

More Than a Decade of Standards:

Integrating "Communities" in Your Language Instruction

BY SANDY CUTSHALL

EDITION'S NOTE: In this issue, we conclude our series of articles focused on the National Standards for Language Learning, or the "5 Cs." In previous issues of The Language Educator this year, we have highlighted the goal areas of Communication, Cultures, Connections, and Comparisons. Here, we take a look at Communities.

Communities

hen 7,100+ language educators gathered at the 2010 ACTFL Annual Convention in Boston, many of them attended a plenary session featuring language experts discussing an important topic for the language education community: "The 'Lost C': The Communities Goal Area."

The session explored the fact that many teachers find Communities to be one of the most challenging areas to teach and that it often receives the least attention in language programs and teacher education. The Standards Impact Survey, which included over 2,100 questionnaire responses as well as a comprehensive literature review focusing on the 5 Cs, noted how teachers tend to neglect this goal area, when compared with the others.

"Communities has often been termed the 'Lost C," read the report, *A Decade of Foreign Language Standards: Impact, Influence, and Future Directions*, released in October 2011, "with the literature expressing the difficulty in teaching toward Communities and its consideration as an application task after the basic language is learned."

According to June Phillips, Professor Emerita at Weber State University, who codirected the survey, "We found that some teachers interpret the Communities goal area as one that requires them to take students into the local community or abroad. They found this goal area to be nebulous, out of their control, and not assessable."

This news is dismaying for the language education profession not only because the five goal areas and 11 standards were designed to be fully integrated with one another, but also because involvement with target-language and target-culture communities is the culmination of nearly all language learning goals.

"Teachers often think of Communication as the most important area of the Standards," says Pablo Muirhead, instructor of Spanish and Teacher Education at Milwaukee Area Technical College. "While it certainly deserves critical attention, it only answers the 'How?' and 'What?' questions. Imperative, yes, but that is merely a stepping stone to getting students to develop the intercultural communicative competence that you get by using the language in the community."

Linda Zins-Adams, German instructor at Highlands High School in Fort Thomas, KY, agrees that this is a crucial, yet neglected, area of language education. "Too often, if you are a language teacher, you are hitting Communication, Connections, and Comparisons. I find the two Cs that may not get attended to well enough are Cultures and Communities," she says.

"We must reach out to our target language communities; that's part of being a $21^{\rm st}$

century teacher. It's vital to give our students the opportunity to use the language outside the classroom," says Zins-Adams.

According to the Standards document, Communities combines elements from each of the other goal areas: "The standards in this goal are dependent not only on careful language use, but on the ability to apply knowledge of the perspectives, products and practices of a culture, the ability to connect to other discipline areas and the development of insight into one's own language and culture."

The Communities Goal includes two standards (see box on p. 33). The first (5.1) emphasizes applied learning and focuses on language as "a tool for communication with speakers of the language through one's life: in schools, in the community, and abroad." The second (5.2) focuses on personal enrichment and sees language as "an avenue to information and interpersonal relations."

Making Community Connections

Maria Treviño, language educational consultant in Texas, recalls that when the National Standards were introduced in the mid-1990s, she was a District Supervisor in San Antonio, and then she later served as Director of Languages Other than English for the state education agency. The Texas State Standards were modeled on the 5 Cs,

Treviño notes, and this meant that the Communities goal was not ignored or set aside.

"We agreed to focus on all the Standards being implemented in the classroom and that meant every Standard had to be included," she says. "We knew that Communities was going to be a challenge but we were determined to come up with scenarios where they were all included, including 5.2—showing evidence of becoming lifelong learners."

The Communities Standards may be addressed through many activities, both within and beyond the school setting. These can include travel and study abroad; service learning projects; formal and informal interaction with native language speakers; visits to restaurants, ethnic festivals, or other locations where the target language is spoken or culture is celebrated; reading books and periodicals or listening to music in the target language; participating in sports or games from the target culture; and more.

"The reason a student studies a second language ultimately is to use that language in its natural context," says Muirhead. "Communities is really the point of everything we are doing. Cultures and Communication give us the tools to function in the community and the Connections and Comparisons help build up the depth and breadth of the language we speak."

