Curricular Goals and Curriculum Design: The Case of a College-level Chinese Language Program

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Abstract This paper reports on a curriculum redesign and reevaluation project conducted by a Chinese language program at a private research university in the U.S. and focuses on the component of setting up proficiency-based curricular goals guided by the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the Standards of Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century. The field of foreign language education has reached a consensus that the setting of curricular goals is of great significance for curriculum development and language instruction, but it is also recognized as a very challenging task. This paper adopts the proficiency-based framework and presents a proposal of curricular goals that provides a brief description of program goals, mission, and vision, and outlines a four-year, two-track plan of proficiency objectives. This paper also notes that implementation of curricular goals involves close interaction with other elements such as teaching, testing, and teacher training. The report concludes with implications for Chinese language curriculum development and a wealth of useful resources collected in the duration of the project.

Keywords: Curriculum Design, Curricular Goals, Proficiency-based, Chinese language education

摘要 本文汇报的是美国一所私立研究性大学中文项目所进行的一项课程设计项目，讨论集中在课程目标的制定上。此项目的理论指导来源于《美国外语教学协会外语水平纲要》和《二十一世纪外语学习标准》。外语教育领域的学者们就课程目标的重要性已达成共识，但同时也认识到这项任务的艰巨性。本文以美国某所高校的中文项目为原形提出了一套基于中文水平的课程目标方案，此方案包括中文项目的整体目标、愿景和宗旨，以及四年、双轨中文教学共八门核心中文课程的水平程度目标。同时，本文还探讨了课程目标的执行与其它因素如教学、测试、教师培训之间的紧密联系。最后，本文讨论了此项目对中文教学的启迪并分享了一系列有助于中文课程设置的资源。

关键词：课程设计，课程目标，外语水平，中文教育
1. Introduction

Chinese language education in the U.S. has experienced unprecedented growth in the past two decades, but at the same time, it faces many new challenges (Wen, 2012). In the U.S., enrollment in college-level Chinese classes has increased rapidly (Furman, Goldberg & Lusin, 2010); the number of middle and high schools in the U.S. offering Chinese has quadrupled from 1997 to 2008 (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010); the Advanced Placement (AP) Chinese Language and Culture Course and Exam as well as the SAT II Chinese language test were launched; and the Chinese language was recognized as a critical language by the U.S. government. The urgent issues in the discipline include standardizing curriculum design, articulating curricular goals, producing high-quality language instructors, and improving the overall quality of Chinese language programs.

To address these issues, a private research university in the Midwest—the institution under discussion in this paper—went through a rigorous reevaluation and redesign of the Chinese language curriculum. The Chinese language program at this institution has developed and expanded extensively in the past 30 years, growing from a small program of about 30 students and a couple of instructors to a large program of 400 students and 10 full-time instructors at its peak. This program houses four-year Chinese instruction for two separate tracks, the heritage track and the mainstream track. Despite its long history, fast growth, and large size, the Chinese language program seemed to lack an articulate statement of curricular goals, a systematic process of curriculum design, a mechanism to ensure instructional consistency among different instructors, and a standardized assessment model for teaching and learning.

This project thus aimed at redesigning the curriculum within the proficiency-based framework guided by the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (the five Cs). More specifically, the ACTFL proficiency guidelines were used to set up proficiency-based objectives for specific courses at various levels; the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning were adopted to guide formulation of program goals and course design in general. The whole endeavor went through several stages. This article focuses on the first stage, namely, the setting of curricular goals.

