

Implementing a district-wide foreign language program: A case study of acquisition planning and curricular innovation

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Federal legislation enacted in the United States—the Goals 2000: Educate America Act—calls for American students to leave grades four, eight, and twelve having “demonstrated competence over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, [and] foreign languages,” Although every European country has a national policy for introducing at least one foreign language into the elementary school curriculum of every child (see, for example, Pufahl, Rhodes, and Christian 2000; Dickson and Cumming 1996), it is estimated that foreign languages are offered in only approximately 31 percent of the elementary schools in the United States (Rhodes and Branaman 1999). If American students are to complete grades four, eight, and twelve with demonstrable proficiency in a foreign language, the number of programs at all levels will have to be significantly expanded and improved, particularly at the elementary level.

The importance of including foreign language study in the elementary school also is supported by research on the amount of instructional time required for developing functional proficiency in a foreign language (Carroll 1967) and by the widely held professional view that language competence can only be achieved by children who follow well-articulated, sustained sequences of foreign language instruction (Donato and Terry 1995). Expanded foreign language instruction in the elementary school will provide students with an extended opportunity to achieve the goals that have been articulated and disseminated as the National Standards for Foreign Language Education (Phillips 1998) as well as an opportunity to develop truly functional ability in a language other than their first language.

A major objection to incorporating foreign language instruction into the elementary school curriculum seems to be that there is not enough time in the instructional day (Baranick and Markham 1986). Our present national concerns with systemic educational reform and competitiveness make this a critical time to explore more fully the factors related to implementation of elementary school foreign language programs. Tucker, Donato, and Murday (2001) review several of the major

issues that often are raised with regard to foreign language education in the elementary school (FLES) for English language speakers in the United States: which model of instruction should be implemented (ban immersion or standard FLES model); at what grade level foreign language instruction should begin; in what language(s) instruction should be offered; what are realistic proficiency expectations for elementary school students studying a particular language within a given model; and how we can best assess the language proficiency of young children. Very little empirical research has been conducted on these critical issues in FLES, and responses to these questions often rely on opinions or impressions about the early language learning experiences of American youngsters (see, for example, Donato, Antonek, and Tucker 1994; Donato, Tucker, and Antonek 1996; Donato et al. 2000; Gilzow and Branaman 1999; Met 1998; Tucker, Donato, and Antonek 1996).

The major purpose of this essay is to describe systematic planning and subsequent implementation and formative evaluation of a system-wide Spanish program in a school district in suburban Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The school system is relatively small, with approximately 2,800 students from mostly European-American, working-class families. For this description we draw on two major sources of data: our own experiences and observations as consultants to this program over a six-year period (as of spring 2001) and analysis of a series of extensive interviews carried out with various stakeholders who constituted the planning committee for the program. In the sections that follow we discuss the origins of the program, with particular emphasis on active participation by all senior administrators—including the superintendent—in a year-long planning effort that culminated in choice of language, teacher selection, curriculum development, and in-service training for all primary school faculty members; the ways in which the language program, which ultimately is intended for all children in the district, has been incorporated into the core curriculum for the district; the status of the program currently in its fifth year of implementation, including some findings from continuing formative evaluation of the students' Spanish language development; several prominent themes that emerged from the interview data; and our reflections on a successful and satisfying collaboration.

Origins of the Spanish Program

In May 1995, we (along with then-graduate student Janis Antonek from the University of Pittsburgh) were invited to attend an informal meeting with the superintendent of Chartiers Valley School District and several members of his administrative staff. The invitation resulted in part from our previous research examining diverse aspects of implementation of a Japanese program at the elementary school level (see, for example, Donato, Tucker, and Antonek 1996; Tucker, Donato, and Antonek 1996) and partly from the fact that one of us (Donato) directs the major foreign language teacher preparation program in the region. This meeting marked the beginning of a mutually beneficial and

thoroughly enjoyable school district-university partnership, which continues to the present day.

The superintendent began the initial meeting by articulating a vision for his students and for his district—a vision that included doing something different, something daring. He proposed that a new program be developed so that *all* of the district's pupils would study a common foreign language throughout their entire scholastic career. He described how American secondary school graduates in the twenty-first century will be competing for positions in which numeracy, literacy, problem-solving, and communication skills will be increasingly valued and how students with bilingual language proficiency will possess a comparative advantage in comparison with their monolingual English-speaking counterparts.

