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Title: Arabic language: Knowing the past to enhance the present and the future

Track: Curriculum and Standards

Abstract: Participants will become familiar with the ACTFL performance guideline K-12 learners, to help them define and articulate their goals of their language curriculum. Samples of communicative activities designed by the teachers, utilizing puppets, internet, TV programs, and authentic materials will be shared and participants will learn how to create their own materials and activities to supplement their text books and meet the ACTFL performance guidelines.

Description: In alignment with ACTFL performance guidelines for K-12 learners, teachers can define their goals and articulate their teachings methods per grade level. Knowing that no text book is perfect, it is the teacher responsibility to create activities where vocabulary and structure are spiraled from one level to another requiring student to carry communicative tasks of various complexities. Also transitioning from oral skills to reading and writing needs articulation and knowing what has been learned, what is learning now and what is going to be learned later.

Benefit: Participants will become familiar with ACTFL performance guidelines for K-12 learners, which will help them to articulate the goals of their language curriculum per grade level. They will learn how to create their own materials and activities to supplement their text books and meet the performance guidelines.

In 1986, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) released the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines which provide a common metric/ scale to determine performance of foreign language learners in speaking, reading, writing, and listening (Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, P. 13). The ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 are organized to describe language use as it is characterized by modes of communication: Interpersonal, Interpretive and Presentational.

The *interpersonal* communication include both oral and written (exchange of personal letters or of electronic mail messages) communication where speakers or writers engage in conversation, provide or obtain information, express feelings and emotions and exchange opinions. In this mode, which is two-way communication, learners negotiate meaning because they can ask for clarification or explanation of the message in the interaction act. The other two modes of communication, *interpretive* and *presentational*, are non-negotiable, one-way communication because the learner listens or reads without having any chance to ask the speaker or writer for clarification or repetition of the receptive message. Examples for interpretive communication are text, movies, radio and television broadcasts, and speeches. Examples for presentational communication are writing of reports and articles or the presentation for speeches. (Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, P. 36-37/ Curtain, H. 2004, P. 39).

These three modes of communication provide the organizing principle for describing language performance, as evidenced by students in K-12 labeled Novice Range, Intermediate Range and Pre-Advanced Range.

ACTFL performance guidelines define *the "how well"* students can be expected to do *the "what"* from the content standards, (Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, P. 1). The language performance descriptors are grouped into the following domains within each of the three modes:

- *Comprehensibility*
(How well is the student understood?)
- *Comprehension*
(How well does the student understand?)
- *Language Control*
(How accurate is the student's language?)
- *Vocabulary*
(How extensive and applicable is the student's vocabulary?)
- *Cultural Awareness*
(How is the student's cultural knowledge reflected in language use?)
- *Communication strategies*
(How does the student maintain communication?)

"Students require carefully planned and well-sequenced learning opportunities that provide practice in using the language in order to internalize language competencies." (Appendix A: ACTFL Guidelines).

Less commonly taught languages like Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese have similar characteristics compared to English as a native language of the learners: They have unfamiliar sound, different writing systems and new grammars. These factors present more challenges and a probably longer learning process. Therefore, it is hard to anticipate that students who learn the less commonly taught languages should reach the same level of

performance as those who study the Romanic languages that more frequently offered in American schools (Appendix A: ACTFL Guidelines).

For that reason a well-articulated language program for Arabic language is primarily demanded because it will provide an optimized language instruction to enhance language learning through out the different levels. In the following it is also necessarily to explain the Articulation and look its benefits to enrich our program.

What is foreign language program articulation?

Articulation is the process of providing a smooth and logical transition from one stage to another and ensuring continuity from one classroom to another. (Wilson. ERIC)

What forms does Articulation take?

A well-designed curriculum is articulated along *three axes*:

Vertical articulation: It refers to the continuity of a program throughout its different stages. Realistic curricular and performance objectives should be put in consideration. Successful articulation requires continuous and open communication with teachers at all levels.

Horizontal articulation: It targets the supervision and coordination of any curriculum across the many or several classes that are simultaneously attempting to accomplish the same objectives.

Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary articulation: It addresses the capability of a second language as a school subject to associate with other disciplines in the curriculum.

What aspects of the educational process does articulation address?

Goals: ACTFL Performance guidelines emphasize the use of language through the three "modes" of communication (Interpersonal, Interpretive and Presentational) richer more the traditional four skills, of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Well-articulated curriculum must seek balance among these four skills to enhance the functional language ability of the learners which is only accessible through the communicative language teaching. There are two kinds of goals: short-term and long-term goals. "Short-term goals must respect the fact that comprehension (reading and listening) precedes production (writing and speaking) and that there is not skills parity. Long-term goals must acknowledge that literacy, the ability to deal extensively with literate language, is, as in native language instruction, the ultimate goal of foreign language instruction." (ERIC Identifier: ED321586).

Length of study: Uninterrupted, well sequenced, long-term language instruction is the most important factor in the attainment of language proficiency.

The Learners: Differentiated instructions especially for diverse learners engaged in the language learning process should be put in consideration. Educational development of learners plays an important role when writing a curriculum.

Syllabus and Curriculum Design: Language proficiency could not be acquired linearly, but in a cyclical way. Well-articulated language program must provide continuously spiral language activities that allow the students

to recycle previous learned vocabulary and structures. Alternating between global, meaning-driven stages and analytical, form-driven stages is vital.

Materials Development: Materials are the backbone of the curriculum. They should be arranged in sequence so that they support the curriculum.

Outcomes Assessment: Not only assessing the learners but also assessing the attainment of goals are essential in articulated programs. Standardized tests that reflect the functional goals in all modes of language use and evaluate previous and no previous knowledge of learners are very important.

Having said that, the new Arabic Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century, have established a new K-12 vision of language education and supported it with challenging goals and standards for curriculum content. As for ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 learners translate those standards into student performance that can guide both curriculum development and student assessment.

As we all know that there is no text book for Arabic language learners developed according to the National standards or performance guidelines, except “Hayya Natkalm Mann” as a starting point to build Arabic language block. Adding that there are no activity books available to teachers to adapt or choose. Therefore there is tremendous need of teacher’s creativity to develop materials and activities to enhance their student’s language level of proficiency.

There is a compelling trust in language teaching toward a new organizing policy for language instruction: meaningful communication in

the context of holistic approach to language. While the first goal of standards for foreign language is to assess students on communicative ability, the K-12 Performance Guidelines for learners is very essential tool for measuring student progress. The teachers attempted to document student progress in relation to the ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K–12 Learners (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1998). Based on descriptions in the ACTFL guidelines, a student can do/ can't do assessment is devised. This “Teacher Assessment of Student Progress” help teachers to rate how well and how accurately their students understand and speak Arabic, and to rate the students’ vocabulary knowledge, communication strategies, and cultural understanding by checking “can do” or “can’t do” on the assessment. Teachers can also document the quantity of language each child produced during class.

Therefore, articulation from one grade level to another will help teachers to acknowledge students’ language ability before and at present stage and future stage. Students, regardless of grade level, will develop the ability to do the following in Arabic:

- Use memorized material
- Imitate pronunciation well
- Speak with accuracy when presenting practical material
- Understand key words and phrases in Arabic
- Comprehend and say everyday vocabulary and classroom instructions
- Pick up Arabic vocabulary from other sources such as stories, internet.
- Recite cultural facts about Arabic-speaking countries
- Say words, phrases, and full sentences to create a paragraph.

Additionally, it is very important to identify systematic grade-level differences that appear where those that involved complex language tasks requiring discourse-level ability, the negotiation of meaning, linguistic creativity, and literacy skills. That is, the kindergarten children are not to perform any of these advanced tasks, whereas the students in 4th Grade are able to control all of them. Systematic growth in ability will be observed across the grade levels.

The student will demonstrate progress each year in specific language skills and cultural knowledge and developed more advanced language functions throughout their language study. As a result students will advance in their proficiency, that the curriculum was well articulated, and that with each passing year, the students could say and do more with their new language.

The results of this the teachers need to realize the need of language learners to have extensive opportunities to hear and produce the target language at early level and the need for teachers to include more conversation-level tasks (e.g., story telling) in the beginning stages and throughout the grade level curriculum.

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Appendix A: ACTFL Guidelines:

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