

Redesigning Instruction Through the World-Readiness Standards

By Rachel Gressel

World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages state,

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When I started teaching in 1999, I often heard, “Why are we learning Spanish? Why doesn’t everyone just learn English?” Students have not asked me those questions

I have a vivid memory of learning the irregular preterite verbs from my AMSCO Spanish workbook during my freshman year of high school. I sat on my bedroom floor with my back against my bed, in years. Today’s learners have so many options as to which languages spread out across my grey carpet. I repeated to myself, “Andar goes to andar. Comer goes to comí. Ir goes to fui. Poner goes to puse. Poder goes to pude.” Then, I remember repeating “e, iste, o, imos, skip vosotros, ieron.” After about 15 minutes of repetition, I had the verbs down cold. Two weeks later, my friend Kristin needed to memorize the verbs. I used the same strategy to help her; I went to her house and we repeated the verbs. The next day, I went out to students learning a heritage language,

students wanting

day, I quizzed her. She couldn't remember any of the verbs. Why was to travel, students wanting to learn for business, for communicative

she forgetting them? Why was she wasting my time? It was as though purposes, or for making connections, and more.

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including: we had never practiced them at all. Kristin ended up taking Spanish

"It is similar to . . .", "It is used to . . .", or "You find it for 2 years, then moving on to other electives.

in . . ." Students use cues to move the conversation forward, such I became a Spanish teacher for many reasons. One of the major

as "I agree with you because . . .", "I disagree because . . .", "In my reasons is because I excelled in Spanish and I was a good student.

opinion . . .", and "I don't understand. Can you explain in other The memory of teaching myself the irregular preterite on my bed-

words?" The World-Readiness Standards outline the need to learn room floor is one that makes me smile. When Kristin thinks of me

strategies to bridge communication gaps, including circumlocution, quizzing her and her struggling to remember the irregular preterite, I

deriving meaning, interpreting, inferring, reflecting, and predicting. don't think she has that same feeling. I think about how my current

The energy level in that class is high. Students are excited to create district has 16 sections of beginning Spanish comprised mostly of

with the language. freshman students. By the time these students are enrolled in a class

Redesigning instruction and assessment is hard work. The World- senior year, there are usually only about seven sections of Span-

Readiness Standards contain powerful information about perfor- ish. We have lost over half of our pool of language learners due to

mance and proficiency to help ensure that students become better attrition. Teaching grammar in isolation does not make our students

communicators. There are Standards for Communication, Cultures, world ready. The World-Readiness Standards are designed to provide

Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. We can make direct global competence for all students. Getting them to the Novice level

correlations to Common Core, to disciplinary literacy, and to teacher of proficiency is not enough. That means we have to vary our ap-

evaluation frameworks. But there is no silver bullet where we can proach in order to reach all of our learners.

be handed a curriculum saying teach these skills in this sequence in I have been out of the classroom for a little over 3 years now, serv-

Spanish I. Use these authentic resources and infographics. Incorpo- ing as the World Languages Department chair at a school that offers

rate these technologies. eight different languages. My school is one school district with Grades

Fifteen years ago, I worked for a school district where our curricu- 9–12. My favorite thing to do is to observe in classes where I don't

lum was not aligned. There were eight different teachers teaching Span- know the language. Based on my language background, I can usu-

ish II in eight different ways, preparing students differently for Spanish ally adapt quickly in an American Sign Language, French, German,

III. In order to get the teachers on the same page, our director pur- or Hebrew class. The students always think I am proficient in every

chased a new textbook series. We were all required to use materials only language we offer, and I am happy to keep up the charade. However,