For the purpose of setting up competitive yet realistic curricular goals, Chinese language faculty members were encouraged to reach out to peer institutions to learn about common practices in the field across the U.S. For example, this author personally contacted more than twenty U.S. institutions and had close discussions with department chairs, program directors, and program coordinators to seek their insights on proficiency-based curricular goals and curriculum de-
Most contacts are experts or leading scholars in program building or curriculum design. They not only shared with me their valuable experiences and practices, but also directed me to an abundance of additional resources. In addition, I conducted needs analysis among students, instructors, and administrators through questionnaires, interviews, informal discussions and conversations, and reviewed extensive literature on curriculum design and curricular practices of other foreign language programs in the U.S. As a result of all these efforts, I drafted a proposal of curricular goals for the program, which was very well received among my colleagues and was adopted for later stages of curriculum design. The present article is, to a great extent, based on that proposal. It should be noted that this was not an experimental study and thus will not follow the format of a standard research paper. The rest of the paper will report on the process of setting up curricular goals in subsections that address the following related topics: significance, challenges, the proposal, and curricular goals and other elements.

2. Curricular Goals: Significance

Foreign language educators have reached a consensus that learning objectives and outcomes constitute an essential part of a sound curriculum and should be specified clearly in course syllabi (e.g. Brown, 1995; Nunan, 1988). This section will discuss the significance of curricular goals from three perspectives: theories of curriculum development, results of preliminary needs analysis, and scholars’ insights across the field of Chinese language education in the U.S.

2.1 Curriculum Design Theories

The field of foreign language education boasts a wide range of design models (e.g. Brown, 1995; Graves, 2000; Harmer, 2001; Nation & Macalister, 2010; Nunan, 1988; Richards, 2001) that could guide us through the process of curriculum development. This section will briefly review three widely adopted models to demonstrate the role of the curricular goals they foreground. They are Brown’s (1995) view of curriculum development, Richards’ (2001) model of curriculum design, and Nation & Macalister’s (2010) framework of language curriculum design.

In Brown’s (1995) model, curriculum development is viewed as “a series of activities that contribute to the growth of consensus among staff, faculty, administration and students” (p. 19). As shown in Figure 1, this model consists of six elements: needs analysis, goals and objectives, language testing, materials, teaching, and evaluation. In this model, curriculum development starts with needs analysis, which aims to identify problems and find solutions. Needs analysis paves the way for setting up goals and objectives, which refer to both desired
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learning outcomes and specific skills/knowledge that students need to master. Language testing is incorporated to assess how well the goals and objectives are met. The materials component involves how materials are developed and then used in the classroom. The component of teaching discusses the kinds of support that language instructors need for effective teaching. Finally, evaluation is an on-going process of assessing and improving the previously mentioned five components. Please refer to Li, et al. (2003) for a more detailed summary of this model.

Richards (2001) sees curriculum design as “the range of planning and im-
plementation processes involved in developing or renewing a curriculum” (p. 41). The critical processes in his model (outlined in Figure 2) include needs analysis, situational analysis, planning learning outcomes, course organization, selecting and preparing teaching materials, providing for effective teaching, and evaluation. This model is similar to Brown’s model which also includes needs analysis, setting of learning goals, materials selection and preparation, teaching, and evaluation. The two models are different in that Richards’ model does not have the testing component and views situation analysis and course organization as separate elements of curriculum design (cf. Storey, 2007).

![Figure 2 Richards’ (2001) model of curriculum design (adapted from Storey, 2007, p. 89)](image)

According to Nation & Macalister (2010), “curriculum design can be seen as a kind of writing activity and as such it can usefully be studied as a process” (p. 1). The curriculum design model in Figure 3 consists of three outside circles, a subdivided inner circle, and a larger outer circle. The outside circles include three components: principles, environment, and needs, which address practical and theoretical considerations important to the process of course production. The inner circle has four parts: goals, content and sequencing, format and presentation,
and monitoring and assessment, which concern the details of teaching a course. As shown in Figure 3, goals sit in the center, indicating their primary importance in the process. The outer circle represents evaluation, which looks at every aspect of a course to gauge the effectiveness of the course.

Figure 3 Nation & Macalister’s (2010) model of language curriculum design

The three models all successfully highlight a number of important elements of the curriculum design process: needs analysis, goals, materials, teaching, and evaluation although different labels are used. In particular, they all see the setting of learning goals and objectives as an indispensable and significant step in curriculum development.
Compared to Richards’ view, Brown’s and Nation & Macalister’s models have an additional major component, i.e., testing or assessment, which is an essential measure to gauge to what degree the goals are achieved. Another notable difference among the three models is that Nation & Macalister’s model focuses on course design from the perspective of an instructor while Brown and Richards view curriculum design as a program-level or department-level process from the standpoint of a program builder.

