President’s Message

Dear Colleagues:

Today the teachers in my district received an email from our supportive Superintendent of Schools in which we were encouraged to unplug for our upcoming day off. This is such a kind recommendation. While ideally I would like to remove myself from technology for twenty-four hours, I am finding it hard to keep up with my current workload. Like many of my colleagues and friends, I am struggling to balance my work life and home life, and I am finding it helpful to focus on what I am grateful for:

- Leslie Grahm’s teacher wellness tips on Facebook. I may not be able to take off an entire day, but I can enjoy a sunset.

- The hard work of the Fall Conference Committee, who worked collaboratively to run a successful Fall Conference.

- The new inductees to the CT COLT Future Teachers Honor Society, who bring diverse experiences, research-based practices, energy, and enthusiasm to our community.

- The three new committees organized by the Board of Directors that are thinking deeply about diversity and equity, professional development, and the current Connecticut World Language Curriculum Frameworks.

- My co-workers at school, who are a true family, working together, collaborating, laughing, and helping each other during this incredibly challenging time.

- My students, who bring grit and optimism to school each day, and who are supportive of each other during class, especially with technology issues.

- My caring partner, who keeps feeding me; my son, who dances after dinner, and my dog, Pasta, who often sleeps next to me on the couch while I’m working.

- The teachers in the world language community who are sharing materials, thinking deeply about equity and inclusivity, social justice, and teaching students to think critically about diverse perspectives, and who are working to build connections and community which is so needed at this time.

I am just grateful to be a part of this amazing community of world language educators and learners and believe more than ever in the importance of the work we do each day. I am finishing this letter by asking you to take time to unplug, wherever and whenever you can, because our wellness is critical as we support our students and families. I too may try to take this advice, but first I just need to respond to more emails...

Thank you for all you do.

Amanda Robustelli-Price
President, CT COLT
**In Memoriam**

**Gregory "Señor" Semplice**  
April 29, 1951 ~ August 27, 2020 (age 69)

Greg served CT COLT for several years as the Audio-Visual Coordinator for our Fall Conference. We truly appreciate all his hard work in support of the organization. We offer our most sincere sympathy to his family.

Gregory “Señor” P. Semplice, 69, husband of Melanie (Bobinski) Semplice, unexpectedly passed away on Thursday, August 27, 2020, with his loving son Matt by his side. He was born in Bristol on April 29, 1951. Greg was a lifelong Bristol resident, graduating BEHS class of 1969. He also attended CCSU for both his BS in Spanish and History, and his MS in Educational Technology. At CCSU he was a proud member of Delta Kappa Chi. He was a parishioner, lector, and Eucharist minister at St. Gregory the Great Church. Greg came to teaching late. However, he found his true calling in life in 2001 at St. Joseph High School in Trumbull, CT. There, everyone knew him as “Señor”, class advisor, student council advisor, mentor, and so much more. In addition to his beloved wife, Greg is survived by a son: Matthew Semplice and his girlfriend Kate Lyga of Bristol; his two daughters: Meredith R. Semplice and Rachael M. Semplice and her boyfriend Greg Corbu; and his two granddogs: Stella and Louis B. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on Thursday, September 3rd, 2020, at 10:30 A.M. at St. Gregory the Great Church, 235 Maltby Street, Bristol. Burial was private. Funk Funeral Home, 35 Bellevue Ave, Bristol was honored to serve the Semplice family. In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to St. Mary Magdalen School, 140 Buckingham Street, Oakville, CT 06779 or St. Gregory the Great Church, 235 Maltby Street, Bristol, CT, 06010. Please visit Gregory’s memorial web-site at www.FunkFuneralHome.com.

**Teacher Spotlight**

**Yaosca González de Bemis**  
Spanish Middle School Teacher  
RHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL

Who are you? What and where do you teach?  
My name is Yaosca González and I am originally from Nicaragua. I teach 7th and 8th grade Spanish at RHAM Middle School.

How long have you been teaching? What inspired you to be a part of this profession?  
I have been a teacher for 12 years. I studied to be a teacher in Nicaragua and when I moved to the United States I saw the high demand for Spanish teachers and decided to get certified in Spanish.

What is a belief about teaching languages that you hold near and dear?  
You can’t teach a language without teaching about the culture. They go together. Language shapes the way we think.

What is your favorite place you’ve ever traveled and why?  
I went to Corn Island once and I fell in love with Little corn. Little corn is a very small Island in the Atlantic side of Nicaragua. There are no cars, no electricity except for generators. At night it’s very quiet and you can hear the ocean waves everywhere you are. Tourists eat at the locals’ houses because there are no restaurants. The food was really good. I have never been to a place like that.

What is your favorite cultural food or tradition and why?  
I like food from all over the world. My favorite food is Nicaraguan’s food of course. My favorite tradition is “LA GRITERIA” literally it means to yell. “La griteria” is a religious holiday in Nicaragua. Every 7th of December very devoted people set Altars with the virgin Mary outside their homes. You go out with a group of friends and sing one or two religious songs to the virgin and they give you candy or other treats. It’s very similar to trick or treating but with a religious touch.
What do you like to do when you’re not teaching or preparing for teaching?

I like crafting and baking. I taught myself how to bake and how to sew. Lately I have been making a lot of masks for my friends and family.

Advocacy

Making Connections: Using Our World Language Skills to Advocate for All Language Learners

Michele Back and Manuela Wagner
University of Connecticut, Storrs

Sara is a fourth-grade emergent multilingual learner (EMLL) from Syria whose home language is Arabic. Normally active and chatty, Sara often becomes distracted and unfocused during whole-class instruction, possibly because she does not yet have the proficiency in English to follow the teacher’s detailed instructions. However, Sara’s level of engagement increases daily at 2:30, when her Spanish teacher enters the classroom, rolling in an enormous bulletin board filled with colorful images and words. Perhaps Sara notices that her monolingual English-speaking classmates become language learners like her, or maybe she has noticed the similarities between Arabic and Spanish in many vocabulary words. Whatever the reason, during Spanish class her attention is laser-focused on the teacher and her hand is always in the air, showing a marked difference in behavior from her classwork in English.

Sara’s reactions to her Spanish class illustrates how world language (WL) educators, by virtue of their subject matter, can act as leaders to ensure the academic success of emergent multilingual learners (EMLLs, also known as ELLs). As our schools and communities become more linguistically diverse, WL educators have become important leaders, often in unexpected ways. WL educators’ knowledge of second language acquisition theory and practice make us well-positioned to act as advocates for all language learners, including EMLLs. Moreover, many WL educators speak the home language of EMLLs in their communities—in the case of Connecticut, this language is most often Spanish, but many WL programs in our state offer other languages spoken by emergent bilinguals, such as French, Chinese, and Arabic.

However, few WL educators are trained in ESL-specific protocols, such as sheltered instruction, and most have not had extensive experiences with EMLLs. Additionally, WL education and the education of EMLLs are often considered different, in our opinion wrongly so. This difference is not only assumed by school administrators, but also by language educators and students, as evidenced by the frequent separation of departments teaching a “foreign” language and those teaching English to EMLLs. Despite this academic separation, WL educators are often asked to serve as informal ESL coordinators, especially in smaller districts where a designated coordinator position might not exist. Thrust into these roles, WL educators may find it a challenge to navigate the duties of regular WL classes against the district demands to assess and assist EMLLs, especially if they have not considered how their education and experiences can position them as advocates for these learners. When WL educators do not speak the home language of the school’s EMLLs, these challenges can seem even more daunting.

In this article we share insights from previous literature and our own research in support of the view that educators in WLs and other disciplines ought to work together to empower all language learners. With the right preparation and mindset, WL educators can lead the way in supporting and advocating for EMLLs, while also modeling the value of linguistic diversity to our more “traditional” populations of English home language students. Given the increasing numbers of EMLLs in our schools, language educators’ leadership can help not only language learners, but the school community as a whole. We use examples from our own educational practices to highlight three strategies: lesson planning and delivery, linguistic and cultural comparisons, and fostering linguistic and cultural diversity. We outline how WL educators can harness these research-supported strategies to support, advocate for, and empower all learners in their schools.

