Common Core State Standards Initiative:
by Paul Sandrock
Every language teacher should be excited with the opportunity presented by the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core Standards have defined literacy and outlined the mission for English Language Arts in a way that provides a natural fit with our National Standards for Language Learning. Taking advantage of this connection, language teachers can showcase the importance of learning languages by demonstrating how literacy is learned, practiced and strengthened through standards-based and performance-based language learning. The national consensus that has coalesced around our National Standards for Language Learning is remarkable. Most states have adopted or adapted the standards represented by the five goal areas, our five Cs of Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. Not only have the language standards endured for over 15 years, they have proven to be flexible and adaptable to fit all types of program models, instructional sequences of varying lengths and all languages, whether alphabetic (French, German, Latin, Russian, Spanish), logographic (Chinese, Japanese) or visual (American Sign Language). The Standards have guided the critical review and improvement of language programs from prekindergarten through postsecondary levels, teacher preparation programs and teacher licensure requirements. Language assessments have also been impacted by the standards as institutions look for or design valid evaluations of language performance.
ACTFL worked with local and state supervisors of languages to create a crosswalk to show the connections between the four strands of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and the Standards for Language Learning. This document is available to download at www.actfl.org/commoncore. The easy part was to link the Common Core strands of reading, writing, speaking and listening to the three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive and presentational). The fourth Common Core strand, language, correlates with the description of language proficiency levels (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced) as Common Core describes growth in the strand of language as increasing accuracy in applying language conventions, deepening understanding of how language functions, and expanding precision of understanding and using vocabulary. The more difficult challenge is to demonstrate what could occur through language learning that would truly develop or strengthen the literacy skills described in the Common Core Standards.
Crosswalk of Common Core State Standards and National Standards for Learning Languages:

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines

Three Modes of Communication

Interpersonal

Presentational

Interpretive

National Standards for Language Learning

FOR LEARNING LANGUAGES:

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Content-Rich Units, Teachers Add to the Impact of Language Learning as Students Learn Not Only a New Language, But Also Learn, Review, or Reinforce Knowledge and Skills Valuable to Other Subject Areas.

Using Three Modes of Communication in Primary Language in Learning

The three modes of communication provide us with a clear outline for designing assessment and instruction that will support and develop the skills described in the Common Core. The literacy that is described in the Common Core ELA Standards needs to start being developed early; both in native language and in second language. What does this look like in early language learning?

Interpersonal

I often hear teachers say that their Novice level learners are not capable of discussing anything. It is also not rare to come across the phrase “Novice level learners may rely more on key words and phrases, but they are capable of asking questions and using sentence patterns when these are highly practiced and memorized. The key in the interpersonal mode is for learners to have motivating reason to engage in conversation, such as to find out some information that one partner knows and the other doesn’t, identify how alike or different they are, or try to come to agreement on their preferences. Novice level learners function in personally relevant contexts, so they need to be themselves when engaging in interpersonal exchanges. They are better able to negotiate meaning when they have a repertoire of memorized expressions to ask for clarification. Consider teaching early language learners expressions to signal they didn’t understand something, expressions like “What do you mean?” or “Please repeat that.” or “An example, please.” With a few key expressions, Novice-level learners will be engaging in meaningful conversations and developing Common Core language skills, as described in the first standard under Speaking and Listening as “Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively”.

What does this look like at the Novice level? Examples from the ACTFL Crosswalk document:

• Identify main ideas in developmentally appropriate narratives that support meaning, such as graphs and charts;
• Interpret informational texts with text features that support meaning, such as graphs and charts;
• Use content knowledge in other subject areas to comprehend spoken and written messages in authentic texts.

Novice level learners understand a lot of what they hear in the target language because of how the teacher provides comprehensible input, regular language patterns, and visual or graphic support. In reading, similar strategies need to be modeled and practiced so that learners begin to internalize how to make meaning. The teacher’s challenge is how to get learners to show what they understood. An important point for teachers of early language learners to keep in mind is to avoid making the learner the focus of the activity. Teachers can help teachers of Novice level learners practice the three modes of communication and build Common Core literacy? Teachers attain this goal by designing units connected with age and grade-appropriate content. Rather than teaching a unit on a vocabulary topic like food, students explore food through the lens of making healthy choices or examine food through the causes of famine identifying where and why people eat what they eat. The focus allows for deeper development of the literacy goals described in the Common Core State Standards. With this approach, language teachers will become valuable allies supporting literacy initiatives in their schools and early language learners will benefit.

ACTFL Webinar Series Fall 2012

• Linking Common Core and World Languages (Three Webinars)
• Building Literacy via Communication Strategies (Three Webinars)
• Create charts to identify pros and cons of an argument in a text
• Write short notes, messages and brief reports about an experience. Practicing literacy in this way will allow early language learners to show their understanding of the impact of language learning as students learn not only a new language, but also learn, review, or reinforce knowledge and skills valuable to other subject areas. How do early language learners practice the three modes of communication and build Common Core literacy? Teachers of Novice level learners will benefit.

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