The present project mainly relied on Brown’s model in the whole process of curriculum development as this model is not only the most comprehensive, but also explains the relationships among different components and provides guidance on how to proceed from one component to another in curriculum development. It is hoped that a stronger Chinese language program could be built through a more unified and systematic process of curriculum design.

2.2 Preliminary Needs Analysis

Before writing the proposal of curricular goals, this author handed out questionnaires and conducted interviews with students to learn about their needs and in particular elicited their opinions on learning goals and objectives. In addition, this author held informal discussions among colleagues on the role of curricular goals in teaching and had conversations with administrators in order to seek their views. Results of this preliminary needs analysis showed that students, instructors, and administrators all valued clear statements of curricular goals and learning objectives. Students welcomed well-articulated learning outcomes and objectives mainly because they were interested in knowing what they could do with the Chinese language after taking two or three years of courses in this field of study. Instructors needed clear curricular goals in order to plan the lessons, convey course objectives to the students, ensure pedagogical consistency among instructors teaching the same course, and promote continuity between different levels of instruction. Administrators pushed for articulation of curricular goals and relevant assessment measures, which has become a nation-wide trend among U.S. higher education institutions for purposes such as communication with parents, comparison with other institutions, and accreditation reviews (cf. Geofffrion-Vinci, Lamb-Faffelberger, & Toulouse, 2013).

2.3 Scholars’ Insights across the Field

Conversations with colleagues from peer institutions across the U.S. also attested to the significance of curricular goals. On one hand, scholars in the field agreed that what the institution under discussion did was a very meaningful endeavor. They were all very supportive and shared many useful resources. Many
of them shared their program goals and curricular goals, but these goals were mostly very brief in form and few of them were based on the ACTFL Guidelines. On the other hand, many scholars pointed out that proficiency-based curriculum and curricular goals were still not very popular among Chinese language programs in U.S. higher education and that, further, proceeding in such a direction could be a difficult task. Several universities were in the process of making similar changes, but there is no established model of proficiency-based curricular goals for a four-year, dual-track college-level Chinese language program at this point. In particular, proficiency-based curricular goals specifically set up for Chinese heritage learners are almost non-existent. Below are a few representative quotations from the email conversations between the scholars and this author:

“As far as I know, there are no resources for curricular goals and curriculum design since standard-based instruction is still not very common in higher education foreign language departments. The only exception I know is the Chinese Flagship programs. However, it is different from a regular program.”

“That's quite a task! We are actually in the process of assessing student progress and setting learning goals for each level of our program, so I don't have a finished product to send you. We work with the ACTFL standards as well, but at this point in time are trying to get a realistic reading on the proficiency level that students can attain in 4 years of college study, including a semester or a year of study abroad.”

“I do not have the information that you described. To my knowledge, most of universities and colleges do not have it. I guess it is not easy to create it.”

“Actually we don't have official goals in terms of OPI. But we did some research during the past years to establish the relationship between OPI and levels. We never published the research result and we use it for our own purposes because the sample is too small (fewer than 100 students).”

Scholars not only concurred with each other that curricular goals were important, but also recognized that the field lacked a generally agreed-upon model of such goals. In addition, they also indicated that curricular goals needed to be set up within well-recognized frameworks so that they could be discussed and compared across various institutions and across different foreign languages. The ACTFL proficiency guidelines and the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning were seen as ready candidates for such frameworks.
3. Curricular Goals: Challenges

The challenges of setting up curricular goals not only stem from a lack of existing models in the field, but are also attributable to the uniqueness of both the Chinese language itself and the learners who study it.