Strategy 1: Using SIOP for Lesson planning and Delivery

WL educators have a wealth of knowledge and experience that they can use to support EMLLs. However, we know from experience that it is important to reflect critically on what we already know and where we might need to learn more in order to best support all language learners. An example of a set of principles that are helpful to support EMLLs is the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) (Echevarria, Vogt, and Short, 2004). Many of the instructional components of sheltered instruction are already used in WL classrooms, while others can easily be adapted by educators who have knowledge of how language and language teaching works.

The first component of SIOP, “lesson preparation,” contains six features, many of which WL educators already apply to their teaching. For example, “clearly defined content objectives” (f.1) and “language objectives” (f.2) are helpful for students in all classrooms. WL educators also use “appropriate content concepts” for the age and educational background levels of
their students (f. 3) and certainly are champions in using “supplementary materials” to make lessons clear and meaningful (f. 4), as illustrated by the Spanish teacher’s colorful bulletin board in our introductory vignette. WL educators know how to “adapt content” to various levels of student proficiency (f. 5) and plan and implement “meaningful activities that integrate lesson concepts with language practice opportunities” (f. 6). Similarly, WL educators also know how to “build background” (Component 2) by “linking concepts explicitly to students’ background experiences” (f. 7), “linking past and new concepts” (f. 8), and, especially, by “emphasizing key vocabulary” (f. 9). As seen in the table below, these and other SIOP protocols overlap productively with the standards and practices already well known to most language educators, mainly ACTFL/CAEP and high-leverage teaching practices.

Table 1: Crosswalk for SIOP Protocols, ACTFL/CAEP Standards, and WL HLTPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIOP Protocol</th>
<th>ACTFL/CAEP Standard</th>
<th>HLTP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clearly define content objectives</td>
<td>Candidates Can Effectively Plan Classroom-Based Instruction</td>
<td>Design lessons and tasks that have functional goals, to include specifying clearly the language and activities needed to support and meet the communicative objective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly define language objectives</td>
<td>Integration of Standards in Planning, Classroom Practice, and Use of Instructional Resources</td>
<td>Design and carry out interpersonal communication tasks for pair, small groups, and whole class instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide frequent opportunities for interaction and discussion</td>
<td>Provide meaningful and authentic activities that integrate lesson concepts with language practice opportunities</td>
<td>Provide appropriate feedback in speech and writing on various learning tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrate all language skills into each lesson</td>
<td>Integration of Standards in Planning, Classroom Practice, and Use of Instructional Resources</td>
<td>Provide meaningful and authentic activities that integrate lesson concepts with language practice opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While we have only looked briefly at two of the eight components and nine of the 30 SIOP features, we assure WL educators that the remaining SIOP components (comprehensible input strategies; scaffolding techniques; interaction; practical application; lesson delivery; and review/assessment) are equally relevant and important to WL education. Both of us have used SIOP with pre-service WL educators, who have found it very helpful in their lesson planning, implementation, and assessment. It is important to note that language teachers at first often feel that SIOP does not pertain to language education. We want to emphasize that SIOP is not only useful for language educators, but it also provides an excellent opportunity for language educators to be mentors for their colleagues in promoting research-based practices that support language development.

Strategy 2: Linguistic and Cultural Comparisons

ACTFL’s Comparisons standard encourages students to reflect on the similarities and differences between the students’ home languages and the target language, while the Cultures standard paves the way for students to analyze the products, practices and perspectives of another culture compared to
their own. These approaches to language learning are similar to recent developments in bilingual education, and ones that WL educators can utilize to help EMLLS succeed.

The CUNY-NYS Initiative on Emergent Bilinguals proposed two pedagogical strategies—translanguaging and multilingual ecology—that support and encourage home language use in the school (Celic & Seltzer, 2013). Translanguaging allows EMLLS to use their home language in the classroom in order to help their acquisition of English. By using their home language, students can reflect more carefully on the differences and similarities between their language and English and master complex academic content more easily. Use of the students’ home language can happen both in and outside of the classroom; rather than reducing their exposure to the target language, translanguaging enhances students’ curiosity of and preparation for the content in the target language.

Many WL educators have collections of books, magazines, and other resources in the languages they teach that can be shared with emergent bilinguals. Streamlining textual resources to fit with other content areas also benefits WL classrooms by reinforcing the Connections standard; that is, content in both languages allows students to more easily make connections between WLs and other disciplines. WL educators can also access a wealth of online resources, including authentic videos, dictionaries, and websites from target language cultures, which can be used to further scaffold EMLLS’ acquisition of content knowledge.

In addition to resources, WL educators, using their knowledge of the target language and culture, can facilitate comparisons between the EMLLS’ home language and English. Some translanguaging strategies include allowing students to read and discuss in their home language before writing or sharing out in English; drafting or developing writing projects in the home language and writing the final draft in English; or using bilingual dictionaries or home language Internet resources to master content. If WL educators know the home languages of these students, they can more easily track these learning processes in that language. Even if WL or other educators do not know the home language, translanguaging is still an excellent strategy to help build vocabulary and content knowledge, as it allows EMLLS to capitalize on what they already know in order to acquire both content and language. Additionally, students understand that their home languages are valued and that they are supported in developing these parts of their identities.

**Strategy 3: Fostering Cultural and Linguistic Diversity**

Like translanguaging, multilingual ecology empowers student home languages in the school setting (García & Menken, 2015). It promotes pride in multilingualism through oral and written language practices throughout the school building in a variety of ways. For example, school-wide texts such as signage, artwork and bulletin boards are displayed in the languages of educators and students. Greetings and parts of the morning announcements are given in a different language or languages each day. Administrators and other school personnel speak to students and each other in their home languages and in English. These actions encourage multilingual flexibility and help emergent bilinguals feel comfortable in their school environments. They also help EMLLS sustain their diverse identities rather than having to adapt to an artificially monolingual society.

There are several ways in which WL educators can lead the way in cultivating a multilingual ecology at their school. After Michele held a professional development seminar on multilingual ecology, one elementary school educator (Sally) worked on specific strategies for her school. During a parents’ night dinner, Sally set up a table where parents and students could write down greetings and other short phrases in their home languages. The response was overwhelming. Sally was inundated with suggestions and discovered many home languages that she was unaware of, including among families whose students were not designated as emergent bilinguals. These greetings and short phrases, in languages such as Chinese, Russian, and Arabic, were posted on the school’s hallway walls. Sally also used Google Translate and parent volunteers to translate signage for the bathrooms, office, school nurse, and cafeteria. Finally, Sally put up a bulletin board near her classroom with images of children experiencing different emotions, and had these emotions translated into several different languages. “I thought it would help children to express how they feel; even when they don’t know English they can point to the picture,” she told me. Now, Sally frequently mentions how students’ eyes light up and how excited they become when they see their home languages on the school walls.

Parents’ nights and open houses are great opportunities for WL educators to not only talk about the languages they teach, but also to promote respect and enthusiasm for multilingualism in general. Parental input on items as simple as greetings in their home language allow WL educators a glimpse into the languages spoken and understood by their students at home. Even in school districts that are predominantly monolingual in English, having different languages posted throughout the school—not just around the WL educators’ classrooms—can help develop intercultural citizenship for all students as they become aware of the many languages spoken around the world.
Another example involves students on a deeper level. Most WL educators are familiar with establishing and running language-specific clubs, yet clubs that celebrate speakers of all languages are also valuable in promoting intercultural understanding and fostering relationships between emergent bilinguals and monolinguals. Martín-Beltrán, et al. (2019) reported on a “language ambassadors” program in Maryland, where high school students recruited from both ESL and Spanish courses got together for regular conversation practice. The authors found that these conversations expanded learning opportunities and positioned emergent bilinguals as experts, allowing them to take pride in their home language and cultures.

