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# The development of a national curriculum guide for Persian: Themes, genres, standards-based goals, and models

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# The Development of a National Curriculum Guide for Persian: Themes, Genres, Standards-based Goals, and Models

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## Abstract

Wang (2009) has challenged foreign language scholars to "engage in rigorous discussions to develop language-specific examples and performance indicators to guide program development and decision-making for less commonly taught language (LCTL) instructors" (p. 284). The 2011-2012 STARTALK programs in Persian aimed to encourage such rigorous discussion through the development of a National Curriculum Guide in Persian. Persian professionals explored current theories in second language acquisition, examined curricular resources and models, and shared successful teaching materials. This article describes the rationale, procedures, and outcomes of a series of faculty development events that aimed to create a model for curriculum development for the LCTLs and, perhaps, also for other language programs in the context of higher education. The final curriculum guide produced by the program participants includes overarching themes and genres, Standards-based goals, strategies for authentic assessment, and model unit plans.

The National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), established in 2006 under the Bush administration, allocated $750 million during the 2007 to 2011 fiscal years to the teaching and learning of critical languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Turkish, and Persian. This initiative became an influential piece of legislation for national security and for the instruction of critical languages in the United States (Powell & Lowenkron, 2006). Its goal was to "increase the number of Americans learning critical need foreign languages . . . through new and expanded programs from kindergarten through university and into the workforce" (NCELA, 2008). The legislation outlined that communication in other languages, promoting understanding and respect of other cultures, and engaging with foreign governments and people are essential components of U.S. national security in the post 9/11 world.

Coupled with increased national attention was an overall increase in enrollments in less commonly taught language (LCTL) courses at the post-secondary level. The MLA report (2009) *Enrollments in languages other than English in the United States Institutions of Higher Education* reported an aggregate gain of 20.8% from 2006-2009 in LCTL course enrollments, with a previous 31.2% gain between 2002 and 2006 and a 69.1% increase from 1998-2002. With increased student demand at the university level, the need to update and improve LCTL pedagogical teaching methods and materials moved to the forefront of professional concerns (Brown, 2009). The LCTL summit in 1996, sponsored by the University of Minnesota's Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA), was one of the first collaborative forums for post-secondary LCTL instructors to strengthen efforts and initiate plans to further develop LCTL programs. The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages' (ACTFL) LCTL Special Interest Group was created in 2003 to establish professional development opportunities for LCTL instructors. Within such groups and forums, postsecondary instructors reported common challenges, such as inadequate LCTL teacher education programs, the unavailability of pedagogically sound teaching materials, and geographical and professional isolation (Brown, 2009; Johnston & Janus, 2003). Solidarity and collaboration among LCTL instructors, increased availability of teacher education opportunities, and curriculum development were mentioned, time and again, as essential to enhancing instruction within LCTL programs (Janus, 2000). Because most existing standards were based on models used in teaching Indo-European

languages, Wang (2009) called for foreign language educators and scholars to "engage in rigorous discussions to develop language-specific examples and performance indicators to guide program development and decision making for LCTL instructors" (p. 284).

## Professional Development Programs in Persian

During professional meetings organized by the American Association of Teachers of Persian (AATP) at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) annual meeting and the International Society of Iranian Studies (ISIS) biannual meetings in 2009 and 2010, college instructors of Persian also highlighted the imperative need for updated teaching materials, pedagogical training, and common standards for Persian curriculum design in higher education. Several Persian instructors, who also taught commonly taught languages such as German or French, noted the discrepancy between the teaching methodologies used in commonly taught languages and the methodologies used to teach Persian in the United States. This discrepancy received increasing attention when the State Department designated Persian or Farsi as a super-critical language after 9/11. Consequently, enrollment in Persian programs almost doubled between 2002 and 2009, according to the previously referenced MLA report (2009). However, similar to other LCTLs, Persian suffered a shortage of qualified instructors in that many college instructors of Persian had a background in literature, theoretical linguistics, and/or history, and had little background in foreign language teaching methodologies and curriculum design. Furthermore, because Persian was historically taught at American research universities to graduate students in various humanities and social science disciplines who needed the language primarily for research purposes but not for active use, grammar–translation methodologies predominated. The dramatic increase in enrollment in Persian courses, however, also brought broadened learning goals, most especially an interest in using the language for oral communication, with a concomitant need for communicative teaching methodologies.

The main goals of recent Persian workshops and professional training programs, supported mainly by STARTALK, the AATP, and the National Middle East Language Resource Center (NMELRC), have been to establish a working network to enhance Persian language teaching in

the United States and to answer the needs of 21$^{st}$ century students. To this aim, the working groups have aimed to develop Standards-based teaching materials as well as draft recommendations for beginning through advanced Persian language programs. Examples of Persian professional development programs include: Persian Curriculum Design (summer 2009); Persian Materials Development (February 2010) Standards-Based Curriculum for Persian (summer 2010); Curriculum Design for Beginning and Intermediate Persian (summer 2011); Curriculum Design for Intermediate and Advanced Persian (summer 2012); and Curriculum Design for Persian Immersion programs (summer 2013) (see "Persian Linguist," 2012).

## National Curriculum Guide in Persian

Despite the progress made in these professional development programs, participants in the 2009-2010 STARTALK programs continued to cite professional challenges. The 2011-2012 STARTALK programs in Persian aimed to take the discussion to the next level by developing a National Curriculum Guide in Persian. Participants in the 2011 and 2012 STARTALK programs included university professors, community instructors, and graduate students from both American and international institutions. To develop the curriculum guide, the professionals agreed that current theories in second language acquisition and curriculum design should be explored; successful materials and procedures should be shared; and resources and appropriate models should be developed.

During the 2011 Persian STARTALK professional development program, twenty Persian professionals developed a curriculum guide for the beginning and intermediate-low levels of Persian focusing on the following elements: emphasizing communication through meaningful interaction; considering the consequences of real-world and culturally grounded contexts; privileging the use of authentic texts and genres; incorporating the interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes of communication; and ensuring the continued development of both cultural content knowledge and language knowledge. Participants in the five-day event included fourteen university professors or lecturers of Persian from the United States and abroad, three community instructors of Persian, three graduate students in Persian, and a curriculum design

specialist. The program included presentations and workshops on curriculum design, Standards-based instruction, and the integration of authentic texts and media. Through group work and collective discussion, the program participants collectively established targeted themes, Standards-based goals, sample performance tasks, and model unit and lesson plans for Beginning and Intermediate-low Persian instruction. These materials were later revised and organized by a curriculum development committee to create the first draft of the National Curriculum Guide in Persian.

Building on this foundation, the 2012 STARTALK professional development program, extended to ten days, focused on the intermediate-high and advanced levels of Persian. Nine university professors or lecturers of Persian from American and international institutions, three community instructors of Persian, three graduate students in Persian, and a curriculum design specialist collaboratively established appropriate goals, evaluation, and learning experiences for the intermediate-high and advanced levels. Morning sessions addressed the history of foreign language teaching; genre-based instruction; the tenets of Backward Design; Standards-based curriculum planning; experiential and constructivist learning paradigms; teaching grammar in meaningful and communicative contexts; communicative tasks to enhance speaking proficiency; and multimedia technology. Afternoon sessions tended to be more hands-on in that participants collectively developed targeted themes, genres, Standards-based goals, genre-based assessment tasks, and model units and lesson plans for the intermediate and advanced level. In the following sections, we provide additional details on the rationale, procedures, and outcomes of the institute whose overall progression is summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1. Program Overview*

| Theme | Schedule |
|-------|----------|
| **Day one: Overview of Curriculum Guide for Beginning & Intermediate Persian** | <u>Morning</u>: *History of Foreign Language Education in the United States* *Curriculum Development and Stages of Backward Design* *Curriculum Guide to Beginning & Intermediate Persian:* <u>Afternoon</u>: Presentations of Sample Beginning Unit Plans in Persian by returning participants |
| **Day two: Toward Advancedness** | <u>Morning</u>: *Stage one:* Identification of Desired Results Presentation & Discussion: *Moving Toward Advancedness: Theoretical, Curricular, and Pedagogical Concerns* - Heidi Byrnes, Georgetown University <u>Afternoon</u>: Group work: (a) Discussions of notions of *advancedness*; (b) the establishment of targeted Persian themes and sub-themes; (c) the identification of suitable texts or genres and their arrangement on a continuum; and (d) the analysis of register, linguistic features, and cultural elements within the genres. |
| **Day three: National Standards of Foreign Language Learning** | <u>Morning</u>: *Stage one:* Identification of Desired Results Presentation and workshop: *National Standards of Foreign Language Learning (2006)* <u>Afternoon</u>: |

| | Group Work:  Articulation of Standards-based Goals for Intermediate/Advanced  Persian (*Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational Communication* ) |
|---|---|
| **Day four: Standards-based Goals** | <u>Morning:</u><br>*Stage one:* Identification of Desired Results Workshop: Standards-based Goals for Intermediate/Advanced  Persian *(Culture, Comparisons, Communities, and Connections)*<br><u>Afternoon:</u><br>Group work: Introduction to Unit Plan assignment.<br>Establishment of sub-themes, sample genres, and advanced level goals for assigned unit theme |
| **Day five: Genre-based outcomes assessment** | <u>Morning:</u><br>*Stage two*: Determination of Acceptable Evidence<br>Presentation: *Genre-based outcomes assessment*<br><u>Afternoon:</u><br>Group work: Creation of genre-oriented outcomes assessment for sample unit |
| **Day six: Constructivist and Experiential Learning** | <u>Morning</u>:<br>*Stage three:* Planning for Learning<br>Presentation: *Constructivist & Experiential Learning,* Nicole Mills, Harvard University<br><u>Afternoon:</u><br>Group work on unit plans (focus on integration of constructivist and experiential learning tasks) |

| **Day seven:** **Modern Approaches to Teaching Grammar** | Morning: *Stage three:* Planning for Learning Presentation: *Modern Approaches to Teaching Grammar,* Stacey Katz Bourns, Harvard University Afternoon: Group work: Unit plan (focus on integration of grammar) |
|---|---|
| **Day eight:** **Communicative Tasks** | Morning: *Stage three:* Planning for Learning Presentation: *Communicative tasks to develop speaking proficiency* - Sara Khanzadi (and Elaine Tarone), CARLA University of Minnesota Afternoon: Group work on Unit plans (focus on integration of unrehearsed communicative tasks) |
| **Day nine :** **Multimedia Technology, Social Media, and Open Source Materials in Persian** | Morning: *Stage three:* Planning for Learning Presentations: *Multimedia Technology, Social Media, and Open Source materials in Persian* Karine Megerdoomian, Peter Janssens, and Anousha Shahsavari Afternoon: Group work on Unit plans (focus on integration of technology) Individual meetings with Curriculum Design Specialist |
| **Day ten:** **Presentation of Unit Plans & Synthesis** | Participant Presentations of Unit plans for Intermediate & Advanced Persian Review & Overview of Intermediate & Advanced Curriculum Guide |

## Backward Design

To develop the curriculum guide, the framework for curriculum design outlined in Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) *Understanding by Design* was used as a blueprint. Backward Design is an approach to curriculum development that begins with the articulation of Standards and goals and then designs (backwards) toward those established goals. Therefore, the development of teaching materials is delayed until goals have been articulated and assessment tools have been developed. The Backward Design approach aims to avoid traditional curriculum design pitfalls such as a preoccupation with textbook "coverage" or activity-oriented design. The three stages of Backward Design include 1) identification of desired results [goals]; 2) determination of acceptable evidence [assessment]; and 3) planning learning experiences and instruction. Wiggins and McTighe claim that "…the shift [to Backward Design] involves thinking a great deal, first, about the specific learnings sought, and the evidence of such learnings, before thinking about what we, as the teacher, will do or provide in teaching and learning activities" (p. 14) Our approach to developing a curriculum guide followed these recommended stages.

## Stage One: Identification of Desired Results

In the first stage of the Backward Design curriculum framework, educators are asked to identify the desired results of the curriculum. Wiggins and McTighe state that "in the best designs, form follows function" (p. 14) and that "all the methods and materials we use are shaped by a clear conception of the vision of desired results" (p. 14). To prepare the participants to develop goals for the intermediate and advanced levels of Persian, it was important first to articulate a vision of the advanced Persian learner. Byrnes (1998) suggests that "curriculum development . . . is a critical act of establishing what the subject is and who the learner is, and how that relationship would be negotiated in an extended curricular sequence in instructional materials, and in methodologies" (p. 89). In the institute's initial workshop, entitled "Moving Toward Advancedness: Theoretical, Curricular, and Pedagogical Concerns," Heidi Byrnes and the participants explored the nature of *advancedness* and the challenges facing advanced language learners.  In response, participants highlighted the importance of enhanced knowledge

of cultural practices and perspectives, the ability to interpret and use academic discourse, and the capacity to speak and write with complex narrativity.

Subsequent guided discussion led to the insight that any discussion of *advancedness* necessitated a textual approach. Such an approach can facilitate the creation of a long-term, articulated curriculum and corresponding goals, moving from the beginning through advanced levels of performance by way of indicating the kinds of texts that learners will be able to interpret and produce (Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, & Sprang, 2006). But, just as important, such a genre-based curricular framework can support the creation of genre-derived pedagogical tasks, an approach that, through a deliberate link between textual genre and the language resources necessary for realizing the genre, can establish an effective foundation for language teaching and learning at the advanced level.

Themes and Genres

In short, a textual approach that is further specified through the notion of genre can enable language professionals to organize texts on a continuum from the beginning to the advanced levels of Persian so as to create a functional, meaning-oriented approach to language teaching and learning. Genre refers to a particular manifestation of an oral or written text in the practices of a cultural/linguistic group (i.e., editorials, advertisements, obituaries). By comparison, register refers to the particular qualities of the linguistic resources that are necessary for creating genres, qualities that can be taught by examining the lexico-grammatical resources that are typical for a particular genre. In an effort to create this text continuum from the beginning to advanced levels in Persian, the participants revised and updated the list of targeted themes and sub-themes that were developed for the beginning and intermediate-low levels of Persian. These themes were initially inspired by the six theme framework outlined within the *College Board's AP French language and culture* (2009). Similar to the AP French language and culture themes, the themes in Persian allow for a contextualized and integrated approach to Persian language learning in which language, content, and culture are intertwined. Through this process, the participants established eight themes and related sub-themes that could be explored from beginning through advanced Persian. These themes included family and communities, daily life, personal and social identities, geography, art and aesthetics, contemporary life, economics, and politics and history (see Table 2).

## *Table 2. Targeted Themes and Sub-themes in Persian*

- Families & Communities (relatives, family ties, family hierarchy, elder care and respect)

- Daily life (shopping, routine, food, clothing, rituals & celebrations)

-Personal and social identities (relationships and dating, origin, religion, hobbies, youth culture, gender differences)

- Geography (travel, weather, regional cultural differences, regional linguistic diversity, regional food, regional clothing, ethnic diversity & awareness, multi-religious nature of Iran, environment, immigration)

- Art & Aesthetics (dance, handwriting, calligraphy, carpets, garden design, paintings, film, Persian miniatures, music, etc., art history, architecture)

- Contemporary life (Education, leisure & sports, professions, current events, technology, health, science)

- Economics – (employment, sanctions, inflation, currency, business practices & etiquette, traditional versus modern marketing practices)

-Politics & History – (historical events, historical periods, historical perspectives, civic duty & responsibility, legal system, government structure, foreign policy, human rights)

Moving from curriculum to pedagogy, Byrnes et al. (2006) invoke the possibility of taking "text to task" (p. 86), in other words, of linking the notion of task-based instruction that has been influential in communicative language teaching to curriculum design, particularly for the attainment of advanced ability levels. Guided by this notion, participants first worked in groups to make a list of genres or texts that they deemed appropriate within the updated themes in Persian. For example, within the established theme of "personal and social identities," sample genres included passports, blogs, and memoirs. The genres were then organized on a text continuum from the beginning to advanced levels so as to create a curricular progression toward *advancedness* (see Table 3). The text continuum established which genres would be most

appropriate to explore at each level of language study. For example, passports were deemed most appropriate for beginning Persian study whereas blogs were allotted to the intermediate-level, and memoirs were assigned to the advanced level. The participants developed the genres and text continuum using *Google Docs*. This tool allowed them to create, edit, and collaborate collectively in real-time. The list of genres was then revised and updated by a curriculum committee that included the curriculum design specialist and specialists in Persian literature and Persian linguistics.

### *Table 3. Texts on a Continuum: Sample Themes and Genres in Persian*

| Theme | Beginning | Intermediate | Advanced |
|---|---|---|---|
| Personal & Social Identities | Family trees<br>Online chat (simple)<br>Simple Advertisements<br>Passports<br>Self-portrait<br>Horoscope<br>Personal ads<br>Cartoons<br>Comic strips<br>Social networking interactions (simple) | Journals<br>Advertisements<br>Resumes/ CV<br>TV series<br>Cartoons<br>Graphic novels<br>Comic strips (extended)<br>Dating websites<br>Social networking exchanges Blogs<br>Interviews | Memoirs (excerpts)<br>Online chats<br>Autobiographies (chapters)<br>Advertisements<br>Graphic novels (excerpts)<br>Music (rap, underground pop, etc.)<br>Blogs<br>Films (romantic comedy, drama, etc.) |
| Geography | Maps<br>Tourism brochures<br>Weather reports<br>Census data reports<br>Travel agency websites | Reviews<br>Tourism brochures<br>Guidebooks<br>Wikipedia entries<br>Televised advertisements<br>Travel journalism (video excerpts) | Documentaries (excerpts)<br>Chapters from Guidebooks<br>Historical travelogues (excerpts)<br>Travel writing (newspapers)<br>Cultural interests reporting (ex: BBC Persian on-line news videos) |

| Politics & History | Graffiti<br>Political cartoons<br>Campaign posters<br>Murals<br>Billboards<br>Banners<br>Timelines<br>Advertisements | Graffiti<br>Political cartoons<br>Campaign posters<br>Murals<br>Billboards<br>Banners<br>Advertisements<br>Letters<br>Documentaries (excerpts)<br>editorials | Graffiti<br>Petitions<br>Formal letters<br>Treaties<br>Campaign posters<br>Political speeches<br>Legal documents<br>Constitution (excerpts)<br>Rap music<br>Documentaries (excerpts)<br>Persuasive essays<br>Historical narratives<br>Historical fiction (excerpts)<br>Manuscripts (excerpts)<br>Propaganda<br>Letters<br>Memoirs (excerpts)<br>Autobiographies (chapters)<br>Poems<br>Epics<br>Newscasts<br>Historical films (excerpts) |

## Standards-Based Goals in Persian

After establishing the theme-based genres, participants translated their work into existing standards-based goals for Intermediate & Advanced Persian by using three overarching questions: (a) What should students know, understand, and be able to do at the intermediate-high and advanced levels of Persian study?; (b) What cultural content is worthy of being understood?; and (c) What enduring understandings are desired in intermediate-high and advanced Persian courses?

Describing the *Standards of Foreign Language Learning (2006),* Byrnes (2008) states that the Standards embrace:

> . . . the lively exchange of ideas, the appreciation and
> understanding of others' history, belief systems, ways of
> interacting, and customs, and the opportunity to re-evaluate and
> enrich one's own positions and those of others in communities
> of various sizes – dispositions, beliefs, and praxes that are highly
> suited to an age of migration and globalization (p. 104).

To realize this acquisitional possibility, teaching professionals need what
Byrnes refers to as conceptual anchors to teach in the content- and
language acquisition-rich environment (p. 105) advocated by the
Standards. Indeed, Byrnes suggests that an integrated curriculum
grounded in textual genres and genre-oriented materials can provide just
such "conceptual anchors" by providing opportunities to link cultural
texts, register variables, and socially situated language use and linking these
to pedagogical tasks (see also Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, & Sprang, 2006).
With this more differentiated understanding, participants began to analyze
the register, linguistic features, and cultural elements within the previously
established genres for the intermediate and advanced levels and to identify
and discuss common linguistic and cultural elements.

To summarize, before developing intermediate-high and
advanced Standards-based goals in Persian, the participants engaged in a
series of preparatory stages. These stages included: (a) discussions of
notions of *advancedness*; (b) the establishment of targeted Persian themes
and sub-themes; (c) the identification of suitable texts or genres and their
arrangement on a continuum; and (d) the analysis of register, linguistic
features, and cultural elements within the genres. Following these
preparatory stages, the participants received focused instruction in a
workshop-like format that provided an overview and detailed description
of the *National Standards of Foreign Language Learning (2006)*. The *Standards
of Foreign Language Learning (2006)* provide descriptions of "what students
should know and be able to do" (p. 13) in a foreign language through five
specific goal areas including *Communication, Cultures, Connections,
Comparisons*, and *Communities*. The *Communication* goal includes three modes
of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. The
three modes suggest that students should be able to interact and exchange
opinions, interpret both written and spoken language, and present
information in the foreign language. An additional goal area is the
understanding of the products, practices, and perspectives of the target

language *culture*. Another Standards-based learning goal is the ability to make *connections* to additional bodies of knowledge and *comparisons* to the foreign language and culture studied. By making these connections and comparisons, students should be able to participate in multilingual *communities* in culturally appropriate ways. Following the Standards workshop session, the groups reviewed the Standards-based goals from the 2011 Curriculum Guide in Persian which had focused on the beginning and intermediate-low levels of Persian.

Subsequently, the participants explored the nature of goal articulation, using sample Standards-based goals for the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes of Communication as a way of focusing discussion. Each set of goals included a beginning Persian goal and an advanced level Persian goal within the same theme. For example, a beginning model goal for presentational communication was: *Students will be able to write a journal entry of their daily activities.* By contrast, the group identified the following advanced level model goal for presentational communication: *Students will be able to write a persuasive essay about Western misconceptions of Iranian daily life.* Following the presentation of sample goals at different levels within the same theme, the groups were provided with established beginning goals in Persian and asked to practice developing advanced Persian goals for the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes of Communication (see Table 4). The drafted goals were then revised collaboratively to ensure that the participants had a clear vision of appropriate goal articulation.

*Table 4. Sample Standards-based Goals in Communication: Worksheet*

| SAMPLE STANDARDS-BASED GOALS: COMMUNICATION |
| --- |
| **Interpersonal Communication** <br><br> ▶ Beginning level: <br> *Students will be able to ask and answer questions about their religious affiliation.* <br><br> ▶ Advanced level: <br> *Students will be able to debate notions of religious affiliation in Iran* |

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**Interpretive Communication**

‣   Beginning level:
*Students will be able to read and comprehend the main ideas of a simple print advertisement.*

‣   Advanced level:
*Student will be able to analyze and interpret the socio-cultural nuances of a print advertisement*

**Presentational Communication**

‣   Beginning level:
*Students will be able to write a journal entry of their daily activities.*

‣   Intermediate/ Advanced level:
*Students will be able to write a persuasive essay about Western misconceptions of Iranian daily life*

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After the guided practice session, participants were placed in groups and given extended time to draft goals for the curriculum guide within the three modes of communication by using a goal development template consisting of (a) a stem (*Students will be able to . . . ); (b)* an action verb; and (c) a product, process, or outcome (see table 5). Participants were also provided with a list of action verbs based on Bloom's taxonomy. Bloom's taxonomy includes the levels: Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate, and Create (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Sample action verbs within the "Apply" level include *construct, illustrate, investigate,* and *demonstrate;* within the "Analyze" level, sample action verbs include *investigate, examine, discriminate,* and *compare.* Using the list of action verbs, goal development template, established themes and genres, and the *Standards of Foreign Language Learning (2006)* as resources, participants spent an afternoon working in groups to create Communication Goals for intermediate-high & advanced Persian *using Google Docs.* This goal list was then revised, formatted, and updated by the curriculum committee. During the subsequent afternoon workshop, participants addressed the remaining four goal areas of the *Standards of Foreign Language Learning*: Culture (products, practices, and perspectives), Communities,

Connections, and Comparisons. The final Curriculum Guide in Persian included ninety-one collectively established goals for intermediate-high and advanced Persian within the five goal areas of the *Standards of Foreign Language Learning (2006)*.

**Table 5. Goal articulation template**

| How do we articulate goals? |
|---|
| **1. Begin with the stem:**<br>    ▸  *The students will be able to…*<br><br>**2. After you create the stem, add a verb:**<br><br>    ▸  analyze, recognize, compare, provide, list, etc.<br><br>**3. One you have a stem and a verb, determine the actual product, process, or outcome:**<br><br>    ▸  At the end of intermediate Persian, students will be able to analyze foreshadowing in various works of literature.<br>    ▸  At the end of intermediate Persian, students will be able to make textual inferences. |

### Sample Units: Goals

Having created the overarching themes, genres, and Standards-based goals for the Curriculum Guide in Persian, participants were tasked with developing advanced-level model units for the Curriculum Guide. Unit development was assigned in various stages based on the Backward Design framework. The stages included articulation of goals and genres; development of assessment tasks; and unit and lesson planning. The multiple and staggered stages allowed the participants to connect their developing theoretical understanding of Backward Design with a practical, hands-on teaching material development experience. Accordingly, in the first stage, the four groups were assigned one theme from the established themes within the Curriculum Guide in Persian. The four assigned themes included: Personal and Social identities; Geography; Arts & Aesthetics; or Politics and History. Each group was then asked to

determine unit goals in the areas of Communications, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities. To determine the goals, the participants were asked to refer to the established list of intermediate-high and advanced goals within the Curriculum Guide in Persian. By first establishing unit goals, the teaching materials to be developed in stage three, would be shaped by a clear conception and vision of the desired results. Participants also generated a list of possible genres that could be integrated within their unit. The sample goals and genres for the Art and Aesthetics model unit are included in Appendix A.

## Stage Two: Determination of Acceptable Evidence

The second stage in Backward Design is the development of evaluation tools that align with established goals or objectives (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) in order to determine whether students have achieved the desired results. The evaluation tools show evidence that students are making progress toward the learning goals. In 2011, participants described varied forms of authentic assessment as appropriate for the evaluation of beginning and intermediate-low Persian students. Authentic assessment is realistically contextualized and asks students to perform meaningful and real-world tasks. Performance tasks, in particular, are examples of authentic assessment (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) because tasks present students with real-world problems and require them to develop a product or performance for a specified audience. Students are presented with a task and context, given a role, assigned a target audience, and presented with a purpose for the development of a final project, product, or performance. In 2011, participants became familiar with examples of performance tasks and, based on these models, created sample performance tasks for beginning level Persian units.

During the 2012 STARTALK professional development program, the program operated with a conceptual and practical framework of genre-based tasks. Using this approach makes it possible to assess learners' language abilities and content knowledge as one makes connections among themes, genres, goals, and assessment tasks. In genre-based outcomes assessment, the instructor first analyzes the chosen genre's schematic structure. This analysis can focus on an examination of the genre's content, goals, language focus, and register. For example, if the instructor would like the students to draft a resume as a sample genre-

based assessment task, s/he would first closely analyze the content, goals, language focus, and register within this genre. Following this analysis, the instructor then has the necessary tools to develop a genre-based task for students, which include task description, content overview, language focus, process, length, and assessment criteria (Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, & Sprang, 2006).

### Sample Units: Genre-oriented Outcomes Assessment

After a discussion of genre-oriented outcomes assessment, the participants moved to stage two of their unit plans based on the Backward Design curricular framework. In stage one, the groups chose a theme, established sample genres, and created Standards-based goals for their unit. In stage two, the participants were asked to create a genre-based assessment task that would align with their unit's established goals. Byrnes et al.'s (2006) model of a genre-based assessment task was provided to the participants as a model. This genre-based assessment task was a political appeal from an Advanced German course. To help guide the groups in the development of a genre-based assessment task, the participants received a structural template adapted from Byrnes et al.'s (2006) model (see Table 6). In groups, the participants first chose one advanced-level genre, using the genres highlighted within the established "texts on a continuum" as a resource (i.e., documentary, newscast, etc.). The groups then collectively drafted a genre-based task to evaluate students' understanding at the end of the unit. The genre-based assessment task created for the Art and Aesthetics model unit is included in Appendix B.

### Table 6. Genre-based outcomes assessment template

- **Task description**
- What is the context?
- What is the structure?
- What is the goal of the task?

- **Description of the Content**
- What content is necessary to complete the task?

- **Language focus**
- What communicative functions are required?
- Grammar? Syntax? Register?

- **Process**
- How many versions or drafts?


- **Length**
- How long is the written or oral task?


- **Assessment criteria**
- What specific criteria will be assessed? How will the task be graded?


*Structural template modeled after Byrnes, Crane, Maxim, & Sprang's (2006) Writing Task Guidelines for a political appeal in Advanced German*

## Stage Three: Planning for Learning

In Stage Three of Backward Design, the instructor establishes the sequence of learning experiences required to achieve the established goals. S/he then determines the instructional approaches, resources, and experiences necessary to equip the students with the needed knowledge and skills targeted in the performance goals and assessment tasks. Wiggins & McTighe (2005) suggest that lesson plans are most effective when the classroom tasks are varied, personalized, and interactive and require the resolution of meaningful challenges with the dimension of real audiences.

The 2012 STARTALK professional development program included focused morning workshops from various presenters to guide the participants in "planning for learning," including constructivist and experiential learning (XXX), modern approaches to teaching grammar (Stacey Katz Bourns), communicative tasks to develop speaking proficiency (Sara Khanzadi), and multimedia technology, social media, and open source materials in Persian (Karine Megerdoomian, Peter Janssens, and Anousha Shahsavari respectively).

Various LCTL groups and forums have reported challenges associated with the availability of teaching materials that advocate student centered instruction and social negotiation (Brown, 2009; Johnston & Janus, 2003). To address these challenges, XXX offered a workshop on constructivist and experiential learning in the foreign language classroom. This workshop placed a particular emphasis on the differences between traditional and experiential approaches to teaching and learning foreign

languages. The workshop focused on creating a learner-centered environment by providing opportunities for social negotiation and collaboration through active and authentic language use in meaningful and authentic environments. She presented a brief overview of research and theory associated with the value of experiential and constructivist learning and student engagement in the foreign language classroom. She then proposed an adapted experiential learning curriculum in the Persian language context. Ideas included possible course themes, interactive writing tasks, oral exams, in-class activities, and a final play assignment that encouraged student negotiation, collaboration, and active participation.

There has been some emphasis placed on proficiency-oriented and communicative methods for teaching Persian at American universities; however, the grammar translation method has remained the dominant methodology. As such, Persian instructors continue to face challenges in the effective integration of grammar in the communicative Persian language classroom. In Stacey Katz Bourns' presentation entitled "Modern Approaches to Teaching Grammar," she began with a discussion of the evolution of grammar instruction in the foreign language classroom over the last 50 to 60 years. This discussion highlighted grammar's role in grammar translation, the audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching, and post-communicative language teaching approaches. She highlighted the flaws of traditional grammar instruction, particularly the presentation, practice, and production (PPP) approach and mechanical drills, and instead suggested that modern approaches to grammar instruction include a form-meaning connection and place emphasis on both structured input and output (Lee & VanPatten, 2003). In structured input and output approaches, learners attend to grammar within a meaningful and communicative context. Techniques to teach grammar effectively include input flooding, selecting alternatives, surveys, consciousness raising tasks, binary options, matching, and true/false options. To replace the PPP model, she encouraged the participants to incorporate the illustration, interaction, and induction (3 I) model in their lessons (McCarthy & Carter, 1995). In this "consciousness raising" approach, learners and teachers examine the data through illustration, discuss hypotheses, and discuss and induce patterns within the data.  In this way, students achieve a hands-on

knowledge of the grammar rules inductively. She then provided various sample lessons to the participants.

In addition to the grammar translation approaches, some LCTL textbooks and teaching materials continue to incorporate audio-lingual approaches to foreign language education including mechanical drills, rehearsed communication, and memorized dialogues. In collaboration with Elaine Tarone, Sara Khanzadi, from the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota, gave an informative workshop entitled "Communicative Tasks for Enhancing Speaking Proficiency at the Intermediate & Advanced Levels." She began her presentation with a discussion of the importance of learner language and *interlanguage.* Interlanguage is a term for the linguistic system within learner language as the learner communicates in the foreign language (Selinker, 1972). She informed participants that teachers can nurture interlanguage development by providing a rich environment for language growth. This rich environment includes comprehensible language input and opportunities for students to engage in spontaneous and unrehearsed communication, supported by pedagogical scaffolding and corrective feedback provided by the teacher. She presented various video-recorded clips of Persian language learners as they engaged in unrehearsed speaking tasks and asked the participants to analyze the type of language that the learners used (e.g., syntactic and lexical variety, complexity). The various clips presented a variety of different image-based tasks that encouraged various types of language production. Such tasks included comparison tasks, jig-saw tasks, information gap tasks, question tasks, and narrative tasks. Because the nature of tasks influences language use, participants discussed how encouraging language complexity through appropriate task choice was particularly relevant for moving students toward *advancedness* in the intermediate and advanced levels of Persian instruction.

To encourage the integration of multimedia in lesson planning, there was also a series of workshops on multimedia resources, social media, and open source materials in the Persian classroom. Karine Megerdoomian explored how various forms of online media such as *Wikipedia, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter* and blogs may be used to situate language learning tasks in culturally authentic contexts. Anousha Shahsavari then introduced the open source Persian textbook, *Persian of Iran Today,* developed at the University of Texas, Austin, to demonstrate

approaches to integrating online teaching materials and resources, including video and audio clips, in lesson planning. Peter Janssens then conducted a hands-on workshop on *Google* + to demonstrate how social networking may encourage collaboration, interaction, and communicative exchange in the Persian classroom.

### Unit Plans: Unit and lesson planning

After a discussion of various resources and instructional approaches for lesson planning, the participants moved to stage three of the Backward Design curricular framework. In this final stage of unit plan development, the groups were asked to create lesson plans that aligned with their established goals and genre-oriented assessment task. There were four participants in each group, and each participant created one lesson plan within the unit. The groups were asked to refer to their notes from the previously described morning workshops on experiential and constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, modern approaches to teaching grammar, communicative tasks to enhance speaking proficiency, and integration of multimedia. They were also provided with a unit plan checklist and lesson plan template (see Table 7) to help guide them in the development of the unit and lesson plans. Collaboration among group members was encouraged to ensure continuity from one lesson to the next within the unit. A sample lesson plan created for the Art and Aesthetics model unit is included in Appendix C.

**Table 7. Unit and lesson plan template**

| |
|---|
| THEME: _____     SUBTHEME: _____<br><br>Unit Goals :<br><br>COMMUNICATION<br><br>CULTURE<br><br>CONNECTIONS<br><br>COMMUNITIES<br><br>COMPARISONS<br><br><br>Possible Genres<br><br><br>End of Unit Genre-oriented assessment task: |
| Daily Goals<br><br>Overview and Purpose of the Lesson<br> |
| Materials/ Resources Needed<br> |

| Lesson Plan | Time Duration | Teacher Guide |
|---|---|---|
| **Introduction/ Warm-up**<br><br><br>*Transition?* | | |
| **Teacher-*guided* activity or activities**<br><br>*Transition?* | | |
| **Independent Activity or activities**<br>(Describe the independent/group/pair activities to reinforce the teacher-guided activity)<br><br>*Transition?* | | |
| **Teacher-*guided* activity or activities**<br><br>*Transition?* | | |
| **Independent Activity or activities**<br><br>*Transition?* | | |
| **Conclusion** | | |

After developing an initial draft of the lesson plans, each participant had an individual meeting with the curriculum design specialist for feedback and review. The groups then revised and updated their unit plans and gave a presentation of their units on the final day of the

professional development program. Following each group presentation, the participants engaged in a comprehensive discussion about the units and provided each other with further feedback and suggestions. The groups then revised and submitted the model units for inclusion in the National Curriculum Guide in Persian. The National Curriculum Guide in Persian was then prepared and shared on a website accessible to Persian teaching professionals and scholars (see "Persian Linguist," 2012). The final curriculum guide included targeted themes, genres, Standards-based goals, genre-based assessment tasks, and model units and lesson plans. Sponsored by STARTALK, the National Curriculum Guide in Persian was then used as a guide in the collective development of a two-week immersion program for intermediate and advanced Persian students at George Washington University in 2013. The guide has also been used as a resource in the development of a common curriculum in Persian at George Washington and Georgetown University.

