

The Guiding Principles of Learning Languages Other Than English

The following eight principles form the foundation of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Languages Other Than English. They are supported by language education research and experience as well as by a strong commitment to the importance of languages as part of all students' educational program in our schools.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 1: Acquiring languages other than English is essential for *all* students.

Language learning is no longer just for college-bound students. Given the opportunity, *all* students are capable of and can benefit from learning other languages.

Data from standardized tests show that traditionally disadvantaged groups gain an educational advantage through LOTE instruction, and research suggests that students with strong LOTE instruction in the early grades score higher on standardized tests than those with no LOTE instruction. The skills and knowledge acquired through the study of LOTE are transferable to other subject areas and strengthen students' intellect while enhancing their lives.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 2: Multiple student variables affect how students acquire languages.

There are a great variety of factors that can influence how people learn languages. These factors include but are not limited to the age and developmental stage of the learner, multiple intelligences and individual learning styles, prior knowledge and experience with language and content, learning disabilities, and emotional and affective factors.

Most students learn and retain knowledge through a combination of learning styles and intelligences. Teachers, therefore, can respond to the different variables affecting language acquisition by using a variety of instructional strategies.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 3: Knowing languages other than English at advanced proficiency levels upon graduation benefits students and society.

When students graduate from high school knowing a language in addition to English at an advanced proficiency level, they can use that language for complex, real-world applications in the community, on the job, and in their personal lives. They possess a skill that is desirable in the workplace, in multiple communities, and in the pursuit of personal enrichment.

Having a populace that is multilingual strengthens our society. When individuals are able to use language to cross linguistic and cultural boundaries, they gain an understanding of each other's similarities and differences and may develop mutual respect.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 4: LOTE programs that start in elementary school and continue uninterrupted through high school allow students the possibility of reaching advanced levels of proficiency and benefit students in other academic and social arenas.

Studies show that developing advanced language proficiency requires an extended period of time so that students have ample opportunities to experience and practice the language in meaningful ways.

The opportunity to achieve advanced proficiency is not the only reason to start learning languages in elementary school. Language study is beneficial to young students for other reasons as well (e.g., greater mental flexibility, improved self-concept, and a sense of cultural pluralism). Some research suggests a "critical period" in childhood when language learning and pronunciation acquisition, in particular, occur more easily.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 5: Maintaining and expanding the language of native speakers benefits the individual and society.

In many schools in Texas, there is a large group of students who have a background in the foreign language being taught (Spanish and other languages as well). These students are valuable linguistic and cultural resources and their language skills should be expanded and strengthened.

Since students with home backgrounds in a LOTE have varying abilities and proficiencies and varying amounts of motivation to learn the language, instruction should take into account the previous knowledge and language experience that these students possess.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 6: Students should have opportunities to develop proficiency in a variety of languages.

In addition to English, there are currently dozens of languages used by the people of Texas. However, tradition and limited resources may cause communities to choose the traditional languages (Spanish, French, German, and Latin) as the only languages offered in the schools.

Knowledge of languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian has become increasingly important as countries that use these languages stand at the forefront of international relations and the world economy. School districts need to make every effort to introduce less commonly taught languages into their curricula.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 7: Learning languages other than English is interdisciplinary.

The discipline of Languages other than English connects to virtually every other subject matter, expanding the knowledge base available to its students. When content from other disciplines is incorporated into the LOTE curriculum, it not only reinforces that content, it simultaneously serves as a vehicle for communicating in new ways using the language being learned.

Students of LOTE have access to material that is not always available to those who know only English, material that can enhance their study of other disciplines (such as newspapers in another language that offer a different perspective on current events).

GUIDING PRINCIPLE 8: Languages other than English enable students to better understand other cultures.

In addition to the traditional ways of studying culture, culture in language instruction is now generally understood to include the *perspectives* (how people perceive things), the *practices* (what people do), and the *products* (what people create) of a society.

As students observe and analyze the interdependence of the perspectives, practices, and products of a culture, they become more aware of similarities and differences among cultures. Students can explore their own culture in the context of exploring others, thus becoming reflective learners adept at using cross-cultural analytical skills.