A similar program took place in a Connecticut elementary school, where two preservice educators organized a weekly language ambassadors club for third and fourth graders. Activities included training students to teach their homeroom classes greetings in different languages and learning from their EMLL peers about the different languages spoken in the school. Similar to Martín-Beltrán’s findings, students took pride in sharing their expertise in their home languages. This was especially important for EMLLs, who are usually positioned as needing help, rather than as helpers or educators. Moreover, all participants learned about many languages spoken in the school by their peers, even by those who were not designated as ELLs. The multilingual students took on their ambassador role with enthusiasm and shared what they had learned with their classmates who did not participate in the program.

With these strategies, we hope WL educators will feel empowered to capitalize on their knowledge of language education in order to advocate for all language learners. As shown in our introductory vignette, WL classrooms can be places where all students, regardless of their first language, and perhaps especially those with a first language other than the majority language, can have the same learning opportunity and might even be able to shine. Our opportunity, and we would argue, obligation to advocate for all language learners, however, does not stop in our own classrooms. If we learn to apply what we know from WL education to the education of all language learners, continue to learn from and about the various contexts in which language learning occurs, and are willing to share what we know with the larger community in and beyond our schools, we not only become advocates for all language learners, but also better leaders. A slight shift in mindset and end goals may be required, but we firmly believe that by going beyond our classroom walls and departments, our impact on promoting intercultural citizenship, multilingualism, and multiculturalism will only increase.

How have you advocated for emergent bilingual students in your schools? Email backm@ctcolt.org and manuela.wagner@uconn.edu with your stories!

Further reading:

* Lesson Planning and Delivery with SIOP

* Center for Applied Linguistics (2018). Learn about SIOP. [https://www.cal.org/siop/about/](https://www.cal.org/siop/about/)

* Cultural and Linguistic Comparisons

* Fostering Linguistic and Cultural Diversity


The Future Language Educators Recruitment Project: A Mead Leadership Fellow Initiative

By Michele Back

Associate Professor, Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut
Advocacy Coordinator, CTCOLT
World language teachers, as critical stewards for language learning and the best judges of student language proficiency and teaching dispositions, are best positioned to engage in teacher recruitment for this critical shortage area. However, there is a disconnect between ACTFL’s recruitment curriculum, Educators Rising 2.0, which is entirely in English, and the important policy of conducting 90% of classroom instruction in the target language and While ACTFL advises using its existing curriculum as an after-school or lunchtime club activity, the myriad responsibilities of today’s students, combined with the current COVID-19 crisis, make this suggestion difficult to enact.

As 2020’s NECTFL Mead Leadership Fellow, I worked over the summer to bridge this gap. Together with 27 K-16 world language teachers of French, Spanish, and Arabic, we updated, translated, and adapted ACTFL’s Educators Rising 2.0 into accessible, interactive modules for easy incorporation into WL classrooms. After multiple online meetings, edits in Google Docs, formatting and reformating, we created 10 modules in each of the three languages for grades 7-12 and postsecondary, as well as 5 modules in Spanish and French for primary learners in grades 4-6. The secondary/postsecondary modules remain faithful to the original topics of Educators Rising 2.0, which include the benefits of multilingualism, the importance of world language teaching, and various modules on how to teach the three, interrelated communication skills, as well as where to go for more information about becoming a language teacher. The emphasis in the primary modules necessarily diverges from that of the secondary/postsecondary modules, with a greater focus on peer learning and peer tutoring in order to engage younger learners more readily in what they can do now in their languages. Each module includes a Google Slides presentation and an interactive worksheet; many modules also offer supplemental resources and activities. Throughout the modules, we emphasize equity in language learning and teaching by providing target-language examples of the diversity of the French, Spanish, and Arabic-speaking worlds and those who teach these languages. Our adapted modules integrate images, videos, and other resources by and for people of color so that every language learner can see themselves as possible language teachers. Our efforts in this area will ensure that Educators Rising 2.0’s important objectives reach a diverse body of potential teacher candidates, including those who may not have previously considered a career in language teaching.

Swanson (2012) accurately stated that teacher recruitment is ideally a long-term process, requiring regular interventions and up-to-date resources. This approach is mirrored in our adapted modules, which we hope will involve world language teachers in ongoing recruitment and advocacy for the profession within the bounds of their own classrooms and curriculum and without the burden of additional duties. After some discussion, we decided to name this initiative the Future Language Educators Recruitment Project, or FLERP. The conception of FLERP as a project, rather than a static curriculum, highlights what we hope will be a dynamic exchange among K-16 world language teachers, who we encourage to contact us with their feedback and ideas once the curriculum is up and running (more on that below).
Currently, we are implementing pilot versions of the modules with instructors from our team. We will collect survey data from students before and after the modules’ implementation to measure the role of the curriculum on student beliefs about world language teaching. After revision based on survey results, we will disseminate the curriculum among members of state and regional language associations, including CTCOLT, and track the curriculum’s implementation and reception through additional surveys. The modules and materials will also be hosted on ACTFL’s website, similar to the existing Educators Rising 2.0 curriculum. We will present preliminary findings at NECTFL’s Spring 2021 conference, as well as ACTFL’s annual meeting in Fall 2021.

I have been absolutely thrilled to work with such a talented, passionate group of world language teachers on this initiative, including several members of the CTCOLT board. This project also enabled me to reconnect with several of my former Neag students, now professionals in charge of their own classrooms. Finally, I was extremely grateful to exchange ideas with teachers working all over the U.S. and worldwide, from Virginia to New Mexico to Egypt. The hard work on this project by these individuals reflects the commitment we all have as language teachers to both our students and the profession. My hope is that these target-language modules will make it easier for us to share this commitment and enthusiasm, in this way inspiring future language teachers in our own classrooms.

For updated information on FLERP, please visit my web site or email me at backm@ctcolt.org.

Reference

realized that I might be treading on new territory with this student and a middle ground seemed to be taking off points only for grammatical agreement errors.

I fell in love with the logic of the Spanish language as I did with a long list of Hispanic writers who mesmerized me as a young student with their intensity, musicality, mystery, beauty, sincerity, and wisdom. I wanted to share this luminous treasure trove with my own students but there was something else I had resolved long ago to share with them, too. When I stood uncertainly in front of my classroom as a new teacher years ago, I was determined to minimize the inherent bias in the language by making the feminine visible. Instead of filling the board with masculine generics I have always repeated the feminine: ‘los niños y las niñas’ (boys and girls) or ‘los alumnos y las alumnas’ (male and female students). It has been the same with subject pronouns: ‘él/ella’ (he/she); ‘nosotros/ nosotras’ (we [masculine/feminine]); ‘vosotros/ vosotras’ (you all, informal [masculine/feminine]) ; ‘él/ellas’ (they, masculine/feminine)) and I have not relegated feminine pronouns to parenthetical status. Younger folks, who do things much more efficiently, often use the ‘at sign’ to incorporate both the feminine and the masculine as in ‘I@siñ@s’ (girls and boys) as they have absorbed the emphasis I have placed on being inclusive. In addition, whenever I have given students the possibility of earning three extra credit points by learning three proverbs (which are chockful of memorable grammar lessons and wonderful cultural material) to translate into Spanish on a quiz, I remove gender bias whenever possible. For example, I ask students to memorize ‘Quien no ha visto Granada no ha visto nada’ which is commonly translated into English as ‘He who has not seen Granada has not seen anything’ but I will provide my students with the translation ‘Whoever hasn’t seen Granada hasn’t seen anything’ which avoids the masculine generic. Or Nadie es profeta en su propia tierra’ becomes ‘No one is a prophet in their own land’.

