

## FLES REINVENTED

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*ABSTRACT: This article describes the FLES Program in the East Islip Public Schools where content-based instruction is implemented in Spanish to address both the National and New York State Standards for Foreign Language Learning as well as the content areas of mathematics, science, technology, social studies, and language arts. This approach meets the current needs of students and of mainstream classroom teachers faced with new and challenging assessments based on these standards. Spanish instruction must reflect these needs in order for FLES to be accepted and maintained as part of the elementary curriculum. The collaborative process of staff development and of designing and implementing a technology-enhanced curriculum is described. A sample unit and projects are also included.*

### I. Introduction

In order for FLES programs to succeed in the new millennium they must incorporate the current trends and challenges in the elementary schools, namely the standards movement and technology. Since 1996, the number of states with standards in the academic subjects has risen from 14 to 49. This has been accompanied by substantial investments in new assessments that are aligned with these standards. (ASCD Conference Report, 2001)

FLES Programs today need to address the standards in the content areas as well as the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning through collaboration between FLES teachers and classroom teachers. They must also demonstrate student achievement of specific benchmarks and goals that have been identified. The history of FLES warns that programs that do not deliver promised results, such as improved proficiency, may face extinction (Curtain and Pesola, 1994).

In East Islip in 1998, a committee of concerned parents, teachers and administrators met throughout the year to investigate elementary foreign language programs and consequently to establish a framework for FLES that would reflect the Foreign Language Learning Standards and that would satisfy all of the constituents in the district. It was agreed that a content-based Spanish FLES program would be implemented in the district that would correspond with the mainstream standards driven curriculum as much as possible so as to enhance both language acquisition and content knowledge.

The East Islip FLES objectives are as follows:

1. Students will build basic communicative skills in Spanish in order to provide and obtain information, to express feelings and emotions, and to exchange opinions related to the themes and concepts they study.
2. Students will reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language by building additional connections to significant concepts in content areas such as social studies, science, language arts and mathematics.
3. Students will demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own. They will be able to compare history, structures and sounds of these languages.
4. Students will demonstrate understanding of the cultures studied and their own. They will show that they have developed the skills needed to locate and organize information about cultures from the library, the Internet, mass media, people and personal observation. They will develop empathy for other people with different linguistic and cultural histories.
5. Students will build thinking skills by maximizing

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This issue of the NYSAFLT Bulletin is dedicated principally to the topic of FLES. There are currently no State mandates favoring the establishment of FLES programs, so we as professionals in LOTE must strive to preserve existing programs and to convince others of the value of establishing new ones.

Janet Hiller and Joanne Clemente begin this issue by describing the development of a content-based program that they initiated in the East Islip Public Schools. Their efforts integrate the use of technology in curriculum and support studies in the other content areas which are influenced by State mandates. The approach that they outline is certainly one that addresses the feelings of colleagues and parents who consider languages other than English to be extraneous in the context of the current focus on high-stakes testing.

In the second article, Harriet Barnett draws on her thirty-five years of experience in initiating FLES programs to offer many practical suggestions for those interested in starting and maintaining programs in their schools. Her description is relevant both to those who teach at the lower levels and to high school teachers interested in learning about FLES.

The third article focused on FLES is a reprint from ERIC. In it, Marie Haas, a well-know specialist in the area, gives suggestions for ways to develop content-based units for use in the classroom. This is, after all, an area in which teacher-developed materials are essential

The editor hopes that teachers who are involved in FLES or who would like to be involved in it will find this group of articles useful.

The final article is the editor's contribution to this the summer issue. Many of us, regardless of the level at which we teach, will be traveling over the summer to places where our target language is spoken. These are excellent opportunities to learn about the cultures of the languages that we teach. My hope is that you will find the suggestions provided to be useful in learning about those cultures.

*Congratulations*

**ROBERT LUDWIG**

Executive Director of NYSAFLT

*was honored at the*

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cognitive engagement through another language and culture. They will have additional practice in the core thinking skills of comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

6. Students will demonstrate evidence of becoming life long learners as they experience personal enrichment and the joy of language learning.

In this article, we will discuss how these objectives are being addressed.

## II. Curriculum Development

FLES and classroom teachers normally meet during the summers to write curriculum for the various grade levels. After first reviewing the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning the group develops a curriculum map, which shows when classroom teachers are introducing particular skills and knowledge in the content areas. Next, using the district's curriculum frameworks for the subject areas, which correspond to the state and national standards, the teachers incorporate and combine both foreign language and content standards to determine performance objectives for their students. For example, the New York State Standards for Math, Science and Technology include interdisciplinary problem solving, that is, students are expected to apply the knowledge and thinking skills of mathematics, science and technology to address real-life problems and make informed decisions. The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning similarly include connecting with other disciplines to further their knowledge through the foreign language and cultures studied. Teachers, then, incorporate these standards-based performance objectives as they develop unit outlines for the year using a format for interdisciplinary units (Curtain and Haas, 1995). The unit plans identify objectives, standards, multiple intelligences, materials, activities, progress indicators and assessments.

In 1999, we received a Title VII, FLAP grant from the US Dept. of Education to better incorporate technology along with the content areas into the program. The goals of the grant are as follows:

- To engage students in active learning through communication with other language learners.
- To educate students through the use of technology as a tool.
- To collaborate with higher education, (New York Institute of Technology) to develop meaningful student-centered activities.

