the world. They desire to learn through experiences; understand how cultures and languages of other nations shape perspectives; and are aware of the rest of the world. They are able to step outside the box, outside of their comfort zones. They have friends of other cultures and languages and seek to experience language and culture beyond the traditional classroom setting. They realize that others can also be right. They understand that there are many ways to live and be happy in the world, and that the "American" way of life is just one way to live.

As people learn languages, they see how it enriches their lives as a life-long endeavor that leads them to value languages, to use them daily and to become linguistically versatile. They realize their own potential ability and understand how learning languages is doable given the right kinds of learning experiences over time. They understand that demonstrating language proficiency as a real life skill means knowing how to use it in various situations – first to understand, then to read, then finally to speak and write in the language(s). They understand that it takes 5 -8 years in a course of study to gain useable proficiency and well-established skills (at Intermediate –Mid proficiency on the ACTFL scale, or higher). They learn how to learn other languages and that, like any valuable skill (such as math, science, and music) they will continue to learn it throughout their life.

What does this vision mean for World Languages programs in our schools?
In "Improving Students' Capacity in Foreign Languages," Miriam Met states: "The key to long-term success (and making the investment of funds and of student time worthwhile) is to keep front and center [these] critical design features:

- Time: sufficient contact time to ensure language learning
- Intensity: engaging tasks that motivate learners to expend effort and persist in challenging work;
- Interaction: extensive opportunities to hear (or read) language used by others and to use language with others in meaningful and purposeful ways;
- Authentic tasks: real-life reasons to use language as a tool for communication;

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[1] Pink, Daniel. A Whole New Mind: Why Right Brainers Will Rule the Future. Riverhead Books, New York. 2005, p. 184.

- Continuity from year to year; and
- Cross-cultural learning."[2]

Regarding school programs, Met reiterates: "Schools that offer foreign languages should ensure that their programs incorporate the features that research has shown to make a difference in language learning. Of these, the most self-evident is adequate time. Learning a language takes a long time."[3]

K-12 Sequences

One can't develop such proficiency with just two years of study. Learning must be supported by a system of articulated sequences (K-12) provided in various languages. If our outcome is for students to use language in meaningful, fulfilling ways by 11th and 12th grade, then language educators must build those skills from elementary, to middle school, and on through 9th and 10th grade. We must plan backwards from where we want them to be when they graduate. For example, if we want students in 12th grade to be able to discuss and analyze humanities, we need to plan learning at the preceding elementary and middle grades levels that builds students' ability to do this through the right kinds of learning experiences – articulated, rigorous FLES and immersion programs that build skills developmentally in sequences through middle and high school and beyond.

Multiple Pathways

Rigorous language learning happens when students are able to build high levels of proficiency over time through spiraling curriculum based on content-themes and topics. Measurable proficiency is a result of a long sequence of study and it gives students a tangible, useful skill. For our students to achieve these outcomes, a sequenced learning pathway that builds language learning experiences is required, regardless of whether students are learning second or third languages, developing their native languages, or are in immersion programs.

The MPS World Languages Steering Committee should be charged with the review of program decisions made by schools and other proposals from outside agencies because of the effect that this has on language pathways, equitable offerings, and coherence of the curriculum

What does this vision mean for curriculum for World Languages?

Standards-based

The national and district standards for World Languages require developmental, extended sequences of learning that incorporate the five broad goals of Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons and

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[2] Met, Myriam. "Improving Students' Capacity in Foreign Languages", *Phi Delta Kappan* (November 2004).

[3] Met, Myriam. "Improving Students' Capacity in Foreign Languages", *Phi Delta Kappan* (November 2004).

Communities. These goals spiral through the curriculum, build on prior knowledge, and articulate to subsequent levels.

Acquisition of Language Skills versus Learning about Languages

For students to be able to use language to communicate, the focus must be on acquisition – acquiring language through *using* it rather than learning *about* the language. Teachers must pay attention to *how and why* students learn language.

If every reference to grammar in a typical language scope and sequence curriculum were taken out, what would be left? Thematically grouped subjects, verbs and vocabulary? But, when the content is the **culture**, language is the tool through which to learn culture. When curriculum focuses on developing cultural competence, teachers plan to develop language skills that students use to build their understanding of cultures and demonstrate their competence. Students can step into a sequence that is content-based through culture, rather than grammar/vocabulary based. Language learning and cultural learning are truly internalized by learners through acquiring language through content and developing proficiency.

