

Assessment,
Articulation,
and Accountability
1999



Part Three:
Articulation

Chapter 8 - The Challenge of Articulation

Articulation

Articulation is not a new issue in education but it is especially crucial in foreign languages. The advent of elementary programs and the restructuring of the middle schools several years back have revived and have placed a renewed urgency on that issue. Language study unlike most other disciplines is characterized by different entry levels and exit points, varying amounts of instructional time, and diverse programs. These concerns are heightened by the spiral and sequential nature of language.

What Is Articulation?

Articulation refers to the way in which parts are put together to make something whole. By putting the different parts together, the end product becomes one and displays cohesiveness. Therefore, the concept of articulation recognizes that sequencing and coordination of instructional goals need to be in place if the educational programs are to attain their goals.

However, for articulation to take place, there needs to be an understanding of the process and of how each part fits with the others. In reality, there are very few articulated foreign language programs in existence in this country and in many places, teachers at different levels do not have the opportunity to meet and work together. For this reason, proactive recommendations are needed from educators. Lack of articulation makes foreign language programs vulnerable and lacking credibility whereas well-articulated foreign language programs provide continuity, give teachers a sense of direction but, more importantly, provide students with appropriate transition from one level to the other to support the development of proficiency.

Heidi Byrnes in "Foreign Language Articulation from High School to the University" defines articulation in the following ways:

A well-designed curriculum is articulated along three axes: *vertical articulation* refers to the continuity of a program throughout the length of the program; *horizontal articulation* targets the coordination of any curriculum across the many or several classes that are simultaneously attempting to accomplish the same objectives; and *interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary articulation* address the capability of a second language as a school subject to associate with other disciplines in the curriculum (Lange, 1982).

Vertical Articulation

Vertical Articulation refers to how the specific goals can be attained. It subsumes that the specific goals have been determined and that they have been expanded by objectives. This part is often missing in language programs in the state. While teachers have access to the *Second Language Standard Course of Study*, the document is broad in its goals and objectives. It needs "to be expanded in the local curriculum to reflect the beliefs, policies, philosophy of the local school district in ways that best meet the needs of their specific student population" (*Second Language Standard Course of Study*, p. 2). Traditionally, it is at the local level that such components as content, topics, units, vocabulary, grammar, and culture are addressed in detail.

The first step to remedy this fragmentation is to bring teachers of different levels together and to get them to develop a local curriculum which is fully articulated and which addresses the span of their program.

Teachers in Watauga County felt that the issue of articulation was problematic especially since

they had no local curriculum. While there are very few teachers at the elementary level, the program was based on what individual teachers want to teach. In the event of a teacher's departure, there was nothing in place to outline specific objectives at each grade level. For them, the first step in articulating was to begin the development of the curriculum for grades 2, 3, 4 and 5 and to continue with the middle grade curriculum.

In order to facilitate her students' transition to high school, the middle school teacher in Onslow County, with the help of her middle school colleagues, devised a checklist for nine weeks exploratory foreign language program for all eighth graders going to high school (see p. 252 for checklist).

The Wake County team is looking at the development of a high school placement test for students coming from the middle grades.

In Haywood County, the issue pertained to the placement of students once they entered high school. Students had, for the most part, benefited from an elementary and a middle school experience, but there was a need to establish some criteria for high school placement. An old eighth grade placement test existed but did not reflect the middle school foreign language program. Middle and high school teachers met over the course of the project to outline the expectations for students entering a high school level II. A level I assessment in French and in Spanish resulted from these meetings (see pages

228-248 for assessment) .

Because the Winston-Salem/Forsyth school system is a large one with a variety of languages and different instructional contact time, the team felt that one needed step included documenting which language students had studied, when they had studied it, and for how long. To help them with this documentation, they developed the *Second Language Study History* form to be included in the student's cumulative folder.

**Second Language Study History
Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools**

(To be completed by second language teachers and kept in the student's cumulative folder.)

Student's Name: _____

Student's Native Language: _____

Please indicate language instruction by year:

- S Spanish
- F French
- G German
- J Japanese
- L Latin

Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Language													

FLES Instructional Time:

_____ minutes _____ times per week

Developed by the Winston-Salem/Forsyth team

Horizontal Articulation

Horizontal Articulation within the program refers to what students are doing at that grade level. At the present time, within a school district and sometimes within a school, there is no guarantee that students at the same grade level or in the same courses are introduced to the same skills and content.

Furthermore, there is no guarantee that all the second language teachers within that school system adhere to one philosophy regarding the teaching of languages. When such situations are encountered, the resulting product is a fragmented program with no consistency and no system to take into account the students' previous knowledge.