Several questions were raised at that first meeting. Was the vision plausible? If so, in which language(s) should instruction be offered? Were teachers available? Would the community support such a program? Would members of the school board support such a program—and provide the necessary budgetary authorization? Could the school district and the local universities (Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh) work collaboratively to their mutual benefit?

The group formed a Foreign Language Program Committee to oversee planning and implementation of a new and innovative foreign language program. Committee members consist of the district's Director of Instruction, who chairs the group; the superintendent; principals from the primary, intermediate, and middle schools; selected teachers; the chair of the secondary school foreign languages department; and the university collaborators. As of March 2001 the group had met on twenty-seven occasions to plan, review accomplishments, and make decisions concerning priorities for future work. As appropriate, subgroups or individuals carry out specific activities, which they report back to the committee.

Choice of Language and Timetable for Implementation

One of the first issues with which the group dealt was the choice of language(s). Several options were considered, including French, German, Japanese, and Spanish. At the time (academic year 1995–1996) the district offered a foreign language exploratory (FLEX) program comprising French, German, and Spanish strands for middle school students, with regular programs of study in these languages available to students in grades nine through twelve on an elective basis. In addition, members of the university partnership proposed that Japanese be considered because of their work with an innovative local program. Several factors were evaluated, such as the likely availability of certified teachers and appropriate materials, potential community support, the perceived utility of proficiency in the target language for graduates, and so forth. For pragmatic reasons, the committee decided to select only one language and to make its study compulsory for all children.

The committee decided that it would be useful to conduct a community survey to ascertain the level of support for such a program and to obtain feedback

concerning the choice of language. A survey instrument—the FLES Community Climate Survey—was developed by a committee member, piloted, revised, and administered to a representative sample of parents, as well as to all members of the school board. The results revealed broad general support for an innovative foreign language education program and support specifically for the teaching of Spanish. Approximately 65 percent of the respondents preferred a program that introduced children to Spanish (the other respondents were split among Japanese, German, or French or indicated that they had no preference). Respondents also indicated that this new FLES program should have the goals of developing cultural knowledge (93 percent), engaging students in the excitement of language learning (80 percent), and building basic language proficiency (19 percent).¹

The second major question with which the committee wrestled was whether to begin the program from the bottom up—that is, at the kindergarten level; from the top down—that is, working backward a year at a time from grade nine (where foreign language instruction then began); or from both ends to meet in the middle. After much discussion of issues such as scheduling, teacher availability, and the necessity of developing long-term articulation, a decision was made to propose to the school board implementation of a Spanish FLES program in September 1996 for all kindergarten children in the district. The proposal recommended extending the program with systematic introduction of new cohorts of kindergarten youngsters in subsequent years (i.e., to grade one in September 1997, to grade two in September 1998, and so forth). The Board of School Directors formally approved this plan in April 1996 and authorized an initial five-year pilot project. In January 2001 the board reviewed the progress of the foreign language program to date and recommended budgetary authorization to extend the program for an additional five-year period, thereby ensuring that the district will have a fully articulated foreign language program from kindergarten through grade twelve for all students by academic year 2004–2005.

Development of an Action Plan

After deciding on the target language (Spanish) and the implementation model (bottom up), the committee next turned its attention to recruiting an appropriately certified teacher for the first cohort of students, planning for curriculum development activities, informing community members about the new program, and systematically informing other teachers and administrators working in the system about the program. These activities continued during the late winter and spring of 1996. A major benchmark was the hiring of the first kindergarten Spanish teacher, who was a dually certified graduate in elementary education and in Spanish from the University of Pittsburgh. The early hiring of the teacher—a procedure to be followed in subsequent years—meant that she was able to devote a substantial block of time to curriculum development activities during the summer months before the start of the program. She worked with other curriculum specialists in the district and

in continuing consultation with Donato. Curriculum development activities benefited from and reflected work that had been done on the national (foreign language) standards, as well as innovative work that had been completed by other staff members in the school district on the standards for the arts.

The Spanish Program and its Incorporation into the Core Curriculum

The Spanish program began in September 1996 in all eleven kindergarten classes in the district, comprising a total enrollment of 223 students. Each class met for twenty minutes per day, five days per week—a model subsequently followed in grades one through four. The Spanish specialist goes to the students in their regular classroom and, in effect, team teaches with the regular classroom teacher.