Through this grant we were able to purchase laptops to ensure that all students had access to computers and the Internet at home, as well as in the classroom, and we were also able to initiate staff development of both FLES and classroom teachers

to help them integrate technology into their lessons. A sample unit plan, which incorporates technology, is found in the appendix.

## III. Staff Development

Several times during the year, Professor Joanne Clemente, an educational technology instructor at the New York Institute of Technology, met by grade level with the FLES and classroom teachers from the four elementary schools in the district. The purpose of these meetings was to help teachers integrate current applications available through software and the Internet into the interdisciplinary curriculum units. Teachers brainstormed potential activities using projects found in Judy Harris' Virtual Architecture Website (<http://ccwf.cc.utexas.edu/~jbharris/Virtual-Architecture/>), as well as other research and curriculum-related websites. As a group, performance objectives for the interdisciplinary thematic units they identified were developed and, with the help of Professor Clemente, the interdisciplinary team further explored various websites for supplemental information and activities to help their students achieve these objectives. An extremely important element of these sessions was the collaborative effort involved. First, teachers representing the grade level, content specialists, and foreign language teachers were present to work together to assure that potential activities could be accomplished in the time allotted. Second, teachers were assured of the supportive nature of the foreign language teacher's presentation of the content. In this way, classroom teachers were not given an additional burden but rather were allowed to participate in developing ways in which an additional teacher could support their curriculum. Professor Clemente has set up a link to these various websites from her NYIT web page and an online forum for teacher communication so that the teachers from the different schools can communicate with each other regarding the websites, the curriculum and the various ongoing projects. The most important resources are being transferred as links to the East Islip website. (See a list of some suggested web sites in the appendix.)

In addition, the elementary schools joined IEARN-The International Education and Research Network- to connect with schools from around the world. Staff developers from IEARN trained FLES teachers how to participate in their current international projects and how to initiate their own. They described the various global projects that were ongoing. Teachers then explored projects that reflected the East Islip FLES curriculum and objectives.

## IV. Evaluation

Accountability is necessary to insure the survival of FLES programs today. The added investment by

school districts requires outcomes that justify the expense for additional staff and materials. Objectives, curriculum and assessments need to be aligned to demonstrate program and student success. The ongoing assessments in the content areas in New York State track progress from year to year. These can be also be used to measure the effectiveness of content-based FLES Programs in the state. On the fourth grade New York State assessments in Language Arts and Mathematics, students in East Islip outperformed the average of students in New York State and they have also shown improvement from year to year. In addition, in East Islip, end-of-the-year evaluations in Spanish are used at each level to measure students' achievement of specific objectives in the target language. Interdisciplinary projects are assessed with rubrics developed by the teachers.

In addition to measuring student performance, these assessments are useful for the purpose of articulation from elementary to middle and high school, a major issue that also determines the success and continuation of FLES Programs (Met, 1990). When the first group of students completes the elementary program at the end of the 6th grade, (they are currently in the fourth grade) they will be evaluated by means of a proficiency test developed by the district's foreign language teachers. The middle school curriculum will be modified to meet their level of proficiency. In the high school these students will have the option of taking advanced placement courses as soon as they demonstrate the appropriate level of proficiency. These students will also be encouraged to study additional languages simultaneously to apply the language learning skills they have developed.

## Selected FLES Curriculum Related Websites (Grades 1-6)<sup>1</sup>

### Judi Harris Projects-Virtual Architecture

<http://ccwf.cc.utexas.edu/~jbharris/Virtual-Architecture/>

### I\*earn

<http://www.iearn.org>

### The WebQuest Page

<http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest.html>

### Conservation Webquest

<http://ci.shrewsbury.ma.us/Sps/WebQuests/Conservation.webquest.html>

### Promoting Tolerance WebQuest

<http://www.nksd.net/schools/dms/comaware/tolerance.html>

### I\*earn One Day Project

<http://www.telar.org/proyectos/oneday/>

### I\*earn Child Labor

<http://www.iearn.org.au/clp>

### I\*earn Folk Tales

<http://www.nsc.ru/folk/>

### I\*earn Cultural Diversity and Human Identity project

<http://iearn.org/projects/culturaldiversity.html>

### I\*earn project on Waterways

<http://iearn.org/projects/waterways.html>

### Aztec/Maya/Inca Websites

[http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/schwww/sch618/Maya/Maya\\_Aztec\\_Main.html](http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/schwww/sch618/Maya/Maya_Aztec_Main.html)

### Mayan Architecture

<http://library.thinkquest.org/10098/mayan.htm>

### MayaPages-Civilization

<http://kstrom.net/isk/maya/maya.html>

### Write your Name in Mayan Glyphs

<http://www.halfmoon.org/names.html>

### Word Search

<http://tjunior.thinkquest.org/6076/ NewPages/KDWrdSrc.html>

### Yucatec Maya Pronunciation and Everyday Phrases

<http://kstrom.net/isk/maya/mayatab1.html>

### Mayan Folktales

<http://www.folkart.com/latitude/folktales/folktales.htm>

### Mayan Calendar

<http://www.geocities.com/wwwtinto/maya.html>

### Mayan Calendar solar glyphs and how to use them

[http://www.2012.com.au/Solar\\_Glyphs.html](http://www.2012.com.au/Solar_Glyphs.html)

