During the past decade, several conceptual frameworks emerged in the U.S. educational landscape defining “21st century skills.” Common to those frameworks is an emphasis on identifying the broad skills and transferable knowledge upon which student success in college and careers depends (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012), defining literacy for today’s learners. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) framework includes critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation—all of which are readily recognized by language educators as central to our aims in the classroom (P21, 2010). In the P21 framework, world languages is named as one of 10 key subjects whose mastery is essential to student success, and global awareness figures as one of five interdisciplinary themes to be woven into the teaching of the key subjects. Closer scrutiny of the P21 framework also reveals recurrent use of the term literacy to refer to various domains salient to the development of 21st century skills.

Although the P21 framework does not explicitly link world language education and literacy development, some researchers and teachers have worked to forge this connection since the 1990s. For example, the Learning by Design project, a collaborative endeavor between U.S. and Australian researchers and teachers, provides resources for instructional planning based on the multiliteracies approach and facilitates the documentation of classroom practice by teacher participants. A second example is the German program at Georgetown University, whose curriculum and assessment practices are articulated cohesively over the span of a 4-year undergraduate program that aims to enable students to become competent and culturally literate users of German. Unlike the traditional postsecondary sequence of four semesters of language and grammar instruction followed by two semesters of culture and civilization “bridge” courses that lead to two semesters of literature, the Georgetown University German Department’s mantra is to blend content and language from the first through the highest level courses: content from the beginning; language to the end.

Yet despite its salience to the development of 21st century skills and potential to change the focus and outcomes of U.S. world language education, multiliteracies-based world language courses and curriculum long remained limited to pockets of innovation in individual departments and institutions and largely excluded less commonly taught languages (LCTLs). However, in the past few years, momentum has grown for linking the goals and means of language study more explicitly to the development of multiple literacies, including in LCTLs. These new ways of learning entail shifts in the focus of instruction. As Kumagai, López-Sánchez, and Wu wrote in Multiliteracies in World Language Education, [L]anguage learning and teaching can no longer be solely (or mostly) concerned with language per se . . . [W]orld language education needs to move beyond current communicative and “language-focused” approaches, and into those that prepare students to be effective producers and consumers of multimodal texts. (2016, p. xiii)

In 2014, ACTFL established the Languages and Literacy Collaboration Center (LLCC) to facilitate a collaborative effort to develop and reinforce literacy skills in first and second languages for learners from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary levels. To emphasize how the discipline of world languages supports and builds on native language literacy, the LLCC adopted the definition of 21st century literacies adopted by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in 2013. This definition recognizes that the Internet makes global communication much easier than at any other time in our history. Communicating globally is now an expectation. Through the LLCC, language educators work in teams to enhance their understandings and instructional repertoire related to 21st century literacies and language teaching by accessing resources including webinars, mentoring, a virtual resource portal, and online discussions. In the 2 years since the LLCC’s creation, 79...
collaborative teams have signed up to learn how to maximize the literacy development of world language learners and design model units and lessons grounded in notions of literacy. The LLCC represents a critical step in making high quality professional development materials and collaboration opportunities related to multiliteracies education widely available to K–16 world language teachers. Providing these resources is particularly significant given the reality that effective multiliteracies-based language teaching requires that teachers develop new understandings of what literacy is and embrace instructional strategies that align with literacy-based learning outcomes. Find out how to join the LLCC at https://www.actfl.org/assessment-professional-development/languages-and-literacy.

What is literacy and how does the development of 21st century literacies relate to world language education?

Whereas a commonplace understanding of literacy relates to a person achieving “basic” levels of competency in reading and writing, the work of the New Literacy Studies have redefined this notion, giving credence to “dramatic changes occurring in everyday life in the realms of work, citizenship, and identity” at the close of the 20th century due to forces including globalization, the Internet, and mass media (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015, p. 3). Linking the notion of literacy to the aims of language education, Kern described an “expanded view . . . that involves not only the ability to produce and interpret texts, but also a critical awareness of the relationships between texts, discourse conventions, and social and cultural norms” (2000, p. 6). From this perspective, literacy includes linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions, and its development does not depend only on learners using language to practice new lexico-grammatical structures but on engagement in literacy events in which they learn to make meaning in a variety of contexts through using, interpreting, and creating texts. A clear overlap is noted between the P21 framework (2010) for 21st century skills, which includes critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation, and Kern’s (2000) principles of literacy development for language teaching and learning, which include interaction with the content of texts through language use, genre-specific conventions, and cultural knowledge through the learning processes of collaboration, interpretation, and problem solving. Consider how such a focus might engage learners at any age or grade and empower them to explore meaningful content through resources only available in the target language.

How do we align instructional practices with the goal of developing world language learners’ 21st century literacies?