In the first year of the program, a strong collaboration between the regular kindergarten teachers and the language specialist developed almost immediately; this collaborative style has continued across grade levels to date, and we believe that it continues to mark this program as unique (see Donato, Antonek, and Tucker 1994 and Tucker 1998 concerning the problem of marginality of FLES programs). Rather than expressing indifference toward the new program by working neither to support it nor to repudiate it, the kindergarten teachers—and subsequently the teachers in grades one through four—have all established close contact with the FLES teachers and freely shared ideas and materials during the curriculum development phase of the program as well as during the teaching. Many also have studied Spanish actively during the FLES lessons in their classrooms. The fact that the Spanish program and its first teacher were clearly positioned from inception as an integrated part of the kindergarten program led directly to the program becoming an equal participant in the total school curriculum.

The curriculum was developed by following the school-district template for planned courses of study. That is, each thematically organized unit (e.g., colors and shapes, numbers, greetings, calendar and weather, clothing and body parts, fiesta and foods) was specified according to student learning outcome; content, materials, and activities; and procedures for assessment. The main focus of each lesson is on vocabulary building and comprehension rather than production. The curriculum reflects this orientation in its assessment procedures, including activities such as coloring, baking brownies, movement activities, and game playing. Every attempt is made to integrate Spanish with ongoing activities in art, music, library activities, physical education, and the computer curriculum. The integrated nature of the Spanish class is explicit and obvious in the curriculum. Children learn numbers by accompanying jumping jack calisthenics with counting, listen to age-appropriate fairy tales in Spanish, and are introduced to days of the week in Spanish when they are learning them in their regular classes. The Spanish teacher uses Spanish whenever possible in the classroom for classroom management, as well as outside the classroom to greet her students in the hallways. She makes extensive use of manipulatives and visuals and brings in a wide variety of

authentic materials. Her classes are enriched with visits by Spanish speakers and through a partnership begun in collaboration with students studying Spanish at the secondary level (e.g., the Foreign Language on Request Elementary Spanish [FLORES] program).

The teacher keeps parents informed about the goals and content of the program by means of a monthly newsletter, as well as frequent tape-recorded updates on the “homework hotline.” There also have been several special presentations for parents and other interested community members at regular back-to-school nights and an informational videotape that was prepared for broadcast on a local cable channel. In addition, on several occasions parents have been asked to complete questionnaires designed to elicit their attitudes toward various aspects of the program. During the course of the 1996–1997 school year, the committee continued to meet regularly to monitor the implementation of the program, to plan for an assessment of student progress during spring 1997, and to begin planning for extension of the program into grade one together with the introduction of a new kindergarten cohort in September 1997—a model that has been followed successfully to the present (March 2001).

Expansion through the Primary Level

The committee continued to meet quarterly to discuss various aspects of the program and to plan for its expansion in the 1997–1998 school year. Another dual-certified teacher from the University of Pittsburgh program was hired, and the teachers spent time with Donato during summer 1997 revising the kindergarten curriculum in light of the first year’s experience and developing the curriculum for the new grade one program.

When classes began in September 1997, all kindergarten and grade one children in the district participated in the Spanish FLES program. They followed the model established during the first year—namely, twenty minutes of instruction in Spanish, five days a week, with a specialist teacher who comes to their home classroom. The curriculum for the second year of the program built on concepts and vocabulary learned during the first year and expanded students’ participation in the lesson to include more oral production. That is, the curriculum retained its integrated, thematic focus but moved toward greater oral participation in the lessons by students.

The committee addressed several major issues during the 1997–1998 school year. In general, committee members wanted to ensure that parents of current students, parents of prospective students, members of the school board, and other teachers in the district were as well informed about the program as they could be. To this end the committee drafted and piloted a “report card” for parents that was intended to convey information about the content of the curriculum and whether their children are progressing to master the material presented. The reporting procedure underwent several revisions in an attempt to create a report that capitalizes on what children can do well rather than on where they are deficient.