Muirhead believes that teachers may neglect this standard because they feel their job is to give students simply the "mechanics and tools" to use the language. "Many of us have fallen into the trap of believing that it is not our job to provide community experiences for our students. But language learning cannot take place in the isolation of the classroom. Languages and cultures are alive; they grow and evolve, and are informed by the communities where they reside."

"It may be considered the 'Lost C' in part because there are some logistical and comfort obstacles," observes Lori Langer de Ramirez, Director of World and Classical Languages & Global Language Initiatives at The Dalton School in New York, NY. "Obviously teachers have a lot on their plates and if addressing Communities isn't going to go smoothly, it can be easy to say, 'I just can't get to that."

Travel and study abroad is one—usually very enjoyable and enriching—way of meeting either or both of the Communities stan-



Communities

Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World

Standard 5.1

Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

Standard 5.2

Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

dards. "Some students may have the opportunities to travel to communities and countries where the language is used extensively and, through this experience, further develop their language skills and understanding of the culture," reads the Standards document.

De Ramirez believes travel is most productive when it goes beyond merely hitting the typical tourist sightseeing spots. "At both my current and previous school (in Herricks, NY), we have pushed for trips that have a service component, a real-life language component, so that students get a hands-on connection to the language in the country," she says citing a recent trip taken by a colleague at The Dalton School: a Chinese teacher who traveled with her students to Beijing over the summer and spent much of their time at a local elementary school teaching and interacting with students there.

But, de Ramirez also points out, it isn't necessary to go halfway around the world to find a community.

"I understand that teachers, especially in the lower levels, see this goal area as a challenge. Right away, they see the words 'multilingual communities around the world' and think: 'We aren't able to take our students abroad, so how can we do this?'" She stresses how important it is to connect to the communities in your own neighborhood—something teachers can sometimes forget.

"Being in New York City, we are extremely fortunate to have virtually every language community close by and available for field trips. Chinese language students can visit Chinatown; we have taken French students

to a Senegalese community in Harlem. Again, these efforts work best when they are not just a day trip out of the classroom, but are more of a service project where the language can be used and culture explored in greater depth."

Some teachers provide ideas or even create specific opportunities for their students to interact in local language communities for extra credit, or they can require a certain number of out-of-class interactions in the target language per semester as part of a course. Others may simply communicate different possibilities to their students and leave it up to them to pursue what they find most interesting.

"Often students have to complete community service hours to graduate and that can be a great opportunity to find a volunteer activity where they can use their language skills," says Lynn Sessler, Japanese teacher and K-5 World Languages Coordinator in the Menasha (WI) Joint School District. Teachers may communicate about service learning opportunities not only in the classroom but also through a class website, wiki, or newsletter, she suggests. "If you can set up a vehicle for that type of communication and let them know those ideas are there. students can be checking for them. Providing these opportunities is part of our job. Are all students going to take advantage of it? Maybe not, but you never know who will."

Sessler says that teachers can decide for themselves if they will make these activities optional or mandatory parts of their class. De Ramirez awards students extra credit when they report back to her about their interactions with native speakers in the community. Muirhead requires his students to choose five community activities they will complete each semester, ranging from tutoring immigrants in English, to taking salsa classes, to becoming politically engaged in causes related to Latinos—and these count in large part towards their overall grade. He and his students use the website *mivoz.com*, which lists service learning opportunities in Spanishspeaking communities in the Milwaukee and Chicago areas. Muirhead believes that other cities may have very similar online resources.

Connecting with the target language community doesn't always mean students leave the school walls behind. Sometimes the community can come to you, notes

Zins-Adams, as in her district where they hosted exchange students from their sister school in Bernau, Germany earlier this fall. These 19 students attended classes, gave presentations at the high school, and visited the elementary and middle schools.

"When we knew they were coming, we reached out to get the students to present to our classes and highlight areas of the world beyond our town," she says. "If our students were going to have the opportunity for this contact, we wanted to take advantage of it and do something beyond our little bubble."