from the textbook for the first year after adoption. Once we began to if I am observing a Chinese or Japanese class, I am out of my element. incorporate other materials, every teacher had to use them. In this way, I can figure out what is going on because I know what teaching looks like. the curriculum became common to all members of the department. like and I know what language learning looks like. Although when This textbook-based strategy will not work as we redesign the teachers and students are speaking in Chinese and Japanese, 90% instruction and assessment to incorporate the World-Readiness of the time I can't understand what is being said, I can read gestures Standards, as the document states: "The standards have been written and body language, follow visual cues, and pick up on routines. But to suggest that the goals of language learning cannot be divided into I like to sit back and look around, letting the language wash over me. a set of sequenced steps . . . differences in cognitive development, Students are asking questions of one another, interpreting short texts, maturity, and interests will determine the pace at which learners comparing and contrasting daily routines, presenting their research to make progress." one another. These students have a language skill I do not have. They Textbooks do not always take into account the needs of our heri- can communicate with so many people in so many situations that tage learners, do not always include authentic and timely materials, they will have many doors open up for them. and do not always allow for a shift from teacher-directed to student- Teaching to the World-Readiness Standards means there is direct directed course of study, based on students' personal interests. In instruction on learning strategies. Students need to be encouraged order to create a curriculum that will help students be college-, to be fearless and speak in the language they are learning. They need career-, and world-ready, that curriculum design needs to shift from to feel safe to make mistakes in the classroom or they never will feel planning for the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) to comfortable speaking in a real-world situation. I was observing in a the three modes of communication (Interpretive, Interpersonal, Pre- Spanish II class recently. The teacher said to the students, "Everyone sentational). The new edition of World-Readiness Standards allows speak Spanish, no extra chatter. If someone doesn't know, let them for real-world applications; thinking of languages as world languages struggle like a little kid does. You tell the kid to get a spoon, he instead of foreign languages. The World-Readiness Standards help comes back with a sock. He can't eat his soup. He learns how to get guide teachers to create a framework for "knowing how, when, and the spoon." why to say what to whom" rather than just knowing how to say what Teachers must in fact encourage mistakes. That same teacher (using grammar and vocabulary in isolation). said to the students, "Go ahead, ask the question. It's OK. Don't be Change is hard. However, these shifts in strategies will pay off nervous. We're all learning together." Students repeat memorized in ways both great and small. One of the teachers at my school phrases to one another that had been reinforced the previous day, attended a transformative workshop this past summer put on by The Language Educator ■ Jan/Feb 2016 49

then they worked together to interpret the infographic and solve the questions the other groups posed to them. As they left class, students stopped the teacher to tell him that they had fun with the infographic.

A few weeks previously, this teacher had spun a traditional research project on its head. Students researched a region in Japan and presented information to their partner. They needed to focus on their questioning techniques, on their ability to clarify, and on their ability to negotiate meaning with one another. Students told the teacher that instead of listening to 20 different presentations, they felt empowered presenting to a partner, and then learning from a partner. They were able to learn more in depth about regions of Japan. As the presenter, they felt more accountable to their partner, knowing they really had to make sure they understood the project. As the listener, they felt more engaged, knowing they had to follow up, ask questions, and clarify their understanding.

With the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, [Students told the teacher that](#)

more emphasis is placed on assessment than has been in the past.

As the Standards are tied to Performance Descriptors and Progress Indicators, both students and teachers need to know how well learners are able to use the language. Instructors need to create scaffolded tasks based on what students can do with the language; they need formative assessment checks in order to do this. There are several assessments that are built on frameworks grounded on the World-Readiness Standards, such as integrated performance assessments (IPAs), the Advanced Placement (AP) exams, and the ACTFL Assessment of Performance towards Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL). However, there are many ways to tie in more formative assessment as well; our interpretation of formative assessment in the language classroom continues to evolve. When I began evaluating language our state organization. TALL-IL (Training for the Assessment of teachers a few years ago, they would tell me on their pre-observation Language Learning in Illinois) is a joint project by Illinois Council planning forms that they were going to formatively assess by check-on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ICTFL) and ACTFL, which ing entrance and exit slips, homework, and look at the quizzes later takes teachers through the implementation of Standards-based unit in the week. While some of these strategies are still used today, we design through a focus on performance assessments. This teacher hear a lot of talk about assessment being used as a checkup rather was able to collaborate with other language educators to explore a than a postmortem; but we need to know today, in the moment, how unit via *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998) which students are doing with what they are learning. If they are struggled the more traditional ways he had taught in the past (with gling, educators need to be able to check in and reteach to reach vocabulary and grammar in isolation). all learners. This teacher is a singleton, meaning he is the only teacher of his There are countless ways to insert learning checks and formative language. He is 20 years into his teaching career, so he refers to this assessments into the language classroom on a daily basis. Technology as his “mid-life teaching crisis.” He has changed his grade-ogy makes this very possible. Currently, my district is phasing in book to include only Interpretive, Interpersonal, and

Presentational

a 1:1 initiative with Google Chromebooks, so our freshmen and categories and he is modifying his assessments and projects so that sophomores all have devices. Some of the tools that our language all are directly connected to the modes of communication. He has teachers have found successful include Kahoot, PollEverywhere, discovered infographics. During his formal 2-day observation, he GoSoapbox, Google Forms, Socrative, Peardeck, Today's Meet, and had students work together to interpret infographics of *shinkansen*, Quizlet. It does not really matter which tool is used. The point is that the high speed trains in Japan. Students in Level III spoke entirely in teachers are able to systematically diagnose how much a student has Japanese. The engaging level of the infographic allowed for different- understood, how well a student can interpret, and how a learner can tiated conversations; each learner was able to enter the dialogue at perform in a controlled environment, so they can modify instruction a level where he or she felt comfortable. Students created questions accordingly. I have observed teachers that do the same thing without about the infographic and passed the questions to different groups, technology just as effectively. They have students hold up answers