A central issue for the setting of curricular goals lies in the fact that the Chinese language program under discussion has two different tracks of instruction, the mainstream track and the heritage track. The mainstream track consists of traditional foreign language learners whose first language is a language other than Chinese such as English. The heritage track is designed for Chinese heritage learners who are raised in a home where Chinese is spoken, who speaks or at least understands Chinese and who is to some degree bilingual in Chinese and in English (cf. Valdés, 2001, p. 38). It would be necessary to set up different goals for the mainstream track and the heritage track as the two groups of students have different backgrounds and learning needs (Kagan, 2005; Valdés, 1989; Valdés & Geoffrion-Vinci, 2011).

Another essential issue is the appropriateness of applying the ACTFL Guidelines to both tracks. ACTFL guidelines were designed based on the “proficiency-based approach” to address the language learning needs and outcomes of traditional foreign language learners. Therefore, they constitute an appropriate framework for setting up curricular goals for the mainstream track. However, many scholars (e.g. Valdés, 1989; Kagan, 2005) have argued that they might not be appropriate for heritage language (HL) learners without proper modifications. For example, as Kondo-Brown (2003) noted in her article, Valdés (1989) analyzed 14 categories underlying the generic ACTFL proficiency guidelines and then questioned the discriminatory power of some of them in measuring the proficiency levels for HL learners. Valdés argued that HL learners did not fit neatly into the hierarchy of language development identified in the guidelines. Therefore, she did not recommend using the descriptors for bilingual HL learners without making some modifications. In particular, Valdés (1989) questioned the usefulness of comprehensibility, one of the most salient dimensions of the guidelines, in describing HL learners’ proficiency levels. She posited that this dimension “tells us little about the level at which Hispanic bilinguals should be placed along the existing continuum” (p. 397).

A third issue worth noting here is the role of the four skills -- listening, speaking, reading, and writing -- in curricular goals. In a previous proposal of proficiency-based objectives distributed internally in the Chinese language program under discussion, an ACTFL proficiency level was matched with a Chinese course: Chinese 111---Novice High, Chinese 121---Intermediate Mid, Chinese 211---Intermediate High, but the proficiency levels as manifest in each
of the four skills were not specified. Does “Novice High” for Chinese 111 mean that students, after taking the first-year three-quarter sequence, will achieve the “Novice High” level for all the four skills, i.e., speaking, listening, reading, and writing? It may be necessary to break down the proficiency levels according to the four skills, depending on the focus and mission of the program. Typically, mainstream foreign language learners would desire to achieve higher proficiency levels in speaking and listening than reading and writing. Due to HL learners’ unique linguistic profiles, this holistic proficiency goal could be especially problematic. It is well-known that a distinct feature of HL learners is their unbalanced distribution of linguistic skills: their proficiency in speaking and listening is substantially more advanced than in reading and writing. Therefore, it seems critical to break down the curricular goals into the four language skills rather than use a holistic label.

An additional potential challenge related to setting up curricular goals involves HL learners. Many scholars strongly advocate that goals for these learners should be different from those set for mainstream foreign language learners as they have different learning needs. The Steering Committee of the UC Consortium for Language Learning & Teaching (2002), the leading committee in HL education in the U.S., presented guidelines for HL education that include some of the following suggestions. Please note that “HLs” in this document means “heritage language learners”.

Although some HLs may be able to pass a proficiency test and satisfy the university language requirement, they should be encouraged to continue to study their home languages in order to attain a high level of proficiency. Programs that would motivate HLs to attain this [high level of] proficiency should establish goals of instruction that would take into account linguistic profiles of HLs learners as well as their motivations for studying the heritage language. For example, goals for HLs can be set higher than those for non-HLs within the same period of study. In addition, HLs typically have a cultural literacy that beginning foreign language students do not have. Such knowledge is a skill that should be valued and built upon. Accordingly, the goals of instruction for HLs should be grounded in the social conventions of the language taught and the communities where the language is used. (p. 3)

The above notwithstanding, no well-established model of curricular goals for HL learners, is widely available to date, which means the present project may make a pioneering contribution to the field. Based on a review of literature on HL lan-
language education, some experience of classroom teaching, and some preliminary findings from a needs analysis study of Chinese heritage learners, this author believes the curricular goals for HL learners may need to attach importance to literacy abilities (i.e., reading & writing abilities), linguistic register, vocabulary range, and cultural literacy.

Finally, the difficulty level of the Chinese language demands caution when setting up realistic proficiency goals. The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the Department of State has defined four categories of foreign languages on the basis of the difficulty for native speakers of English. According to the FSI, the most commonly taught languages—Spanish and French—are both Category I languages, whereas less commonly taught languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic are classified as Category IV. According to FSI figures, in order to achieve the same level of proficiency, students need three times more hours of instruction in a Category IV language than they do for languages classified as Category I (Walker, 1989). Thus, when drawing on established models of curricular goals for languages of lower categories, it is necessary to take this factor into consideration.

4. Curricular Goals: A Proposal

Despite many types of criticism (Liskin-Gasparro, 2003; Rifkin, 2003; Trammell, 1991), the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1982, 1986, 2000, 2012) and the Standards of Foreign Language Learning (1996, 1999, 2006) have created a huge positive impact on foreign language education in the U.S. This section first discusses the background and impact of these two frameworks to justify their adoption as a theoretical foundation, and then presents a proposal for program goals and proficiency-based course objectives.

4.1 Theoretical Background

As early as the 1980s, many scholars (e.g. Lambert, 1987; Schulz, 1988) had already seen the necessity of developing and using “a common metric” to measure foreign language proficiency across all languages. The President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (1980) called for the establishment of “language proficiency achievement goals for the end of each year of study at all levels, with special attention to speaking proficiency” (p. 23).

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were then created to respond to this call. Trammell (1991) explains the historical background of the guidelines in the following way:

The guidelines originated as ACTFL’s response to the recommendations
of the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies in 1979. … These recommendations led to an ACTFL proficiency guidelines research proposal funded in 1981 by the United States Department of Education. ACTFL's first proposed task was to create a set of generic proficiency goals in the four skills for each level of attainment (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior) and then language-specific proficiency goals in each of the three commonly taught languages, followed by ones for less commonly taught languages. These goals would not be directly linked to time spent in the classroom or to specific achievement-oriented tests of vocabulary and grammar. The emphasis was to be on functional proficiency in each of the four skills. The ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines were published in 1982. Subsequently, the guidelines were revised with input from the language teaching community. (Trammell, 1991, p. 14)

After two decades’ use and development, the guidelines have been very well received in the field. For example, Omaggio (1983) believed they provided a yardstick for instructional planning and progress assessment. She also opined that the benefit of using proficiency as an “organizing principle” of curriculum development and assessment lay in its descriptive and predictive power for comparing different programs and methodologies (p. 330). Liskin-Gasparro (2003) noted that “[the proficiency guidelines] have been institutionalized in foreign language professional circles in the United States through their prominence in the textbooks used in foreign language teacher education programs and, more recently, in the Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century” (p. 484).

In like fashion, Difffey (1992) maintained that the American model of program design was exemplified by the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and based on “pre-established descriptions of language proficiency for different levels of a sequential program” (p. 208). Rifkin (2003) saw the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the “proficiency movement” that followed as landmarks in the history of foreign language education in the United States. He went a step further to describe the oral proficiency guidelines as “the only nationally recognized criteria for the assessment of communicative competence in speaking across languages” (p. 582).

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century have also been shown to have a huge influence in the field of language teaching (Byrnes, 2008; Liskin-Gasparro, 2003; Magnan, et al., 2012). The quotation below gives a brief introduction of the Standards and demonstrates its impact on foreign lan-
guage education in the U.S.