Zins-Adams asked the German visitors to prepare presentations on the six Advanced Placement (AP) themes [e.g., Beauty and Aesthetics, Global Challenges, Families and Communities, etc.] for her classes. "These discussions are 100% in German in the higher levels and include a Q&A afterwards. The students also brought artifacts and other items from their hometowns to share with us," she says.

While it is possible to address Communities standards through travel abroad or volunteering in the local community, it can also be something simple as when students discover and enjoy music or art from the target culture. Sessler says that teachers can help facilitate these discoveries for their students, which will help them to begin "using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment."

"You can start with their interests and build on that," she says. Many of her young learners, for example, are fans of Pokémon characters, so she uses that tie to Japanese pop culture to get them engaged in learning the language. Other teachers might seek out Spanish pop music or German hip hop, in order to expose their students to different musical styles and artists. She warns teachers not to approach the language and culture through their own interests, but to think more about what will appeal to their students. "This may be completely different from what drew you to study the target language and culture," she notes, "but can still be equally valid."

Muirhead recalls one student he was encouraging to study abroad in Mexico who resisted going because he didn't want to leave his skateboard behind. "I told him to bring it and he wound up developing friendships in the skater community there, speaking the

target language with peers and entering the local culture that way."

Communities simply isn't—or doesn't have to be—as difficult as some teachers may imagine. "Sometimes people think addressing these Standards always has to be a huge long-term service project taking your students out of the classroom and in the community," says Sessler. But there are many different ways—large and small—that educators can work to incorporate Communities in their language class.

"It could be as simple as saying to your Spanish I students: 'Here is a list of restaurants in your community that have people speaking the target language. Go there and listen, look at the menu and let me know what you experience.' Sometimes they first need to understand that the language really is out there being used in your community," she says.

Zins-Adams has her students interact in their school community, in addition to the larger community. For example, during National German Week in October, her students went around to interview their other teachers, asking them questions like: "Have you ever studied German?" and "Do you have any German ancestors?" in order to choose one teacher to honor with a "Friend of German" award.

When it comes to Communities, "the main thing is to get students out of their comfort zones," says Zins-Adams. "Whenever you can, have them do something with the language out in the community. Once they do it, they like it. And, they are building additional skills beyond just language—such as leadership and technology skills—that are going stay with them."

Technology Changes Everything

Even back in 1996 when the National Standards were first introduced, there were inklings that technology would have a major impact on how the 5 Cs—particularly Communities—could be implemented. Among the sample progress indicators then included students communicating "on a personal level with speakers of the language via letters, e-mail, audio, and video tapes." Treviño says that her district installed multimedia language labs about 12 years ago and that

the use of computers "afforded teachers the opportunity to reach beyond the classroom."

Fast forward to 2012 and add to that original list: Skype, blogs, podcasts, VoiceThread, Facebook, Twitter, wikis, and countless other Web 2.0 tools that facilitate interaction and communication.

"Teachers really can't complain about the hassle of getting kids out of school to connect to communities, with the incredible opportunities that the Internet now offers that we didn't have even a few years ago," says de Ramirez.

Many teachers today find that the easiest and most effective way to connect their students to other communities is through electronic tools like Skype, a software application that allows users to make voice calls—including video—over the Internet. What once could only take place in the physical realm is now happening in classrooms every day through virtual means.

Muirhead provides an example of how technologies like Skype can make other cultures and communities very real and immediate for students. "Our class was Skyping with a friend of mine in Santiago de Chile a few years ago not long after a terrible earthquake had happened. As we were talking with him, he started shouting that he had to go because they were experiencing major aftershocks," he says.

The students were concerned and very engaged by the dramatic events, asking their teacher, "Is this for real?" Muirhead's class then went online to his friend's Facebook and Twitter accounts and found him posting about the aftershocks, trying to find secure places and checking on his family. "This was all done in the target language," he notes, "and it made the language just come alive. We didn't leave the classroom; all we needed was an Internet connection."