Gender is at the heart of the Spanish language and common and proper nouns based on biological sex have always been easy to figure out as have the adjectives that modify them. But perhaps some Spanish teachers are even encountering students who consider their gender to be non-binary. These students who present new ways of being and seeing themselves pose a very interesting linguistic challenge and it is possible that these scenarios could become more frequent in our classrooms. Making corrections to students’ writing for accuracy (according to the established grammatical rules) seems the right thing to do but not to their speaking so as not to disrupt the extemporaneous flow of what they want to say or, I hope, the love they will come to feel for this beautiful language. While standing by the linguistic rules of gender I also remind myself that Spanish is as alive as the human beings who speak it and as dazzling in its infinite possibilities.

**ACTFL 2020: The Same, But Different**

Joseph Parodi-Brown, Marianapolis Preparatory School @SenorParod

This year was not the first year that I have attended the ACTFL Annual Convention, but just like everyone else, it was the first time that I attended from my living room! While I absolutely missed the opportunity to see colleagues and friends from across the country, felt the absence of the energy that comes from being around thousands of engaged world language professionals, and was disappointed that I couldn’t explore a city that I absolutely love to visit, there was much in the virtual format convention that I found beneficial.

In the online format, ACTFL offered two types of sessions: on-demand and simulive. The on-demand are exactly that - recorded presentations that participants could access anytime from the start of the convention through December 31, 2020. Simulive presentations were also recorded, but they were first shared at a scheduled time and the presenters were available to live chat along with the presentation. This offered a great opportunity to ask more questions of the presenters without disrupting a session. I found myself incredibly appreciative of colleagues who shared their expertise in this way.

One of the hardest parts of any conference is having to choose from among several phenomenal sessions and speakers all scheduled at the same time. This year, there was no putting four or five sessions at one time on my calendar in order to make a last minute decision, because I knew that I would have the opportunity to loop back and check in with sessions that I “missed” and even ones that I saw positive responses to on social media that I might not have thought to go to. No ACTFL FOMO here this year!

Another first this year had nothing to do with “unprecedented times.” Even before social distancing became an inescapable part of our vocabulary (and our lives!), ACTFL had announced that they would have not one, not two, but three featured keynote speakers throughout the conference. For me, attending ACTFL amid my regular life, each of these sessions were “appointment TV” for me, and each of them offered so much insight to us as professional practitioners. John Quiñones, Erin Jones, and Nyle DiMarco may seem like an assorted lineup for a language teaching conference and yet each of them fired up and inspired those who watched. Quiñones, most recognizable for his ABC show *What Would You Do?* detailed the ways that his education was marked by discrimination based on racism and linguism, but also...
chronicled the way being bilingual offered him opportunities. Throughout his address, he seamlessly articulated the ways that teaching explicitly about making connections, about interculturality, and about what our students can do to stand up to injustice are central to our work. A former Washington State Educator of the Year, Jones focused on three main ideas in her address: humility, humanity, and history. She focused on personalizing what we know - that speaking multiple languages offers tremendous opportunities, but she also asked us to consider who we (societally) we expect to speak multiple languages and how identity is privileged in multilingualism. DiMarco, most recognizable for his wins on America’s Next Top Model and Dancing With the Stars, talked about the ways that he has used his multilingualism to advocate for the Deaf community. Through anecdotes about frustration in times he was unable to utilize his native language and in describing how he discovered an authentic identity through that language, he offered a poignant reminder about the importance of what we do as language teachers.

Perhaps what was most gratifying to me was what WASN’T new about this year’s ACTFL Convention: the ways that I was able to connect with and learn from colleagues and language practitioners in order to improve my teaching. I was able to attend sessions with the same goals that I have in mind each year - to learn something new about a practice I already incorporate in my work and to expose myself to something I don’t know much about. I got great ideas about inspiring my students’ passion from Connecticut’s own (and ACTFL President-Elect) Jessica Haxhi and entered deeper into connecting social justice and social-emotional learning in my classroom with Cassandra Glynn, Beth Wassell, and Pamela Weseley. Paul Sandrock and Donna Clementi informed work I want to do as a department chair to use proficiency to guide program consistency and Ali Moeller offered some insights into Interculturality.

Even in what has been a trying year, I have been energized by what I learned at the ACTFL Annual Convention and I have a long list of sessions that I will be diving into through the end of this year. I do, think, too, that in some ways the ACTFL Annual Convention will never be the same. I think that this year’s successful conference opened up some ideas for moving forward with a 21st century conference.

But - I still hope to be in San Diego for the Convention next year!

### Materials and Resources

**What is the “Tip of the Week?”**

Michelle Nicklas - William H. Hall High School
@MichelleNicklas

With the shifting sand of this year, different platforms, tools, blocks of times, we at CT COLT wanted to offer a minute sized hug each week. These one minute videos (some of them a little longer) offer a taste of what is in store for you as a CT COLT member. So far, we have offered such topics as: feedback, Nearpod for literacy skills, Virtual Lavatory passes (QR codes), using student work for communication, uses of Google Forms, Canva for Education, using Teachermade.com, reversing the mirror effect in Zoom and so many more!

In feedback, we talk about how the depth and open endedness of what you ask of students is connected to the quality of feedback you can provide them. Students crave a nugget of a specific something they have done well as well as a clear vision of the next step to improve. In Nearpod for literacy skills, we address how you can take a reading and cut out some key words. The words you remove can measure students comprehension as well as contextual observations. In doing so, you can measure students ability to determine placement of capitalization, punctuation, and agreement.
Virtual Lavatory passes teaches you how to create a ready-to-fill linked document to track where students go and when they return, all using their phones. Communication skills with student work exercises interpersonal, interpretive, and presentation skills all at once. After editing student writing samples, student writing becomes the focus for partner question creation. Students upload questions to a Padlet and all groups answer the questions. In addition, students summarize another student generated reading in class or for homework.

Uses of Google Forms reminds teachers of the multiple inputs they can use for practice and assessment. In Google Forms, teachers can upload a link to an audio, video, scanned document, or text to be accompanied by questions or activities. Canva for Education shows teachers how to apply for free Canva with premium features just by showing a teaching credential.

Teachermade.com, is a new website with resources made by teachers to create assignments using PDFs that can be manipulated and edited by students; they can even be self-correcting. Reversing the mirror effect in Zoom shows us how to use writing and sharing screens to model for students. Teachers learn how to adjust video settings so that using small whiteboards has the same effect on the screen as it does with the teacher in front of the room.

These tips come out every Sunday morning, ready to be enjoyed with a cup of coffee! They are created by language teachers all over the state. If you have an idea and want to send a 1-2 minute video, we at membership would love to include your tip among our minute sized hugs.

**Distance Learning**

**Creating and Enhancing a Community Feeling in my Remote Class; All About Attitude**

By Sarab Al Ani
Yale University

“Strategies for Engaging Learners”, “Online Syllabus Design”, “Synchronous Versus Asynchronous Task Design”, “Selecting and adapting materials for online language learning and teaching”, “Integrated Performance Assessment”, “Creating Connections, Exploring Cultures”, “Building a Community Response to Crises”. Do any of those titles sound familiar to you? In the past eight months, language educators have attended webinars and training sessions tackling topics similar to those and more. They did all of this in an effort of laying the groundwork to building language classes that will now have to be taught online.

As the academic year started and teaching began, it did not take long for some of us to realize that despite all this hard work that was put forth towards ensuring engaging, effective, and reliable class design something is still missing. Webinars - such as the ones mentioned above - were attended, strategies were followed and teaching goals were maintained, yet learners might still seem distant at some level. Even those learners who are “engaged” and are attending the synchronous meetings, turning their cameras on, and submitting their work on time, they are doing so in with remote involvement, especially when comparing it to their involvement in similar face-to-face classes. What then went wrong?

The answer is: nothing. Nothing went, wrong but something might be missing. Research has long shown that creating a community in online classes is a key element that leads to intentional learner participation, involvement, and commitment (Hsieh et. al., 2017), (Church, 2003), (Hege, 2011). It is also an element that learners report missing when taking an online class (Stodel et. al., 2006)). Therefore, building a class community will ensure that your hard work in creating the optimal learning experience is finding the best conditions that would lead to maximum advantages.