Parents receive a checklist of several functional language abilities (e.g., saying the date and month, identifying classroom items, telling time) with an indication of whether the child has *mastered* the material or is *progressing*. Care has been taken to design the report card so it will not discourage children by sending the unintended message to parents that their children lack an aptitude for language study or are not progressing adequately. Given that we do not know what constitutes “adequate achievement” at this level of instruction, we felt that it was important to highlight achievement over failure in a formal report procedure that would inspire confidence in parents concerning their children’s ability to learn another language and bolster the image of the program in the home. This report card also is an innovative development because the school district previously had not assigned grades or provided other formative information to parents about children’s progress in foreign language programs at the primary grades. The “Spanish Progress Report K–5,” as it is called, is distributed to all K–4 students and their parents twice a year (at the end of the first and second semesters). Four areas are assessed: listening and reading comprehension, communicative ability in speech and writing, cultural awareness, and responsibility for work and class participation. Students are assessed for each area as either “proficient,” “progressing,” or “needing improvement.” The progress report collaboratively devised and agreed upon by the steering committee uses a rubric that does not imply failure to provide feedback on the students’ ability at the time of reporting.

In addition, several back-to-school nights with a focus on the Spanish program were held for parents; an evening orientation program for parents of prospective new pupils was held; an informational video featuring children and teachers in the program was shown on local cable television; and an in-service program was presented in the spring to inform other teachers in the middle and intermediate schools about the FLES program.

This same general model was followed for the 1998–1999 school year, with the recruitment of another dual-certified teacher, as the program expanded to include all students from kindergarten through grade two.

Expansion to Intermediate Level and Middle School

The committee continued to meet quarterly to discuss various aspects of the program and to plan for its expansion in the 1998–1999 school year. Another dual-certified teacher was hired, and curriculum development work continued. The committee addressed several major issues during the 1998–1999 and 1999–2000 school years, including planning for the program’s expansion to grade three and then grade four (where it is at present) as well as beginning the process of thinking carefully about the expansion into the middle school that will not occur until 2002–2003. Indeed, this careful advance planning is a distinguishing characteristic of the program and the work to date—a characteristic that unfortu-

nately rarely is present in the implementation of innovative FLES programs (see, for example, Curtain and Dahlberg 2000).

Themes of Success: A Model for Other Districts and the Nation

Several features set the program at Chartiers Valley apart from other foreign language program initiatives. A comprehensive review of the history of the program reveals several themes that contribute to the vitality, health, and longevity of the program. In particular, five emerging themes characterize the program's past and present and anticipate its positive future.

First, a hallmark of the program is the overarching concern for *careful and collaborative planning and evaluation* each year as the program expands. This feature is worthy of repetition as a major contributing factor to the program's success.

Second, consonant with the theme of careful planning, *program expansion* is carried out consecutively each year, rather than to students in all elementary grades in a single year. Knowing what lies ahead and what must be prepared for each upcoming year provide necessary time for developing a well-articulated curriculum on the basis of annual assessments of students' expanding abilities.

Third, an overriding concern of teachers and the committee is that students make *progress in proficiency*. All stakeholders share a common goal: As students progress in the program, so too will they progress in their linguistic and cultural knowledge. Proficiency outcomes are critical to the success of foreign language programs because observations of early language learning programs often reveal that children are faced with repetitions of the same content presented in the same way from one year to the next (see Donato et al. 2000 for evidence of this assertion, as well as possible explanations). A repetitive curriculum and failure to adjust instruction to the expanding abilities of the child will result in student outcomes that will undermine the value of foreign language instruction in the eyes of school boards and parents—and ultimately will fail to motivate students to continue their study (Rosenbusch 1995).

A fourth theme that contributes to the overall quality of the program is the *quality of its foreign language faculty*. Each year a teacher is hired who is certified in both foreign language education and elementary education. This practice of ensuring high-quality, well-prepared teachers who understand how children learn and develop safeguards against the demise of the program. As FLES history has taught us, teachers who import approaches and methods of foreign language instruction from the upper grades to the elementary school usually do not provide the type of instruction that is appropriate to the learner. On the other hand, teachers who understand how children learn present age-appropriate lessons that take into account the capacity and natural curiosity for language learning that young children bring to the classroom.

The fifth theme, which is related closely to hiring qualified and appropriately prepared teachers, is the teachers' orientation to their work. Over the years we have

observed that the teachers are truly “*reflective practitioners*” who make instructional decisions and modifications on the basis of classroom observation and evidence. Specifically, teachers have conducted systematic classroom-based investigations of student production beyond word-level; the frequency of instructional tasks that require unplanned, spontaneous interpersonal communication; and the effect of wait-time on student participation, among other issues. As the director of curriculum pointed out, these teachers, newly inducted into the profession, truly are in training for educational leadership positions in the near future.