The development of literacy in any language entails learning to make meaning through linguistic and schematic resources; understanding the cultural products, practices, and perspectives related to interpreting and creating texts; and drawing on cognitive processes and strategies to construct meaning and overcome learning challenges. Cope and Kalantzis (2015) outlined the key components of literacy pedagogy, which can be envisioned much like basic food groups that are all essential for a well-balanced diet and a healthy body, or, in the case of language learning, are all critical for literacy development. These four learning processes serve as tools to help educators teach in a way that aligns with the principles of literacy (Kern, 2000) outlined above. They include:

- **Experiencing**, which involves immersion in language use and communicative activities that focus on learners expressing feelings, opinions, and thoughts;
- **Conceptualizing**, which entails learners developing a metalanguage to identify and use linguistic and schematic resources that contribute to meaning making in the target language through scaffolded learning activities;
- **Analyzing**, which focuses on building learner understanding of the cultural, historical, ideological and social contexts of texts and awareness of how the often implicit rules of language use are tied to specific contexts of communication; and
- **Applying**, in which learners use new linguistic and schematic resources to reshape existing texts or create new ones.

These four learning processes serve as a framework for planning world languages instruction and assessment. Concrete models for doing so in relation to the development of Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational communication skills can be found in Paesani, Allen, and Dupuy (2016).

We stated above that literacy development depends on learner engagement in meaning-making activities through using, interpreting, and creating texts. An important precision to add is that in the 21st century, as Cope and Kalantzis wrote:

[It] is no longer enough for literacy teaching to focus solely on the rules of standard forms of the national language . . . communication and representation of meaning today increasingly requires that learners become able to negotiate differences in patterns of meaning from one context to another . . . Meaning is made
in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile, and spatial patterns of meaning. (2015, p. 3)

In the same vein as the description of multimodal meaning making practices provided above, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE, 2013) definition of 21st century literacies includes a list of six competencies that “active, successful participants in this 21st century global society must be able to do.” Below, we summarize each of those competencies and its relevance to world language education.

- **Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of information:** The Internet brings authentic resources from around the world to language learners, giving them 24-hour access to written, audio, and video resources in the target language. World language learners need to learn how to access these resources efficiently and evaluate their credibility. They need to pay attention to the cultural contexts of these resources and how those contexts are reflected through textual messages.

- **Design and share information for global communities:** Learners select, organize, and design information to share beyond the classroom. The information must be crafted with an awareness of the cultural background of the audience. In designing the presentation of information, learners need to consider what background information may be needed to help the audience understand the content. They need to consider appropriate formalities and protocols in the choice of vocabulary and register, in the organization of the information, and in the choice of media for delivering the information.

- **Build intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others:** Learners develop interpersonal skills to work in both face-to-face and virtual environments to pose and solve problems collaboratively. World language learners gain deeper understandings and insights into the people who speak the language they are learning when they can engage with them in real-world tasks. Technology such as Skype allows classrooms around the world to connect in order to work collaboratively on a variety of projects. The classes contribute unique perspectives that influence how they approach and work through the project and how they arrive at a final product. As the classes collaborate, ties are strengthened and cross-cultural understandings are deepened.

- **Develop proficiency and fluency with the tools of technology:** Learners access information through a variety of digital tools and learn how to select and use the most appropriate tools to access, share, and present information. The medium that learners select is influenced by the intended audience. The medium selected also influences the message as different tools enable the incorporation of audio, video, images, and written texts.

- **Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts:** Learners become critical consumers and creators of multimedia texts. They benefit from examining authentic texts for style and format in addition to the vocabulary and syntax used to communicate the message. In turn, learners can create texts modeled after the authentic texts they have examined.

- **Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by complex environments:** Learners understand and adhere to legal and ethical practices as they use resources and create information. It is critical that learners document their sources of information appropriately. To avoid plagiarism, learners need to practice summarizing and synthesizing ideas in their own words from a variety of sources. Ultimately, learners develop new understandings and create original applications based on what they have learned.

Language educators are now making important progress in aligning program content and instructional practices with the concept of literacy and literacy-based pedagogy and, as such, making our mission as language teachers salient to the larger goal of educating our students to become active and successful participants in a 21st century global society. The focus topic articles in this issue of *The Language Educator* provide evidence of this progress and of the varied and innovative ways in which literacy-based teaching practices are finding their way into U.S. K–16 language classrooms. It is our hope that these articles and the references and resources listed here will inspire you to learn more about literacy and literacy-based pedagogy.

Engage and motivate language learners with learning activities focused on facilitating literacy development across all three modes of communication: Interpersonal, Interpretive, and Presentational. Start with thinking how learners will use what they are learning to explore messages to mine a deeper meaning; create messages to inform, explain, persuade, or narrate; and engage in discussions and negotiation of meaning with people around the globe. This is a 21st century understanding and application of literacy to language learning.

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**References**


