

Leading with Culture

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

In this issue, we present articles on the focus topic, "Leading with Culture." The submissions for this issue were blind reviewed by education experts, in addition to staff from *The Language Educator* and ACTFL. We thank Jacque Bott Van Houten, World Language Specialist for Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, KY, and Kathleen Shelton, World Language Education Program Specialist at the Ohio Department of Education, for writing an introduction to this important topic.

From Culture to Intercultural Communication: Framing the Cultural Landscape of the Classroom with Can-Do Statements

Many students study languages, but enrollment data indicate that few continue long enough to reach Advanced levels of proficiency. So, what is the value of studying a language? What can students gain from a few years of learning a language?

At a time when STEM and career and technical education are becoming priorities, educational institutions in the U.S. are simultaneously grappling with the role of world languages. Beyond the obvious benefit of communication, it's important to recognize and promote the value of language learning in developing the skills and dispositions crucial to a dynamic workforce and a productive life. Such skills and dispositions include: acting and speaking with an open and inquisitive mind; listening openly to new points of view; thinking flexibly, critically, and with empathy in new situations; fostering a desire to find out what is beneath the surface of cultural practices and

products; and promoting a willingness to interact with others from different cultures.

How can these critical transformations occur within the context of language learning? Consider these two overviews of a second semester level II high school Spanish class focusing on health and safety:

1. The teacher uses Facetime to bring in someone to speak to students about the needs of newly arrived immigrants. Students are then urged to select an area of focus (i.e., dental clinics, health fairs, nutritional practices, bike safety laws/tips, etc.), develop a list of words and phrases needed to explore the topic, gather information and interview Spanish-speaking ELL peers or others in the community. The outcome is an exhibition at a public venue where students share brochures and flyers they have created to provide newcomers with information and resources about local health and safety topics.
2. The teacher presents the culturally relevant vocabulary with pictures, shares slides about a recent medical mission trip to Guatemala and has students do a cultural reading about health care in Latin America from their textbook. Students are told to choose a country, research information, and do a report about that country's health care system and make a presentation about it to the class.

Both classes are learning about culture, but which class is more likely to use more target language; learn more about their own culture; interact with native speakers; develop insight that may change attitudes; and be more open to community engagement? Unlike the more teacher-directed approach to learning about culture in the second scenario, the first scenario provides

an opportunity for learners to take ownership of a meaningful project within their own community—to uncover deficiencies and possibilities, take some action that fills a need, and interact with native speakers for a purpose.

The *NCSSFL-ACTFL Intercultural Communication Can-Dos* go beyond learning about culture. Culture is what a society creates, how it behaves, and what it believes in and values. Intercultural Communication is demonstrating one's knowledge of culture through language. Intercultural Communicative Competence, or ICC, is using language skills, and cultural knowledge and understanding, in authentic contexts to effectively interact with people. It is not simply knowing about the language and about the products and practices of a culture. Rather, it is an active participation in communicating with those from another culture, experiencing and discovering the culture because of an inherent curiosity, and forming new attitudes that mediate between one's own and the others' cultures.

The goals of ICC are to expand one's own world view; to develop an insider's perspective toward the target culture's beliefs, traditions and ways of behaving; to develop a sensitivity toward alternative perspectives and cultural differences and mediate those divides through language; and finally, to expand one's own identity as a global citizen.

The Cultures goal of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* refocused educator priorities and learner outcomes on interaction with cultural competence and understanding. The Cultures standards themselves are now action-oriented and emphasize communication, calling for learners to use language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationships between products, practices and perspectives. The addition of reflection is intended to lead the learner to develop the dispositions that support intercultural growth.

While the *Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* and *Reflection Tool for Learners* are first and foremost for learners, they were also designed to drive instruction toward a more natural integration of culture in language classes, as seen in the first classroom scenario, and help teachers facilitate the development of an intercultural mindset in their learners. These user-friendly statements deconstruct the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*. They are intended to guide learners to set progressive goals for how to communicate in the target language with cultural competence, and to guide educators to facilitate the integration of culture in classroom target language instruction.

Understanding the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication

What Are They?

The *Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* and the *Reflection Tool for Learners* are a set of benchmarks, indicators, examples, and scenarios that show how learners use the target language and knowledge of culture to demonstrate Intercultural

Communicative Competence. The *Can-Do Statements* describe what intercultural communicative interaction looks like within varied cultural and social contexts, using culturally appropriate functional language and behavior across the five major proficiency levels (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished).