## Conclusion

Responding to Wang's (2009) call for LCTL educators and scholars to engage in "rigorous discussions to develop language-specific examples and performance indicators to guide program development and decision making for LCTL instructors" (p. 284), the 2011-2012 STARTALK professional development programs in Persian aimed to encourage such rigorous discussions through the development of Persian-specific examples and performance indicators to guide curriculum development in Persian. Because there are limited examples of beginning through advanced articulated language program curricula, however, establishing realistic goals and learning outcomes for Persian courses at every level still requires more work. We were able to begin the discussion and move the initiative forward by drawing from the informed professional experience of seasoned educators of Persian and establish a theoretically informed proposal. It is important to move to the next stage, however, where course and program evaluation plays a role in determining the efficacy of the established curriculum guide. In addition, revisions and adjustments will likely be necessary to establish precise guidelines for what Persian learners should "know and be able to do." The pooling of professional experience, the exploration of current theories in second language acquisition and curriculum design, and the

development of updated teaching materials may serve as an initial foundation for program development and decision-making for Persian instructors; however, further and ongoing evaluation and research are needed. In conclusion, the hope is that the organization and stage-by-stage procedure involved in the development of the National Curriculum Guide in Persian may serve as a model for curriculum development for other LCTLs and, perhaps, also for language program development in general in the context of higher education.

## Acknowledgements

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## Appendix A. Model Unit Goals and Genres

Theme: Arts & Aesthetics
Sub-theme: Poetry of Hafez
Goals
Communication
> • Students will be able to make suggestions using expressions
> that require the present subjunctive (مضارع التزامی)
> • Students will be able to identify some defining formal features
> of classical Persian poetry even without understanding the
> meaning of every word in a poem.

Culture
> • Students will be able to describe the importance and the story
> behind historical sites and monuments
> • Students should show understanding of Iranian perspectives
> associated with prominent historical figures (poets).

Comparisons
> • Students will be able to compare some of the formal features
> of classical Persian poetry with other poetries.

Connections
> • Students will be able to make connections between Persian
> art and aesthetics (poetry) and its role within contemporary and
> historical notions of art and aesthetics in the world.

Communities
> • Students will be able to describe and participate in practices
> associated with Persian gatherings (i.e., fortune telling and
> hypothesizing and interpreting the message of the poet)

Possible Genres
Wikipedia entry
Fortune-telling websites
BBC News Documentary
lyric poetry

Created by Samad Alavi (University of Washington), Aazam Feiz (University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana), and Ebby Sharifi (George Washington University), and Daniel Solaimani (University of Haifa)


## Appendix B. Genre-based assessment task

<u>Theme:</u> Art & Aesthetics
<u>Task</u> فال حافظ (Fortune-telling with Hafez's poetry)

<u>Context</u>
In Iran, it is common practice to read poetry by the 14th century poet, Hafez of Shiraz (also known as *Lesan al-Ghayb or "*the language of the hidden") and interpret the poetry to tell others their future or fortunes. The practice is to ask Hafez for an answer to one's life inquiry (*niyyat*) and to then open up Hafez's *Divân* (i.e. collection of poetry) randomly to a page. After reading the entire *Ghazal* of Hafez on the page, the reciter then interprets the poem and tries to find the answer to the person's life inquiry within the poet's lines.

Imagine that you and your neighbors have gone to Hafez's tomb for the afternoon. While you are at the tomb, you decide to use Hafez's *Divân* (i.e. collection of poetry) to tell each other's fortunes.
<u>Goal</u>
The goal of this task is for you to practice reciting poetry, to understand or grasp the general mood in a given line, and to talk about what you think *might* happen and what you think will *definitely* happen in the future.
<u>Language Focus</u>
Talk about future possibilities and future certainties using the indicative (اخباری) and subjunctive (التزامی) moods. Here are some helpful expressions for fortune telling:

به احتمال زیاد...
احتمالاً...
ممکن است... (ممکنه...)
امکان دارد... (امکان داره...)
شاید...
احتمال دارد...(احتمال داره...)

حتماً...
فکر می‌کنم...

Register
1. Formal when reading the line of poetry
2. Informal spoken when telling your partners' fortune

Process
1. Work in pairs to tell each other's fortunes using the poetry of Hafez (فال حافظ). Each pair will receive a set of cards with a line of Hafez poetry on each card. Do not read the cards! Make a wish or think about a decision that you have to make without telling your partner. Then draw a card from the set. Your partner will recite the line of poetry on the card, interpret the words for you, guess your wish or decision and tell your fortune accordingly. Make sure you take turns drawing cards and telling each other's fortunes.
2. After you have practiced telling each other's fortunes in pairs, you will come to the front of the class, read the line of poetry that you selected for yourself, interpret the line, and tell your own fortune to the class.

Length:
Each presentation will take two to four minutes.

Assessment Criteria:
Your instructor will assess your presentation based on the criteria outlined below:
1. Analysis
2. Grammar (Attention to the correct use of indicative and subjunctive in your fortune telling)
3. Pronunciation
4. Register (Attention to the "formal" register or کتابی in your recitation of the poem and "informal" register or محاوره‌ای in your fortune telling)
5. Fluency (how convincingly and naturally you tell your own future)

Created by Samad Alavi (University of Washington), Azam Feiz (University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana), Ebby Sharifi (George Washington University, and Daniel Solaimani (University of Haifa)

**Appendix C. Sample Lesson Plan**

Theme: Art & Aesthetics
Day 3 شعر خوانی
Genre: Lyric Poetry (Ghazal)
Created by Samad Alavi

Lesson Goals
Communication-Interpretive Students will be able to identify some defining formal features of classical Persian poetry.
Communication – Interpersonal Students will be able to ask and answer questions about formal features of classical Persian poetry.
Communication – Presentational Students will be able to present their poetic interpretations to the class
Connections: Students will be able to make connections between Persian art and aesthetics (poetry) and its role within contemporary and historical notions of art and aesthetics in the world.
Comparisons: Students will be able to compare some of the formal features of classical Persian poetry with other poetries.

Materials
Hafez, Ghazal #476 (written in both calligraphic (نستعلیق) and standard printed text (چاپی))
Audio recording of Ghazal #476
Websites: http://ganjoor.net/hafez/ghazal/sh476/
http://hafez.mastaneh.ir/ghazal/ghazal-476/

I. Introduction (5 minutes)

A. The teacher shares an image of Hafez's ghazal #476 in cursive font (نستعلیق) and asks questions open-ended questions such as:

      1. Can you read this type of writing easily? If not, why?

      2. Have you seen this type of writing before? Where?

      3. What kinds of texts would you expect to find in this style? Novels? Poems?

      Government documents? Why?