Current Program Status: Formative Evaluation of Student Progress

Members of the committee have believed throughout that it is important for all stakeholders (e.g., pupils, parents, teachers, members of the school board) to conduct regular systematic assessments of student progress near the end of each school year. In addition, the university partners decided that it would be useful to document as fully as possible the process of program development and implementation in a manner analogous to that described by Markee (1997).

Assessment of Student Progress

To carry out the first of these objectives—systematic assessment of student progress—a curriculum-based interview protocol was initially developed, pretested, and revised with the assistance of the university partners. At the end of the first year of program implementation (June 1997), forty-four pupils (two boys and two girls from each of the eleven classes) were randomly selected to participate in a ten- to twelve-minute interview conducted by the high school Spanish coordinator and one of the primary school counselors. The subtasks of the interview provided a basis for assessing the students’ listening comprehension (e.g., responding to a command, such as *point to the letter M on the rectangle*, with an appropriate action), their range of vocabulary (asking the child to name in Spanish a range of visuals, such as *elephant, book, school*), and their emerging sense of grammaticality (by asking them to make grammaticality judgments and by asking them to perform sentence repetition tasks with increasingly long sentences that were designed to exceed short-term memory capacity). Interviews were recorded for later transcription and analysis. In addition, the students were asked to draw a picture in their art class that later served as the “stimulus” for a picture description task. This general framework has been followed for the past four years, with gradual refinement of the assessment instruments (thanks to assistance from Sue Todhunter of the University of Pittsburgh and Rocio Dominguez of Carnegie Mellon University), to ensure that the tasks were age- and grade-appropriate and that the language forms and functions sampled were representative of the language use in their classrooms. In general, the results of the end-of-year testing show repeatedly that listening comprehension exceeds oral production, production is limited to learned material, production begins as

single-word utterances and formulaic expressions, language mixing is common, and children can be expected to develop good pronunciation in Spanish.

The children in the program and their parents also have been unanimously positive about the Spanish program and in wanting it to continue. Likewise, the views of the regular classroom teachers were positive and supportive. None expressed the view that the Spanish program was somehow detracting from other elements of the school district's program. The classroom teacher noted that "we are most pleased with the level of achievement our students have attained [and] inspired by the enthusiasm they demonstrate in so doing."

Student Progress and Early Language Learner Guidelines

Most recently we attempted to benchmark the progress of the students in relationship to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) Early Language Learner Guidelines. For this purpose, in winter 2001 we designed a teacher assessment instrument to assess student proficiency on a variety of tasks. Teacher assessment has been an accurate indicator of student ability and correlates highly with independent measures of proficiency (Donato et al. 2000). Based on the descriptions in the Early Language Learner Guidelines for students, we devised a "can do/can't do" assessment that was distributed to all FLES teachers working in the program.

Our Teacher Assessment of Student Progress, drawn from the major categories of the guidelines, asked teachers to respond to items that relate to how well and how accurately the children understand and speak Spanish, their vocabulary repertoire, the communication strategies they use, and their cultural knowledge. An additional category was added that asked teachers to report on the quantity of language their students could produce (e.g., word-level, phrase-level, and so forth). We tallied teacher ratings and compared them across all grade levels. The results of the teacher assessment indicate that children in the program after five years of instruction performed as predicted by the guidelines. When we compared the teacher responses for each grade level, the results fell into two categories: what all children in all grades can do versus indicators of expanding language ability. It was necessary to analyze the teacher assessment in this way because the guidelines reflect overall outcomes for various program models (e.g., high school programs versus thirteen years of instruction) rather than specific outcomes for each year in a given sequence of instruction.

Specifically, we found that all teachers, regardless of grade level, reported that the majority of their children had developed the ability to do the following in Spanish:

- Use memorized material
- Imitate pronunciation well
- Speak with accuracy when presenting practiced material
- Understand key words and phrases in Spanish

- Comprehend and say everyday vocabulary
- Pick up Spanish vocabulary from other sources
- Know cultural facts about Spanish-speaking countries
- Say words, phrases, and full sentences.

