

"POSSIBLE OBSTACLES AND IMPEDIMENTS TO CURRICULAR CHANGE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTS"

BEFORE READING THE ARTICLE

1. The article we are asking you to read identifies obstacles and impediments to curricular change. Let's begin first with the notion of curricular change. Do you think curricular change is a good thing in colleges and universities? Explain why or why not.

2. Have there been recent curricular changes on your campus? How did these changes come about? Who wanted them? Why? How easy or difficult was it to obtain support for these changes?

3. Make a list of as many obstacles or impediments to curricular change in your department as you can think of. Then group the items in your list according to their degree of seriousness:

minor | somewhat serious | serious | very serious

4. When did you first begin your study of foreign language? When did you take your most recent course? Did you notice any differences in approach or methodology from your first course to your most recent one?

5. Read the following terms and put an "X" in front of any that describe your first foreign language course. Put an "O" in front of any that describe your most recent course.

culturally neutral dialogues
authentic texts as basis for oral, written work & reading
separate skill practice
translation (L1 ->L2, L2->L1)
grammar rules linked to meaning
grammatical syllabus
vocabulary lists to memorize
self-expression
culture as context
personalized language
edited texts
integrated skill practice
focus on language as discourse
grammar rules linked to formal accuracy
situational syllabus
distinction between active & passive vocabulary
discrete-point or fill-in-the blank exercises
culture as facts

In the above list, circle any items that you believe promote language learning.

WHILE READING THE ARTICLE

6. At the top of p. 14, ICee notes that, despite their shortcomings, the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines have had a major impact on foreign language instruction in the U.S. How familiar are you with these guidelines? What contribution did they make?

7. In light of what we know about language proficiency from the ACTFL Guidelines, what, according to Klee, is wrong with the model under which many/most foreign language departments continue to operate?

8. (Bottom p. 14) What pressures are being exerted on institutions by business and government? What issues or questions are these demands raising for institutions, in general, and for language departments, and area and international studies programs, in particular?

9. After examining what students can accomplish at the end of 3 or 4 semesters in a proficiency based approach, what does Sudennann conclude about the "fit" between language programs and FLAC programs? What recommendation does he make? Do you agree with him? What have the Univ. of Ottawa and the Univ. of Minnesota discovered concerning the "readiness" of students to participate in a FLAC program?

10. What appear to be the main challenges confronting those interested in developing FLAC programs?

11. Beginning at the bottom of p. 14, Klee discusses a variety of obstacles to curricular change in foreign language instruction as well as factors that may contribute positively to promoting curricular change. Fill out the chart below by linking possible obstacles and examples of support according to the types of institutions analyzed in the article.

Factors that promote curricular change in a positive way	Obstacles to Curricular Change
Small liberal arts colleges	
Large research institutions	
Both types of institution	

12. After filling out the chart, think about the nature of the institution where you currently teach. Circle any factors or obstacles discussed in the article that reflect the situation at your institution. Feel free to add other items at your institution that either promote curricular change positively or create obstacles that impede curricular change.

AFTER READING THE ARTICLE

13. After reading Klee's article, how would you describe the "context" which has given rise to curricular innovations such as foreign languages across the curriculum? Which features or aspects of FLAC would seem to be attractive to which constituencies?

14. What is the lure of FLAC programs? What larger objectives can they help attain? What do you see as the benefits of FLAC for each of the following:

the institution

foreign language departments

non-foreign language departments

area studies/international programs

faculty

students

"POSSIBLE OBSTACLES AND IMPEDIMENTS TO CURRICULAR CHANGE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENTS"

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Over the past 20 years, changes in foreign language education have amounted to what some scholars have called "a shift in paradigms" (Swaffar 1989, Kramsch 1993). The focus of language classes has changed from grammar-based, teacher-centered instruction to an emphasis on functional language use and learner-centered practices. These changes reflect new thinking in such fields as second language acquisition, cognitive psychology, and critical pedagogy and were reinforced by the move toward national standards, represented throughout the 1980s by the dissemination of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Swaffar (1989) summarizes the practical implications of the changes in elementary language classes as follows (P. 304):

Lower-Division Curricular Shift: Materials/Techniques

Preexisting Paradigm New Paradigm

Culturally neutral dialogues, edited texts, separate skill practice Personalized language

Sentence drill (fill in blanks) Authentic texts as basis for oral, written work, and reading