The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1996, 1999, 2006) represent a major effort for setting goals for language instruction across the United States and across instructional levels. They provide descriptions of what “language students should know and be able to do” (2006, p.13) through 11 content standards in five goal areas, the five C’s—Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. … The framework of interrelated goals has helped states institute standards for learning, helped teachers set learning goals, and helped students achieve them. It has had a major impact on language teaching and student learning in the United States, as shown by the recent ACTFL survey of the profession. This survey revealed that 80% of teachers follow a local or department curriculum based on the National Standards, on state standards (which 78% of teachers reported are based on the National Standards), or both. The survey also included a database of 591 scholarly publications about the Standards and their instructional applications, showing their considerable diffusion in the field. (Magnan, et al, 2012, p. 170-171)

Liskin-Gasparro (2003) also pointed out that the national standards document had served “as the basis for the curriculum frameworks for foreign language instruction developed by 49 of the 50 states” (p. 484).

In light of the above, in order align with instruction of other foreign languages and standardize curriculum development, college-level Chinese language programs in the U.S. may also need to use the ACTFL proficiency guidelines and the Standards for Foreign Language Learning as guidance for program building and curriculum design. The present project is a direct response to this call.

As previously mentioned, the ACTFL proficiency guidelines demonstrate inadequacy in describing and assessing the proficiency levels of Chinese HL learners despite their benefits and advantages. In order to address this issue, the present proposal separates course proficiency goals into four skills-based areas and encourages instructors to outline specific objectives in the areas that Chinese HL learners need the most improvement. It is also important for instructors to turn abstract terms in the guidelines into concrete language in course syllabi. Below is a tentative proposal of program goals and proficiency-based course objectives for a four-year, dual-track college-level Chinese language program.
4.2 Program Goals, Mission, and Vision

In an increasingly interconnected world, learning a foreign language such as Mandarin Chinese affords a powerful key to success. Aligned with the Standards for Foreign Language Learning, the Chinese Language Program aims to educate students to be linguistically competent and culturally aware so that they can communicate successfully in Mandarin Chinese across cultures and borders. The dual-track (mainstream and heritage) curriculum of the Chinese language program adopts the proficiency-based framework and promotes a well-rounded development of communicative competency (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and cultural literacy in Mandarin Chinese. The students will be able to know how, when, and why to say what to whom in Mandarin Chinese and be adequately prepared for life, work, and research in Mandarin-speaking countries. More specifically, we endeavor to educate students to be able to:

• Consistently demonstrate appropriate levels of functional fluency in Mandarin Chinese.
• Communicate in linguistically and socio-culturally appropriate ways in Mandarin Chinese in real-world situations.
• Interpret diverse authentic public media (audio, visual, and print) in which Mandarin Chinese is the principal language of communication.
• Write personal thoughts and opinions in a coherent, persuasive manner in Mandarin Chinese.
• Develop deep cross-cultural understanding of the values, attitudes, and beliefs in contemporary Chinese society.

4.3 Proficiency Objectives

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are used as reference to set up instructional goals and the proficiency objectives for each instructional level for the two tracks detailed below. The institution under discussion adopts the quarter system. Each of the courses in the above table is a three-quarter sequence. For example, Chinese 111 consists of Chinese 111-1, 111-2, and 111-3. Chinese 111, 121, 211, and 311 are first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth-year Chinese language courses respectively and are designed for traditional foreign language learners; Chinese 115, 125, 215, and 315 are first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth-year Chinese language courses designed for heritage learners.

It should be noted that the proficiency objectives listed above have drawn on my colleagues’ feedback, Dr. Tianwei Xie’s unpublished research results on students’ proficiency achievements across various courses, and other published or
unpublished documents (e.g. Ke, 2006; Ning, 2006). Although they are well-grounded, they await testing in practice.

Table 1 Proficiency-based Course Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Mainstream Track</th>
<th>Heritages Track</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese 111</td>
<td>Novice High</td>
<td>Intermediate Low to Advanced Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese 121</td>
<td>Intermediate Mid</td>
<td>Advanced Mid to Advanced High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese 211</td>
<td>Intermediate High</td>
<td>Advanced Mid to Advanced High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese 311</td>
<td>Advanced-Low</td>
<td>Advanced High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on research results and other relevant resources (e.g. Ke, 2006), there seems to be a consensus among Chinese language educators that the proficiency level of the writing skill tends to be somewhat lower than the proficiency demonstrated in the other three skills among the same group of learners. This is reflected in the table of proficiency objectives.