      4. What do you think this picture shows?
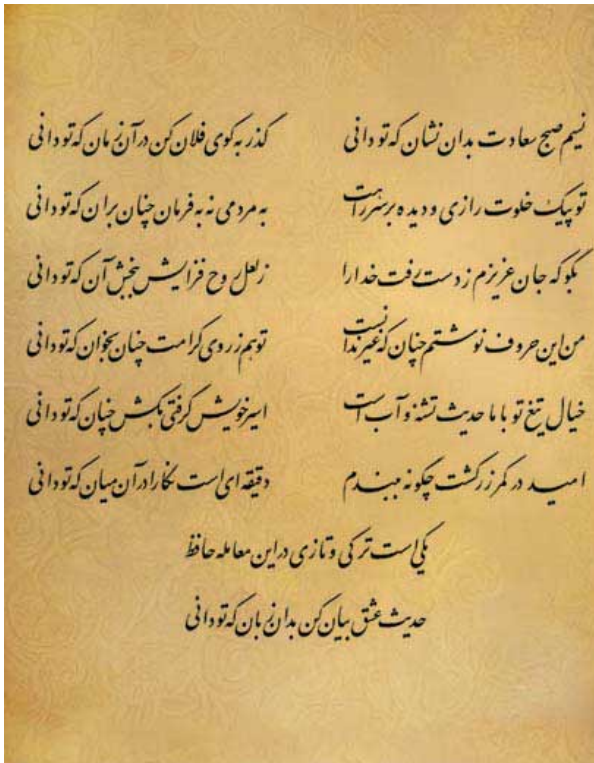


B. Transition

The teacher explains that this is a Hafez poem that we will read together today. Literate Persian speakers might be able to read this style of writing easily because they are already familiar with the poetry. So today we will familiarize ourselves with one famous Hafez poem. Before reading the poem in an easier font, though, the teacher shares

the image below to show how calligraphers often use a highly stylized form. This image shows the last line of the poem we are about to read:



II. Teacher-guided listening activity (10 minutes)

A.  Students listen to a recording of the poem and think about the following questions as they read along with the printed text.

    1. How does the reciter pronounce words differently from spoken,colloquial

    Persian?

    2.  What words and sounds are repeated in the poem?

    3. Who is speaking in the poem? How do we know?

    4. Even though the poem is difficult overall, what "message" do you pick up in the

    final line?

| | |
|---|---|
| گذر به | نسیم صبح سعادت بدان نشان که تو دانی |
| | کوی فلان کن در آن زمان که تو دانی |
| به مردمی نه به | تو پیک خلوت رازی و دیده بر سر راهت |
| | فرمان چنان بران که تو دانی |
| ز لعل روح فزایش | بگو که جان عزیزم ز دست رفت خدا را |
| | ببخش آن که تو دانی |
| تو هم ز روی | من این حروف نوشتم چنان که غیر ندانست |
| | کرامت چنان بخوان که تو دانی |
| اسیر | خیال تیغ تو با ما حدیث تشنه و آب است |
| | خویش که گرفتی بکش چنان که تو دانی |
| دقیقه‌ایست نگارا | امید در کمر زرکشت چگونه ببندم |
| | در آن میان که تو دانی |
| حدیث عشق بیان | یکیست ترکی و تازی در این معامله حافظ |
| | کن بدان زبان که تو دانی |

III. Independent/Pair Activity: Interpersonal and Creative (10 minutes)

The teacher explains that this poem fulfills the requirements of the *ghazal* form. Any poem can be a *ghazal*, regardless of its content, as long as it conforms to certain rules. Students look at the poem in pairs and discuss the following two questions in order to think about what makes a ghazal a ghazal:

> 1. What kinds of rules or patterns do you identify in this poem? Possible answers might include: the poem has a rhyme; the poem repeats the same word(s) at the end of every line; the poem has a meter; the poem repeats the same rhyme throughout; the first line repeats the same rhyme and refrain in the first and second hemistich, but the rest of the poem repeats the rhyme and refrain only in the second hemistich; etc.
> 2. Who is speaking in this poem and how do we know? Possible answers include: Hafez is speaking because he addresses himself in the last line; a lover is speaking because s/he addresses a "you" and uses the word "love;" a warrior is talking because we have martial-sounding language in words like "kill," "captive" in the fifth line, etc.

IV. Teacher-guided class discussion (10 minutes)
  A. Students share their observations about the poem with the class. The instructor will note their conclusions on the board and extrapolate any relevant literary terms accordingly. Terms might include:

rhyme قافیه
refrain ردیف
line (distich)  بیت
half of a line (hemistich) مصرع
meter وزن
penname تخلص
  B. As a class, identify the rhyme and refrain of the poem.

* Note: In a very advanced class, the instructor might choose to discuss the meter as well, but this is likely too involved for most advanced-low learners. At this point, it should suffice to point out that any classical

ghazal must conform to a single meter, meaning a single pattern of short and long syllables.

    C.   Discuss the meaning of the final line as a class.

V. Creative activity (10 min)

        1. Now that the students have identified the poem's rhyme and refrain (*zabân keh tow dâni, miyân keh tow dâni, barân keh tow dâni*, etc.) they will compose their own line with the same rhyme and refrain to insert into to the poem.

        2. Students write their lines individually. Very advanced students should be encouraged to make their line the same number of syllables or even to write their line in the same meter. Other students should focus on re-creating just the rhyme and refrain.

        3. Follow-up. Now the class reads its new ghazal. The instructor or a volunteer reads the first two lines of Hafez's ghazal, then volunteers from around the class chime in with their own lines. After about ten lines, the instructor should "seal" the poem by reading Hafez's final line.

 VI. Conclusion/Homework Introduction (10 minutes)

For homework, the students will listen to the recording of the poem from class as many times as necessary to feel comfortable with the language. Then, the students will listen to a recording of the famous modern poet Ahmad Shamlu reading the same poem. The students should write a paragraph describing the differences between Shamlu's reading and the one from class. After describing the changes, the students should also write about how the changes affect the poem's tone.