### Ancient Maya

<http://www.penncharter.com/Student/maya/index.html>

### Maya Astronomy Page

[http://michielb.nl/maya/astro\\_content.html](http://michielb.nl/maya/astro_content.html)

### Maya Environment

<http://michielb.nl/maya/geographical.html>

### Kids' Community

<http://education.nmsu.edu/webquest/wq/kidcomm/KidComm.html>

### Conservation International Do Brasil

<http://www.conservation.org.br/news.htm>

### Vistas del Sistema Solar

<http://www.solarviews.com/span/homepage.htm>

### Connecting Students

<http://www.connectingstudents.com/themes/aztecs.htm>

### Ethnoweb- Kids in Los Loros

<http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~ctennant/EthnoWeb/forKids.htm>

### Holocaust A Teacher's Guide

<http://fcit.coedu.usf.edu/holocaust/default.htm>

### Holocaust A Student's Guide

<http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/tc.htm>

### English-Spanish On-line Dictionary

<http://dictionaries.travlang.com/EnglishSpanish/>

### The Atom's Family

<http://www.miamisci.org/af/sln/frankenstein/>

### BOCES Elementary Science Program Homepage

<http://www.monroe2boces.org/shared/esp/>

<sup>1</sup>For an on-line list of these websites, go to [www.nysaftl.org](http://www.nysaftl.org) and click on the LINKS link, followed by FLES Websites.

## Conclusion

Our knowledge of the history of FLES and the errors of the 1960's can help us avoid the decline of elementary programs experienced in the past. The need for fluency in languages other than English and for cross-cultural comprehension is greater today than it has ever been. In order for our students to succeed in our global economy and build a peaceful world they must be able to communicate with and comprehend other nations and cultures. Quality FLES Programs are essential to these goals because they build motivation, multicultural awareness, linguistic, cognitive, and metalinguistic skills (Met, 2001).

In East Islip continuous monitoring, evaluation, articulation and collaboration are crucial elements of the program's implementation. The FLES committee still meets regularly to address any current issues and make changes that benefit the students and the school community. It consistently draws upon the expertise of classroom teachers, content specialists, foreign language teachers and higher education faculty to nurture continued success.

## APPENDIX FIFTH GRADE SPANISH

### UNIT 1

#### PASAPORTE AL MUNDO LATINO

1. Foreign Language Standards: 1.1, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 5.2
2. Intelligences: Mathematical, Visual Spatial, Interpersonal, Linguistic, Naturalist
3. Content: Science, Math, Technology, Language Arts, Foreign Language, Social Studies
4. Unit Objectives: Students will be able to
  - Track and analyze temperatures in Fahrenheit and Celsius for Latin American countries and the US and graph their findings.
  - Track, analyze and compare weather patterns for Latin American countries and the US and graph their findings.
  - Compare and contrast exchange rates between US currency and currencies of Latin American countries and create a pictograph comparing values.
  - Design and create a personalized travel brochure using Microsoft Word and Printshop

highlighting the weather patterns, clothing and currency of a Latin American country.

- Select appropriate clothing for travel to a Latin American country based on observations of weather and climate.
  - Select activities indigenous to the country in Latin America that they plan to visit.
  - Research locations of volcanoes and record their recent activity
  - Compare the seismic activity of different Latin American countries.
  - Engage in cooperative group activities for research, graphing and creation of brochure.
5. Vocabulary: Numbers to 10,000, weather vocabulary, clothing vocabulary, travel vocabulary, directions, modes of transportation.
  6. Grammatical Structures: Nouns, adjectives, present, past and future tenses of the verbs to travel, to see, to wear, to do.
  - 7 Essential Materials: Microsoft word, Printshop, the Graph club, Internet access, current newspapers, brochures, fieldtrips.
  8. Activities: Creating a brochure, Internet research, graphing, temperature tracking, graphic organizers, oral presentations, asynchronous communication by e-mail, collaboration with target culture.
  9. Assessments: Presentation, brochure, graphs, foreign culture assessment of brochure, grades based on rubrics

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# Lessons from the Classroom Onsite Professional Development

Harriet Barnett  
Manhattanville College  
and  
Consultant to ACTFL

Approximately 40 years ago there was little information available on the teaching of a foreign language in the elementary school (commonly known as FLES). Now there are excellent resources and even special methods courses on teaching FLES. I have learned a tremendous amount in my many years as a FLES teacher. Perhaps some of my experiences could be of help to other FLES teachers and might even help high school teachers to understand the nature of Languages Other Than English below the high school level.

My FLES journey began around 1958. As with most foreign language teachers, I had been trained and licensed to teach grades 7-12. I was married while in college, had my first child just after graduation and planned to stay home and take care of my children. Times were different and that's what mothers were supposed to do. I became active in the PTA and other school activities. There was a TV program called *La puerta abierta* that attempted to teach Spanish to young children. The principal thought that the children might be interested in watching during lunch hour, but needed someone to stay with them. I volunteered for the job, and thus my career was launched.

