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*Interpreting Communicative  
Language Teaching*

CONTEXTS AND  
CONCERNS IN  
TEACHER  
EDUCATION

*Yale University Press  
New Haven &  
London*

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## 6

## *National Standards and the Diffusion of Innovation: Language Teaching in the United States*

ANA SCHWARTZ

In 1994, U.S. president Bill Clinton signed into law the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The purpose of this act was to create national curricular standards in the subject areas of math, English, history, and science. These standards were designed to provide high expectations for all learners (Tucker and Codding 1998) and to serve as examples of excellence, an “objective ideal” that all learners can attain (Wiggins 1999).

The first direct involvement of the federal government in the creation of curricular standards, Goals 2000 marked an important turning point in American educational history (Saxe 1999). Education in the United States has been traditionally a state and local concern; issues of curriculum and assessment have been addressed by the states and local school districts, *not* by the federal government. The national curricular standards are voluntary, however; states and school districts can determine the degree to which they follow them in developing curricula. This decentralized system of education poses fundamental obstacles for true and meaningful implementation of the standards, as will be shown here.

This chapter focuses specifically on the U.S. national curricular standards for the foreign languages and issues of their implementation. Implementation issues will be discussed using Markee’s (1997) model of curricular innovation, which is based on a “diffusion of innovations” perspective. To under-

stand how and why an innovation is either adopted or rejected requires consideration of the social context in which it is communicated. This perspective will be adopted to illustrate that both the *reasons* for implementing standards and *the consequences* of their implementation will depend on *where* within the social structure (bottom or top) they are advocated and *how* (bottom-up or top-down) they are diffused.

Given its decentralized nature, curricular innovation in U.S. education can result from top-down or bottom-up methods of diffusion, or some combination of the two. The potentially dual nature of innovation can lead to a conflict of interests among members of the U.S. educational system at various levels of its sociopolitical structure (local, state, federal). Before addressing these issues of implementation, however, we need first to review the content and underlying theory of the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning.

### The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning

#### DEVELOPMENT

Foreign languages were not included initially in the Goals 2000 project. Only after considerable lobbying efforts by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and the National Committee on Languages (NCL) did foreign languages become the seventh and *final* area of the school curriculum to receive support from Goals 2000 (Davis 1997). These lobbying efforts resulted from the collaboration of various national foreign language associations, among them ACTFL and the American Associations of Teachers of French (AATF), German (AATG), and Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP). Representatives from each of these organizations served on the board of directors for the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (NSFLL) project and guided its development.

An eleven-member task force was responsible for the actual writing of the standards. This task force was selected on the basis of two criteria: (1) membership should include representatives from the entire field of foreign language education, and (2) membership should include currently practicing teachers familiar with the classroom environment (Lafayette and Draper 1996). The drafting of the standards was further guided by the project’s statement of philosophy:

Language and communication are at the heart of human experience. The United States must educate students who are linguistically and culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and

abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which all students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language. (ACTFL 2000, 1)

Based on this philosophy, the project members formulated goals of foreign language education, expressed in terms of curricular goal areas. The task force also included progress indicators to aid in the assessment of learner progress toward the standards as well as learning scenarios to exemplify ways for promoting this progression (Lafayette and Draper 1996).

#### THE FIVE C'S

The National Standards for Foreign Language Learning were completed in 1995. Eleven standards are organized into five goal areas, known as the Five C's (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities). Each area consists of two to three standards and sample progress indicators for grades 4, 8, and 12 (see Appendix).

The *communication* goal area addresses learners' ability to use the second language to communicate thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a variety of settings. The three standards listed under this goal area emphasize what learners can *communicate* with the language. The benchmarks for each grade level reflect a gradual increase in the complexity of the context in which learners are expected to communicate.

The *cultures* goal area includes standards that address learner understanding of how the products and practices of a culture shape its perspectives, which in turn are reflected in the language. An understanding of how culture shapes language is of primary importance for language learners.

The *connections* goal area addresses use of the language to learn new content and information beyond the classroom. Learners should use the language as a tool to access and process information in a diversity of contexts. As they use the language in different settings, learners can discover the "distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its culture" (standard 3.2).

The standards included in the *comparisons* goal area are designed to foster learner insight and understanding of the nature of language and culture through a comparison of the new language and culture with the American English language and culture with which they presumably are already familiar. Through such comparison, language learners not only increase their awareness of linguistic features of syntax, morphology, and phonology; they

can also develop a more sophisticated understanding of what is meant by *culture* and the factors that comprise it.