When we examined closely the items for which differences were reported, we observed systematic growth and progress in language ability. In addition, when we examined interindividual difference by grade level, we found that these specific items shared a common feature: the ability to use language in ways that go beyond word-level, formulaic utterances and memorized material. That is, the six items that were assessed differently by the teachers were complex language tasks requiring discourse-level competence, negotiation of meaning, linguistic creativity, cultural appropriateness, and literacy skills. The analysis also indicated that these tasks did not develop randomly, nor were they equal in complexity. As Table 10.1 indicates, the kindergarten children could not perform any of these advanced tasks, whereas the students in grade four were reported to control them all. In between the kindergarten class and grade four, we observed systematic growth in advanced ability at intervals in grades one to three. Thus, this analysis of differences revealed

Table 10.1. Teacher Assessment of Advanced Language Skills

Task	Can't	Can
<i>Less complex</i>		
Recombine to make short sentences	K	1-4
Understand simple stories	K	1-4
Use invented spelling	K	1-4
Clarify meaning	K-2	3-4
Use cultural expressions	K-2	3-4
Tell a story	K-3	4
<i>More complex</i>		

that as students moved through the program, the teachers at each higher grade level reported that their students could perform more advanced tasks.

The conclusion from this analysis is clear. Students demonstrate solid progress over the years in their language skills and cultural knowledge and develop more advanced language functions throughout their language study. The analysis indicates dramatically that these students clearly are advancing in their proficiency, that the curriculum is well articulated, and that, with each passing year, the children can say and do more with their new language.

Collaborating on Curricular Innovation: Insider's Perspective

As described elsewhere (Tucker, Donato, and Murday, 2001), we drew on Markee's (1997) definition of curricular innovation to develop an interview protocol that allowed us to construct a narrative report by uniting the opinions and perspectives of the stakeholders themselves and our own participant observations of the district's experience in collaborating on the design and implementation of the district-wide Spanish FLES program. The interview protocol, which is described in detail in Tucker, Donato, and Murday (2001), was designed to elicit participants' recollections of topics such as the early stages of program development, as well as their opinions of the relative success of implementation to date, problems likely to be encountered in the future, and comparisons with implementation of other curricular innovations in the district. The thirteen interviewees included the superintendent, a member of the school board, the director of instruction, principals, regular classroom teachers from various levels, and two of the Spanish teachers.

All participants expressed remarkable enthusiasm for the FLES program and reported that they considered it to be a success to date. During our analysis of the interview data, six overarching and consistent themes emerged across respondents:

- A vision that resonated
- Careful planning
- Empowerment
- Support of, and for, the teachers
- The physical contribution of consolidation
- Concerns for the future

We turn now to a brief consideration of five of these themes in the form of discussion and analysis of the collective thinking of the respondents that emerged during our interviews.

Articulating a Shared Vision

The superintendent wanted a foreign language program for the Charters Valley school system "because of a sense that American education was behind

[the rest of the world] with regard to exposure to foreign languages.” From the time he first proposed the idea of a foreign language program beginning at the elementary level as part of the district’s plans for consolidating several community schools in one new facility, his vision resonated positively throughout the group. That the language be Spanish was not particularly important; instead, most respondents “felt strongly that a foreign language should be introduced, but it didn’t matter [to them] which one.”

The members of the steering committee—which had representatives from administration, teachers, community members, parents, and students—all agreed that for their students to be viable citizens for the twenty-first century, “[they] needed knowledge of another language.” Students should be prepared to compete for jobs in a global market, where other students would have the benefit of school systems that emphasized the learning of several languages. The student representatives expressed dissatisfaction with the status quo; after several years of foreign language instruction at the secondary school level, they often could remember no more than a few key phrases. Many of the respondents also echoed this frustration with regard to their own language experience in school.

In addition, the respondents reported that a foreign language program would help elevate the reputation of the Chartiers Valley School District. As one respondent pointed out, “This definitely seemed a way of making them better, and improving their reputation as a leadership district It was also a way to show the people that this was something they could do for the children, to improve cultural awareness, and improve their self esteem as well.” Not only would it show their willingness to try innovative new programs, but it would demonstrate their dedication to doing things that benefit the students.

