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The Interconnected Language Curriculum: Critical Transitions and Interfaces in Articulated K-16 Contexts

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Direction: The Interconnected
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Introduction

Beyond the Collegiate Foreign Language Program: Horizontal and Vertical Articulation for 21st-Century Learners

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Beyond the Language Program

Language learning never occurs in isolation. This volume is about connecting language learners to domains beyond the narrow confines of the collegiate language classroom. Directors of language programs have expended considerable energy in recent years developing articulated and cohesive curricula. A major goal of such efforts is to overcome the traditional two-tiered structure that often separates linguistic training at the lower levels of undergraduate programs from content instruction in the form of literature and cultural studies at the upper levels. Early initiatives in the German programs at Stanford (Bernhardt & Berman, 1999) and Georgetown (Byrnes & Kord, 2001) inspired numerous projects to create integrated curricula that connect language and content acquisition throughout the four-year undergraduate degree program. In response to increasing pressure from stakeholders to build meaningful and effective learning experiences that attract undergraduate students into foreign language programs at North American universities, the insights from these programs were codified nearly 10 years ago in the 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) Report (MLA *ad hoc* Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007).

Without doubt one of the most influential policy documents issued by a major organization for language and literature scholars in recent years, the MLA Report sparked a great deal of discussion among members of the profession. By increasing general awareness of the shortcomings inherent in a conventional two-tiered curriculum, the report helped set the stage for substantive curricular change. Translating the recommendations of the report into pedagogical practice, however, remains a considerable challenge (Melin, Levine, Crane, Chavez, & Lovik, 2008).

Long before the recommendations articulated in the MLA Report entered the consciousness of the profession at large, applied linguists, and experts in second language studies were developing and using standards- and outcomes-based

frameworks, including most notably the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*—recently revised as the *World Readiness Standards for Language Learning* (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). Since the mid-1980s, this set of guidelines has motivated and assisted language program directors (LPDs) to modernize their undergraduate programs and think beyond the goal of communicative competence. However, while the impact of the ACTFL *Standards* on secondary school curricula has been enormous, literature and cultural studies experts in collegiate foreign language (FL) departments have not embraced the ACTFL *Standards* as a useful model for curriculum development projects that include upper-division undergraduate offerings. As a result, the effectiveness of the ACTFL *Standards* in overcoming the two-tiered curriculum and integrating language and content over the four-year undergraduate program has been limited.

Nevertheless, numerous publications inspired by the ACTFL *Standards* have offered valuable insight to LPDs tasked with curriculum coordination, teacher education, program assessment, and materials development at their institutions. These publications include several AAUSC volumes on advanced curriculum design (Byrnes & Maxim, 2003), articulation (Barrette & Paesani, 2004), the ACTFL *Standards* (Scott, 2010), and the evaluation of language programs (Norris & Mills, 2014).

Despite these numerous valuable contributions to curricular integration, language departments tend to undervalue the impact of students' prior educational experiences on the departments' own undergraduate programs. Making an effective transition from public school to a B.A.-granting institution (often via community college) is increasingly viewed as a critical component in educational success (Urlaub, in press). As ongoing educational reform efforts at the secondary level (such as the redesigned AP course and exam and the implementation of Common Core State Standards) continue to alter the skill sets, expectations, and attitudes of college freshmen, it becomes ever more essential that postsecondary programs pay attention not only to the ACTFL *Standards* themselves but also to these shifts in secondary education (Heining-Boynton & Redmond, 2013).

Language departments serve (or at least, might serve) as key partners in institutional efforts to attract and support students with diverse ethnic and national profiles, including international students and heritage language speakers with bilingual or multilingual backgrounds. The population of students with (emerging) bilingual capacity is likely to increase as dual language immersion education expands at unprecedented rates at the secondary level across the United States (Boyle, August, Tabaku, Cole, & Simpson-Baird, 2015). For heritage and immersion students, language study opportunities at the postsecondary level must go well beyond the traditional language curricula geared toward beginning or intermediate learners, who are expected to enter the program with, at best, a few years of language-learning experience at the high school level. In other words,

to remain relevant and effective, language curricula at colleges and universities around the country must react in a timely manner to significant changes in the educational landscape.