HL learners sitting in the same class typically have diverse backgrounds and exhibit various levels of listening and speaking skills (e.g. Carreira & Kagan, 2011; Kagan, 2005; Valdés, 1989). Thus, realistic course objectives for the her-
itage track need to allow for a certain range of variability in order to address the issue of heterogeneity as proposed in the table above.

Finally, compared to the proficiency objectives of commonly taught languages, those outlined above for Chinese language learners are relatively lower, especially for reading and writing skills. This is because Chinese is identified to be a category IV language, a comparatively more difficult foreign language for English-speaking learners due to its character-based writing system and tonal nature.

5. Curricular Goals and Other Elements

Once sound curricular goals are established, the most important issue revolves around implementation. It is essential that the goals be effectively integrated into and supported by other elements of foreign language education such as teaching, assessment, course design, materials, and teacher training. Otherwise, no matter how wonderful they are, curricular goals are no more than an abstract and isolated entity with no grounding in the realities of language teaching and learning.

5.1 Goals and Teaching

It is self-evident that goals should be closely connected with and effectively supported by teaching, which includes aspects ranging from course design to materials to teaching approach. For example, the materials should be carefully chosen to guarantee that they facilitate achievement of the stated learning goals. The goals listed in a course syllabus not only need to incorporate the ACTFL guidelines but also should be stated in such a way that they are accessible to the students and tailored to the materials in use. The teaching approach(es) should also be carefully selected and clearly articulated to ensure their effectiveness in achieving the goals.

5.2 Goals and Testing

Several scholars in the field of Chinese language education in the U.S. have recognized the close relationship between goals and testing in curriculum development (e.g. Ke, 2006; Ning, 2006). Ke (2006) reports an assessment model of Chinese language education developed and implemented at the University of Iowa which nicely connects goals and testing and could potentially serve as a model of testing for all college-level Chinese language programs across the U.S. Ning (2006) holds that “a well-designed program will measure differences in student performance at entry to and exit from each component course against program goals defined for that level” (p. 5). She further suggests that the lan-
language coordinator(s) work with the faculty to design a bank of task-based test items reflecting level goals in all four skill areas, which are to be administered at the beginning and as part of a final exam at the end of semester. Such insight is commendable in that the assessment materials (i.e., midterm exam, final exam) of each course need to fully reflect curricular goals. For example, a final exam that heavily relies on translation exercises is by no means able to indicate how well the program is meeting its goals in communicative competence.

5.3 Goals and Teacher Training

Despite the student-centered framework, instructors still play a key role in language classrooms. In order to guarantee the achievement of curricular goals, proper teacher training is essential to ensure instructors are on the same page, share a common teaching philosophy, conduct classes under a unified approach, adopt similar class procedures, and have a clear understanding of curricular goals, not in an abstract sense, but in a practical form. In other words, instructors need to be trained so that they are able to implement the curricular goals in everyday classroom practices.

6. Conclusion, Limitations, Implications, and Resources

In an era of rapid development, it is very important for the field of Chinese language education to standardize curriculum and instruction and innovate existing teaching and curricular practices. In particular, it is of great significance to use a generally accepted framework for curriculum design and a common metric for the articulation of curricular goals. The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century and the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines have been widely adopted for curriculum development in many foreign languages other than Chinese across the U.S. This article presents the efforts of a college-level Chinese language program to move in this direction, hoping that more institutions will place curricular innovation and the setting of proficiency-based curricular goals on their agendas.

This article focuses on the importance of the construction of sound curricular goals in the process of curriculum development. A critical challenge related to such construction involves the need for the development of differentiated instructional goals for Chinese HL learners that are not easily captured by the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The problem has been partially addressed by separating mainstream and HL goals into different skills-based categories and setting up different goals for different skill areas. However, the unique linguistic profiles of HL learners and their learning goals may require a completely different set of
proficiency guidelines. Curriculum development is, in general, an underdeveloped area that needs special attention.

