

# Preparing Students for the Global Workplace: The Relevance of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP)

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## Abstract

*Acquiring second language and intercultural skills tied to real-world contexts is key to personal and professional success for students in today's globally connected society. This paper defines and details the benefits of integrating a current Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) approach, which connects language learning and intercultural skills across disciplines, particularly professional schools, and prepares students for the 21st century workplace. Additionally, the paper provides an overview of the current state of LSP alongside specific resources such as a professional learning network that brings together K-20 educators interested in developing innovative curriculum for language learning that prepares students for a variety of career paths.*

**Key words:** *Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), global competence, language instruction/language learning, careers, intercultural competence*

## Background

As world economies become more integrated, industry and educational reports regularly tout the need for language and cultural skills to succeed in the 21st century workplace (Davies, Fidler, & Gorbis, 2011; Language Flagship Report, 2009; Fenstermacher, 2013; Languages: State of the Nation Report, 2013; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012; Across the Atlantic- Languages for All?, 2014). The ability to analyze and solve complex global issues taking into account diverse perspectives is not only necessary for those who will work abroad, but also for those entering the increasingly diverse U.S. workforce who will virtually collaborate with clients and colleagues around the world. Singmaster (2014) cites this need for globally competent students to meet the demands of changing demographics in the U.S. workforce, to strengthen U.S. economic competitiveness, and to maintain national security.

Many educational researchers discuss the importance of global competence (Caligiuri & Di Santo, 2001; Parkinson, 2009), which Hunter (2004) defines as “having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one’s environment” (p.1). The Asia Society issued a report on Edu-

cating for Global Competence in which it defines global competence as “the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance” (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2011, p. xxiii). The American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) 2014 Position Statement expands the definition to explicitly include language skills. It emphasizes the need to communicate with cultural understanding in more than one language as an essential attribution of global competence. LSP as a discipline bridges this gap between the definitions of global competence that may or may not include language skills precisely because it has the capacity to integrate languages and cultures across subject areas that bring relevance to the curriculum and prepare students to navigate the global workplace.

### **Overview of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP)**

Through an LSP approach, educators can better prepare students to interact appropriately across a broad range of professional and personal real-world contexts. A common misconception is that LSP curriculum focuses only on terminology and rote dialogues. According to M. Long (2010), language for ‘professional use’ goes beyond being a technical course and demands critical thinking skills and deeper cultural knowledge that have always been fundamental elements of humanities education in language and literature. What has changed from the traditional approach to language and culture courses is the type of texts and situations being studied. García Laborda (2011) adds an emphasis on learners and their plans for using the language studied in his definition of LSP as “the teaching of a language as a second or foreign language for certain groups of students to whom the syllabus, tasks and methodology are especially tailored to their interests and needs” (p. 1).

An LSP approach helps students discover and practice the types of communication skills and cultural knowledge they need to meet their specific professional goals (Crouse, 2013). In addition to these practical communication skills, LSP materials and pedagogical activities can help students develop empathy and a deeper understanding of other perspectives by taking into consideration contexts beyond those with which they are already familiar. Empathy and understanding of the “other” is cited as a top skill required to successfully interact with an increasingly diverse citizenry (Anders, 2014). LSP courses in higher education have traditionally focused on professions including business, medicine, and law enforcement. However, recent findings by Long & Uscinski (2012) show that LSP courses are expanding across languages and professions such as leadership, STEM, tourism, translation/interpretation, legal, diplomacy and to a variety of specific topics within healthcare.

While LSP has historically been more prevalent in higher education curriculum, it has been emerging at the secondary level. There is some literature on business language within the secondary curriculum (Fryer, 1986; Grosse, 1988; Risner, 2006; Takami, 2010), but only anecdotal information about other industry themes being integrated into K-12 classrooms. More recently documented secondary level courses have expanded the scope of LSP by offering courses such as “Language for Leadership” (Bleess & Cornelius, 2012) and “Language for the Community and the Workplace” (Beeck, 2013). These language courses allow students with broad career interests to acquire professional skills with a global perspective as they contemplate what type of work to pursue in the future.