One of the first steps to take is to encourage regular meetings of teachers to discuss grade expectations. Of course, to implement horizontal articulation, foreign language teachers must be in agreement on the content, skills, and language functions stressed at a particular grade level. Hopefully, teachers will have access to a locally developed curriculum which outlines these elements.

When first grade teachers in New Hanover County met to develop their progress checklists, they realized that there was no uniformity nor consistency within the different third grades in each one of the schools. For this reason, they began meeting regularly and developed four checklists (see checklists on pages 255-258) to correspond to their four yearly grading periods. The checklists they have developed outline a common set of skills and knowledge for all first grade students enrolled in the foreign language program. This kind of horizontal articulation facilitates the vertical articulation as students enter a different grade or a different school.

The assessments were given to the entire class.

Some of the listening comprehension involved paper and pencil work, for example students were asked to "write a 1 under the picture of the table, or write the number you hear." This kind of assessment usually took about 10 minutes of the class time. For the individual oral component. The teacher and class played a game. The elementary teacher noted that a game was the only way to keep students interested and on task. For example, when assessing whether students could use greetings, she asked them to write their name on a slip of paper numbered 1 to 4 (or

more). Each number represented a question (for the teacher's record keeping). For example, 1 would be, "What is your name?" 2 "How are you?" and so on. All the slips were collected and divided into two stacks and students were divided in two teams according to the stacks. Slips were chosen from each stack alternatively and the student whose slip was chosen was asked a question. A check mark or an X were written next to the corresponding number depending on the student's answer to that particular question and the slip went back to the end of the stack. At the end of the game, teacher and class counted how many checks each team had and the team with the most checks was declared the winner. This activity usually took one class period depending on the number of questions. The teacher found the students to be attentive and eager to participate.

At the end of the nine weeks, the checklist was completed and sent home to the parents. A letter introducing the program and listing students' expectations was mailed at the beginning of school.

A middle school teacher in Onslow County adopted the same approach. Prior to articulating with the high school, she felt an urgent need to convene her middle school foreign language colleagues for

monthly

meetings. During those meetings, middle school teachers across the district were able to discuss common concerns and to cooperate with one another on the development of their curriculum for the sixth grade level.

The Winston-Salem/Forsyth team had been hard at work on the development of their curriculum during the previous year. However, they were lacking the assessment component. For this reason, the team met on a regular schedule and devised a series of assessments (rubrics, checklists) to accompany the district-wide curriculum and to be shared with the receiving school. (see samples on pages 226-227, 248-251, 253-254).

Interdisciplinary/Multidisciplinary/External Articulation

External articulation looks at reinforcing what students are doing at that grade level in other disciplines. This kind of articulation is addressed in the national standards under the goal of Connections. It promotes uniformity across the grade. To find out what is being taught in other content areas, teachers can study the Standard Course of Study from other disciplines, they can send questionnaires to other teachers, or they can ask them directly. Another solution, involves posting a chart in a common area with the various disciplines and the month listed and asking individual teachers to write main concepts and/or topics relating to their own content areas.

Road Blocks to Articulation

As noted previously, there are many challenges in dealing with articulation. Participants in the *Assessment, Articulation, and Accountability* project identified roadblocks to articulation and suggested possible solutions.

1. Program Roadblocks

- △ Scheduling (does not always take in consideration the students' previous language experience, varies a lot from school to school within a school system, scheduling at grade six is problematic)
- △ No local curriculum (no hierarchy to determine goals and objectives)
- △ Inconsistency of programs (many gaps and/or redundancy)
- △ Lack of a textbook
- △ Language courses denied to in-coming ninth graders
- △ Choices of languages at the middle school prevent sequencing
- △ Different ability grouping makes teaching difficult

- △ Foreign language teachers not understanding nor valuing program at other levels (the blame chain)

Possible Solutions

- + Develop a local curriculum (the curriculum dictates what is taught not the textbook)
- + Develop flexible pacing guides as needed
- + Look at national and state document to establish common ground
- + Arrange meetings of K-12 teachers and/or of teachers assigned to the same level and agree on possible outcomes (write a CEU proposal)
- + Develop a newsletter for foreign language teachers within the school system (teachers sign up for writing the newsletter for a special month)
- + Develop and share scheduling guidelines and recommendations at the district and/or at the school level
- + Incorporate cooperative learning, group and pair work, to deal with students with different abilities and language levels
- + Visit different schools and classes or ask teachers to videotape some of their lessons for viewing by others

2. Outside Forces Road Blocks

- △ Foreign languages are not considered an academic course in the same way as reading, writing, and math and so do not get the necessary attention
- △ Pull outs (at elementary and middle school levels) disturb learning and teaching process

Possible Solutions

- + Focus on connections to other teachers and subject areas (to find out what is being taught across the curriculum, place a white board in central location with individual

teachers listing topics and concepts to be taught)

- + Relate foreign language to school priorities and accentuate the similarities rather than the differences
- + Attend Board of Education meetings
- + Take part in school decision making
- + Communicate with guidance counselors

3. Teacher Road Blocks

- △ Lack of commitment to the program from the administration (especially for the elementary and middle school programs)
- △ Lack of a coordinator/spokesperson for the foreign language program at the local level
- △ Lack of communication with other foreign language teachers in the school system
- △ Lack of interest on the part of some foreign language teachers in the school system, accompanied by mistrust and resistance
- △ Lack of teachers

Possible Solutions

- + Design a plan for in-servicing and present to administration
- + Take a leadership role and draft meeting dates, times, and agenda for supervisor's signature
- + Give other teachers a role and responsibility in organizing meetings
- + Help new teachers, or first-year teachers by being their mentor
- + Agree on outcomes not on HOW to reach them when working with reluctant teachers
- + Tap into colleges and universities for support and potential teachers
- + Join professional organizations and report back to group
- + Open your classroom to observers and student teachers

4. Alternative Assessment Road Blocks

- △ No system for placing students once they reach the high school level
- △ Management of alternative assessments
- △ Lack of time to develop and administer assessments

Possible Solutions

- + Share assessments with other teachers
- + Spot check. Not all students have to be assessed the same day on the same skills
- + Involve students in the development of assessment
- + Enroll students' assistance in keeping records (student of the week can rate the class's participation according to a 1-2-3 scale and back it up with examples)
- + Engage students in self and peer assessments
- + Include a variety of assessments

Issues to Consider in Articulation

1. Characteristics of staff. What are the teachers' attitudes? What kind of training have they had? What is their outlook on changing?
2. Look at the goals and nature of the programs
3. Flush out the expectations of the staff
4. Look at the nature of the learner
5. Look at the curriculum and methodology

The 6 Cs of Articulation

In a presentation on articulation, Dr. Al Rubio identified six "Cs" in dealing with articulation. They are:

1. *Common concerns*. From the beginning it is important to define clearly the task and to agree to find some acceptable path for reaching it.
2. *Colleagueship*. Teachers need to be supportive of one another and need to work in an environment where their views, expertise, and experience are respected and valued. They can agree to disagree.
3. *Cooperation*. Articulation is a cooperative endeavor. It involves many different people at many different levels. Teachers need to be able to work with one another to complete assignments and to contribute to group work.
4. *Compromise*. Through compromise teachers can design a plan that is acceptable to *all* parties concerned. There may be times when consensus building activities may be needed to end a deadlock.
5. *Commitment*. Teachers who are reluctant to change hinder the process for everyone else. It is important to seek the commitment of all persons affected by the changes.
6. *Constructive criticism*. Differences in philosophy and opinions must not be regarded as personal attacks on one's credibility, integrity, and ability. Criticisms must be placed in the proper perspective and must always be accompanied by suggestions for remedying the identified concern.

Statement on Articulation from the Coalition of Foreign Language Organizations

Our pluralistic American democracy and global society need citizens who can function in more than one language. All students, whether they speak English or another language, whether they will make the transition from school to work or from school to further education, should have the opportunity to become fluent and literate in a second language.

We affirm the long-standing conviction among language professionals that to learn a language in school, students need planned sequences of study articulated vertically, that is, through elementary, secondary, and postsecondary education, and horizontally, that is, connected to other fields. By building on prior learning, articulated programs make efficient use of time and money.

When foreign language education is organized in extended sequences of instruction, teachers are able to plan and implement the most effective curricula to enable students to become competent users of a second language.

Articulation takes place when language teachers

- o communicate and collaborate across levels and among disciplines
- o acknowledge common principles and common goals
- o focus on the learner and the content of the curriculum
- o take into account the variety of student accomplishments at elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels

To facilitate collaborative efforts, educators can draw on many sources, such as

- o discussions of good teaching practices

- o curriculum frameworks that reflect a range of language learning purposes
- o national standards documents
- o performance assessment guidelines
- o local, state, and regional guidelines, standards, and frameworks
- o results of state and regional articulation projects
- o state and federal education reform policies

We urge educators to work toward the goal of articulated sequences of foreign language instruction so that the American educational system can fulfill its responsibility to its students and to the nation

**Members of the Coalition of Foreign Language
Organizations**