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on whiteboards or hold their thumbs up/down/to the side. Students We do struggle to find the time to come together and we hesitate snap their fingers if they think the answer is A and clap their hands to implement something new in our classrooms before it is tried, if they think the answer is B. Students rate themselves on a post-it tested, and considered more polished and ready. We are piloting our on the corner of their desk or display a colored cup (red=stop and rubrics department-wide during this semester and reviewing them help; yellow=still thinking; green=go ahead). Students compose a over the summer. Our Interpersonal Communication rubric has Facebook status, tweet, or #hashtag of the most important point three categories, which include Language Function and Structure, from class that day. Teachers can use this information and modify Interaction, and Comprehensibility. The rubric is written in student- instruction instantly. These learning checks are usually most effective friendly, "I can" statements. Our strategies for students include when pre-planned and varied. links to programs like WeSpeke, where students can practice their Students should play an active role in the path toward world language online for free, or to Quizlet, with explanations of how each readiness by self-assessing. It is important that students understand type of activity (Cards, Learn, Speller, Race, Scatter, Test) will help what they need to know and be able to do, what they actually can them reach their target. Moving forward, we plan on having district- do, and how they can fill in that gap. When working with students wide Interpersonal and Presentational rubrics so that we can focus to self-assess, another powerful tool is the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do on incorporating IPAs into our curricula. Statements. When students see that the next step in the language In our district, we are fortunate to have the support of our admin- acquisition process is not to perfectly form complex

sentences with
istration in making shifts that are aligned with the World-Readiness the imperfect subjunctive and the conditional, but
instead to ask for
Standards. The challenge is to align these shifts to district and state and provide information about a hobby or a lifestyle,
such as sports,
initiatives that are not specific to world languages, so that all change language learning becomes more manageable.
is as meaningful as we can make it for our language learners. When Instead of telling the teacher “I don’t get this,” the
Can-Do
working with Student Learning Objectives for the state, we will tie Statements can help students express that “I can
introduce myself but
in our common rubrics. When working with student discussion
I keep struggling and I can’t introduce someone else.” Linking the
techniques for the district, we will hone in on Interpersonal Com-
formative assessment and learning checks explicitly to the Can-Do
munication. When focusing in on increasing access to AP classes for
Statements (or daily learning objectives) will make the connection
all students, we will work to align our course sequence beginning at
clearer for students. “I got #1 and #2 right on the GoSoapbox assess-
the lower levels. In the conclusion of the World-Readiness Standards,
ment, so I know that I can introduce myself. I got #3 and #4 wrong
it states that they have had a transformative impact on language
on the assessment, which is how I know that I need help introducing someone else.”
Teaching to the World-Readiness Standards means assessing performance and proficiency. Rubrics are an important part
of the as- sessment equation, especially in today’s climate where student growth is a part of many teachers’ evaluations. I
have spent 4 days this year designing common rubrics with five members of our department. To begin, we focused on
interpersonal rubrics, as we felt this is an area that requires lifting up in our department. As a district, we need to build
capacity of what an effective interpersonal task looks like. We have begun to create tasks together that can transcend
languages. We examined rubrics from *Implementing Integrated Performance Assessment* by Bonnie Adair-Hauck, Eileen
Glisan, and Francis Troyan (2013; see p. 58), from *The Keys to Assessing Language Performance* by Paul Sandrock (2010;
see p. 54), and by many of the documents by the Ohio Foreign Language Association (OFLA).
We decided that we wanted to create living rubrics on Google Docs that had links for both students and teachers. These
rubrics have instructions for teacher use, strategies for students to advance from one performance level to the next, and an
ability to cut and paste performance levels based on student level, from Novice Low through Advanced Low. We are still
in our planning stages, talking through the various components in the rubrics, discussing what this

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learning. In our district, this has certainly proven to be true. We are moving away from teaching grammar in isolation
(such as lists of irregular preterite verbs), towards a more integrated approach. At the end of 2015, for the first time, we
administered the AAPPL to 500 incoming freshmen to best place them in language classes for next year. In previous years,
we used a multiple-choice vocabulary and grammar test to decide if someone is ready for French I or French II.
We need to empower our students. By providing rich curricular experiences with real-world applications, we ensure that
“students are not just college-and career-ready, but are also world-ready.” By focusing on language learning strategies,
using formative assess- ment techniques to modify instruction in the moment, and viewing rubrics as living documents,
teachers will take great strides forward in making the learning process more transparent to learners. I know that my
colleagues and I have a long road ahead of us and that much work is still in store, but I look forward to a day where our
curricu- lum, instruction, and assessment will entice more of our students to remain in our program for its full duration.
Looking back at the progress made since my high school years and since the beginning of my teaching career, I can see
how far I have come and I have great hope for the future.

Remember my friend Kristin? I’m hoping that she will let me try again with her, if I promise not to drill her on all of the
verb endings.
will look like in different languages, and debating how to transfer

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