At any grade level, integration of LSP content into the curriculum develops skills for real-world use of the target language. It strengthens the notion of language study by helping students see language in context as valuable for their professional future and not just an academic requirement. Students see the value of language study when it is applied to workplace skills. LSP makes connections across disciplines, helping students see the big picture of the need to be able to navigate an increasingly complex world. When students learn the language of the workplace, examine the cultural practices of international professionals, and discover that their future supervisors, clients and colleagues might be from the target culture, then they see the potential outcomes and impact of language study.

As the demands of the world and workplace change, educators also need to adapt their curriculum to student-centered learning and consider a variety of skills to prepare them for multiple perspectives. Figure 1 illustrates the overlapping elements necessary to navigate the global workplace and how language and culture occupy the center. The four “Cs” of communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration as proposed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2009) function best when tied to intercultural competence and language proficiency. For students who will be interacting in virtual spaces and on teams at a distance, it is important to master other skills such as digital competence. This implies more than using technological devices, but also the ability to effectively deploy them to collaborate across national borders and cultures (Ilomäki, Kantosalo, & Lakkal, 2011). Connecting to classrooms in the target culture and hosting virtual guests through Skype and other free online tools are excellent ways for students to improve their digital literacy.

In addition to area and technical expertise, students need a grounding in the liberal arts to understand and connect the politics, history, and economics of nations and regions across the globe (Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006). And finally, students should develop empathy for other cultures by reflecting on their own cultural expectations and norms (Anders, 2014; Hunter et al, 2006) in order to successfully navigate a variety of diverse contexts by utilizing the intercultural competencies they acquire in their LSP courses.



Risner (2011)

Figure 1. The 4 “Cs” of 21st century skills expanded. Adapted from Risner, 2011.

## LSP & Proficiency

A primary concern for language educators is meeting standards and building student proficiency to comply with ACTFL's five "C" standards: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. An LSP focus can meet these standards. Table 1 lists examples of real world applications of the five C's and activities that can be implemented to reinforce them in an LSP classroom.

Table 1

### *Fives C's Applied to LSP and Real World Contexts*

<b>Standard</b>	<b>LSP Focus</b>	<b>Real-World Application</b>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice communicating in a variety of work situations</li> <li>• Integrate pair work with meaningful tasks that require students to get accurate new information</li> <li>• Interview professionals in TL</li> <li>• Telecollaborate with classes across borders</li> <li>• Blog about relevant workplace topics in the TL</li> <li>• Build a professional learning network in their field of interest through social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handle tasks that vary from simple clerical messages taken by phone to scheduling and leading meetings giving presentations</li> <li>• Interact professionally in TL</li> </ul>
Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze case studies, films, documentaries related to the global workplace</li> <li>• Conduct virtual or local consulting projects</li> <li>• Telecollaborate with teams across borders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiate and accomplish goals according to local norms</li> <li>• Understand and adapt to local perspectives</li> </ul>
Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bridge the gap between the humanities and the professional schools, other fields</li> <li>• Invite guest speakers from various fields, webinars</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use appropriate terminology in specific contexts according to subject or professional area in question</li> </ul>
Comparisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compare and contrast professional contexts in case studies, films, documentaries</li> <li>• Identify similarities and differences across workplaces through virtual or local consulting projects</li> <li>• Telecollaborate with classes across borders to explicitly identify varying professional norms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize and respect differences in cultural norms</li> </ul>

<p>Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide service learning opportunities</li> <li>• Provide internships, volunteer work</li> <li>• Coordinate site visits at relevant venues in community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain an open mind to interact in personal and professional contexts through an ethnorelative* view rather than an ethnocentric one</li> </ul>
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*\*Ability to understand and accept a variety of viewpoints different from one’s own.*

As Table 1 shows, LSP puts some of the often-neglected “Cs” such as Communities and Connections on equal footing with the others-Comparisons, Communication, and Culture (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). LSP provides a means to fully embrace the 5 “Cs” within the classroom and beyond it—both spatially and temporally.