The *Can-Do Statements* serve as a framework, not a curriculum, to integrate target language use and intercultural competencies in instruction, making clear the inextricable link between language and culture. The accompanying *Reflection Tool for Learners* supports deeper learning by providing sample scenarios that show how teachers can organize activities for intercultural reflection, both inside the classroom in the target language and outside of the classroom in English or in the target language.

Why Use Them?

The *Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* demonstrate the evolution of the *World-Readiness Standards* for the teaching and learning of culture. They move learners from learning about culture to interacting in culturally appropriate ways, to using language to mediate and develop deeper relationships via a mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms. In an intercultural society, there is a shared understanding and respect for all cultures. Global transformation takes place as everyone learns from one another and grows together.

How Do We Use Them?

The *Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* consist of two Global Proficiency Benchmarks: Investigation of products and practices to understand perspectives; and Interaction with others in and from another culture. Here are the Proficiency Benchmarks for the Novice Level:

- Investigate – Novice: *In my own and other cultures, I can identify products and practices to help me understand perspectives.*
- Interact – Novice: *I can interact at a survival level in some familiar everyday contexts.*

Each proficiency benchmark is broken down into two Performance Indicators that outline how learners develop their intercultural communication skills through cultural knowledge, language, and behavior. Performance Indicators for the Novice level are:

- Investigate – Novice:
 - Products: *In my own and other cultures, I can identify some typical products related to familiar everyday life.*
 - Practices: *In my own and other cultures, I can identify some typical practices related to familiar everyday life.*
- Interact – Novice:
 - Language: *I can communicate with others from the target culture in familiar everyday situations, using memorized language and showing basic cultural awareness.*

- Behavior: *I can use appropriate rehearsed behaviors and recognize some obviously inappropriate behaviors in familiar everyday situations.*

The performance indicators for *Investigate* encourage an increasing complexity of intercultural knowledge as learners move across the continuum from Novice to Distinguished, as evidenced by the terms *identify, compare, explain, analyze, and evaluate*. This applies to both the learner's own culture as well as to the target culture.

The performance indicators for *Interact* encourage the development of deeper intercultural relationships and mutual respect as learners move across the levels, as evidenced by terms such as *awareness, interest, understanding, adaptation, and mediation*. This applies to both language and behavior.

Each performance indicator is further broken down into examples of investigation and interaction that show samples of consistent intercultural language and behavior at each language proficiency level. The examples are meant to be adapted to individual learning contexts and include open-ended "I can ... " statements for learners and teachers to customize in order to fit the content and context of the learning and the targeted proficiency level. Two examples linking investigation and interaction:

- Investigate – Novice: *In my own and other cultures, I can identify locations to buy something and how culture affects where people shop.*
- Interact – Novice: *I can use rehearsed behaviors when shopping in a familiar type of store.*

Who Should Use Them?

Learners should use the tool to self-assess competencies, set personal goals, and chart progress in developing intercultural communication. Seeing incremental progress in meeting goals is a known motivator. If the tool is not shared with and used by the learner, intercultural growth will not be transparent and an opportunity for learner metacognitive awareness will be lost.

The best scenario is for educators to use the statements in the beginning of a course and show how the development of language skills and growth in cultural knowledge can move learners along the continuum to intercultural competence. Then, they may continually refer to the benchmarks and indicators, use them to create rubrics, and model customizing goals to specific contexts and content. The benchmarks and indicators are also appropriately used as long-term goals for classes and courses.

How Do We Use the Reflection Tool?

Learners' awareness and understanding of their own and others' cultures grow with each new intercultural encounter. They begin to experience how language proficiency can limit or enhance their comfort level or success in these encounters. It takes reflection, however, to process the depth of understanding that develops openness and promotes an examination of values

A complete set of the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* and the *Reflective Tool* are available for download at actfl.org/global_statements.

and attitudes which, along with knowledge and skills, are the foundation of intercultural competence.

However, since deep reflection normally occurs in one's native language, the reflective activities are designed with maximum use of the target language during instructional time and an option for use of English at home for deeper reflection. The framework for reflective activities involves:

- Introductory in-class component in the target language
- Deeper reflection outside of class in English or, if the learner's proficiency level allows, in the target language
- Follow-up in-class target language component

An example of the cycle of reflective activities for a Novice learner on the topic of grocery shopping may begin with an in-class video clip in the target culture of a family shopping for groceries. Learners fill in a simple T-chart in the target language comparing their family's shopping (on one side of the chart) to the shopping in the target culture (on the other side of the chart), examining similarities and differences in the shops they see in the video, the types of items for sale, and how much families buy of each item. Outside of class, learners then answer journal reflection questions in English about what they noticed in the video, how grocery shopping in the target culture compares to their family's shopping habits, whether it's practical for their family to shop like this, and any insights they've gained about themselves or others. For the closing target language activity in the classroom, the teacher facilitates the completion of a class Venn diagram to summarize the similarities and differences of grocery shopping in the target culture and in the United States. Learners then participate in face-to-face, Facetime, or Skype conversations about grocery shopping with native speakers. This is followed by more shared noticing and reflection as the cycle continues.

The Process of Intercultural Learning

The development of cognitive and affective skills is a factor in intercultural reflection and growth. Based on the theoretical frameworks of Bennett, Byram, Dearsdorff, and Fantini, we are able to see that intercultural learning is a dynamic cycle of noticing, comparing, reflecting, and interacting. Learners begin by observing, noticing, and comparing products and practices in their own and another culture. Guiding questions may facilitate awareness, observation, and comparison: *What do you already know about this topic in your own and in the target culture? What do you see? What is the same as or different than your own culture? What values does this suggest about this culture?*

NCSSFL-ACTFL CAN-DO STATEMENTS

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

PROFICIENCY BENCHMARKS + PERFORMANCE INDICATORS



NOVICE

INTERMEDIATE

	PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK	PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK
INVESTIGATE Investigate Products and Practices to Understand Cultural Perspectives	In my own and other cultures I can identify products and practices to help me understand perspectives.	In my own and other cultures I can make comparisons between products and practices to help me understand perspectives.
	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
PRODUCTS	In my own and other cultures I can identify some typical products related to familiar everyday life.	In my own and other cultures I can compare products related to everyday life and personal interests or studies.
PRACTICES	In my own and other cultures I can identify some typical practices related to familiar everyday life.	In my own and other cultures I can compare practices related to everyday life and personal interests or studies.



	PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK	PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK
INTERACT Interact with Others in and from Another Culture	I can interact at a survival level in some familiar everyday contexts.	I can interact at a functional level in some familiar contexts.
	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
LANGUAGE	I can communicate with others from the target culture in familiar everyday situations, using memorized language and showing basic cultural awareness.	I can converse with peers from the target culture in familiar situations at school, work, or play, and show interest in basic cultural similarities and differences.
BEHAVIOR	I can use appropriate rehearsed behaviors and recognize some obviously inappropriate behaviors in familiar everyday situations.	I can recognize that significant differences in behaviors exist among cultures, use appropriate learned behaviors, and avoid major social blunders.

Reflection is a subsequent step in the process, as learners reflect on their own attitudes, values, and beliefs, and how these affect their perception of another culture's products, practices, and perspectives. Guiding questions again facilitate the reflection process: *Why do you think that? How does this make you feel? What new insights have you learned about yourself and others? How do you see yourself changing from thinking about this—how might you act differently in the future?*

Intercultural interaction then allows learners to use the target language and their cultural knowledge to begin to develop deeper relationships with native speakers from the target culture. This may take the form of a videochat session with a class in the target culture, guest speakers, project-based learning, or interaction via social media.

Continued reflection after the intercultural interaction encourages learners to think about their ability to communicate with native speakers, people's actions or reactions to what was said, or events that surprised or irritated the learner.

Conclusion

This new tool is one of a kind. While there are many rubrics and assessment tools that measure cultural competence, the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* and *Reflection Tool for Learners* provide the means to measure the demonstration of cultural knowledge through one's learned language. Charting progress in developing Intercultural Communicative Competence can be done in class, on one's own, or by using the updated *Linguafolio* online (ncssfl.org/linguafolio-materials).

The journey to Intercultural Communicative Competence is a personal one, with many steps, both backward and forward, and a growing awareness of self and other. Just as the use of the language Can-Do Statements has had a positive impact on learning and teaching, the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* are expected to make both learner and educator more mindful of the importance of culture in communication.

NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication

The *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* and the *Reflection Tool for Learners* provide a set of examples and scenarios that show how learners use the target language and knowledge of culture to demonstrate their Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC).

Just as the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements* for language clarify the Communication standards in the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*, this tool is intended to clarify and support the Cultures standards and lead learners toward developing ICC. For the purpose of this document, ICC refers to the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with people from other language and cultural backgrounds. ICC develops as the result of a process of intentional goal-setting and self-reflection around language and culture and involves attitudinal changes toward one's own and other cultures. Intercultural communicative competence is essential for establishing effective, positive relationships across cultural boundaries, required in a global society.

The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication:

- **Provide samples** of how learners can develop and demonstrate their ICC through the language they are learning. The extent to which one can fully understand and participate in a culture is related to the level of language proficiency.
- **Apply to a variety of learning and life environments**, such as in elementary school, an immersion class, a high school or college course, independent learning, a study abroad situation, or a work setting.
- **Serve as a framework**, not a curriculum, to integrate target language use and intercultural competencies in instruction, making clear the inextricable link between language and culture.
- **Focus on communicative interaction** in another culture, (i.e., the ability to communicate and articulate in the target language and behave appropriately in the target culture).
- **Are illustrated with examples** for each proficiency level, paired as complementary examples as learners investigate and interact.
- **Support deeper learning by providing a Reflection Tool with sample scenarios** that show how educators can organize activities for intercultural reflection, both inside the classroom in the target language and outside the classroom in English or the target language.
- **Are meant to be used as part of a school-wide program** that includes educator collaboration with other content areas and time for guided learner reflection on their intercultural experiences.

The use of the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication* can be a first step in the process to simplify the complexities of ICC and provide guidance for educators and learners. Rather than a linear process, ICC is more iterative and interactive, like a mosaic of various cultural experiences informed by self-reflection. Each individual begins at different cognitive, cultural, and linguistic stages and progresses at various rates.

The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements for Intercultural Communication show the intersection of language proficiency and cultural competence, which do not always align. One individual may possess strong cultural competence yet demonstrate a low level of language proficiency (figure 1). Another individual may display high language proficiency but minimal cultural competence (figure 2).

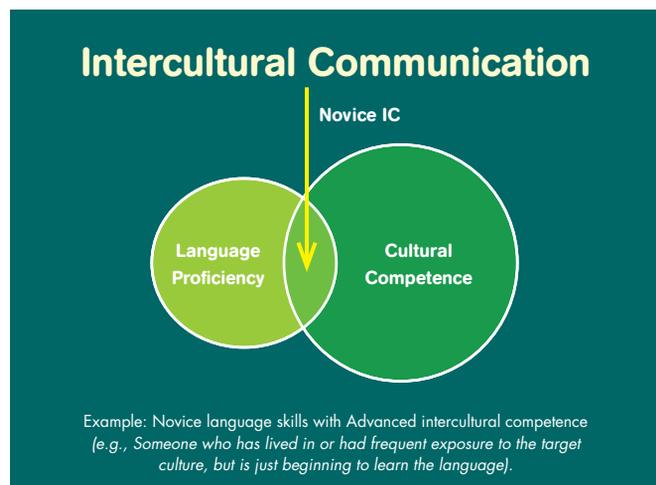


Figure 1

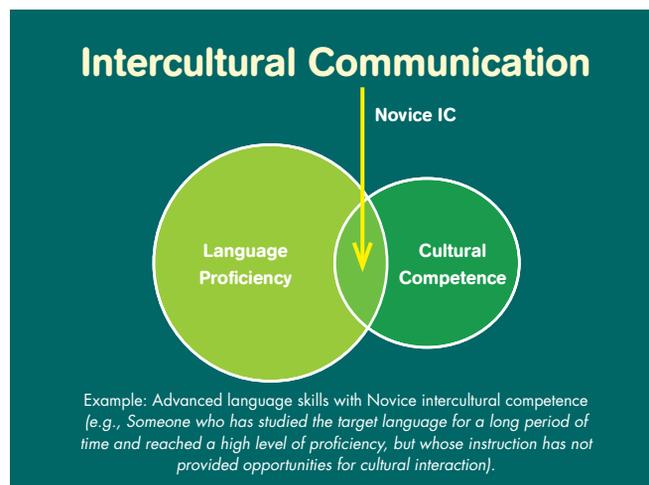


Figure 2



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