This article also draws attention to the close relationships between curricular goals and other curricular components. As different components of a curriculum are closely connected with one another, the setting of new goals or revising existing ones would inevitably involve innovation at the program level. Different programs may attach importance to different components in curriculum design or innovation depending on their focus or mission. For the purposes of robust and systematic curriculum development and innovation, different components (e.g. needs analysis, teaching, material development, assessment) of a curriculum should be periodically examined, designed, and adjusted to ensure that they are well-designed and properly implemented individually and, at the same time, effectively connected and integrated into the whole curriculum.

It should be noted that the work presented in this article is preliminary. The proficiency-based course objectives outlined here are based on instructor perception rather than empirical evidence. Well-conceived empirical studies and powerful assessment tools should be designed to examine the appropriateness of these objectives in the future. In addition, these course objectives were formulated for the specific context of the institution under discussion. For example, at this university, students meet 50 minutes a day, five days a week for first-year and second-year mainstream Chinese courses, which may not be the case for many other institutions. Thus, caution needs to be taken when applying the objectives beyond the context of the university under discussion.

The field of Chinese language education in the U.S. faces an unprecedented opportunity today. Curriculum design in general and articulation of curricular goals in particular need energetic attention. The tasks are significant and meaningful yet very challenging. Throughout the process of curriculum design, this author collected the following wealth of useful resources, many of which were shared by scholars in the field across the country. Hopefully, they may be of some use to Chinese language programs that continue their efforts in this area.

### Documents

1. Summary of ACE Credit Recommendations for Official ACTFL OPI Ratings (shared by Dr. Jianhua Bai, Kenyon College and Dr. Tianwei Xie, University of California-Long Beach)
   

2. Four-year instructional Goals for the Chinese language (shared by Dr. Cynthia Ning, University of Hawai‘i at MĀnoa)
   
   [http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/NetWorks/NW47.pdf](http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/NetWorks/NW47.pdf)
3. Curricular goals of first-year and second-year Chinese language courses at Stanford University (shared by Dr. Chaofen Sun, Stanford University)  

4. A Model of Formative Task-Based Language Assessment for Chinese as a Foreign Language  (Shared by Dr. Chuanren Ke, University of Iowa)  
http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15434311laq0302_6#.VLQBk9LF9dc

5. ACTFL Chinese Proficiency Guidelines (shared by Dr. Zhiqiang Li, University of San Francisco)  

6. California Dept. of Education, Content Standards for World Language  
(shared by Dr. Zhiqiang Li, University of San Francisco)  
http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/

7. California Dept. of Education, Curriculum Frameworks for World Languages  
(shared by Dr. Zhiqiang Li, University of San Francisco)  
http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/fl/cf/


9. Curriculum Guidelines for Heritage Language Classrooms at the University of California (shared by Dr. Olga. Kagan, University of California at Los Angeles)  
http://nhlrc.ucla.edu/nhlrc/page/curriculumguidelines/materials

10. ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012  

11. ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners 2012  
http://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/PerformanceDescriptorsLanguageLearners.pdf

12. The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century  

**Associations/Centers**

1. ACTFL-American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages  
http://www.actfl.org/
2. Language Testing International
   http://www.languagetesting.com/
3. Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA)
   http://www.carla.umn.edu/
4. Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR)
   http://clear.msu.edu/clear/
5. National Foreign Language Associations (shared by Dr. Cecilia Chang, Williams College)
   http://www.scolt.org/index.php/foreign-language-associations
6. Association of Departments of Foreign Languages
   http://www.adfl.org/bulletin/
7. National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages
   http://www.ncolctl.org/
8. U.S. foreign languages flagship programs
   http://www.thelanguageflagship.org/chinese
9. National Heritage Language Resource Center
   http://www.nhlrc.ucla.edu/nhlrc

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References