**Integrating LSP in the Curriculum**

An LSP approach to foreign language teaching focuses on the needs of learners who study languages to complement their pre-professional studies and plan to use languages in diverse industries and careers. LSP needs can be different at each institution and will vary by student interest and social and employment demographics of the local community. For instance, on a campus with a high number of pre-med students, medical-focused LSP courses might be in high demand. The proximity of a strong law school could drive demand for legal-focused courses. Lists of current minors and majors will indicate other key areas of study so that courses for specific purposes can be built around enrollment. LSP course types might also be influenced by the industries surrounding a community such as logistics and international trade in a major port area or engineering (STEM) where there is a large concentration of high tech firms.

Basturkmen (2010) stresses the importance of needs analysis in the development of English for Specific Purposes (also applicable to LSP) courses and describes it as a “pre-course design process.” As part of the design process the instructor determines the course focus, content related to terminology and culture skills to be covered, and the learning methodology. Materials resulting from the needs analysis are based on aspects such as specialty or topic, learner situation, skills needed, and expected outcomes (García Laborda, 2011). LSP activities should ultimately infuse intercultural components through guided reflection and comparison between the world of origin and the target community (CoE/CEFR, 2001).

Wherever possible, LSP course design should also include opportunities for students to interact and engage with professionals in the workplace through service learning, consulting projects, shadowing, or internships. One example of this type of integration is the high school World Language and Business Leadership program at the Center for Advanced Professional Studies (CAPS) in Kansas where business students with intermediate language proficiency complete an internship at a local firm using their language skills. In this way, students experience first-hand the daily operations of local companies while developing intercultural skills as they work on

a variety of projects with local employees and others based abroad through virtual connections. Building more partnerships with industry professionals and making interdisciplinary connections between Colleges of Liberal Arts and professional schools (or K-12 career academies) can be the role of LSP in educational contexts.

Developing solid relationships across colleges can aid in developing workforce skills that bring together technical expertise and global competence across a variety of content areas. In the field of engineering, an LSP approach could be a valuable contribution to the education of 21st century engineers where soft skills are not a required part of coursework, but certainly necessary for teams of engineers working to solve problems on a global scale. By integrating an intercultural and multilingual, interdisciplinary approach, LSP instructors foster critical reflection on historical, ethical and social aspects of engineering (Arnó-Macià & Rueda-Ramos, 2011). An example of this type of interdisciplinary collaboration at the K-12 level is through the integration of language in career academies. One Florida school has established a program where all healthcare academy students take Spanish courses that are adapted specifically to the medical field (Caplan, 2015; Josey, 2015). The program is in the early stages, but has plans to eventually develop projects where students work with local health professionals and Latino populations.

Increased articulation across disciplines and colleges, and education and industry has the potential to improve the way we prepare our students for the 21st century workplace by reducing boundaries between education and work environments. Furthermore, an emphasis on articulation and collaboration among K-12 and post-secondary levels can contribute to higher levels of proficiency as we strive toward regular offerings of LSP-focused second language courses from elementary levels and beyond.

Offering a full LSP course or program for any profession requires garnering support from colleagues, obtaining course approval, developing content, and recruiting students. However, LSP activities which focus on future work-related skills can also be integrated on a small scale in existing courses from business to mathematics. Sample activities for courses consist of basic communicative tasks that are needed across a variety of job possibilities and in everyday life such as taking messages, answering the phone, introducing oneself while using appropriate body language and gestures, and writing numbers in a variety of contexts such as during sales negotiations.

Another classroom-tested activity is introducing business cards. Students can create their own business cards as well as learn about variations in content and how they are exchanged across cultures. Lessons using foreign currency build math skills by converting exchange rates and increasing awareness of national symbols and historical figures often found on bills and coins. Other examples for an introductory level class are learning about personality traits and discussing which words people mostly use across cultures to define themselves on their resume or LinkedIn profile. For example, cultural differences across cultures might include listing marital status or not on online profiles, what kind of photo to include, or even submitting a cover letter by hand to analyze handwriting style. At the intermediate level the activity can be expanded to developing a resume or profile in the target language according to their career interests.

Other sample activities at the intermediate to advanced levels include discussing concepts and fundamental questions about leadership through literature as in March's (2003) lecture-length film *Passion and Discipline: Don Quixote's Lessons for Leadership*. M. Long's (2015) recent text *Teaching Gender for the Multicultural Workplace* offers students an additional perspective to compare and contrast gender dynamics in the workplace across cultures. Career exploration projects followed by face-to-face or virtual guests who use language and culture in their work are also ways to get students thinking about professional and real-world use of these types of global skills.

Full descriptions of some of the lesson ideas mentioned above and more are available through the free online handbook *Connecting Foreign Language Curriculum to Workplace Skills* (Risner & Markley, 2015), a collection of intermediate lessons to enhance the curriculum with content and activities that make language learning more relevant for students. The examples are in Spanish and have been used in K-12 courses to date, but the activities can be adapted to other languages and levels. The goal of the handbook is to provide a ready-to-use resource that teachers can expand upon and adapt to their particular teaching context. The handbook is one of the few resources originally developed for K-12 classrooms.

A plethora of existing resources and activities that integrate intercultural issues into the LSP curriculum are available online. Some case study examples that include teaching notes, discussion questions, and supplementary resources are available for Portuguese (Kelm & Risner, 2007), French (Sacco & Senne, 2013), and Spanish in the business Spanish textbook *Éxito Comercial* (Doyle & Fryer, 2015). An e-handbook with video clips on how to use business language case studies in the classroom is available through the George Washington University CIBER Business Language Program website (Gonglewski & Helms, n.d.). A rationale for and sample case activities on leadership in the language classroom are presented in *Fusing Language Learning and Leadership Development: Initial Approaches and Strategies* by Spaine Long, Le-Loup, Derby & Reyes (2014). Finally, the sixth and most recent edition of *Éxito Comercial* (2015) includes readings and leadership-focused activities throughout the text.

### **LSP Professional Learning Network**

While the field of LSP in the United States extends back for more than 30 years (Grosse & Voght, 1991), it still maintains a minority presence within foreign language curriculum, professional development offerings, and a focus of major professional associations. This is gradually changing and LSP has become more mainstream, (Doyle, 2014; Long & Uzcinski, 2012). Instructional materials and course models are still limited and there is a need for further development of theoretical foundations and empirical studies. One attempt to unite LSP instructors at all levels is through the Network of Business Language Educators (NOBLE), a professional learning network established in 2009. NOBLE brings together K-20 educators interested in curriculum and program development that integrate the study of foreign language and culture across disciplines, particularly professional schools and career academies. While the NOBLE acronym only includes business, the network promotes all LSP areas. The NOBLE website provides LSP resources, models, research, and events to those just starting out so that they can avoid re-inventing the wheel.

The network also organizes professional development opportunities that connect educators and industry professionals to promote real-world connections that foster innovative teaching and learning approaches. Table 2 lists the type of resources available at nbl.org.

Table 2

*Resources at nbl.org*

<b>Resource Type</b>	<b>Brief Description</b>
Course Models	K-12 syllabi, program development information
Program Models	Post-secondary certificates, minors, majors, continuing education courses
Publications	Journals and special issues focused on LSP
Professional Development	Webinars, workshops, conferences, LSP meetings
Advocacy	Academic and industry reports, video clips
Social Media	Blog, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn
Languages and Professional Fields	Business, Healthcare, Legal, STEM, Law Enforcement, Translation
Events Calendar	Conferences, Call for Papers

NOBLE goes beyond compiling resources and aims to increase LSP visibility by leveraging group strength connecting the humanities to professional schools and career academies to build connectivity and advance the field. NOBLE also provides social media platforms to stay engaged with colleagues virtually. The ultimate goal is to develop foreign language leaders that promote change and prepare globally competent students with increased levels of language proficiency and cultural competence. Table 3 lists some of the activities that take place through NOBLE and how they fulfill needs in advancing an LSP approach.