Grammar rules linked to formal accuracy in a sentence Integrative use: grammar rules linked to meaning in paragraphs and discourse as well as sentences

Grammar rules taught in class at least 30% of class hour by translation or grammatical terminology Grammar rules to be learned by students outside of class; 95% of class time devoted to contextual practice

Cued by translation or grammatical terminology Cued by situational variables

Vocabulary lists to be memorized for active use—largely cued by translation Distinction between actively used and comprehended word—vocabulary understood and cued in L2 context

These changes in language instruction slowly began to affect the curriculum in many foreign language departments in the 1980s. Generally, first- and second-year language classes began to focus more on the development of language use in the four modalities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and less on direct grammar instruction. A few institutions (e.g., the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Minnesota, and the University of South Carolina) went one step further and implemented proficiency-based language requirements. At such institutions, two years of seat-time no longer was sufficient to complete the language requirement; students had to demonstrate proficiency in the four modalities at specified levels, which generally were in the intermediate range on the ACTFL scale.

Despite their shortcomings (cf. the June 1988 issue of *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*), the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines have had a major impact on foreign language instruction in the United States and have provided realistic objectives for both students and their instructors. For example, we now are aware that two years of study in the traditional college sequence will not produce near-native speakers, listeners, readers, or writers. This fact should make it easier to articulate the lower-division language program with the courses for minors and majors. Unfortunately, however, most institutions continue to operate under a model in which students are expected to master the language in the first two years and then devote the junior and senior years to the study of content (i.e., culture and/or literature).¹ While many departments now focus on communicative language instruction in the early levels, few have dedicated much attention to the articulation of lower- and upper-division courses.

Many institutions have evinced a desire to respond to students' needs and interests as well as to external pressures from business and government. More frequent demands are being made for pragmatically oriented courses, such as "French for Business," "Spanish for Medicine," "Japanese for Engineering." Much discussion is currently taking place in the field about when offering such courses is most appropriate: in the first, second, or third year of instruction in the

more commonly taught languages, or even in the fourth year of languages such as Japanese, Chinese, and Arabic. This question is complicated by debate about whether language department instructors have sufficient expertise to offer instruction in languages for special purposes. The issue raises additional questions about the need for upper-division language programs to move beyond a primarily literary model and provide students with multiple options for study at this level.

Programs such as area and international studies have begun to make demands on language departments to be responsive to what students should know in order to participate in "foreign languages across the curriculum" (FLAC) programs. After examining what students are able to accomplish at the end of three or four semesters in a proficiency-based approach, Sudermann (1992), for example, recommends that language programs not concentrate on the development of all four skills: "The FLAC concept, ironically, would work best if the goal of multiskill proficiency in the beginning courses were abandoned in favor of a reading-centered routine that would develop this single skill" (p. 42). Most language programs have not followed his advice, since the vast majority of students regard the development of conversational skills as one of their major goals in language study (cf. Omaggio Hadley 1993). Several institutions (e.g., the University, of Ottawa, the University of Minnesota) have found, however, that students are able to participate best in FLAC programs if they have completed at least three years of language study with a multiskills approach. The question remains as to how students can be prepared adequately to participate in FLAC programs and how instructors can be prepared to teach their content effectively to language learners at various levels of proficiency.

This paper will focus on some of the obstacles and impediments encountered by participants in the "Spreading the Word" project as they have attempted to respond to some of the pressures and changes described above. The discussion has been informed by interviews with several of the mentors, who were very frank about the difficulties they had witnessed at small liberal arts colleges as well as large public research universities that were implementing change. The impediments to curricular change identified by the mentors can be classified in several broad categories: differences of opinion regarding the mission of language and literature departments, the special difficulties of articulating undergraduate programs at large research institutions, the lack of rewards for time dedicated to curriculum development, and resistance from faculty members who feel left out of the decision-making process.

One of the major obstacles to change in many foreign language departments is the resistance of faculty who view the mission of the language department as the teaching of literature. As Patrikis (1995: 294) has pointed out:

French or German or Spanish programs ... historically fit into the humanities [in contrast to the less commonly taught languages, which are frequently housed in area studies programs].

Consequently, such programs have typically sought to develop and to emphasize the skills of high literacy for the study of texts; they have tended not to have personnel trained to develop courses outside the fields of literature and culture ...

One mentor noted that many faculty members do not want to lose the humanities base of their programs and fear that by focusing on courses with a more pragmatic orientation they will lose the literary component that they consider the heart and soul of their profession. They therefore resist any change in the lower-division language program even though, as she stated, the vast majority of the students taking the first few semesters will not become literature majors. Another mentor found that younger, untenured faculty members were interested in changing the program, but encountered resistance from older, tenured faculty members, resistance that, given the status difference and the vulnerability of the younger faculty, surely would impede change.

Several of the mentors noted major differences in the level of receptivity by faculty at small liberal arts colleges and large public research universities. One mentor, for example, expected the most resistance at small colleges to the broadening of the foreign language curriculum to include courses for business and other professions. However, she found that the faculty at these schools

were more open, at least initially, to considering alternate delivery systems and reexamining their goals and objectives. These colleges responded energetically because they were in jeopardy of losing their language programs, while the larger institutions still had a sufficient number of students because of language requirements and a larger student base. Another mentor found the faculty of small liberal arts colleges easier to work with because such institutions give greater emphasis to-and reward-teaching, making the faculty ready to find ways to improve their teaching effectiveness and to do a better job of meeting the needs of their students.

Articulating lower-division language courses with upper-division courses for minors and majors appears to be much easier at small liberal arts colleges. At such institutions, all faculty teach both language and literature and are more aware of the adaptations that must be made for non-native speakers when they enter upper division courses. At large institutions, the split between faculty who work in the lower-division language programs and faculty who teach the upper division "content" courses can be difficult to bridge. Harris-Schenz (1993: 49) has described the problem this way:

Colleagues who teach undergraduate and graduate literature courses see themselves as "content" (i.e., literature and culture) and not "skills" (i.e., language) specialists. To do what they do best, they need students who can understand and use the foreign language well enough to read and respond to text (written not for language learners but for native speakers), discuss content and ideas on several levels, understand lectures, and write convincingly on abstract topics. In fact, what they are really looking for are non-natives with near-native language skills. This level of language, however, is well into the Superior range on the ACTFL proficiency scale and much beyond what we can reasonably hope to accomplish in two or three years in the foreign language classroom.... While our literature colleagues criticize what's being done in the lower-level language courses, they also refuse to continue language teaching in literature courses.

Some mentors experienced the frustration of trying to involve literature faculty at large institutions in efforts to articulate lower-division with upper-division courses. One of the major obstacles to implementing a well-articulated undergraduate program is the lack of interest by literary scholars, who believe that their classes should focus solely on content and not on language development.

The prevalent faculty reward system is an impediment to curricular change. The granting of tenure at both large and small institutions is related primarily to research and publication; therefore, many faculty members feel that time devoted to curriculum development is not well spent. For example, a faculty participant at one of the institutions involved in Spreading the Word was told that she should publish more and not focus so much on curriculum development. A mentor noted that administrators often were enthusiastic about their institution's participation in the ACE project, but did not provide any rewards for the time and effort required for its implementation.

Those actively promoting curricular change in the context of the ACE program sometimes created obstacles to success by failing to consult with those not participating. Attempts to bring about curricular change were blocked, not only for the reasons described above, but also because colleagues felt that they had been left out of the decision-making process. Some long-term faculty had the sense that something was being done to them and thus resisted any attempts at change. One of the mentors stressed the need for early notification of faculty when changes are being proposed and the inclusion of all faculty in the discussion of how best to change the program. Everyone in the department, particularly the senior faculty, must feel ownership if implementation is to succeed.

Given the numerous obstacles to implementing meaningful changes in foreign language programs, what advice do mentors have for those who plan to alter their approaches in response to some of the pressures described above? First and foremost, the mentors stress the need to give appropriate attention to communication. Again, faculty must know the reasons for the proposed changes and be aware of the various options. Members also must have a sense of

ownership of the plan for change and a role in its development.

Jane Harper suggests that changes involving the development of pragmatically oriented courses (e.g., Spanish for Business) be explained to faculty as "additive" rather than "subtractive." She feels that faculty members' fears about losing the literary components of their programs could be alleviated if they understood that they would be adding to students' options, not replacing literary study.

In addition to faculty approval, the support of key administrators also is essential. If the faculty members who invest large amounts of time and energy in the implementation of changes are not rewarded by the institution, the plan is doomed before it ever gets off the ground. The reward structures of institutions of higher learning must change in order for curricular innovation to receive the attention it deserves. Although many institutions have begun to give lip service to the importance of teaching, prestige within institutions of higher education and within the profession at large still is tied almost exclusively to research and publications. At a minimum, for curricular change to occur, teaching must be valued and rewarded when faculty receive yearly merit increases and taken into consideration when tenure is awarded.

This lack of full respect for curricular and instructional reform in language teaching might be addressed by a small but growing movement to create foreign language centers. These centers bring together foreign language teachers from all departments and build interdisciplinary bridges with colleagues in other disciplines. Such centers already have been established at a number of larger institutions, such as Brown University, the University of Hawaii, Ohio State, the University of Pennsylvania, and San Diego State. In the Center for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, for example, applied linguists from the language departments and English as a Second Language together with faculty from the College of Education conduct research on proficiency testing and computer adaptive testing, elementary- and university-level immersion programs, learning involved in a strategies, and the development of cultural competence. Some members of CARLA are involved in a state-wide articulation project and the development of standards for high school teachers of Japanese and Russian. These types of joint efforts increase the visibility and prestige of faculty responsible for the "language" side of language and literature departments at large research institutions and, at least to some degree, allow for a renegotiation of the traditional hierarchy.

Warning about the problems that might be created by certain types of centers, one mentor expressed her opposition to those that unite language teachers from throughout the university in one large institute, creating a departmental structure that separates them from their colleagues in literary and cultural studies and linguistics. Such institutes, their proponents argue, help bolster the notion that foreign language teaching, learning, and assessment constitute their own disciplinary area and allow for the increased coordination of curricula and methodology. But this mentor sees a danger in the centers' separation of the teaching of language and culture, the "Berlitzification" of language teaching. Such centers also increase the difficulties of articulating the lower- and upper-division curricula. In addition, the isolation of language teachers in a separate institute would most likely underscore their second-class status rather than enhancing their position. If one understands foreign language teaching as focusing on language as a "social signifying practice" (Kramsch 1993), then language teachers have more in common with their colleagues in literature than frequently is acknowledged. Kramsch (1993) describes the type of teaching required currently as one that calls for "a critical pedagogy that pays attention not only to words and sentences but to discourse practices as well" (p. 9). She concludes that language teachers "can best prepare for their role as critical educators through the study of literature or applied linguistics, which trains them in the critical reading of texts" (P. 9, emphasis mine).

If we are interested in changing the foreign language programs of our institutions of higher education, one of our strongest prospects for success is in the preparation of graduate students in literature and applied linguistics as both scholars in their respective fields of expertise (i.e., literature, cultural studies, or linguistics) and as teachers who are aware of the importance of

language learning at all levels of the curriculum, both lower and upper division. Since fewer tenure-track positions are available than in the 1980s, colleges and universities now can require that job candidates be able to "do it all": have scholarly credentials in their areas of expertise and have the pedagogical skills and knowledge of foreign language education to contribute to the entire undergraduate curriculum.

The experience of the mentors and the institutions with which they worked suggests that change, while difficult, is not impossible. The biggest challenges foreign language departments now face are how best to broaden the foreign language curriculum to respond to the needs and interests of students, and how to articulate lower- and upper-division courses. Specifically, faculty members need to determine what types of options for further study should be available to lower-division students and to insure that they give explicit attention to language learning at all levels of the undergraduate curriculum. As Dorothy James, chair of the German Department at Hunter College and a Spreading the Word mentor, noted in a recent personal communication, "The dichotomy between teaching skills and teaching content is a false one. In a properly organized language and literature program, content, be it literary or otherwise, is better taught when student skills are simultaneously enhanced, and student skills are better enhanced when they are focused on increasingly challenging intellectual content." Ideally, faculty who specialize in literary, linguistic, and cultural studies (as well as other disciplines in which foreign languages are used), and those who specialize in applied linguistics will work together to develop a coherent, articulated curriculum at all levels of undergraduate study.

ENDNOTES

My thanks to Wendy Allen for pointing this out. Special thanks are due to her, Dale L. Lange, and Robert Shoenberg for their detailed comments and suggestions, many of which have contributed substantively to the final version of this paper.

I would like to thank Jane Harper, Dorothy James, and Clara Krug for their willingness to reflect on their experiences and for their insightful analyses of the issues surrounding the implementation of changes in foreign language programs.

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