All students should be able to learn languages better through a content-based, culturally rich, whole language approach to instruction. The best programs for delivering this instruction are sequential long-term language programs, immersion, and those with opportunities to use the language for real purposes (i.e. in the community, through internet, or study/travel in the target language and culture.

Culture as the Content; Language as the Tool

Culturally rich, content-based instruction is brain friendly and intrinsically interesting. It is cognitively engaging because it requires deeper processing and use of prior knowledge. Instruction focuses on language acquisition versus learning about the language. It coherently presents information that is thematically organized, which is easier to remember than providing isolated facts. Students learn real-life skills. There is greater flexibility in the curriculum to allow for adjusting to students' interests and needs, and to address gaps. Such instruction results in increased language learning and content learning, and increased student application, motivation and interest. Cultural topics and themes are intrinsically interesting. Students are intrigued by world views. In culturally rich, content-based curriculum, students study what students in other countries study – contemporary cultures and civilization, geography, history, religions, art, and global issues, stories, and literature.

This is in contrast to former practices of grammar-sequenced curricula. For our students, the unit on the past subjunctive is not all that interesting as a discrete, stand-alone topic. In content-based thematic curricula, grammar structures naturally emerge from that content.

"By teaching on a theme, the teacher can avoid isolated exercises with grammar practiced out of context, which fragment language at the word or sentence level and avoid conversation. Research shows that the "kill and drill" method of language learning is less efficient than using language in context. By teaching in a

story form, activities, lessons and units are engaging, meaningful, and memorable and have a clear beginning, middle, and end.

"These key points show us how thematic instruction can help students learn to communicate in real-life situations where they are required to convey important ideas and collaborate with others to solve problems. These are skills that will result in globally competent students prepared to work in an interconnected world."[4]

Developmental Articulation

If our desired outcomes for our students are rigorous, such as being able to use language to create, think in the language, or narrate using different time frames, then the instruction required to get them to these outcomes must expose students to these high expectations from the beginning. Instruction builds on this, ramping up through spiraling content and structures and scaffolding sequential learning, adding skills that build towards independent usage. There's no magical moment when students can *suddenly* do the narrative; rather, these skills are built from the beginning. Spiraling language instruction views and presents language holistically, not in discrete parts. To demonstrate their proficiency, students in grades 11 and 12 might do a capstone project for a humanities course taught in the second language. Teachers from previous grades would plan instruction to develop that foundational knowledge through content-based instruction that lead students' inquiry into historical perspectives and deep culture.

The building blocks for high levels of proficiency use are grounded in Bloom's Taxonomy. To get to analysis, students need to build and use their knowledge of language and culture, demonstrate comprehension, and compare languages and cultures, then move on to analyzing language use and cultural practices, evaluating and synthesizing their learning.

A Holistic Approach to Language Acquisition

Research supports the use of content-based instruction to provide contextualized, meaningful learning combined with a lot of *comprehensible input* in the language in order to produce high levels of proficiency. Content-based language instruction is brain-friendly because it is cognitively engaging, geared to deeper processing through using students' prior knowledge, and presents intrinsically interesting language as a whole, rather than in parts. Content-based instruction is based on language acquisition theory that claims that "We acquire language in only one way, when we understand messages (comprehensible input) ...we acquire when we understand what people tell us or what we read, when we are absorbed in the message."[5] Comprehension precedes production. This language acquisition approach is contrasted with "language learning" which is limited in function and focuses on form and applying the rules.

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[4] Met, Myriam. "Improving Students' Capacity in Foreign Languages", *Phi Delta Kappan* (November 2004).

[5] Krashen, Stephen. Foreign Language Education: The Easy Way. Language Education Associates. Culver City, CA. 1997

Language learning through content is supported by instructional methods such as the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response (TPR), and TPR Storytelling. These methods view language learning holistically, scaffold learning, and incorporate cooperative learning that uses Socialized Intelligence and Accountable Talk – principles of learning from IFL. They promote reading, especially free voluntary reading that builds proficiency, with students demonstrating understanding through reading and retelling.   Instruction for writing in the second language incorporates process writing practices such as the Collins writing approach.