Table 3

*How NOBLE Promotes LSP*

<b>Activity</b>	<b>PD*</b>	<b>Free LSP Resources</b>	<b>Language Advocacy</b>	<b>Empower Educators</b>	<b>Empower Grad Students</b>
Workshops	X	X		X	
Videos			X	X	X
Conference Sessions	X	X			

Exhibit Booths at State, Regional, and National Conferences		X		X	
State Conference LSP Track	X	X			
LSP Webinars	X	X			
Co-present with K-16 Faculty/Grads				X	X
Develop Materials	X	X			
Monthly Newsletter Social Media	X	X	X	X	

*\*Professional development*

LSP teacher training is crucial for instructors to develop practical how-to skills to integrate relevant and authentic language activities in their classrooms. With basic LSP training, language instructors can see how to make relevant connections to authentic contexts that lead to deeper learning, increased language proficiency, and ultimately to global competence. Resources, curricular models, and training to support implementation of LSP programs such as those available through NOBLE must be widely disseminated via social media channels, professional publications and listservs, at professional conferences, and in-service continuing education events (Risner & Markley, 2013).

Many national language conferences are held annually where little by little, LSP is becoming more prominent in sessions and workshops. Some sample sessions since 2012 at the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) conference covered diverse LSP areas such as translation, healthcare, advertising, government careers, business, global internships, sustainability and general career skills. These sessions focused on languages ranging from French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Russian as well as sessions that applied across languages. Since 1981, a conference on Foreign Languages for Business was held annually at Eastern Michigan University, which eventually became a series of ongoing events sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. They are professional development opportunities provided by the Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBER). The first CIBER was held in San Diego in 1999. The most recent iteration of this event is the International Symposium on Languages for Specific Purposes (ISLSP), which convenes every other year at different campus locations and includes all areas of LSP.

Many teachers are unable to take advantage of existing professional development opportunities or attend events outside of their local area due to limited funding. Virtual platforms such as webinars and strong, highly-trafficked social media channels together with robust LSP professional development offerings at state and regional conferences will benefit faculty at all levels. By improving affordability, responding to the local context, and developing community connections, these strategies for dissemination of LSP will reach a mix of K-12 and post-secondary faculty and consequently enhance articulation between levels (Risner & Markley, 2013).

## Conclusion

This chapter makes the case for the seamless fit between LSP and U.S. language teaching standards, which provides an excellent way forward for language education in the U.S. The usefulness of the activities and resources provided above are supported by the 2011 report on Global Engagement U.S. Higher Education in the 21st Century, which provides strong evidence of the need for LSP programming to promote global competence. The report voices concern that U.S. students have a minimal knowledge of other cultures through interaction from long-term exchange programs, while non-U.S. students are much more regularly immersed with other languages and cultures. Even when long-term exchange programs are not viable for U.S. students, LSP-focused programming builds global competence by integrating language and culture skills across disciplines and course activities that give students a chance to apply what they are learning into the workplace and community.

One of the many advantages of LSP is that it can be adopted on a very small scale by simply adding one professional element to a single section of a course or integrating one new lesson or activity from LSP resources such as those listed in this chapter. At present, LSP programming is disseminated instructor to instructor, course to course, and program to program. Through increased publication efforts, a stronger presence at local and national conferences, and growth in virtual communities of educators, the value of LSP will increase in educational contexts as well as in broader communities.

In addition, for the emerging field of LSP to advance we need to prepare graduate students for the field, provide more options for professional development that is specifically focused on LSP, and garner support from decision-making administrators. Articulation across languages, academic subject areas and industry automatically occurs as LSP programs develop. LSP has the potential to stimulate foreign language enrollments in the U.S. while also meeting the need for globally competent citizens working toward a sustainable world and future.

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