In addition to managing critical transitions between educational levels, successfully integrated language programs must also accommodate institutional trends at the American research university by articulating with entities outside the language department. To take just a few examples, language departments can participate meaningfully in models for integrating language and academic content (Cultures and Languages Across the Curriculum (CLAC)), interact with teachers' colleges, and work to incorporate FL programs into internationalization efforts at their respective institutions.

Several book-length publications on curriculum development and articulation in collegiate language programs have appeared in recent years. Besides the aforementioned AAUSC publications, recent volumes by Plews and Schmenk (2013), Swaffar and Urlaub (2014), Byrnes, Maxim, and Norris (2010), and Swaffar and Arens (2005) examine curricular innovations in collegiate FL departments, often with a strong emphasis on the undergraduate program. However, these publications have dedicated little attention to how changes in language programs at secondary schools or in other institutional settings may affect FL departments.

Horizontal and Vertical Articulation

With this 2016 AAUSC volume, we hope to advance the existing knowledge base for the collegiate FL curriculum by (1) exploring the *horizontal* interfaces between language studies and other disciplinary and administrative units within the university and (2) providing a *vertical* K-16 perspective on the academic pipeline. This dual perspective will facilitate the promotion of curricular coherence throughout the various stages of the undergraduate curriculum. It will also be of value to LPDs who manage the critical interface between language proficiency and content knowledge in disciplines beyond the FL department and the humanities.

Part 1: Horizontal Articulation

The first part of this volume is dedicated to horizontal articulation. Three of the four chapters describe and analyze curricular and instructional innovations that are connecting language programs to other disciplines on the authors' campuses or to programs at other institutions of higher learning. The fourth chapter presents a case study on a high school Spanish immersion program featuring content courses across the curriculum.

The first two chapters in Part 1 consider collegiate FL education within the context of institutional internationalization processes. In "Internationalizing the Curriculum at Home: Transcultural Exploration in a French-German

Course,” Sébastien Dubreil and Maria Stehle describe and analyze a joint learning environment that connects advanced-level students in the French and German undergraduate programs at the University of Tennessee. Designed according to multiliteracy principles, the joint course aims to foster critical awareness in students and develop learners’ abilities to work collaboratively with diversity, complexity, and ambiguity. With these goals in mind, the authors guide learners to ask critical questions, form and test new hypotheses, and develop and explore new perspectives in order to understand changes in France, Germany, Europe in general, and the United States. The authors explain how the program offers public university students, who increasingly lack the resources to fund an extended period overseas, the opportunity to develop a truly international outlook at their home institution.

The Shared Course Initiative that connects learners of less commonly taught languages at Columbia University, Cornell University, and Yale University highlights another response to the global aspirations shared by many private and public research universities. Nelleke Van Deusen-Scholl’s and Stéphane Charitos’s chapter “The Shared Course Initiative: Curricular Collaboration Across Institutions” offers a critical reflection on the irony that globalization efforts (which, in higher education, frequently coincide with the adoption of corporate management principles) often marginalize the role of language instruction in universities. The authors respond to this trend with a project specifically focused on promoting and sustaining the study of their institutions’ smallest (and therefore most vulnerable) languages. In smart classrooms equipped with cutting-edge technology, retrained language teachers are delivering language instruction simultaneously on three campuses. The authors discuss how the development and implementation of this successful model of telecollaborative language instruction provides a blueprint for broader institutional efforts to facilitate teaching and learning on a global scale. The same technology and pedagogy that connects learners of Polish in New York City, Ithaca, and New Haven has also the potential to connect political science students in New York City, Shanghai, and Buenos Aires.

Cori Crane’s chapter, “Making Connections in Beginning Language Instruction through Structured Reflection and the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages,” shifts the volume’s focus from global issues to the individual learner. Crane’s analysis of 26 learners of German demonstrates the impact of structured reflections in beginning collegiate language instruction. Throughout their first semester of German, learners are guided to write in English about their perceptions of the target language and culture as well as their thoughts regarding the impact of German on their performance in other classes, their academic interests, and their emerging professional aspirations. Crane’s study demonstrates that structured reflections can help students develop the competencies associated with the ACTFL’s *Communities* and *Connections* standards.