Part of creating a class community in online classes revolves around the learner, research tells us. Thus, to build a classroom community, learners must be “engaged”, and must not be “passive observers” (Hanna et.al,2000). Additionally, collaboration is a crucial ingredient in the remote class (Palloff et. al., 2004). Engagement and collaboration are in fact two pillar components of the language classroom whether taught face-to-face or online. Hence, you have probably got this covered already.

A second part in creating class community, specifically in online classes, actually has to do with educator attitude. Educator attitude towards creating class community plays a significant role in this regard (Aragon, 2003).

But what does this attitude look like? How can you tell if you are a language educator who supports creating a strong class community? Below is a checklist of five elements that educators need to bear in mind to have the right mindset which in turn leads to creating a solid class community.

1. This is not an opportunity to cut corners.

I recognize that approaching the task of teaching remotely as a task that is “short cut”, “easy”, “time saving” and “on autopilot” will inevitably lead creating to huge gaps in
teaching, learning and community building. (Brinthaupt et al., 2011).

2. Technology to Serve Pedagogy.

When I design my remote class, I am aware of the relationship between technology and pedagogy and its role in creating and sustaining community engagement, and I design different aspect of my class with this consciously in mind (Hege, 2011).

3. A Bigger Picture; a Deeper Goal.

My remote class is an experience in deeper learning that focuses on the content. It is not a “series of exercises to be completed”. Tasks, assignments and activities are related, connected and devised to serve a main teaching goal (Henry and Meadows, 2008).

4. Social Presence through Teacher Immediacy

In my remote class, I create “Social presence” and “Teacher immediacy” by using gestures, humor, personalized examples, praising, encouraging, and avoiding tension. And I realize that both Social Presence through Teacher Immediacy help give learners in my class a feeling of belonging to the class community (Aragon, 2003).

5. Learners’ Individual Needs

In my remote class, I model the social roles for my learners by attending to their individual needs (Liu et al., 2007, Berry, 2019).

Anyone who has taught at any point in their lives can tell you that teachers tend to put themselves last. They tend to prioritize the learners, and the learning process. This comes out of the realization of the value that the learning process carries in the lives of the learners. Some of aspects this value can have immediate effects on learners’ lives as they learn and grow. While other aspects are long lasting as learners absorb lifelong lessons from their instructors and peers during the learning process. The choice instructors make by prioritizing learners is thus understandable. When it comes to creating a class community in an online class on the other hand, it pays to attention to the instructor’s attitude. The learner though, is the ultimate beneficiary.

References:


Stodel, E. J., Thompson, T. L., & MacDonald, C. J. (2006). Learners' perspectives on what is missing from online learning: Interpretations through the community of inquiry framework. The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 7(3).


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Infographic was created by Sarab Al Ani (https://campuspress.yale.edu/sarabalani/)
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Image number: 33844183

Remote Learning: Lessons Learned
By Jessica Haxhi, New Haven Public Schools

In New Haven Public Schools, we have been remote learning since March, never returning to the hybrid model, despite many plans to do so. As a result, world language teachers have had some time to get used to the remote-only teaching space. Based on conversations with five of our amazing teachers, Trudy Anderson (Spanish), Zhanyun Chen (Chinese), Hanan Elkamah (Arabic), Odalis Mercado (Spanish), and Mary Sullivan (Latin), and recent experiences observing and listening to colleagues, we have identified three things that both students and teachers need to experience and feel this year: support, sharing, and success.

Students
We need to offer support to students by helping them to feel comfortable, included, encouraged, and empowered in our classes. Comfort starts with familiar daily routines and structure, clear rules, and consistent use of practiced, target language cues with visuals to maintain class norms (mute, unmute, etc.). You can increase feelings of comfort by including social-emotional check-ins as part of your routine. Our teachers have also found that periodic one-on-one meetings and/or interpersonal interviews with students are key to relationship building in the remote environment (and to getting students to turn their cameras on!). Support also means that students feel included by “seeing themselves” in the images, examples, and language that we use in class and by accurate representations of the diversity within the target cultures. Students must be encouraged often by positive praise and feedback; our “re-entry” unit this year included phrases for students to praise each other in class as well. Finally, supporting students means empowering them, by allowing them to set their own proficiency goals for the year and self-assessing their progress. You can also include student voice by asking them to vote for the “best” (anything), suggest the vocabulary they want to include in thematic units, and by having menu choice boards for projects and assessments.

Relationships and connection are essential in the remote environment. Our teachers are finding ways to prioritize sharing and community building with students, as they learn about their teachers, learn about each other, and collaborate on work. Lessons in which teachers share photos of their own families, pets, and experiences are always successful; chat-boxes suddenly light up with comments and questions. We have found that simple polls about likes and dislikes (using Pear Deck) and short presentational tasks (using Flipgrid or Padlet) in which students express their opinions are both engaging and help them to get to know each other. Even when students are not interacting on camera or in the chat, we have seen that activities involving collaboration pull students into the lesson. These include tasks in which everyone adds something to a whole-class shared Google Doc, pairs work together on a Google Slide, or groups play in teams for Quizlet Live or Quizziz. NHPS teachers also saw student engagement increase in breakout rooms, after overcoming the challenges of setting them up in Google Meets. These collaborations help students to have some of the social interactions that they are missing so much.

With all of the challenges of online school, students need to feel success on a daily basis. We can provide that by staying focused on proficiency, providing scaffolds for students to “level up,” using activities that help them to experience “quick wins,” and clearly defining what they need to do to succeed in
world language class. Staying focused on proficiency means emphasizing functions (expressing opinions, making requests, etc.), providing students with scaffolds such as visuals, choice questions, and sentence starters, and offering conjunctions, rejoinders, and other phrases that help students to say what they want to say and participate naturally in conversations. Every day, teachers can provide moments of “quick wins” for students by creating a “game-like” environment. This could mean an actual game, or just asking students to predict answers and then having a “big reveal” in which they can think (or say) “yes! I got it!” Regular praise, positive feedback, smiles, and cheers add to this feeling of success. For longer assignments, projects, and assessments, students need to know specifically what they need to do to succeed. This requires clear directions, often repeated in writing, in class, and even on a recording. Try to provide a sample product for longer tasks or one good example for shorter tasks, as well as clear rubrics, checklists, and even suggested timelines for longer projects. Just like adults right now, students are screen-fatigued, so we can’t assume or expect they will read everything we give them; instead, allow for the time to patiently and kindly repeat, reinforce, and remediate their understanding of what they need to be doing to succeed.

Teachers

Teachers also need to be supported, have opportunities to share, and experience feelings of success right now.

Please take the time to get enough sleep, do things you enjoy, and get away from screens. Set time boundaries for when you will and won’t work. Find ways to feel included and encouraged, by having a teaching partner, even if you have to reach out to someone in a different discipline. So many technology tools require having a partner who can act as your “student” and try it out so that you can see if it works or how it looks from the student perspective.

For more encouragement, check out #langchat on Twitter on Thursday nights, or attend some of the recent free webinars by professional organizations. Check out inspiring language podcasts like Inspired Proficiency, WeTeachLanguages, or Language Latte. You’ll find that everyone is struggling with the same issues with remote/hybrid teaching, and there are some great suggestions out there.

This is also a time when teachers must collaborate and share materials and resources. Even if other teachers you know teach different languages, you can share simple resources, such as clipart for visuals, ideas for instruction, and technology teaching tips. If you can find a colleague teaching the same language/level, divide up the work and plan together. Many of our teachers have found that this kind of collaboration makes all the difference in handling the prep load of remote teaching.

How do teachers find success in this environment? First, maximize those hours of preparation time by finding ways to use every resource you find or material you make multiple times. A great short video can be shown to the same class with very different tasks a few days in a row, or can be shown to different levels by modifying what you are asking students to do with the video. An image-rich set of slides for introducing a unit can be used daily to review the theme of the unit. Each day, the teacher speaks less and asks the students to say more questions about the images on the slides. If you make slides for vocabulary images, one-per-slide, they can be used for flashcards, quizzes, student labeling, daily review, Screencastify recording, etc. Make once, use multiple ways!

