

The Home/School Connection:

Collaborating to Promote Best Practice in World Language Education, Pre-K-8

Issue 10

Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Dear Parents,

In Issue 4 you were given an overview of the national *Standards for Foreign Language Learning*. In this issue, we take a closer look at the third standard, **Cultures**, and how it is addressed in the early language classroom. We will also discuss how you as a parent can help your child develop his/her understanding of other cultures and gain global awareness.

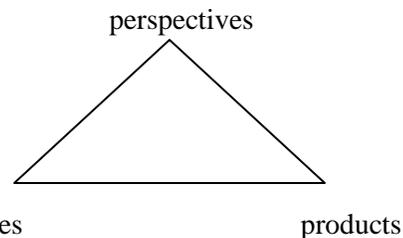
Cultures: Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Gaining knowledge of cultures through second language learning allows students to go far beyond what can be taught about other cultures in Social Studies or The Arts. “The study of another language enables students to understand a different culture *on its own terms*...Because language is the primary vehicle for expressing cultural perspectives and participating in social practices, the study of a language provides opportunities for students to develop insights in a culture that are available no other way” (Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, 1999).

Second language instruction allows children to learn about the similarities and differences between their culture and those being studied. Through learning about other cultures, children will learn to avoid cultural misunderstandings. They will also develop a better understanding of their own culture.

The Culture Standard addresses the three components of culture: practices, perspectives, and products. The American

Council for the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) uses the triangle below to show how the three components are interrelated.



Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between practices and perspectives of the cultures studied.

This standard focuses on the practices, which are the “*what to do when and where*” of a culture. It is important to understand the relationship between these practices and the underlying perspectives that help to develop them.

Teachers address this standard through teaching appropriate gestures, oral expressions, and games. Your child may also sing songs and listen to stories from the target culture during language class.

A Japanese teacher will teach students to greet each other with a bow. Children that speakers of European languages may learn to begin counting with their thumb instead of their pointer finger. Volunteers in a classroom can be chosen using a culturally based chant. Birthday songs unique to the culture studied may be sung when a child celebrates a birthday.

What can I do at home?

- Have your child teach you the songs s/he is learning in language classes.
- Talk to your child’s teacher or search online for games to play that are unique to the language and culture your child is studying.
- Have your child teach you how to appropriately greet someone in the language s/he is studying.
- Learn a lullaby in the target language and sing it together before going to bed.

Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

This standard focuses on the products of the culture and how they reflect the perspectives of that culture. Cultural products may be tangible or intangible.

The language teacher may share information regarding the products of the culture such as clothing, dwellings, and food. Your child may read, perform, produce and identify

songs, literature and artwork from the target culture.

Students learning German may learn to eat with a knife in the right hand and a fork in the left hand and then discuss why Germans eat this way and how it compares to the way children in the United States eat. Children learning Spanish may create and then learn about *vejigante* masks from Puerto Rico.

What can I do at home?

- Go to the supermarket together and look for foods eaten in the target culture. Talk about the foods’ importance in that culture.
- Look online for pictures of homes from the target culture. Together compare and contrast those homes with your home.
- Go to an art museum and look for works by artists your child has learned about in class.

You can read more about the Communication Standard in *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century*, available from ACTFL.

*“Through learning language we learn about culture.
Through learning about culture we learn tolerance for others.
Through learning tolerance for others we can hope for peace.”
--Unknown*

NNELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today. We would love to hear from you!

This issue of Home/School Connection was written by Tammy Dann. It is full of tips and resources that can be found at www.nnell.org. Teachers may reproduce it and send it home in their students’ backpacks. Send suggestions/comments to Tammy Dann, NNELL’s Early Language Advocate: trdann@q.com