Teachers use the Natural Approach (Krashen and Terrell, 1983) that is based on how humans naturally acquire language. In the Natural Approach, teachers provide a lot of comprehensible input in order for language learning to develop naturally as students first absorb comprehensible language in a silent period, then move to minimal response, then to speech emergence. Teachers use brain-friendly instruction that is engaging, personalized, uses humor, provides a relevant context, and helps students to connect to prior knowledge. They focus on whole language versus learning discrete skills. This kind of instruction lowers the students' "affective filter" (Krashen, 1982) by promoting a comfortable, non-threatening, enjoyable environment for student learning.

Teachers provide comprehensible input that contains aspects of language that students are developmentally ready to acquire but have not yet acquired (Comprehensible input +1). They use language that focuses on culture as content, through stories and authentic texts. They scaffold learning through spiraling skills and content to prepare students to use real-life, real-world language skills for communicative purposes (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational). Their curriculum is thematically organized, making it easier to remember than isolated facts. This gives teachers greater flexibility in designing constructivist learning through curriculum that they can adjust to meet student needs and address gaps. Students learn from each other in cooperative groups. They use their language skills to be of service to others, as socialized learning builds greater language and content learning, increased application of learning, and more motivated, interested students. Mihaly Csikszentmilahyi addresses students' intrinsic motivation as a contributor to the *flow* of learning that launches students "on their way to a self-propelled acquisition of knowledge." [6]

Language teachers must take a critical look at world language scope and sequences to see what is available and what they will need to create in order to attain the results desired for our students. Since most textbooks haven't changed much in the past fifty years, teachers can't expect that a magic, packaged program is out there. Fortunately, we practice our profession in Minnesota, where curriculum decisions are local and teachers are allowed the creative freedom to choose, to be visionary, to make use of technology and the wealth of materials available on-line, and to create learning experiences that match their student populations. They can rewrite their own story because they have the power to create and produce the results they want for their students.

Reading helps with overall language development

Language teachers must incorporate regular reading and free voluntary reading of comprehensible texts and books into language acquisition programs. Researchers and practitioners confirm the power of regular

reading in the second language to increase vocabulary and proficiency in languages, as evidenced in the citations below:

"People acquiring a second language have the best chance for success through reading."

- Stephen Krashen, <u>The Power of Reading</u>. 1993, p.84

"There is overwhelming research showing that recreational reading in a second language is a powerful means of improving grammar, vocabulary, spelling and writing ability—and it is far more efficient and far more pleasant that traditional instruction."

"Picking up word meanings by reading is 10 times faster than intensive vocabulary instruction."

-Stephen Krashen, <u>The Power of Reading</u>. 1993, p. 15

 "Only a fraction [of the words that students need to know] are likely to be acquired through formal study, leaving the pedagogical implication that any others have to be acquired through simple exposure to the language or not acquired at all. This puts a premium on nonteaching activities that can bolster exposure to a language, with reading being an especially important source."

- Norbert Schmitt, <u>Vocabulary in Language Teaching. </u>2000, p. 3

"Less frequent words…may be best learned by reading extensively, because there is just not enough time to learn them all through conscious study."

- Norbert Schmitt, <u>Vocabulary in Language Teaching. </u>2000, p. 137

"Incidental learning of words during reading may be the easiest and single most powerful means of promoting large scale vocabulary growth."

-W.E. Nagy & P.A. Herdman, <u>The Nature of Vocabulary Acquisition</u>, 1987, p.27

"The only significant predictor of the ability to use the subjunctive was the amount of free voluntary reading done in Spanish; the amount of formal study of Spanish, the amount of formal study specifically aimed at the subjunctive, and how long subjects had lived in a Spanish-speaking country were not significant predictors of subjunctive competence."

- Stephen Krashen, <u>The Power of Reading,</u> 2nd edition, 2004, p. 10

"The study of complex grammatical constructions does not help reading (or writing); rather, mastery of complex grammar is a result of reading."

- Stephen Krashen, <u>The Power of Reading,</u> 2nd edition, 2004, p. 28

"According to the research, students who do Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) typically gain at least as much on standardized tests as students who participate in traditional programs, and usually do much better if the program lasts long enough."

- Stephen Krashen, <u>Foreign Language Education the Easy Way.</u> 1997, p. 27

Assessments – Formative and Summative

Instruction that supports "Academic Rigor in a Thinking Curriculum" (IFL) for World Languages is guided by formative and summative proficiency-based assessments of the standards, at developmental benchmarks. Assessments that support language acquisition and proficiency-based methods are:

- Formative assessments that guide instruction, i.e. comprehension checks;

- Summative assessments, i.e. integrated performance assessments;

- Standardized proficiency assessments such as the Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessment (CARLA), the STAMP (Avant Assessments) and International Baccalaureate exams;

- Student self-assessment and portfolios that help students to understand how they develop language proficiency, i.e. MPS Language Portfolio or *Linguafolio*.

MPS World Language teachers will work to review, adopt, or develop fair and credible proficiency-based assessments that evaluate students' developing proficiency, support articulation between program sequences, and inform students, parents, and administrators of achievement of expected results.

Backward Design

Designing (or selecting) curriculum begin with the end in mind. Curriculum and instruction is based on language acquisition theory and best practices, incorporates brain-friendly approaches, and is differentiated for the success of the range of students in MPS. We begin by deciding which skills or tasks we want our language students to do in 11th and 12th grade. If we want them to demonstrate high levels of proficiency in order to communicate ideas as they discuss humanities and cultural perspectives, teachers plan back from this goal to design the sequential learning for students in 10th grade, 9th grade, middle school, and elementary levels. Teachers select learning materials guided by criteria based on the key principals of language acquisition. Time and professional development for teachers is provided for planning and coordination of these learning sequences.

Materials

Learning materials that are used by World Language teachers in Minneapolis must be motivating and relevant to MPS students, and must promote equity, develop global thinking and international-mindedness, provide access to high quality, rigorous learning, and enable teachers to differentiate learning to students' needs. Curriculum materials support language learning through content, and use visuals, authentic materials, and comprehensible leveled texts. Technology is judiciously infused through the right kinds of

authentic learning experiences that enliven and expedite learning, but is not used to "drill and kill." In addition, using technology supports language learning if it is used for the "right kinds of tasks" (IFL), which promote social interaction and mediation in languages by connecting students and teachers around the world. This ubiquitous connectivity allows teachers and students to be networked as opposed to isolated, provides access to free materials on the internet, and offers virtual experiences of other cultures and countries.

Professional Development

Continuous, focused professional development centered on improving teacher practice is a *key* requirement for students' language acquisition and proficiency development. It requires continuous:

- Coaching of teachers' use of second language acquisition methods, such as providing enough comprehensible input, giving appropriate feedback, use of formative assessment, proficiency-based assessment, and apprenticing language learners;
- Guidance of teachers' development of high-quality content-based language lessons, and time to write them;
- High-quality, interactive on-line support for sharing lessons, assessments, and practices.

Conclusion:

To prepare our students with 21st century skills, classroom teachers must use sound strategies to engage all learners, implement high-quality curricula, and understand what their students are able to do with language to communicate, connect with, and understand the perspectives of people from diverse cultures. To accomplish this important and evolving task, teachers need to use many tools, research-based methods, and their own creative professional practice to engage all students. There is no "packaged" curriculum program that can accomplish what an inspired, talented teacher can do when supported by their schools, colleagues, and on-going professional dialogue. Teachers must be "supported to use new materials, instructional methods, and learning processes …develop new ways of thinking about teaching and learning in the classroom and observing how students are thinking and learning. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on and discuss their teaching and assist each other in identifying the knowledge and skills necessary to improve their practice and seek new solutions." [7]

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[6] Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. "Thoughts About Education", <u>Creating the Future: Perspectives on Educational Change</u>, compiled and edited by Dee Dickenson, New Horizons for Learning, 1991.

[7] Jensen, J. and Sandrock, P. with Franklin, J. <u>Priorities in Practice: The Essentials of World Languages Grades K-12- Effective Curriculum Instruction and Assessement.</u> ASCD. 2007, p. 54

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