Zins-Adams stays in touch with former students using social media such as Facebook and her current students see her interacting with others online in German. "I try to find them as many people to speak with in German who aren't me as I can, and I also model that because they see me connecting with a lot of different people in German." Her former students often share how their language skills are helping them in their careers. "It helps my students see

that there is a future to this language study. When they leave this community—what bigger community are they going to go to and how are they going to use German, as well as other skills they have learned in my class?"

De Ramirez recognizes the benefits of real-time connections, as occur through Skype. But she points out that many other simple online tools—like wikis, blogs, and podcasts—enable asynchronous communication, which can be a great benefit when there is a significant time difference between students in the United States and those in the target-language community, such as with a 12-hour time difference to China.

"With something like a blog or wiki," she says, "you can post a question about what is happening in China right now with a current issue and then students in your partner school can respond in what seems to be 'the dead of night' so that when your kids to come to class the next day, they are excited to find they have a response."

Collaborative work has been completely transformed from what it was even just a few years ago. "Let's look at a wiki, for example," she says. "Your students can co-author an article: choose a topic and start adding their ideas. Students in the partner school can check that out later and make edits. Then your students can go back and see what edits they made and continue on. There is a tremendous amount of potential in using these tools and, indeed, this is exactly what the adult working world is doing now—this type of online collaboration. So it's not just the language that gets practiced, and it's not just the Communities standards, but it's a real-world work skill that students need in the 21st century."

De Ramirez points out that among the many advantages of using Web tools, one is the benefit of writing for an authentic audience beyond the teacher. "When you publish to the Web, you have not just an audience of your instructor and classmates, but you've got potentially other students in your school, you've got your parents—which can be very important in terms of promoting the language and supporting your program—and you've also got this worldwide audience, if you want it."

It is at this point that many teachers and administrators become worried about online

security issues and protecting kids. De Ramirez acknowledges those concerns and says that every school has to determine the level of access with which they are comfortable.

"But," she asserts, "if you have a completely open page, then people all over the world can view what you post—and that can be a good thing." She gives an example of one high school Spanish teacher who had her students writing poetry—a typical assignment—except that these poems were posted on a blog with open access. "One day there was a comment under one girl's poem from a poet in Peru—a published working poet," she says. "Who knows how he got to the blog, but he responded to her in Spanish, saying 'Keep it up. You have a lot of potential,' and so on. You can only imagine the response! Now, she considers herself quite a poet-in Spanish, nonetheless."

It is true, de Ramirez admits, the commenter could just as easily have said something unkind or inappropriate, but although the potential is there, she has been using blogs for years and has rarely had any problems. "We don't put a lot of personal information of our kids online—for obvious reasons," she says. "But everyone feels good about how this accesses the worldwide community. In some ways, things can be hidden in plain sight on the Web and you can also direct friends and colleagues to check out a page and make a few comments for your students."

While today's technology is impressive and continues to improve exponentially—it is still more important to think about what you are trying to communicate as to concern yourself just with how you are doing it. Some teachers who discover a tool like Skype can get stuck in the mode of introductory talk, or simple chit-chat, with another class or group, never going beyond that level of discourse. One way to move past this to something more substantial is to embark on a collaborative project, as mentioned above. For teachers needing inspiration in finding such a project, De Ramirez recommends the book, High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them. It's a resource which, she says, the international school community has really embraced and that has inspired many projects.

"I love this because it is real-world and these are actual issues that communities in very different parts of the world can relate

Resources

Around the World with 80 Schools *aroundtheworldwith80 schools.net*

Around the World with Skype

langwitches.wikispaces.com/Around+The+ World+With+Skype

Cross-Cultural Classroom Connections, UW-Madison

www.studyabroad.wisc.edu/classroom connections.html

Edublogs Student Blogging Challenge studentchallenge.edublogs.org

ePals

www.epals.com

Flat Classroom Project

www.flatclassroomproject.org

Global Competency Matrix

www.c21hub.com/globalpartnership/global-matrix/

High Noon: 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them by J.F. Rischard (2003). Published by Basic Books.