There was no interactive TV at the time. The program just kept going, and the children were expected to sit, listen and learn. There was some opportunity for student response, but very little and the situation was totally inflexible. The children kept asking me to turn off the TV and explain things. They also wanted time to respond to what they were hearing. I learned my first important lesson about young children and foreign languages. They are truly interested and wanted to learn to communicate in this "strange" tongue. Why did I come to this conclusion? Well, when children ask you to turn off the TV in order to learn something, they must be interested. We proceeded from then on without the TV.

At about the same time I learned another lesson. My fourth grade daughter was in the TV group. When I discussed at home what we were doing in our "class", my second grader joined in with great interest, surprising fluency and near-perfect reproduction of words and sounds. He was not a particularly verbal child and so I thought that there must be some connection between the young age and the ease of learning a language. Materials I read later confirmed the important lessons I was learning from

my experiences. All brain research has shown that young children have a great capacity to learn more than one language. However, there is a window of opportunity that begins to close after about age 10. Before this age the brain is ripe to learn many languages with relatively little effort.

Since it seemed so natural to learn a language at an early age, I approached my son's teacher to see if she would like me to come in and teach Spanish to her class. She was a flexible teacher and readily agreed. The children did so well and wanted to learn and do so much that I was amazed. It seemed as if everything about the learning of another language and another culture appealed to the youngsters. Exploring the unknown, making new sounds, calling things by "magical" names were what they loved and enjoyed.

The success and popularity of this linguistic enrichment was noticed by parents of children in other second grade classes in which children were not exposed to a second language experience. They went to the School Board to demand Spanish instruction for their children as well. In a surprisingly well attended and emotional meeting, it was decided that I had to teach all the second grade classes and become an official member of the teaching staff or stay home. Can you guess which choice I took? A FLES program was born.

Other lessons were learned in the classroom. Young children are restless and have short attention spans. Therefore, for the lessons to be successful, I had to create several mini activities with a smooth transition from one to the other. The activities included singing, touching, seeing, smelling, drawing, guessing, imitating, repeating, coloring, pasting. Etc.

ALL the students were able to learn and participate and therefore were included, and ALL the students had to be engaged or their minds and even their bodies wandered off. Fortunately, this proved to be an easy task for me. It meant that I had to create my own materials to be sure that they fit the age and interests of my students. Ask any FLES teacher which materials are best and the answer will be "teacher-made materials". Now, more appropriate materials do exist, but still must be modified to fit the particular students in particular program designs. Teacher-made or commercially prepared, all materials and activities have to be interactive, student directed, interesting, and age-appropriate.

When report card time came, I learned several lessons. I did not want to give grades, but my principal gave me very sound advice which I did not like or appreciate at the time. Over the years I realized that she was absolutely correct. Anything not assessed is not considered important. If I wanted Spanish to be considered an important subject, I would have to give grades and to include them on the report card. Grading in the elementary school is not the same as it has traditionally been in high school. It is age appropriate, indicating more than just linguistic achievement, and is not based solely or even primarily on paper and pencil test grades. With approximately eight half-hour classes daily, I had to devise a practical method for keeping track of what the students were doing and learning. Most of the time in class was spent on oral/aural activities with very few written tests. Participation, attitude, written exams, individual performances and projects, linguistic growth as well as paper and pencil tasks and assessments had to be included when I sat down to do my student assessments. I checked the recording techniques on the report card that were used for other subject disciplines to be sure that mine was in line and was stated in terms familiar to the students and to their parents.

Speaking of parents, I learned another lesson. The parents of elementary school students are your friends and helpers and want to be closely involved with their child's school experiences. You rarely see a parent in a high school classroom, but often find one in an elementary school class. This means that you can plan activities and projects that require more than one set of hands. You can have parties, cook, cut and paste, etc. It also means that you can get lots of materials from them. Old crayons, socks, magazines, toys will be brought in for class use thus easing your budget, while ensuring safe and age appropriate materials, creating a comfort level from the familiar and giving the parents a useful place for the things they "didn't know how-to but wanted-to get rid of". Parents are often the strongest supporters of FLES. They are not interested in scheduling or finances, but are interested in what is best for their children.

As a program grows in the length of its sequence, you realize that articulation is essential. Language is a sequential process building one proficiency layer on another. When planning you must keep in mind what went before and what is to come and not treat any one level or grade as an island unto itself. You can also see how much more effective any subject is when it is part of the picture of the child's entire program. A content coordinated curriculum is the best way to go rather than teaching the foreign language in isolation. For example, if a grade is focusing on

graphing, you reinforce this by using graphing in your teaching. In both content and skill development you plan to be an integral part of the school's curriculum. This integration leads to more effective learning and for the continuation of the program itself.

FLES is not a State mandated subject. Therefore, we must always be aware of self-preservation. Existing as an integral part of the entire curriculum helps ensure the continuance of a program. Reaching out beyond the classroom by encouraging students to use their language at home and at play is essential. My new role has been in helping and encouraging school districts to implement FLES programs. One must be careful to point out the many positive aspects of FLES rather than warning too much about pitfalls and problems. Those who, through ignorance or laziness fight against starting early and planning for a long sequence quickly find those pitfalls and problems and use them as an excuse to avoid implementing a FLES program. It is usually not the intention of those who publicize the problems, but my experience has shown me that time and again the information is misused.

You often hear the question asked, "Do students really care about learning?" Just observe any good elementary foreign language class and the answer is obvious. The youngsters can't seem to get enough. Participation, enthusiasm and comfort co-mingle in a positive learning environment. There are many positive aspects of early language learning such as: increasing the knowledge, awareness and appreciation of their first language; developing near-native pronunciation in the foreign language; reaching a higher level of proficiency; understanding and appreciating other and their own culture; improving analytical thinking skills; attaining higher SAT scores; developing a skill which will lead to the increased ability to obtain a job in the future or even the need for people who speak other languages and understand other cultures in our national defense. But the children are not interested in these. They are, however, interested in the fun they are having, the ease with which they are learning, the things they can do and say in a mysterious new world. Is this caring about learning? Yes, it is the best example of caring and learning without being conscious of the caring or of the learning. It is learning for the joy of what you can do with the learning. Isn't that the best way?

I hope that my painting a composite of the large number of lessons I learned onsite in my 35 years of teaching and of creating FLES programs will ease the way for others. It can be an interesting and rewarding experience for teachers, parents, and most of all, for the children.

# Thematic, Communicative Language Teaching in the K-8 Classroom

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Foreign language instruction for children can be enriched when teachers use thematic units that focus on content-area information, engage students in activities in which they must think critically, and provide opportunities for students to use the target language in meaningful contexts and in new and complex ways. The national standards for foreign language teaching and learning support this approach to language instruction (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1996).

According to the standards, when teachers plan lessons they should focus on the five Cs of Communication, Culture, Connections with other disciplines, Comparisons with students' native languages and cultures, and use of the foreign language in Communities outside the classroom. Increasingly, foreign language educators are integrating the five Cs of the standards into "content-related" (Curtain & Pesola, 1994) or "theme-based" (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992) curricula. These curricula reinforce or extend the content of the regular classroom curriculum to give coherence to the language lessons. A unit on the solar system, for example, might include vocabulary that describes the attributes of the planets, which students are also learning about in English. Students might also listen to and recite a poem about the moon and the stars. They could then compare the view of the "rabbit in the moon" found in Aztec and Asian cultures to the North American view of the "man in the moon." Subsequently, they might observe the night sky (phases of the moon and star constellations) in their area at different times of the year, and compare their observations with those of students in other parts of the world through email exchanges in the target language.

## I. PLANNING THEMATIC UNITS

Themes for curriculum units can be derived from many sources. Planning thematic units allows the teacher to incorporate a variety of language concepts into a topic area that is interesting and worthy of study and that gives students a reason to use the language. Teachers should choose themes that lend themselves to teaching language that will be useful for their students. Themes and lessons should integrate language, content, and culture into activities that allow students to practice the foreign language and that prepare them to use it in a variety of contexts. A focus on communication, including the interactions present in all uses of the language (for

speaking, listening, reading, and writing) is essential. Students need to be able to interpret the language, express themselves in the language, and negotiate meaning in the language (Savignon, 1997).

In beginning communicative language classes, the teacher's role includes introducing vocabulary and phrases and providing comprehensible language input for the students. Visuals and manipulatives, gestures, sounds, and actions all help students understand the new vocabulary and structures. Students need opportunities to be active participants in tasks that require them to negotiate meaning and practice language in communication with their teacher, their peers, and others.

Pesola (1995) developed the Framework for Curriculum Development for FLES programs, which begins with a thematic center and creates a dynamic relationship among the factors that teachers must take into account: language in use, subject content, and culture. (See also Curtain & Pesola, 1994, for a detailed description of the framework.) The framework highlights a set of questions to guide curriculum planning:

- Who are the students in terms of learner characteristics, such as developmental level, learning style, and experiential background?
- What are the planned activities, and how will teachers assess students' performance?
- How will the classroom setting affect the planned activities?
- What materials do teachers need to support the activities?
- What language functions, vocabulary, and grammatical structures will students practice through the activities?
- What knowledge about subject content and culture will the students gain?

## II. EXAMPLES OF THEMATIC UNITS

Three thematic units—"Visiting the Farm," A German Fairy Tale, and The South American Rainforest—are described below. They were developed by teachers who used Pesola's framework to guide their planning process. In each of these units, the teachers created language immersion settings in their classrooms, planned lessons around themes that were interesting to the students, asked the students to think critically, reinforced concepts and skills from the regular classroom, integrated culture, and gave students many opportunities to use the target language in a variety of situations (Haas, 1999).

"Visiting the Farm" Martine's second-grade

French class focused on the farm for 4 weeks. The class began each day with an activity that reviewed previously learned language. For example, one student would make an animal sound and call on another student to say the name of the animal. As the students moved from activity to activity, Martine gave them short time limits for specific tasks to be completed on their own or in pairs or small groups. The students used French as they manipulated pictures and completed assigned tasks. Activities included: 1) brainstorming in French a list of names of farm animals that students already knew; 2) learning new animal names in French; 3) drawing a farm mural on butcher paper; 4) singing a song about animals in the barnyard (*Dans la basse cour*); 5) comparing barns in France and the United States; 5) planting two types of vegetables chosen from seed packets of common French vegetables; 6) measuring and charting the plants' growth; 7) tasting radishes with butter (as they are served in France); 8) creating a labeled farm page for their book of all of the places they "visited" in class that year; 9) sorting food by plant or animal and completing and describing a food pyramid; 10) making *baguette* sandwiches; 11) comparing with a partner pictures of vocabulary words (e.g., the animals on their farm pages, their favorite foods, the ingredients in their baguette sandwiches); 12) listening to the story of the three pigs in French and creating their own versions of the tale (e.g., the three horses and the big, bad, hungry cow), which they acted out; and 13) taking their *baguette* sandwiches with them to a fantasy picnic on the farm.

"A German Fairy Tale." In this 3-week unit, Frederike introduced her third-grade German students to a story based on a Grimm's fairy tale about a pancake ("Pfannkuchen") by singing the song "Ich Habe Hunger" ("I Am Hungry") with them, then preparing batter (measuring in grams) and cooking a pancake in class. Next, pairs of students compared the sentences they had cut apart from mixed-up copies of the recipe and resequenced them in the appropriate order. Throughout the unit, Frederike began each class by telling or retelling part of the pancake story. "The Thick, Fat Pancake" ("Der Dicke Fette Pfannkuchen") is the story of an old woman who bakes a pancake that does not want to be eaten. It jumps out of the pan and rolls through the forest. The pancake's delicious smell attracts one forest animal after another. The names of the animals describe their characteristics, such as Wolf Sharptooth ("Wolf Scharfzahn") and Rabbit Longears ("Haselongohr"). As the animals tell the pancake to stand still so that they can eat it, each one adds another adjective to describe the pancake: "Thick, fat, dear, sweet, yummy, wonderful, golden, delicious, marvelous pancake, stand still! I want to

eat you up!" At this request, the pancake laughs and waves and continues rolling down the hill. Finally, the pancake meets two hungry orphans, jumps into their laps and begs, "Eat me, I will give you strength." The orphans then eat the pancake.

The students practiced new vocabulary by drawing pictures on the board as Frederike recited the scene and by sequencing sentences about the story using sentence strips and a pocket chart. The retellings were never boring and always included student input and probing questions that elicited information about the animals in the fairy tale. With each storytelling, Frederike emphasized different vocabulary or introduced a new animal. She also engaged the students in activities that provided practice in using German:

- copying sentences from the story and illustrating them to create personal storybooks
- listing characteristics of the animals, such as the large, sharp teeth of the wolf
- creating surnames for the animals, like Wolf Sharptooth
- playing "inside outside circles" (Kagan, 1986), with one circle of students asking questions about the story and their partners in the other circle answering
- pretending to become animals and pancakes when the teacher waved her magic wand, then role playing their actions in the story
- singing and dancing the "duck dance" and learning the parts of the animals' bodies
- listing what the animals ate and learning the German words for carnivore, herbivore, and omnivore
- practicing reading the fairy tale to a partner
- selecting roles for a play based on the fairy tale and presenting the play for their parents and the first-grade German students
- reading their illustrated storybooks to the first graders.

"The South American Rainforest "Necesitamos los portafolios de español?" (Do we need our Spanish notebooks?) is one of the questions students ask as they prepare for Soledad's fifth-grade Spanish class. Soledad begins the first class of this 6-week unit on the rainforest with a song about the weather and questions about the weather outside. Soon the class is working with maps, first with Soledad asking questions about the location of various rain forests in the world, then with the students in the role of teacher, asking other students questions.

The activities that follow lead students to communicate with each other, to practice their Spanish, and to focus on vocabulary and structure: locating rainforests on the map using their background knowledge from social studies class. They also

contribute to a written description of rainforests on the overhead projector; read chorally what they have written; and play games and sing songs that practice the names of animals and their movements. In addition, students work in small groups to tell each other how to color the different animals, to create sentences about animal pictures, to introduce themselves as an animal to their neighbors, to create a dialog between two animals, to write their animal dialogs on chart paper and to read and role-play them, and to edit the dialogs that they have written. They learn about the layers of the rainforest and where each animal lives, what they eat, and what their body coverings are. They write and record conversations between two animals that incorporate all of the information covered in class. They create the sounds of the rain in the rainforest through claps, snaps, and pounding feet. They write a paragraph about the rainforest and, finally, they make *batidos de mango* (mango shakes).

### III. CONCLUSION

Although each class is different from the others in content and specific activities, all of the teachers planned interesting thematic units that included daily review of language; rich, comprehensible input in an immersion setting; and opportunities to think critically and to process language and negotiate meaning. They also involved students as active and interactive participants in a variety of activities that reflect the goals of the national standards. Although creating thematic units takes time and effort on the part of the teacher, this way of teaching engages students and provides them with a meaningful and exciting context in which to learn a new language.

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# Making the Most of a Target Culture Experience or “Being There” Is Not Enough

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Summer is upon us, and soon many of us will depart for places where the language we teach is spoken. Our hopes for linguistic and cultural enrichment are high as we pack our bags and get our official papers ready.

Study in the target culture promises to raise levels of linguistic and cultural proficiency, but these results are not necessarily automatic. A concentrated effort must be made in order to maximize the benefits of the experience. What follows are some thoughts on how such an experience might be focused. It is not intended that any one person attempt all of them, after all, this is part of a hard-earned vacation.

A useful point of departure for teachers is a topic relevant to our curricula that will provide us with materials and knowledge that we can take home and use in the classroom. As we are well aware, an on-site summer project can give us an extra burst of energy and enthusiasm for that return to the classroom in the fall.

## Careful Cultural Observation is Essential

As sojourners in the target culture, we should make plans to focus on a particular aspect of that culture. A seemingly endless range of possibilities exists. Teachers of young children may wish to explore the way adults interact with children of the same age as their students, as well as the ways these children interact with the adults and with one another. This will tie in closely with the collection of typical songs, games, rhymes, chants, and other types of authentic artifacts that perhaps can't be predicted ahead of time. Others may wish to look into common curricular topics such as family, shopping, schooling, or current political issues.

In order to attempt to make objective observations of another culture, we must become aware of the nature of our own conceptual binders because our ability to observe is influenced by personal biases, values, attitudes, and beliefs. Reading about our own culture as well as the target culture is a good way to prepare for an intercultural experience.

Acquiring some ethnographic techniques is key to being able to learn how its members view a culture. Insights gained from doing an informal ethnographic study while overseas will enrich the experience. Jurasek, et. al. (1995) report that ethnographic learning by participants in study abroad programs leads to:

- an enriched language experience
- insight into the complexity of culture and societies
- involvement and investment in the cultural

learning process

- meaningful interaction with members of other cultures
- increased flexibility of thought, reflection, and self-reflection (p.63).

Consequently, undertaking a small-scale informal ethnographic study while abroad is highly recommended.

Jantz and Weaver (1992) provide some good suggestions to use as a starting point.

1. **Observe as many people interacting as you possibly can in the situation(s) you have chosen to investigate.** Take copious field notes and make them as objective as possible. What may seem unusual or unacceptable to North Americans, (women and men segregated during religious services; parents taking very small children out with them in public places until 10:30 p.m. or later) may be the norm for the target culture. Inquiring in a non-judgmental fashion is the only way to discover the insider's point of view.
2. **Little differences may have a big cultural effect. Asking questions is the only way to unveil the insiders' knowledge.** Although the majority of Mexicans are Roman Catholics, priests and nuns, until recently, were rarely seen in the street wearing religious garb. Why did this happen and what brought about the change?
3. **Relying too much on past experience as a teacher can be a pitfall.** For example, teachers observing older students making maps might assume that the main goal of the activity is instructional, when the local view is that they are making the maps for younger children to use.
4. **Learning does NOT take place by osmosis but rather through careful observation.** Does hand raising mean students wish to answer a question? Do students ask direct questions of teachers during class? If they don't, does it mean that they never ask questions? Just walking through the halls of a school in target culture does not lead to extensive knowledge of the educational system.
5. **Data should be gathered from several sources including multiple observations and in-depth interviews.** Questions that work from the broad to the more detailed will

help to ferret out the information needed. Ask "What is your school like?" before "When do you sing the national anthem?" OR "What are the unwritten norms that people have for protecting their space?" before "Is there a table at lunch reserved for a certain individual or group?"

Spradley (1979, pp. 70-91) gives excellent information on types of questioning techniques for ethnographic interviews. His model is helpful in more informal studies. For example, questions based on this model which explore the leisure time activities of teenagers might be...

1. What do you do on a typical day when you don't have to work or study? (typical grand tour)
  - a. Tell me what you did yesterday from the time you left the house with your friends until you came home. (specific grand tour)
  - b. Could you show me around the café? (guided grand tour)
  - c. Could you play a game of X and explain what you are doing? (task-related grand tour)
2. What did you do at the discotheque? (mini-tour)
3. Can you give me an example of something you and your friends do together? (example)
4. Can you tell me about some interesting experiences you have had while playing soccer in the street with you friends? (experience)

Notice how the above questions are based on information already elicited through the interview process. An valuable tip from Spradley (1980) is to assume the role of a learner who wants to learn as much as possible about the target culture from the resource people. When interviewing, it is also good practice 1) to listen to what is being said, 2) to follow up on what the interviewee has said, 3) to ask questions when what is said is not immediately comprehensible, 4) to try to avoid leading questions, 5) to ask open-ended questions, and 6) to avoid reinforcing your respondents' responses.

Although topics of ethnographic study should not be rigidly set beforehand, an area of interest can be selected before departing, and some local contacts made to assure access. Possible topics include but certainly are not limited to: Use of a specific room in the home (the kitchen, the living room), some facet of the educational system (access may be limited in the summer), teenagers' activities - gathering places, things they do, types of groups they socialize in; the functioning of cultural centers, special interest organizations, etc. The possibilities are many and cover just about every imaginable aspect of daily life. The biggest problem may be limiting the study so

that it can reasonably be completed in a four- to six-week time frame. (Jurasek, et. al., 1995; Jantz and Weaver, 1992). Not only will this type of investigation provide information about observable customs, but effective ethnographic inquiry will help reveal the "meanings, values, attitudes and ideas" that underlie cultural practices and products (Standards, p. 43) but are often difficult to tap.

When undertaking an ethnographic project, it is essential to protect the identity, privacy and well-being of interviewees. Spradley (1980, pp. 20-25) reviews in detail the ethical principles published by the American Anthropological Association. Anyone undertaking an ethnographic-type study should become aware of and adhere to those principles. Obtaining the desired results in an ethnographic study depends on establishing a relationship of trust between the ethnographer and the interviewees. The ethnographer must put the interests of the subjects first despite other pressures that may be brought to bear.

### **Bring It Home for Students**

Perhaps the most obvious way to bring home a slice of the target culture is through the collection of artifacts, the things people make and use (Spradley, 1980, pp. 5-6), or products of the culture (Standards, 1996). The list of items that may prove useful is extensive - slides, materials written for young children, as well as their oral literature, photographs, commercial recordings in various media, processed food samples (or simply their packaging), currency and coins (play money is very useful); unusual toys and games, native costumes, newspapers and magazines (especially age-appropriate ones), brochures, pamphlets, school texts, trade books, song books, posters, maps, museum reproductions, calendars, advertisements, greeting cards, invitations; formal announcements, recipes, restaurant menus, national flag, national symbols. The question to ask about all of these items is "What is their cultural significance?" The teacher must know the answer to this question in order to be able to use the artifact confidently with students at home.

One approach which is useful to the investigation of the cultural significance of products or practices is formulating questions based on Seelye's six (1993, p. 33) goals of cultural instruction. Let's assume for a moment that the item in question is an invitation to a *quinceañera* from Mexico.

1. Interest - There are several facets to this question that really have to do with the selection of the artifact. The first is related to the home front. Will it engage the interest of students? The second is related to the target culture. Is it of interest to the culture?
2. Who uses it (or participates in it)? Probe social variables such as age, sex, social

class, religion, race, ethnicity and role expectations.

3. What? Probe any special connotations the target people may have toward the event represented in the invitation. Some interviewing techniques will come in handy here. Did you have a *quinceañera*? Describe what happened on that day. How did you feel about it? Take me through the room where the party was held. What did you do to prepare for the mass? To whom did you send invitations?
4. Where and When? Query the circumstances of using the invitation. Is this a common or infrequent happening? How often do you commonly see one of these take place? Is it associated with any particular segment of the population? Does every fifteen-year-old young woman have one?
5. Why? How does the observed behavior fit into the values (or the needs gratification system) of the culture? Answering this question will require a lot of inferring on the part of the researcher from the replies received to the earlier questions. It is not something one can ask an informant directly and expect to be told what the underlying values are. Probes such as, "Do you (will you) want your daughters to have *quinceañeras*?" and "Why?" or "Why not?" may yield some revealing responses.
6. Exploration. Is this linked to other cultural patterns? What other sorts of rites of passage are there in women's lives? Is there a similar celebration for young men?

Although these are questions that Seelye<sup>2</sup> poses for students to explore, teachers may use them themselves to find out as much as possible about authentic materials and their cultural meaning before they bring them home. They may also wish to keep an eye open for pictures, magazine articles, videotapes, and other material that would help students discover the answers to these questions. Some materials might not require as thorough background research as the invitation to the *quinceañera*, but it will never be easier to explore the meaning of unfamiliar terms and abbreviations than it is when there are numerous native speakers at hand.

Traditional rhymes, riddles, and songs are also something that the teacher-ethnographer may wish to collect while on site in the target culture. It is fun to ask native speakers to recollect and perform some of these. Are there typical verses recited while bouncing babies on one's knee, or lullabies to calm them? What are some of the skip-rope chants that children use? Probing these sorts of cultural artifacts provides a light-hearted context for interaction with native speakers, and since the "learner" will want to remember them later, it involves either tap-

ing them for subsequent transcription (best do this while they can still be checked with natives), or trying to write them down on the spot with native help. In either case, listening, speaking and writing skills will be honed in a naturalistic, entertaining context.

The sojourn abroad is also an excellent opportunity to collect listening materials. One item that teacher-learner will not want to be without is a small tape recorder with a built-in radio. Not only is it extremely useful in recording interviews with informants, it can also be used to record traditional songs sung at a family celebrations, as well as taping all sorts of programs and advertisements off the radio. Recordings of traditional songs can be used to help students learn them. As illustrated above, they also can be exploited in accordance with Seelye's suggestions to further fathom their cultural significance. Even though the identity of interviewees in ethnographic research must be zealously protected (Spradley 1980; Jantz and Weaver 1994), portions of interview topics may also be used as classroom listening activities with the permission of the interviewee and a certain amount of editing and retaping. For example, an interview with a teenager that elicits the description of the activities involved in a typical school day could later become a resource for students whose task is to find out what a typical school day is like for a peer in the target culture. Not only will collecting materials of this sort enrich the teacher's repertoire and make classes more interesting for students, collecting them and preparing them for student use will also encourage the teacher to engage in extensive interaction in the target language. After all, isn't this what we all want from our trips to places where our language is spoken?

<sup>1</sup>As Spanish teachers probably know, the *quinceañera* is a very elaborate fifteenth birthday celebration that marks the passage of a young woman into adulthood. It involves a religious ceremony as well as a party that is in some ways similar to a debut.

<sup>2</sup>pradley's approach could also be taken. Please describe your *quinceañera* for me from beginning to end...

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