Careful Planning

All respondents reported that the success of the program was traceable in large part to the careful planning that went into the development and implementation of the program. The most crucial part of this planning was the involvement of all of the stakeholders: the school board and administrators, of course, but also the teachers, parents, student representatives, community members, and university partners. All stakeholders were continually encouraged to “raise their concerns so that they could be addressed, instead of complaining in isolation later.” As one administrator pointed out, “This one was done right. Sometimes when school districts make a decision to implement a program, they’re not always careful to get all of the stakeholders to buy in.”

Repeated again and again among the respondents was the sense that anticipation of concerns prevented them from becoming obstacles. As one respondent mentioned, “They anticipated concerns, and they were built into the action plan. . . . The proactive nature minimized problems.” In addition, the program is

under constant scrutiny and evaluation and is revised as needed. As one respondent put it, the steering committee “helps them keep on top of things, and anticipate issues.” This factor gives the respondents confidence in contemplating potentially problematic issues that they feel will need to be addressed in the future.

Empowerment

The notion of “empowerment” was central to many of the interviews. Respondents were unanimous in feeling “ownership” of the foreign language program from the beginning. The early discussions surrounding implementation of the program were seen as drawing on “the philosophy of teamwork in the district.” Respondents reported that they were “never hesitant to voice a very small concern because . . . you know any comments are treated with respect and addressed.”

This empowerment that teachers, department heads, principals, and others felt clearly was the result of strong leadership provided by the superintendent, who regarded his position as one that would “allow him to guide ‘the powers that be’ toward the inclusion of the program [centrally within the core curriculum for the district].” It is noteworthy that both the superintendent and the director of instruction have personally participated in *all* meetings of the steering committee over the past five and a half years. Members of the Foreign Language Committee were carefully selected to include representatives from the key constituent groups: administration, building management, supervision, classroom teaching, and the university partners. Many respondents regarded this strategy as a new and desirable approach to curricular innovation for Char Valley.

Support of, and for, Teachers

Another central thread that was woven throughout the interviews was that of support of, and for, the teachers. This support took many forms. For example, there is a continuing search for teachers with dual certification (in elementary education and Spanish) so that classroom teachers would not be expected to learn and then teach Spanish—as has been done with many other programs in the United States, often with less than optimal results. A good deal of attention was paid to ensuring that the Spanish program was incorporated into the regular curriculum of the primary school with a minimum of disruption. Care was taken to provide assistance to the Spanish teachers through continuing linkage with the university partners and for classroom teachers through systematic provision of in-service training.

Respondents also noted that the Spanish teachers “had the support of the classroom teachers; they’ve really accepted it, they’re learning the language and speaking it with their students, and they reinforce what they’re learning all throughout the day.” The principal of the primary school noted that he devotes a good deal of attention to ensuring that the regular classroom teachers are “attempting to implement the Spanish instruction in their daily lessons as well.”

Concerns for the Future

Respondents were asked to discuss their long-term prognosis for the program, which brought several concerns related to the future of foreign language learning in the district sharply into focus. The most resounding theme reflected a realization that issues of articulation will be critical if the district is to have a coherent and viable foreign language program across thirteen years of instruction. Several respondents mentioned the need to rethink the curriculum in the middle school (grades six through eight) and high school (grades nine through twelve). As the chairperson of the high school foreign language department stated, "There will need to be drastic changes in the curriculum in the later years of schooling," though she hastened to add that she regards this "as a wonderful problem." Similar comments from several other respondents made clear that the district anticipates the effect of such a program on all levels of language instruction and recognizes the centrality of language instruction for the total school curriculum.

What is striking in the interview data are the possible solutions envisioned to the "wonderful problem" of restructuring a foreign language curriculum upward toward high school. Many respondents provided concrete suggestions for a well-articulated program model, course content, and teaching personnel. The second-grade teacher spoke of later courses containing challenging subject matter in Spanish that could be taught by highly qualified instructors who are trained to deal with academic content. According to the intermediate school principal, the "domino effect" of an elementary foreign language program on later years of instruction requires careful planning and active preparation for the language curriculum in the upper grades. Her suggestions included recruiting highly qualified teachers with teaching certificates in both elementary education and foreign language instruction and constant attention to the curriculum to ensure that it is developmentally appropriate for the learners and reflective of advances in the field of language learning. The intermediate school principal—a non-foreign language specialist—anticipated that students will be better able to acquire "additional foreign languages because of their early learning experiences with Spanish," thus possibly foreshadowing expansion of foreign language offerings to students in the high school.