In the final chapter of Part 1, “Perceptions of Native English-Speaking and Heritage Spanish-Speaking High School Students in a Spanish Immersion Program,” Lucy Johnson reports on a qualitative study of 27 native English-speaking and Spanish-heritage language students who participated in a Spanish immersion program at a suburban high school. From grades 10 to 12, the students were enrolled in Spanish language and subject matter courses and also participated in an optional study-abroad program. Johnson’s interviews and focus group discussions revealed that students’ confidence in their ability to learn content such as math and world history in the immersion target language increased over their time in the program. In fact, many of the immersion participants felt sufficiently confident to seek opportunities for using Spanish outside the classroom in their communities. An important contribution to the relatively small body of research conducted with immersion students at the high school level, this study suggests that students’ awareness of and tolerance for different cultural perspectives increases through their immersive classroom experiences and intensive interactions between native English speakers and Spanish heritage speakers.

Part 2: Vertical Articulation

Part 2’s four chapters on vertical articulation discuss initiatives that connect language study across educational levels.

In order to stage instruction effectively and craft meaningful educational experiences, university language instructors must be aware of ongoing developments in secondary education: many of these developments have an immediate impact on the experiences that shape the competences and attitudes of incoming freshmen. The first chapter in Part 2, “Implications of Advanced Placement World Languages and Cultures Tenets for University Foreign Language Programs” by Christina Frei, Glenn Levine, Heather Willis Allen, and Bridget Swanson, provides an overview of the recently redeveloped advanced placement (AP) exams and discusses how this redevelopment has resulted in a reframing of the AP curriculum in world languages and cultures. Based on a thorough analysis of existing third-year college courses, the developers of the AP followed backward design principles to create high school curricula and exams. Both the result of this effort and the process that led to its instigation bear numerous implications for curriculum development and instruction in collegiate FL departments.

Jane Hacking and Fernando Rubio, in their chapter titled, “A Proficiency-Based Articulation Project between Postsecondary Institutions,” question the assumption that cross-institutional language-course equivalencies are sufficient for students to transfer readily from one institution to another. Pointing to the perennial challenge of successful articulation between two-year community colleges and universities, Hacking and Rubio argue that transferability should be determined through the establishment of proficiency targets. Their chapter reports on a multi-language proficiency study conducted at Salt Lake Community College

and the University of Utah as a first step toward implementing effective transfer policies based on proficiency data and benchmarking. Based on their findings—which demonstrate disparate proficiency levels within courses and across the two institutions—the authors argue that university policies have to be supported by joint pedagogical interventions, including proficiency training for instructors and the redesign of curricula and courses.

Since 2007, six states have completed the process of constructing “Roadmaps to Language Excellence,” initiated and facilitated by the Language Flagship to respond to the need for higher levels of language and cultural capacity in the United States. In “The Roadmap to Mainstreaming Dual Language Immersion in Rhode Island,” Sigrid Berka and Erin Papa advocate for collaborative co-construction of language policies by various groups and individuals with a stake in multilingualism. They present the well-known International Engineering Program (IEP) at the University of Rhode Island as an example of a significant shift in language education that was instructive for the Language Roadmap process and emphasize that interdisciplinary programs such as the IEP and the Language Flagship share the premise of K-12 immersion and, ultimately, the goal of a seamless K-16 language education. Berka and Papa conclude with an acknowledgment of the challenges inherent in implementing ambitious state-wide projects and a summary of lessons learned.

In the last chapter of this volume, Michael Everson reminds us of the possibility that the standardization of educational discourses can also create challenges. In “Confronting Literacy in Chinese as a Foreign Language,” Everson—a strong advocate for standards-based instruction—argues convincingly that current literacy standards provide insufficient guidance for learners and instructors engaged in language learning across languages with nonalphabetic writing systems. Given the enormous time and effort required to acquire Chinese literacy skills, as well as the ongoing controversy over a number of pedagogical issues, including the use of romanizations in the form of pinyin glosses, Everson concludes that successful Chinese K-16 articulation will depend on the creation of standards that are mindful of the particularities of Chinese literacy.

Outlook

A single volume cannot exhaustively address all the aspects of curricular transformation that are required to sustain collegiate FL programs as a vital enterprise in the 21st century. However, the individual chapters of this collection provide valuable snapshots of recent and ongoing curricular transformations that consider factors and realities beyond collegiate language departments. It is our hope that these pages will inspire colleagues to look beyond the walls of their institutions to create effective curricular structures and promote instructional practices that will serve the most important stakeholders of all—our students.

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