International Partnership Rubric asiasociety.org/files/exchange-matrix.pdf

Mivoz

www.mivoz.com

Poll Everywhere

www.polleverywhere.com

to, issues such as water rights, or not having enough water in the future—things like that." Students can choose an issue and develop a plan or proposal together to address it. "It can even be pairs of kids—one from here and one from the partner school—and then they can co-present their ideas via Skype, one presenting virtually, back and forth," she says.

Sessler enjoys using the free e-Pals Global Community website with her students, although she says that it offers so many different opportunities that she is sure she is only using a small percentage of what is there. Still, last year, her class of beginning Japanese learners in Wisconsin connected with a third grade class in Japan and together they "adopted" a killer whale on a website of a conservation nonprofit association. The

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POP QUIZ: 8



How Well Do YOU Know the "Communities" Goal Area of the National Standards?

Quiz created by ACTFL Director of Education Paul Sandrock

- 1. The goal area of Communities is described with these two key ideas:
 - A. Field trips and festivals
 - B. Beyond the classroom and lifelong learning
 - C. Home and abroad
 - D. Any place and any time
- 2. Which of the following were used in the original Standards document to describe Communities?
 - A. Students are highly motivated to excel in their study of a second language when they see immediate applications for the skills they learn
 - B. The Standards in this goal are dependent not only on careful language use, but on the ability to apply knowledge of the perspectives, products, and practices of a culture, the ability to connect to other discipline areas, and the development of insight into one's own language and culture
 - C. In addition to the ability to communicate in more than one language as a job skill, knowledge of other languages and cultures opens the door to many types of leisure activities
 - D. All of the above
- 3. To prepare for a speaker of the target language from the local community, students would demonstrate the Communities Standards through any of the following, EXCEPT:
 - A. Prepare open-ended questions to ask the speaker (avoiding yes/no questions)
 - **B.** Research topics related to the speaker's area of expertise
 - **C.** Memorize a dialogue about an interview
 - D. Practice asking follow-up questions on the topics students identified as related to the speaker's area of expertise, to keep the conversation going

- 4. Which of the following would best represent how technology helps educators implement Communities?
 - A. Search for films in the target language
 - **B.** Order flags from countries that speak the target language
 - **C.** Get menus from restaurants serving food from countries that speak the target language
 - D. Connect via Skype with a partner school abroad to discuss schools' anti-bullying efforts
- 5. The Communities goal area implies that students benefit when they have personal interest in their language learning. If a language teacher were to outline a broad topic for students to explore, such as environmental issues, the following would be best practice examples of Communities, EXCEPT:
 - A. Students turn in news articles on the topic for extra credit
 - B. Students generate vocabulary they anticipate needing in order to read materials, discuss content, and present ideas on this topic
 - **C.** Students identify their own focus within the broad topic
 - D. Students search online for materials and websites related to the topic
- **6.** "Beyond the classroom" summarizes Standard 5.1 (Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting). Which of the following serve as indicators of progress for this standard?
 - A. Students discuss a topic important in their life with peers who are native speakers of the target language
 - B. Students prepare to host students visiting from abroad, anticipating what they need to share in order to help the visitors understand cultural similarities and differences
 - C. Students create a school-to-work project of benefit to the local community, which taps their proficiency in the target language and culture
 - D. All of the above

- 7. "Lifelong learning" summarizes Standard 5.2 (Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment). The following serve as indicators of progress for this standard, EXCEPT:
 - A. Students find materials and/or media from the language and culture studied on topics of personal interest
 - B. Students use an online translation tool to create a letter of introduction
 - **C.** Students view programs or attend cultural events presented in the target language
 - D. Students voluntarily bring in music and songs from the target culture, explaining the music's background and their personal reaction to it
- **8**. Which of the following is true regarding how students demonstrate Communities?
 - A. Students have to leave the school building
 - B. Students have to communicate faceto-face with a native speaker
 - **C.** Students need the teacher to outline options to demonstrate this goal area
 - D. Students at all levels can identify creative ways to meet this goal area
- **9.** One legitimate challenge to implementing the Communities goal area is:
 - A. Only students of Spanish can meet this goal area, because of the large Spanish-speaking population in the United States
 - B. Only students who can schedule an independent study can meet this goal area, because they have to pursue topics of their own choosing
 - **C.** Finding ways to encourage students to follow their individual interests through the target language, while documenting improvement in their language skills
 - D. Without individual computers in the classroom, students can't really pursue language for their own enjoyment

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students named the whale, tracked its migration online, and researched and discussed what whales eat and other similar topics.