From Local Themes to Professional Practice

We believe that the profile that emerged from the interviews provides important lessons for others who may embark on similar curricular innovations. This study has examined, in actual practice, key elements in developing an apparently successful educational innovation and in so doing has told the story of one district's lived experience with FLES. The direction and decisions of this district rested on the concerns of several important constituents and reflect Markee's (1997) observation that innovative projects are affected, positively or negatively, by complex sociocultural variables such as cultural beliefs; political climate; his-

torical and economic conditions; administrative attitudes; institutional support; and technological, sociolinguistic, and language planning factors (see also Holliday 1994). Viewed globally, these themes—vision, planning, empowerment, support, and future concerns—refract and reflect all of the sociocultural variables listed by Markee and attest to their importance, as well as the need to acknowledge and address these factors openly in designing and implementing new programs. Others in the profession who are contemplating development of a program such as the one we have described here or monitoring and evaluating current FLES programs might be well advised to benchmark successes and failures against these themes.

Reflections on a Successful and Satisfying Collaboration

Several factors have contributed to the success of this project to date. The first factor that comes to mind is the key role played by the superintendent. Through his active participation in all of the committee meetings, he has provided immediate and visible credibility and value to the activity. He continually reminds committee members that they are embarking on an innovation by “navigating uncharted waters” that will have far-reaching consequences for the school district in terms of its visibility and reputation. We also have been struck by the extent to which committee members—themselves mostly monolingual and monocultural—have embraced the goal of multiple language proficiency and cross-cultural competence for their students and themselves “act as if” they were multilingual and multicultural. Throughout our association with the committee, we have found the representatives from the district to be continually and genuinely concerned with providing the best possible education for their students. We have never heard a disparaging remark about a pupil, a parent, or a community member; to the contrary, committee members express genuine knowledge about and concern for the students’ educational, social, and personal well-being. We have found it enormously satisfying to be a part of this committee.

What are some of the issues that have intrigued us over the past five and a half years? Clearly, we have appreciated the opportunity to attempt to extend the generalizability of some of our ideas about language program evaluation to another setting. Perhaps more important, however, we have enjoyed the challenges—in the words of the superintendent—of “navigating uncharted waters” in helping to write a curriculum for the elementary grades; in examining the relationship between what goes on in the language arts curriculum to what should be accomplished in the FLES curriculum; in thinking through and sharing with other committee members various issues related to the introduction of second-language literacy in relationship to native language literacy; in examining the complex set of issues related to reporting student progress to parents (we are intrigued, for example, by how parents evaluate the progress of their

children in areas in which the parents themselves have no experience); and, more generally, with the responsibility of injecting substantive issues from time to time into what otherwise might become a procedural dialogue. We have enjoyed witnessing the genesis of this program and being a part of this collaborative achievement thus far, and we look forward to its continuation in the future.

Yet we are far from finished. The program committee has now turned its attention to curriculum revision and development, materials selection, and so forth for expansion of the program to the middle school (grades six, seven, and eight), and committee members have begun to think about the ways in which the current high school Spanish program will need to be thoroughly revised for subsequent cohorts of students who will bring to the high school language class a “beyond-the-basic” level of proficiency. The district and the current Spanish teachers will face a major challenge in developing a rich, content-based Spanish program that will allow these students to continue to develop cognitive and academic language proficiency in English and Spanish by the time of their graduation. This concern for articulation is well founded in light of the failures of FLES programs in the 1960s (Rosenbusch 1995). One commonly observed phenomenon during that period was that former FLES students often repeated basic language lessons when they entered high school. This repetition of previously learned material resulted in a severe lack of motivation in students and diminished their interest and enthusiasm for language study. The source of this instructional discontinuity in language study has been traced to the lack of clearly articulated shared goals and outcomes for language learning in a seamless sequence of instruction. It is not surprising that in foreign language education today, articulation programs and studies still dominate the professional literature, grant-funded projects, and conference presentations. The committee is fully aware of these issues and is taking steps to assure that transitions between instructional units and course outcomes will expand student proficiency rather than recycle rudimentary skills each year.

NOTE

1. It is interesting to note that these desired outcomes are quite similar to the rank-ordering of goals expressed by parents in our longitudinal study of a Japanese FLES program (Donato, Antonek, and Tucker, 1994; Donato, Tucker, and Antonek, 1996; Tucker, Donato, and Antonek, 1996).

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