The ultimate, overarching objective of the Five C's is the fifth and final goal area, *communities*. Drawing from the knowledge and competence developed in the other four C's, this goal area describes learners' lifelong use of the language, in communities and contexts both within and beyond the school setting itself.

Together the Five C's reflect a focus on what learners can do with the language. They represent a holistic, communicative approach to language learning. This signals a move away from the longstanding pedagogical representation of language ability as consisting of four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and components (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) (e.g., Rivers 1968) to encourage instead a consideration of the discursive and sociocultural features of language use (see Halliday 1978; Savignon 1983, 1997). Although the eleven standards are categorized into five goal areas, the development of competence in any one area is intrinsically linked to the development of competence in another.

#### The NSFL and Other Representations of CLT

The influence of earlier representations of CLT can be found in the content and pedagogy of the NSFL. Breen and Candlin (1980), for example, provide principles for designing and implementing a communicative curriculum that coincide well with the structure of the national foreign language standards. According to Breen and Candlin, the content of a communicative curriculum is specified by first designating a selected repertoire of communicative performances that ultimately will be required of the learners. Based on this repertoire, specific competencies assumed to underlie successful performance are identified. For the NSFL, the performance repertoire is designated by the eleven standards.

Breen and Candlin also discuss the role of teachers as facilitators of communication within a communication-based classroom. Within their framework, the teacher is both a provider and an organizer of resources as well as a resource for communication. Moreover, the teacher acts as an interdependent participant in classroom communication. Similar notions can be found in discussion of the communication standards. Hall (1999), for example, describes the teacher's role as that of facilitator of communicative acts by providing learners with modeling and feedback and directing their attention to important features of communication. (For illustration of the risks

inherent in such teacher “attention,” however, as opposed to actual classroom practice of communication, see Chapters 4 and 5.)

The content of the NSFL reflects the communicative curriculum proposed by Savignon (1983). Savignon outlines five curricular components for a communicative classroom: Language Arts; Language for a Purpose; My Language Is Me: Personal Second Language Use; You Be . . . , I’ll Be . . . : Theater Arts; and Beyond the Classroom. These components are not separable. They represent clusters of activities or experiences that can be used to promote learner use of the language. Instruction involves a blending of these components, which, in turn, overlap (see Chapter 1).

The intertwined nature of this curriculum is similar to the interrelated and interconnected components of the Five C’s. Moreover, three components in particular, language for a purpose, language use beyond the classroom, and personal second language use, relate to curricular objectives of the standards. Similar in objective to the connections goal area, language for a purpose involves activities that encourage learners to use the second language to express, interpret, and negotiate meaning. Language use beyond the classroom involves activities through which learners use the language to interact with second language representatives outside of the classroom, as reflected specifically in the communities standard.

Finally, personal second language use addresses the affective aspects of learning a new language. It includes activities and instructional practices that allow students to express themselves personally through the second language. This notion of personalizing the new language, and in a sense making it one’s own, is emphasized through the learner-centered approach of the Five C’s (Overfield 1997; Met 1999). Learner experiences serve as the basis of learning within each of the Five C’s. For example, through connecting the language with other disciplines (standard 3.1), using the language to gain new perspectives (standard 3.2), and using the language to gain new experiences in a second language community (standards 5.1 and 5.2), learners create their own experiences and develop their own insights. To summarize, the NSFL appear to be based on a communicative approach to second language learning and teaching with a strong basis in second language acquisition theory and research.

### The Indispensable Link Between Theory and Practice

Descriptions of the theoretical underpinnings of the NSFL are provided in an ACTFL publication, *Foreign Language Standards: Linking Research Theories and Practices* (Phillips and Terry 1999). In this volume, vari-

ous authors discuss the theoretical models and empirical studies that support the communication, culture, connection, and comparison goals (for a review of the theory for the communities area see Overfield 1997). Since it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss each of these areas in depth, attention will be given to Hall’s (1999) description of the theories of communicative competence that support the communication goal area. Inasmuch as communicative competence is seen as integral to each of the Five C’s, similar theoretical links presumably can be made to each goal area. Indeed, other authors (for example, Overfield 1997; Fantini 1999) make reference to the same theoretical frameworks cited by Hall.

Hall delineates what she perceives to be the theoretical links between the NSFL and theories of communicative competence. Her analysis begins with a description of what is meant by the terms “communication” and “communicative competence.” Communication is described as based on socially constructed “communicative plans.” These plans are used to reach communicative goals and involve specific communicative roles. They “function as maps of our sociocultural worlds and contain significant sociocultural knowledge about our communicative activities” (1999, 17).

She traces the term communicative competence to Hymes (1966), noting the well-known contrast of his view of language as social behavior with a Chomskyan concern with individual morphosyntactic knowledge, or linguistic competence. Following brief mention of the familiar frameworks of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990), Hall evokes a little-known representation of communicative competence proposed by Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurell (1995), claiming it to be the most comprehensive, “because it takes into consideration some of the most recent research” (Hall 1999, 20). No research is identified, but the representation itself is subsequently described in some detail.

#### THE “MODEL” OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF CELCE-MURCIA AND COLLEAGUES

Citing the “practical needs” of syllabus design and teacher education, and a “belief in the potential of a direct, explicit approach to the teaching of communicative skills” (1995, 6), Celce-Murcia and colleagues offer what they describe as a “pedagogically motivated model with content specifications.” In so doing, they expand the Canale and Swain (1980) framework (see Chapter 1) to include actional competence, or “competence in conveying and understanding communicative intent . . . matching actional intent with linguistic form” (1995, 17). Thus, Celce-Murcia and colleagues describe five components of communicative competence: (1) discourse, (2) actional,

(3) sociolinguistic, (4) linguistic, and (5) strategic, with discourse competence at the core. In keeping with the Chomskyan perspective to which Hymes reacted, but in opposition to Halliday (see Chapter 1), they hold to a distinction between performance and competence. They use the term “linguistic” in a narrow sense to refer to sentence-level grammatical form.

Celce-Murcia and colleagues make no claim for the validity of the components they identify. In providing teachers and curriculum developers with an “elaborated checklist” for creating a communicative curriculum, they state as their purpose to provide “a practical guide for teachers,” to “achieve a *clear and simple* presentation” (1995, 20, emphasis added). In fact, with its emphasis on simplicity, their proposal fails to adequately capture the dynamic and interactive nature of communicative competence. Unlike the Canale and Swain (1980) and Bachman (1990) frameworks, it has neither appeared in a major professional journal nor drawn the attention of researchers in second language acquisition or assessment. (For a critique of Celce-Murcia et al. 1995 with respect to the implications drawn by the authors for communicative language teaching, see Thornbury 1998.)

Curricular reform cannot occur in the absence of theory. A look through the history of curricular reform and innovation reveals a continual failure to establish true change when methods and materials are disseminated without an understanding of basic theoretical issues (see Musumeci 1997a; Savignon 1990, 1991; Chapter 10). In the absence of a well-articulated underlying theory, the extent to which the foreign language standards can be said to represent a significant redefinition of curricular goals remains unclear. Liskin-Gasparro has represented the U.S. national standards movement as the “most provocative debate in the history of education reform” (1996, 169) and a fundamental paradigm shift in the area of curriculum. More recently, however, she revisits the efforts within ACTFL in the 1980s to differentiate language “proficiency” from communicative competence and goes on to assert that the proficiency movement that has dominated the American foreign language profession since the publication of the *ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines* (ACTFL 1982) “*inspired* the national Standard in Foreign Language Learning” (Liskin-Gasparro 2000, 486, emphasis added; see also Chapter 10). If the standards are to promote true and long-lasting reform, the underlying theory, which is the glue connecting the Five C’s, must be clarified and conveyed.

We turn now to a consideration of issues regarding the implementation of standards from a diffusion of innovations perspective. This analysis will show that the success of the NSFL will vary according to the social roles of the

participants, or stakeholders, who are potentially affected by this specific curricular reform effort.

### The Diffusion of Innovations Perspective: Basic Definitions and Concepts

The purpose of diffusion of innovation theory is to explain and predict the rates of adoption of innovations. This perspective is also used to analyze how innovations are implemented, designed, and maintained by examining certain attributes of the innovation and the social roles of those participating in its diffusion (see Rogers 1995). An innovation is “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption” (Rogers 1995, 11). A *diffusion* of innovation is defined as “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (10). Thus the major elements of innovation diffusion include (1) the innovation, (2) channels of communication, (3) time, and (4) the social system.

#### MARKEE’S THEORY OF CURRICULAR INNOVATION

Markee (1997) developed a theoretical framework for understanding innovation in language teaching. By adopting a diffusionist perspective and drawing from the research of multiple disciplines, he suggested how various sociocultural factors interact to influence the implementation of curricular innovation. He defines curricular innovation as “a managed process of development whose principal products are teaching and/or testing materials, methodological skills and pedagogical values that *are perceived as new by potential adopters*” (46, emphasis added).

Thus, it is the perception of newness that defines curricular change as innovation. For example, many consider the Five C’s to be reflective of a new and therefore innovative “proficiency paradigm.” However, the proficiency paradigm is based on a communicative approach to language learning and teaching that has emerged throughout history under a variety of labels. Early examples of a communicative approach can be identified as far back as the fourteenth century (Musumeci 1997a). Nonetheless, the “proficiency paradigm” is indeed an innovation if those participating in its diffusion perceive it as new.

It is also possible for a single aspect of a curricular innovation (beliefs, materials, or methods) to be perceived as new, and therefore innovative, while other aspects are not. For example, some may perceive the underlying

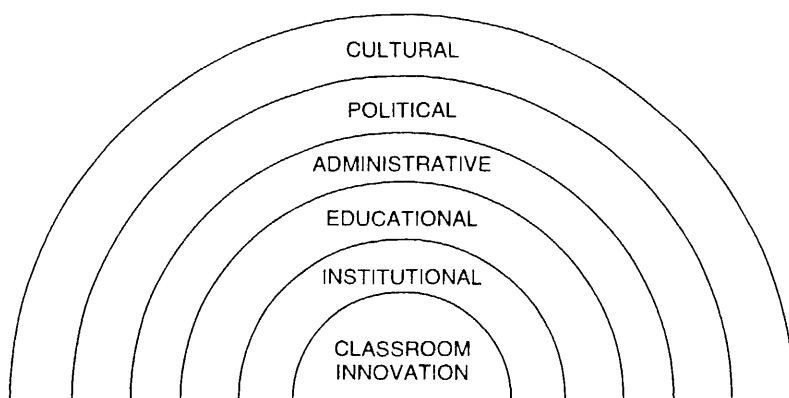


Figure 6.1. The hierarchy of interrelating systems in which innovations have to operate. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press from C. Kennedy, "Evaluation of the Management of Change in ELT Projects," *Applied Linguistics* 9. 4 (1988): 332.

model of the NSFL (CLT) as not new, and something that indeed dates back to the Middle Ages. However, the method (federal government involvement) is indeed new within the context of U.S. educational history. For this reason the NSFL may be seen as a curricular innovation, since they have at least one component which may be perceived as new.

#### SOCIAL ROLES AND THE CONTEXT OF CURRICULAR INNOVATION

Participants in an innovation take on different social roles depending on whether they are effecting change or being affected by change. The two major social roles of those effecting change are change agents and suppliers. A change agent is someone who influences others' decisions to adopt an innovation. Change agents are further categorized as being either internal or external. Within curricular innovations, external change agents come from outside the educational system, while potential internal agents include teachers, administrators, and other participants in that system (see Chapter 10). Suppliers facilitate curricular innovation by providing textbooks and other types of materials. The two major social roles played by those being affected by an innovation are those of adopters and clients. Adopters are those individuals who decide to use an innovation. If they have not completed the decision process they are considered potential adopters. Clients are the recipients of an innovation. In the case of curricular innovations, these would be the learners.

Innovations take place within and across different levels of a social structure. Within curricular innovations there are six levels of interrelating sub-

systems, which are hierarchically arranged and have distinct subcultures. These include classroom, educational, institutional, administrative, and political subcultures (Figure 6.1). As will be seen, the social context from which an innovation is initiated will have a fundamental impact on the method used for its dissemination or diffusion.

#### Methods of Curricular Innovation

There are a variety of methods adopted for innovation diffusion, which are characterized by the degree to which they represent top-down or bottom-up change. The former refers to change that is mandated from higher levels of the social structure to lower levels (see Chapters 2, 3, 5, and 7). The latter refers to change that is voluntary and works its way up through the social structure. Since the U.S. educational system operates through a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes of change (Davis 1997), curricular innovation can occur through various methods of diffusion.

Three methods of diffusion may be seen as operating in the dissemination of the NSFL. These three methods are center-periphery, research development and diffusion, and problem solving. The first two are examples of top-down methods and the third is an example of a bottom-up method.

#### THE CENTER-PERIPHERY METHOD

Within the center-periphery (CP) method of innovation diffusion, the power to promote change lies with a small number of individuals. "The decision makers derive the right to exercise authority based on the hierarchical positions they occupy in a bureaucratically organized institution" (Markee 1997, 63). Change is implemented through means of power and coercion; rewards and sanctions are often used to ensure implementation of the innovation. When this method is employed for curricular innovation, teachers are most often on the periphery and do not share in the decision making.

In terms of the implementation of the foreign language standards, the CP method is most likely to be used when standards are advocated at the political, institutional, or administrative levels as a method to effect change at the educational or classroom levels. For example, a state's political system may institute standards as a method for improving the quality of its schools. To ensure that the standards are implemented, the state may require the administration of certain assessments and offer incentives to the districts that show overall improvements in scores.

This type of implementation can promote change. Research has shown,

for example, that state curricular frameworks have a significant impact on local curricular development. These frameworks are often developed to aid schools and districts in designing a curriculum that matches current educational research and development. For example, research on foreign language curriculum in particular suggests that the development and use of ACTFL's proficiency guidelines fostered a shift from grammar-oriented approaches to proficiency-based ones (Bartz and Singer 1996).

However, a CP method, which relies solely on top-down change, is not sufficient for effecting long-lasting reform. Since individual initiative is not fostered and teachers are passive recipients of the innovation, they often do not have an opportunity to develop a full understanding of the innovation (Markee 1997). As discussed earlier, the dissemination of theory along with the method is crucial for curricular innovation. Without the theory, misconceptions regarding the innovation are likely to occur, which will in turn impede its maintenance.

There is substantial evidence suggesting that sole reliance on a CP method of diffusion would be detrimental for true implementation of the standards. As explained above, a CP method of curricular innovation starts typically at the political or administrative level and progresses top-down. However, the U.S. educational system is decentralized. The miscommunication that arises from the agendas of various sectors of the U.S. public educational system is a major obstacle for reform.

Davis (1997) provides an example of reform efforts in the state of Pennsylvania that illustrates how state-level politics can be a hindrance to successful change. In past years, politicians in Pennsylvania worked toward establishing an outcomes-based, minimal expectations approach to curricular development. The Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association (PSMLA) lobbied for several years to have one of the fifty-three outcomes address foreign languages. In 1996, however, newly elected Governor Ridge blocked outcomes-based education in favor of a standards-based, maximum expectations approach. The PSMLA found the standards for foreign languages to be untenable for Pennsylvania school districts, particularly those that did not offer foreign language instruction at the elementary level. Therefore, the PSMLA's struggle to attain state recognition and support for foreign languages was lost with the shift in the state's educational framework.

Davis (1997) also points out that teachers may agree with the underlying pedagogy of the foreign language standards, but that their perceptions of how the standards are being politically instituted may turn them away. He points out the importance of recognizing the multiple identities that individuals carry with them. For example, a teacher may identify herself as a mother,

teacher, Latino, and Republican. Therefore, although she may favor "advancing the agenda of her profession via educational reform," her politically conservative leanings may include fears of federally mandated policies and centralized control (155).

Another fundamental limitation of the CP method is the conflict and tension that may result from opposing agendas among different sectors of the educational system. The standards movement has increasingly been seen as a method for instituting school and teacher accountability: "The issue of increased control at the state level with required standards and/or mandated assessments will only exacerbate problems and conflict" (Saxe 1999, 8). This tension is illustrated in Crookes' (1997) description of foreign language teachers' situations in schools. He describes the employment circumstances of teachers as an environment of "alienation." Part of this tension is attributed to the "strong 'accountability' of schools and of teachers to their immediate administrators and to political authorities; [which] in turn results in heavy reporting demands for tests taken . . . as well as day-by-day conformity to a specific page of text" (68) (see also Chapters 3, 5, and 7).

This focus on accountability, testing, and conformity contrasts sharply with the earlier discussion of the theoretical basis behind the foreign language standards. There appears to be an almost complete mismatch between what is advocated pedagogically by the standards and what is emphasized when these same standards are administered and mandated in a top-down fashion. The CP method for implementing standards is characterized by top-down mandated reform, which most likely will result in partial or temporary adoption and/or ineffective assessment practices.

#### THE RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND DIFFUSION METHOD OF INNOVATION

The research development and diffusion (RDD) method of innovation represents another top-down approach to innovation diffusion. This method starts with applied research and development followed by testing and mass production. Within the context of the RDD method it is important to make a distinction between primary and secondary curricular innovations. Primary curricular innovation involves changes in pedagogy, methods, and teaching skills. Therefore, it is considered the heart of innovation. Secondary curricular innovation involves changes in curricular materials, such as textbooks. These are the most tangible and readily observed aspects of an innovation. However, in isolation secondary innovation does not represent true curricular change. Once again, the method and the materials must be accompanied by the underlying pedagogy (Markee 1997).



One of the advantages of an RDD model is the rapid diffusion of secondary innovation through mass production (e.g., textbook publishing). Indeed, many textbooks purportedly reflect a communicative approach to foreign language teaching, suggesting that the underlying theory of the standards has already been widely accepted (see Chapters 5 and 7). Researchers have noted, however, that the innovation resulting from RDD has remained mostly at the secondary level. Classroom research has revealed that many of the textbooks used in foreign language classrooms are replete with trendy jargon that would suggest a communicative approach to language learning. The “communicative exercises” of textbooks are often used to drive entire lesson plans in foreign language classrooms (Savignon 1983; Savignon 1997; Thornbury 1998).

The completion of textbook exercises alone does not constitute true classroom communication, the essential feature of CLT. Classrooms have a discourse culture, which determines how students are to interact with the teacher and one another. The structure of this discourse is most often asymmetrical, with most of the communicative decision-making being done by the teacher. In the foreign language classroom this asymmetrical structure has particular consequence. More specifically, when learners use the second language exclusively through an asymmetrical discourse structure, they may think that the learning of this language is fundamentally different than the learning of the native language (Brooks 1993).

This message is incompatible with the underlying pedagogy of the foreign language standards. Each of the Five C's is designed to convey the message that second language learning, much like learning a first language, involves communication with a purpose. Therefore, although RDD may be effective for disseminating the products of secondary innovation (teaching materials), this does not imply a similar effectiveness in disseminating the products of primary innovation (pedagogy).

There are other limitations of the RDD method of innovation. The change agents often assume that a theoretical rationale is sufficient for promoting adoption, and they are often insensitive to issues of implementation. Furthermore, teachers are most often at the bottom of the hierarchy of this expert-driven change and do not feel that they truly own the products of the innovation (Markee 1997).

Yet through the use of a continual process of research, development, and diffusion, the RDD method by its very nature may overcome the obstacle of inadequate theory dissemination. Change agents for the NSFLC have used research to improve diffusion and development by obtaining feedback from

adopters and potential adopters regarding their perceptions, understanding, and use of the standards. For example, Bartz and Singer (1996) distributed questionnaires to various members of the academic community, including teachers, supervisors, and administrators. The questionnaires addressed members' awareness of the standards, their agreement with the content and underlying pedagogy, and the potential for implementation. Several items asked teachers to rate each of the Five C's in terms of its importance and feasibility. The pattern of responses indicated that overall, teachers gave less favorable ratings to the communities goal area, which describes students' lifelong learning and use of the language. Comments on the questionnaires reflected the general impression that this goal area was not practical. One teacher commented that “the goals are unrealistic, especially at the upper levels” (160), and another expressed her view that without study abroad experiences, the average learner would not be able to reach the standards of this goal area.

These responses to the communities goal area would indicate the utility of capitalizing on publishing resources to disseminate information regarding how to attain these standards, even with limited resources. In fact, the major change agency of the standards, ACTFL, has made readily available a description of the standards, as well as progress indicators and sample learning scenarios, through its website ([www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org)). Responses to the questionnaire also indicated that teachers did not perceive the standards as new; they felt they were already engaged in such practices. However, inasmuch as the goal of the standards is not to validate current teaching practices but to examine and improve student performance (Phillips 1999), statements such as “My students perform those tasks at high levels of competency” (2) would be more reflective of a true understanding of the objective of the standards. Thus, change agents involved in the dissemination of the innovation should devise ways of encouraging in-depth reflection on the standards. This could be done through the use of workshops and focus group discussions.

In another study, Solomon (1997) distributed surveys to educators in public and private schools to assess their awareness of the NSFLC. Educators in private schools reported less awareness of the standards than those in public schools. Once again, change agents could make use of a variety of channels of communication and publishing resources to reach the targeted audience.

To summarize, the RDD model is limited by its top-down nature. Although it leads to rapid production of the tangible products of an innovation (textbooks, teaching materials), it does not promote pedagogical change. Perhaps if the RDD method is used as a continual, cyclical practice, with

research continually informing development, its efficacy can be improved. As will be argued in the next section, however, the RDD method lacks a key component, the active participation of teachers.

#### THE PROBLEM-SOLVING METHOD OF DIFFUSION

The two methods of diffusion discussed so far, the center-periphery and the research, development, and diffusion approaches, share the limitation of their top-down nature. In both methods teachers remain passive recipients. Although they have responsibility for implementing change, they often do not feel a personal commitment to change. The problem-solving (PS) method, however, involves teachers as both initiators of and collaborators on change. In this case, teachers are internal change agents, who may or may not act with the support of external agents. The bottom-up nature of this method promotes a sense of ownership, which is crucial for the dissemination and true adoption of curricular innovation (Markee 1997).

Yet the PS method faces the major limitation of limited resources. For example, it is difficult for teachers to find time within their tight schedules to engage in professional discussions with others, much less engage in research endeavors. There are not sufficient resources, in terms of money or time, to support teachers' professional development (Crookes 1997; Chapter 3).

Furthermore, teacher-initiated innovation may be blocked by resistance from students and/or their families. For example, teachers have reported student resistance to a communicative approach of language teaching. Because this approach is often not compatible with students' expectations, they may insist on the more familiar direct knowledge-oriented approach (Thornbury 1998; Chapter 7). This lack of support reflects the major obstacle for a PS approach to innovation. The reality of these limitations is clearly reflected in another set of teachers' responses to the Solomon (1997) survey mentioned above. Although the teachers were aware of the standards, they stated that "knowing the best procedures and techniques does not mean there [are] training, conferences or money for implementation" (7).

#### A COMBINATION OF THE PROBLEM-SOLVING AND THE RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND DIFFUSION METHODS

Within the context of the foreign language standards project it is difficult to draw clear distinctions between the use of RDD and PS methods. As described above, the task force included practicing foreign language teachers. Furthermore, the project involved the voluntary participation of teachers from pilot schools to aid in the research and development process.

This tactic, combining an RDD with a PS approach, may be particularly

beneficial for the diffusion of curricular innovation. In fact, the benefits of this combined approach are gaining recognition. There has been a call for a paradigm shift in research approaches that involves teacher-researcher partnerships. This new paradigm, known as action research, "places the development of theory in the hands of the practitioner" (Crookes 1997, 73).

A PS approach enhances RDD because it includes the essential component of implementer ownership. Likewise, the RDD approach enhances problem-solving because it provides support and resources such as research and access to mass media communication channels (e.g., textbook publishing). This is particularly important since innovation through an exclusively PS approach is infrequent and more often discussed as an ideal than a reality (Markee 1997).

Therefore, a collaboration between members of funded research and development projects with interested teachers may be the optimal approach. The following comments from teachers who were involved in a pilot project of the foreign language standards illustrate the benefits of this collaboration:

The standards provided the impetus to foster communication among the teachers.

The standards made all three of us teachers sit together and talk. They made us think bigger.

The standards really helped me and my fellow teachers reflect on our own practice. (Bartz and Singer 1996, 149)

#### Benefits of a Combined Approach to Diffusion of Curricular Innovation

Research from other disciplines, like school psychology, has shown the importance of teacher interaction for promoting change. For example, a major concern of school psychologists is the improvement of teachers' self-assurance with regard to their ability to use suggested interventions. They address this issue by providing an environment that fosters teacher modeling, discussion, and reflection (Wong 1997). Although a problem-solving approach to innovation includes the essential component of teacher involvement, its effectiveness is often limited by a lack of resources and external support. Therefore, a combination of methods is preferred, as illustrated through examples from the NSFL project.

For the sake of clarity, the examples in the preceding section were framed in terms of a combination of RDD and PS methods. This is an oversimplification. A broader perspective suggests that the foreign language standards project is actually a combination of all three of the methods of innovation

discussed in this chapter. Teacher initiatives for change (problem solving) are supported through the resources of collaborating organizations (research, development, and diffusion). These organizations, like ACTFL, also receive support and resources from federal monies (center-periphery). What allows these three methods to work together is the sharing of an objective, such as the formulation of foreign language standards.

### Drawbacks of a Combined Approach to Diffusion of Curricular Innovation

This is not to suggest that the foreign language standards movement represents an ideal collaboration. Although the three change agencies (teachers, professional organizations, and government) share one objective, this does not imply that they share all objectives. For example, a teacher may see the establishment of standards as a means of improving her teaching. She may measure the attainment of this objective through formative evaluations (c.g., authentic assessments) of learner progress. In contrast, a state politician may see the establishment of standards as a means of developing objective measures of the performance of the state's schools. She may measure attainment of this objective through state scores on standardized achievement tests.

Although the teacher and the politician share an overarching goal (improved learner achievement), they may employ different methods in an attempt to attain that goal. At times these methods will be incompatible. Herein lies the major problem in the diffusion of standards. It is not the content of the standards themselves that is controversial but, rather, the methods and purposes for attaining them.

#### ISSUES OF ASSESSMENT

Many attempts at curricular change have been foiled due to the lack of a corresponding change in method of assessment (Savignon 1983, 1986, 1992, 1997), and issues of appropriate and effective assessment for the NSFL are far from resolved. Although there is a need to assess learner progress toward the standards, it is important to distinguish standards from standardized tests. Assessment of progress in terms of the standards requires a move away from discrete-point tasks. Assessment needs to be multiple and formative; "Standards are met by rigorous evaluation of necessarily varied student products and performances" (Wiggins 1999).

It has been argued that the paradigm shift reflected in the NSFL requires a similar shift to authentic models of assessment. Instead of items, authentic assessment includes projects, whose completion is not restricted to a short

period of time. Such projects can be used as both summative and formative measures of learner progress. Their completion involves learners' reflection on past performance to improve their future performance (Liskin-Gasparro 1996). If introduction of an authentic model of assessment does indeed represent a paradigm shift, and therefore a curricular innovation, once again the importance of adopting the underlying pedagogy must be emphasized. "Partial adoption of alternative assessment strategies without an underlying paradigm shift in one's view of teaching and learning may jeopardize both the validity and reliability of the assessments" (Liskin-Gasparro 1996, 182; see also Chapter 5).

The above discussion of assessment is included to highlight the fact that the assessment of learner progress with respect to the standards cannot be achieved solely through the use of mandated standardized tests created outside the classroom and implemented in a strictly top-down fashion. Instead, the assessment process needs to include the active participation of teachers who share the underlying theory and pedagogy of the standards, thereby encouraging a bottom-up method of implementation. As with diffusion of the standards themselves, implementation of assessment methods would benefit most from a combination of top-down and bottom-up methods. Here once again, however, although the overarching goal is presumably shared, there remains the inherent risk of miscommunication and conflict when different methods of curriculum and assessment are advocated at different sociopolitical levels of a decentralized system of education.

### Appendix: The National Foreign Language Standards Adapted from American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2000)

#### COMMUNICATION

##### *Communicate in Languages Other Than English*

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

#### CULTURES

##### *Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures*

Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspective of the culture studied.

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

#### CONNECTIONS

##### *Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information*

Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are available only through the foreign language and its cultures.

#### COMPARISONS

##### *Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture*

Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

#### COMMUNITIES

##### *Participate in Multilingual Activities at Home and Around the World*

Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

## *Innovative Teaching in Foreign Language Contexts: The Case of Taiwan*

CHAOCHANG WANG

From a sociocultural perspective, language phenomena reflect contextual needs, which, together with learner needs, have implications for language teaching. These phenomena pertain to both language use and language learning; the former is a function of an interaction of attitude, function, context, and competence; the latter has to do with language educational systems, institutional practices, and learner beliefs and attitudes. Understanding these components that inform language use and learning is a prerequisite to any pedagogical innovation. To understand English language use and learning within the context of Taiwan, a study delineated a sociolinguistic profile of English use and learning within a four-dimensional framework: attitude, function, pedagogy (Berns 1990), and learner beliefs. Data were both quantitative and qualitative and included teacher, learner, and parent questionnaire responses and interview accounts (Wang 2000).

This chapter presents only a small part of the study concerning teacher educators' perceptions of English language teaching and learning in Taiwan. The interview accounts contribute to a fuller understanding of present day English teaching and learning in Taiwan, where curricular innovation has been both encouraged and challenged. Another reason for presenting this qualitative part of the much larger study is that it provides rich information necessary for in-depth analysis and addresses research questions for which quantitative methods alone are insufficient.