"You can create a long-term relationship with another class, or just find people to participate in a quick survey or project," says Sessler. "This gives students something to talk about past introductions, especially when the kids don't have enough language to expand on their own."

Sessler highlights another online project—Cross-cultural Classroom Connections—which connects students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison who are studying abroad with kids in a K–8 classroom back in the Madison area. This cyber pen-pal relationship is a one-credit course for the college students who regularly report back to the class, mostly through blogs, telling them about the culture and their personal experiences in and impressions of the country.

Finding the Lost C

"When I talk to teachers about Communities, I think their biggest panic is that they think they can't assess it—and, if they can't assess it, they don't need to do it," says Sessler.

De Ramirez agrees this is a challenge. "The piece about lifelong learning—there is a tension: How do we assess that? I think when teachers start feeling uncertain about how to assess something that's when they start saying—I don't know what to do with this or how to encourage that."

Muirhead says that he does assess the Communities standards and that, in fact, "it's

a pretty hefty piece of the grade for my students in a semester." After his students participate in five community activities, they write a paper reflecting on the cultural growth that they had through the experiences.

"This ties together with the intercultural competencies that we do in class," he says. "So the students have that kind of intercultural communicative model that they speak from when they are writing their reflection papers. I'm not assessing their linguistic skills in this instance, but their cultural growth in the community. I'm not looking for them to give me a summary of what they did, but rather to reflect on and look at some of the cultural perspectives they gained and if there were any themes."

Sessler suggests using portfolios or journals—"some form of self-assessment"— which can help the students see how they used the language outside the classroom and help instructors to better measure their progress in these standards.

"It doesn't have to be extra credit, but somehow you need to find a way to put a value on this. Colleges are looking for that more and more—What have you done through your high school career?" she says.

One bonus of having students get out more into the community is that this can be a way of advocating on behalf of your language program, notes Sessler. "This is PR for your program and you're letting your kids be your advocates. Parents want to see what kids can do in the language. Letting them show what they can do: It speaks volumes."

Zins-Adams took the opportunity to showcase her students using technology in

the classroom when a legislator came to her school in September. Kentucky State Representative Derrick Graham visited her German class and watched the students use the Poll Everywhere tool to gather information about their classmates' ideas and opinions, identify a problem, and work together towards a resolution as a group. She saw this both as a way to build community among her language learners and also to reach out to this political leader and advocate for her students.

"Whenever something is going on in your classroom, you've got to publicize it," she suggests. "Put projects out there for others to see, get your students up and out of their seats—mine are constantly filming videos, active in the community, volunteering, and so on—and everyone notices."

According the Standards document: "Students are highly motivated to excel in their study of a second language when they see immediate applications for the skills they learn." The Communities standards offer evidence of this immediate application and can motivate students to continue learning and practicing the language in and out of class. As language educators commit to the integration of this goal area into their instruction, they help their students discover how multilingual communities exist in their own neighborhood and around the globe—and how their study of language and culture can open the door to the world.

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POP QUIZ Continued

10. Communities is an important goal area to keep in mind because:

- A. Students are empowered and motivated when they are allowed to connect language learning with their personal goals and interests
- **B.** Students are motivated by field trips to the community
- **C.** Students sign up for another language course when they get to visit local restaurants
- D. Students will work harder when they can practice vocabulary on a computer

9. C (The other choices are simply excuses!)

things described, but demonstrating
Communities does not **require** the actions described in the other choices)

a .7

extra credit does not signal personal interest in the topic)

D (The other choices have potential, but there is no indication of what is done with what is found; moving students into active, authentic, real world use of language is key)

A (There is no indication of what students actually do with the news students actually do with the news

3. C

J. B

POP GUIZ Answers: