

Common Core State Standards and Heritage Language Education: How do they match?

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The Common Core State Standards provide a set of common learning goals that learners are expected to achieve in order to have the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their college and future careers. Heritage Language Education (HLE) offers a unique opportunity to strengthen the common core since these standards go hand in hand with HLE goals and priorities.

Common Core literacy in writing and reading goes in concert with the goal of developing HL learners' literacy skills. Teachers of HL learners seek to help learners develop advanced literacy for academic learning. For many, reading and writing skills are acquired only once. Bilingual education specialists argue that when learners learn to read in their first language, they can transfer this ability to the second language (Goodman, Goodman & Flores, 1979). Moreover, research strongly suggests that bilingual learners should develop literacy in their primary language in addition to English language literacy (e.g.: Cummins, 1994; Collier, 1992; among others). Thus, equipping learners with literacy skills in the HL greatly benefits learners, who can then transfer skills to English reading and writing.

In addition, bilingual literacy can greatly enhance HL learners' bilingual professional opportunities, giving learners an opportunity to compete not only at national levels but also in international contexts. Thus, HL literacy instruction not only reinforces the development of English literacy but also allows learners to engage in literary practices beyond English.

Common Core literacy in listening and speaking also goes hand in hand with the main goal in HLE of developing HL learners' second varieties of the language. Students typically come to the classroom with some degree of fluency that allows them to participate in informal conversations in the heritage language. Teachers of HL learners strive to help learners develop additional registers of the language to be able to perform appropriately in professional, academic, or formal contexts of language use.

An important goal of HLE, which also supports the common core standards, is the goal of helping HL learners develop stronger academic skills (see Valdés, 2007). Typically, language minority students do not do as well academically as language majority students (del Pinal, 1995). HL instructors seek to provide different types of guidance so that students develop their academic skills to be successful in their college and professional careers.

Yet another goal of HL instruction is to foster learners' self-esteem and pride in the heritage language and cultures. This goal too supports the Common State Standards since a sense of self-identity and pride can ensure academic success. When students' varieties are devalued, students tend to host a feeling of inferiority, self-rejection, and failure (Bernal-Enríquez & Hernández-Chávez, 2003).

Teachers attempt to strike a delicate balance between helping learners improve on their existing weaknesses while at the same time constantly valuing the strengths they possess. The newly

gained confidence can go a long way in promoting language use and subsequent maintenance of the language, which can in turn lead to improved feelings of self-worth and accomplishment.

The final goal for HLE that closely aligns to the Common State Standards is the development of cultural literacy. Increasingly, learners need to learn to interact in English and the heritage language in culturally appropriate ways. They need to increase their intercultural understanding to be able to compete in a global society. HLE provides learners with three important types of cultural knowledge (Aparicio, 1997):

- 1) Self-cultural knowledge (about learners' own cultural group);
- 2) Intra-cultural knowledge (about different groups within their own ethnic culture);
- 3) Intercultural knowledge (about other ethnic groups in the United States)

The heritage language classroom can achieve increased awareness and understanding of cultural diversity through diverse curriculum content, culturally themed community and classroom projects, and culturally sensitive instruction.

Heritage language education is in a unique position to support the development of skills described in the Common Core State Standards, while at the same time, helping learners develop advanced levels of proficiency in the heritage language. These high proficiency levels are invaluable resources for students, their families, their community, and the entire nation. Programs that have not yet begun a HL program should consider this option as HLE will greatly help learners achieve these standards.

For resources on heritage language education, visit <http://www.nhlrc.ucla.edu>
To learn about heritage language programs in the United States, visit
<http://www.cal.org/heritage/profiles/index.html>

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