Teachers can also find success by establishing 1 or 2-week structures that work well for their schedule and help to organize lesson planning. For lower proficiency levels, you might organize by having more interpretive/input tasks and vocabulary games the first week with scaffolded interpersonal practice, and more intense interpersonal practice and a presentational task by the end of the second week. Or, you might designate certain days of the week (in your planning) as the days that you always do breakout rooms, certain games, individual meetings with students, etc. As you identify the activities that are the most effective in engaging students and building proficiency, find ways to use those activities more often. You can also determine why those activities work so well and apply that knowledge to other activities you build.

One final piece of advice from our teachers: always have a back-up plan. We suggest a list of three things you can tell students to do if your technology doesn’t work that day. For example: have them go on Quizlet for a set amount of time, tell them to draw or find images to represent the current vocabulary, or even tell them to go into their Google Classroom and work on any assignment they are behind on or need to revise. They will thank you for it!

This is not an easy time, and this may not be an easy year, but we can all get through this together, if we support each other, share with each other, and seek out those feelings of success, however small, every day.

*If you would like to view the graphic we are using to organize our thinking around this, go here: https://tinyurl.com/NHPSSuccess20202021
**Updates on CT COLT Board Activities**

**Self-Study for ACTFL’s Virtual Assembly of Delegates**

In preparation for ACTFL’s Virtual Assembly of Delegates, the Diversity and Equity Committee of our Board of Directors met to complete a self-study about our organization’s work to break down structures that promote systemic inequities in order to achieve a more diverse and inclusive organization and profession (and also to increase the diversity, equity, and inclusion of our language learners, educators, and programs). As part of the virtual conference, ACTFL opened up its Assembly of Delegates to the entire Board of Directors, and a number were able to attend sessions specifically for world language organizations about diversity and inclusion, and supporting teachers.

**CT COLT Future Teachers Honor Society**

On Wednesday, November 11, CT COLT inducted fourteen new members into the CT COLT Future Teachers Honor Society. For the virtual ceremony, the students were present, as well as their university supervisors and members from the CT COLT Board of Directors.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Poetry Contest</th>
<th>CT COLT Networking Fellowship</th>
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<tr>
<td>The CT COLT Poetry Contest is scheduled for Wednesday, April 21, 2021 and will be virtual due to the ongoing pandemic and restrictions. Look for information about this event coming soon.</td>
<td>The CT COLT Networking Fellowship, organized by two of our board members, continues to meet monthly and to feature experts in the field.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Jessica Haxhi is ACTFL’s President!</th>
<th>CT Frameworks</th>
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<tr>
<td>A member of the CT COLT Board of Directors and the Supervisor of World Languages for New Haven Public Schools is the 2021 President of ACTFL. Congratulations, Jessica!</td>
<td>A board committee met to discuss the current Connecticut World Language Curriculum Frameworks, published in October 2005, and to think about ways and processes for updating them.</td>
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<tr>
<th>CT COLT Virtual Fall Conference</th>
<th>Professional Development Committee</th>
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<tr>
<td>The CT COLT Virtual Fall Conference, held Sunday October 18 through Thursday October 22 was a success, thanks to the engagement and work of the Fall Conference Committee, the attendees, and the presenters.</td>
<td>The Professional Development Committee met to discuss ways to support members and has developed a survey to send to membership to gain additional insights in what format and length of professional development would be most helpful at this time.</td>
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CT COLT News

TEACHER AWARDS 2020

By Magali Hannegan
Spanish Teacher/ Glastonbury Public Schools

Every year the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers recognizes teachers for their excellence in the classroom, district, and community through teacher awards open to all members of CT COLT. The CT COLT Board of Directors evaluates the applications, essays and letters of recommendations. Teacher awards are a great way to recognize the accomplishments of our members that are happening in our state.

This year, it is with great enthusiasm that CT COLT celebrates two exceptional educators: the 2020 winners of the Pegasus PRIDE Award and Robert G. Mead Award.

Robert G. Mead Award:

Abir Zenait was selected as the recipient of the Robert G. Mead Award for her leadership, enthusiastic cultural approach and for promoting the Arabic program city-wide. Abir teaches at the Engineering & Science University Magnet School in New Haven and she was described as a teacher that is always thinking of new ways to promote the Arabic program beyond her own school. “The fact that we have five schools that teach Arabic now is largely due to her efforts,” says Jessica Haxhi, Supervisor of World Languages in New Haven.

Pegasus PRIDE Award:

Carol Chen was selected as the recipient of our prestigious Pegasus PRIDE Award. Carol Chen teaches at Choate Rosemary Hall and she is a tireless advocate for Word Languages at the state and national levels. She also participates actively in CT COLT, serving as a conduit between languages in Connecticut and the Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools (CLASS).

Congratulations to these remarkable professionals!

The Board of Directors would like to encourage teachers to apply or nominate someone for Teacher Awards next year. Check the CT COLT website https://ctcolt.org/awards-contests/ for more details about the different awards and how we can continue recognizing the work of teachers. Deadlines are typically in August.

CT COLT Networking Fellowship:
Bringing CT’s WL Teachers Together

By Joseph Parodi-Brown, Marianapolis Preparatory School @SenorParodi

The CT COLT Networking Fellowship enters its third year facilitated by Rebecca Aubrey and Joseph Parodi-Brown taking the reins from the group’s creation by Gina Gallo Reinhard and Amanda Robustelli-Price.

As with much in the profession this year, the fellowship program adapted, resolving to meet virtually monthly, each meeting featuring a guest speaker to highlight a topic of interest to new and veteran teachers alike. This adaptability has included the ability to have national leaders in the field speak with the group. Helena Curtain kicked off the year in the September meeting, Gina spoke to the group in November and future guests include Katrina Griffin, Greta Lundgaard and others.

Between monthly meetings, seven pairs of experienced and new teachers meet informally to discuss areas raised from the monthly meetings or from the experiences of the classroom. A monthly newsletter including resources and information for the monthly meeting bridges the weeks between full group meetings.

Matt Mangino, a Spanish teacher at Wethersfield HS, has volunteered as a mentor in all three years of the program’s run. He wants teachers who are newer to the profession to see how supportive and welcoming the language teaching community is. As he values the professional connections he has made, he hopes that those who are in the early stages of their career will feel comfortable building those connections as well.

Connections were what encouraged Cecilia Dávila to sign up for the mentoring program. A middle school Spanish teacher in Middletown, she sees the value of collaboration and presented at the CT COLT Virtual Fall Conference with colleagues from her time at Glastonbury. She was eager to participate in the fellowship to continue building on the
knowledge she gained during her teaching program, where she was a member of the CT COLT Future World Language Teachers Honor Society. To that end, she has appreciated the full-group meetings each month where she is able to learn from leaders in the field and from the full fellowship group as well as the opportunities she has had to work one-on-one with her mentor, Matt, and ask his advice as she plans for and reflects on her lessons.

Matt reflected that his favorite moments from the program have included the opportunities he has had to informally share thoughts with the teachers he has been partnered with. Over a casual cup of coffee, for example, discussing highlights of the classroom, sharing lessons and activities that were particularly successful, and also seeking and sharing advice about challenges. The sharing of resources and ideas that occurs in the fellowship plays to the strengths of each member - mentor and mentee alike. Matt spoke of his enthusiasm for sharing the high leverage teaching practices with teachers he has worked with.

Both Cecilia and Matt expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the program and found the willingness of all the participants in the fellowship to be an example of the generosity that is very common in the profession. Both recognized that the contributions of all members of the fellowship contribute to the growth of the profession.

The CT COLT Mentoring Fellowship continues to build networking relationships among teachers from across the state and both Matt and Cecilia say that they have benefited from the fellowship and encourage others to get involved in future years.

CT COLT’s First Virtual Fall Conference
By Amanda Robustelli-Price and James Wildman

The first CT COLT Virtual Fall Conference, held 10/18/20-10/22/20, was a huge success! The Fall Conference Committee worked diligently throughout the summer to change the scheduled in-person event to the online conference that was held last month. While it is the sincere hope of the Fall Conference Committee to return to our in-person conference next year, the reimagined and redesigned format this year allowed for some positive changes that supported teachers during this year of the pandemic:

- The addition of many nationally-known presenters, including Leslie Grahn, Rebecca Blouwolff, and Meredith White, to the list of workshop offerings.
- A more flexible schedule, with the conference lasting from Sunday through Thursday, with synchronous offerings scheduled around work hours.
- Workshop recordings and materials available through 12/31/20 to registrants who are also members of CT COLT.
- A virtual exhibit hall over four days that included access to sixteen conference sponsors and free giveaways.
- A student panel, facilitated by Judith Ojeda and Christi Moraga, which allowed students to share their experiences from their world language classrooms.
- Daily door prizes for conference attendees.

As the conference focused on professional development for teachers, it was students who may have spoken the loudest. In place of the traditional keynote speaker, the conference committee continued its revisionary design with a panel discussion with a diverse group of learners, from middle school through college, from a variety of towns throughout the state, and languages studied. These students helped paint a vivid picture of what learning is like during this time of distance and hybrid learning. Their comments were pointed and focused on the great job that teachers are doing, but also highlighting areas that are challenging for them.

A picture from a conference session, “Moving All Students Up the Proficiency Ladder,” presented by Rita A. Oleksak and Megan Villanueva, Glastonbury Public Schools, and Cecilia Dávila, Middletown Public Schools.
The evaluations from the conference were incredibly positive, with praise for the organization of materials and the effective use of technology. If you were unable to attend the conference but would like to purchase recordings and materials access from the conference, materials access will be available for purchase through 12/31/20.  https://ctcolt.org/events/fall-conference/.

Also, please check out the excellent and inspirational welcoming speech by our CT COLT Language Teacher of the Year, Gina Gallo at  https://youtu.be/ydZCcAW2kd4

We would like to thank our members for supporting this change to our conference!  The 2021 CT COLT Fall Conference is scheduled for October 24 & 25 at the Omni New Haven Hotel at Yale, located in historic New Haven, CT.  Please be sure to visit our website often as our organization continues to evolve to meet the needs of our members.

Organizational News

ACTR Fall 2020 Board of Directors Meeting

By John R. Rook, Recording Secretary – CT COLT Executive Board; ACTR Board Member, Teacher of Russian and Spanish – Glastonbury Public Schools

The Fall Board of Directors Meeting for the American Council of Teachers of Russian (ACTR) took place on Saturday, September 26, 2020. Below are some of the highlights of this meeting.

- Natalya Ushakova was elected as the new president of ACTR in February 2020 and presided over the meeting of the ACTR Board of Directions.
- Cynthia Ruder will be stepping down in February 2021 as Treasurer for ACTR to be replaced by Tony Brown.
- The status of international academic programs for Russian was also presented, which concerned NSLI-Y and CLS. NSLI-Y (National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) provides overseas critical language study opportunities to American youth through merit-based scholarships to spark a lifetime interest in critical foreign languages and cultures. CLS (The Critical Language Scholarship Program) is an intensive overseas language and cultural immersion program for American students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities. The status of programs for the Summer 2021 are still TBD. This will be contingent upon the status of the pandemic, the host countries and any advisory levels. It is possible that these programs will not be accepting applications until the Fall 2021. For a complete status of these international Russian programs, one can visit the ACTR website: (http://www.americancouncils.org) American Council also reported that student repatriation from study abroad programs at the beginning of the worldwide pandemic was successful. Some students were also able to continue their programs virtually.
- The 2020 results of the NEWL Test (The National Examinations in World Languages) were revealed at the Board meeting. NEWL is a series of online proficiency exams for language learners of Arabic, Korean, Portuguese, and Russian seeking college placement and/or credit and which are administered by the American Councils for International Education. There were 390 students who took the Russian exam, with the score-breakdown as follows: 72.6% received 5, 21.0% received 4, 4.4% received 3, 1.5% received 2, 0% received 0.  For 2020, a bit fewer students sat for the NEWL Russian exam.
- ACTR is committed to a stronger focus, dedication and concerted effort towards social and ethnic diversity in Russian programs nation-wide.
- The latest issue of the flagship Russian Language Journal updates will be published at some point in the fall 2020. A special 2nd fall edition will also be released in early 2021 with the focus on digital humanities in Russian. Jennifer Brown, the journal committee chair requested any current and relevant research be submitted for this special publication.
- ACTR is also more committed than ever to ensure that enrollment in Russian is inclusive and diverse with regard to social, ethnic, economic, gender and LBGQT diversity. The ACTR Newsletter will start to cover such topics in the newsletter and this will also be reflected in the various programs, materials and contests. Diverse students, teachers and scholars will also be recruited into the ACTR organization. The Board also proposed the establishment of an ACTR committee on diversity and inclusivity. A side discussion also occurred about how Russian and other Slavic languages are reflective of transgender communities in those respective countries. Lastly, there was also mention of the book, A Voice from the Slavic Studies Edge: On Being a Black Woman in the Field by Kimberly St. Julian Varnon of UPenn, in which she reflects on her experience in the field as a scholar and researcher in the field of Slavic Studies.
- ACTR will continue to offer webinars for the teacher of various aspect of Russian language and culture. This will
also include new installments of the National Conversation on the Teaching of Russian, as well as the weekly Virtual Russia Teacher’s Lounge on Friday afternoons via Zoom, alternating weekly between secondary and post-secondary instruction.

- ACTR Membership is currently at 416 active members. The Membership Committee will embark upon a campaign to recruit graduate students in Russian and Slavic Studies.
- An update was provided regarding the ACTR Russian Program of Excellence (RPE) Standards. The RPE program standards represent a significant revision of those developed originally through the Partnerships for Language in the U.S. (PLUS) initiative; a national effort originally intended to support rigorous peer review and ultimately accreditation of language programs in higher education. They are based on AATG’s Program of Excellence, with insights from the Commission on English Language Accreditation (CEA).
- A status of the ACTR contests and awards was also provided, which included the Olympiada of Spoken Russian and the National Russian Essay Contest (NREC). Both contests will be offered virtually in order to accommodate the various learning situations during the pandemic.

**News from CITA**

**Distinguished Lecture Series, Italian Style**
By Gina Gallo

Zoom, Webex, Skype and more; so many options yet so little time! With this sentiment in mind the The Connecticut Italian Teachers Association joined forces with experts around the nation to create the Distinguished Lecture Series. This program was designed to maximize the use of technology and invite language experts into our virtual classrooms. Now, more than ever, we are determined to use the resources around us to best meet the needs of our language students! CITA is offering specialty lessons on culture, music, diversity, daily life and literature. The first interactive lesson was delivered by Maria Gloria Borsa from Bellaire High School in Houston, TX. CT students from Bristol, Westport and Oxford were taken on a high-energy, virtual journey that discussed the Italian identity of today’s world; highlighting social justice and the need to break the barriers of stereotypes around the world. CITA looks forward to inviting Caterina Cassin from The Hopkins School and Cristina Tommassi from My Italian Podcast as our next expert speakers. The themes of our upcoming virtual lessons will be "Italy through the eyes of an Italian Teen and "Parla come mangi: the love story between Italians and food". We encourage all AATI members to join us in this wonderful learning experience, let’s not forget - siamo piu’ forti insieme!

**ACTR Virtual Teacher's Lounge for Russian Teachers 2020-2021**

By John R. Rook, Recording Secretary – CT COLT Executive Board; ACTR Board Member, Teacher of Russian and Spanish – Glastonbury Public Schools

The American Council of Teachers of Russian has been continuing its Virtual Teacher’s Lounge as of this September. The lounge was started in March of this year and is a Zoom-virtual space for Russian teachers to discuss current issues facing their instruction during the pandemic and share ideas for instruction and assessment. The lounge continues to be held each Friday from 5-6PM (EST) and is attended by ACTR member-teachers who want to talk about issues related to the online teaching of Russian language. The discussions rotate between secondary and post-secondary topics.

As is the case with much of the nation, Russian teachers and their students have been facing a variety of learning environments – in person, hybrid or fully remote learning. The start of the 2020-2021 school year is somewhat similar to how the school year ended last year, with some modifications for in-person or remote teaching, depending on the region and pandemic. Teachers continue to use a variety of online educational platforms ranging from Google Classroom to Seesaw, with the majority offering synchronous teaching now.

Teachers continue to face similar challenges that they experienced at the end of last year. Such challenges concern student attendance, engagement and participation during online teaching. In some secondary districts and post-secondary institutions, teachers are not allowed to require students to turn on their camera/video during E-learning. This presents a problem for teachers to keep track of exactly what students are doing at any given moment during the class. When students are placed into breakout rooms for speaking or collaborative activities, the teacher is only able to be present in one breakout room at a time, trusting that students in other rooms are fully engaged. Some teachers have been able to record their students’ speaking activities on Zoom, while others make students more accountable by requiring that they turn in a completed assignment.

Many Russian teachers seem to be using Flipgrid, which is a website that allows teachers to create "grids" to facilitate video discussions. Each grid is like a message board where teachers can pose questions, called “topics,” and their
students can post video responses that appear in a tiled grid display. Other apps and sites that have been discussed thus far this year include, Edpuzzle, Peardeck, and Padlet just to name a few. It is clear that teachers have become much more skilled at delivering Russian language instruction to students given the current learning situation, be it online or in-person. As we proceed in the current school year and the colder months, there is a potential for education to go fully remote again, as was the case last spring.

This past summer, many Russian teachers also took advantage of a variety of professional development that addressed online teaching and how to maximize learning in such conditions. The Black Lives Matters movement and marches of recent have also empowered and enlightened teachers to include more themes of social justice and diversity in their curricula, as represented in the peoples and cultures of Russia. Teachers are also much more sensitive now to the problems faced by some of their students during E-learning. Issues with connectivity, home environment and family dynamics continue to affect how our students are able to access and complete their online learning, even when provide with the proper device.

During the pandemic, learning across the US continues to be one that requires patience, creativity and flexibility. These are characteristics that many teachers possess and which make them particularly adept at delivering effective instruction no matter what the environment is. Throughout this year, the Virtual Teacher’s Lounge for Russian will continue to provide teachers with a space to discuss issues and share resources in order to ensure that their students are receiving quality and enriching learning experiences in Russian language and culture.

For AATF-CT, The Show Must Go On - Even While Quarantined!
Melissa Tubbs
Organizational Director, AATF

The pandemic has put a damper on many events this year, but one example of ingenuity in the midst of quarantine was the AATF-CT “Alors, on chante!” singing competition in early April. Conceived as an “American Idol”-style live singing competition for CT French students by Mikel Berrier of the Brunswick School, and assisted considerably by chapter president Jon Shee, the original live show was adapted to a video submission format, with fantastic results. I chatted with Mikel (via Zoom, of course) about this quarantine event to find out more.

How did the idea for this event come about?

I think it was the conflation of several things: my interest in music and singing, being inspired by the COLT Poetry Recitation Contest and also loving to organize live, festive events.

What kinds of songs did the students sing?

We really got a large range of genres: some pop, some classics, selections from Les Mis and Ratatouille. We got the impression that some were chosen by the students themselves based on preference, and some were recommended by teachers.

When it became apparent that an in-person competition was not to be, how did you and the rest of the organizers decide to proceed?

Part of the initial selection process was to send a video of your act (just so we could see what to expect and weed out those that were not really stage material). So I just thought: let’s acknowledge the effort students and teachers put into this by “judging” those instead of the live performances. We sent out an email to the students who had submitted a video telling them they could redo it if they wanted it to be a better video.

What was the student response to the changes?

Some students went all in and redid their entire video. A video that was just two people facing the camera singing turned into this elaborate dramatic scene, for example. Larger groups generally did not resubmit their videos, but some individual acts really went far and beyond. I am thinking of this one student: she did not submit anything for the live performance, just a very elaborate film involving complicated camera movements and masterful black and white images.

Berrier has taught at the Brunswick School for 13 years now, after relocating to the States from Paris, where he was born and raised, with his wife and children. Aside from teaching French (and just recently, Spanish) at the school, he is also the faculty advisor for the UN club and school magazine. He told me he loves working with teenagers, and is also a poet, musician and yoga practitioner. When he talked me through some of the logistics of organizing an event like this, his enthusiasm for his school community shone through. The initial design for the “Alors on chante!” competition was to involve both the Arts and Music departments at the Brunswick School, who intended to showcase student work before the competition and play a short concert while the judges deliberated on the acts. The judges themselves were a high point of my conversation with Berrier as well.

Tell me about the judging process for this event.

The judging panel was my Honors seniors French class, who have been taking the language for four years or more. It was a
pleasure to watch them settle on prizes to award as they judged the video submissions. It struck me during this process that the event facilitated a real sense of connection, even in the virtual format, between my students and other schools’ participants. They felt linked by the language, even if they weren’t in the same school or room.

Prizes were awarded as well! The main categories of grand groupe, petit groupe, chant solo and vidéo received trophies, and other recognitions such as performance la plus émotionnelle, performance la plus entraînante, vidéo avec la meilleure chorégraphie, performance la plus grunge, chanson la plus énergique and groupe le plus dynamique received certificates. While Berrier lamented the loss of the organization of a live show, which undoubtedly would have brought about more authentic language production by the students, he is very much looking forward to next year’s production and is already in the planning stages.

What was the most surprising aspect of this event for you?

How enthusiastic teachers were when I told them about the project. It was one of those things: you announce it and it feels like it was meant to be. Why didn’t an event like this exist before? It is such an “obvious” thing to do, right? Of course it should exist! Everyone was so excited, I was surprised it didn’t already exist.

In retrospect, if you could change anything about how the event unfolded, would you?

We did our best given the situation. To be perfectly honest, the change of format was actually a godsend, in my opinion. I think the information went out to the teachers too late, because it took me so much time ironing out the details (performance hall, copyright issues, submission website, etc.) In order to put on a good show, I think we would need 15 to 20 entries. Now we are ready for next year and the information can go out in September! I would love for more teachers to sign up next year. Who knows, in the future, they could have their own in-school contest and send their “best” acts to the state competition! It is pretty easy to organize and there are plenty of students who like to sing out there! I think the challenge is to prioritize what’s important for our students. Song has always been a great way to learn languages.

The information for next year’s “Alors, on chante!” competition will be sent out at the beginning of the school year, with the show itself being planned for early April or late March. Visit www.aatfct.org/alors-on-chante for more info.

News from CT Schools

Study Buddies during COVID-19

Spanish Honors Society at The Academy of Information Technology and Engineering
By Clerin John

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on many high school students. Due to financial issues, many students are not able to get tutors. The Spanish Honors Society at AITE’s goal for the winter semester is to provide free tutoring lessons for freshman enrolled in Spanish classes. Members of the Spanish Honors Society will tutor a student with whatever they need help with in regard to Spanish. Trisha Lopez, President of the Spanish Honors Society, came up with this idea. Given social distancing and other safety protocols, Trisha was concerned that most freshmen would be impacted the most by being unable to make friends, as she says, “[it’s] an important part of high school.” Trisha created this program so that freshmen could have a buddy in grades 10-12 to help guide them through the high school process. “I hope that students find the guidance that they need to succeed in their Spanish classes,” Trisha Lopez said. Trisha Lopez created this with a loving and caring attitude towards the new set of students who embarked on their high school journey only a couple months ago. This program was not intended to just benefit the freshmen, but it was also created to benefit tutors themselves. Trisha believes that tutors would have a sense of satisfaction for doing good. The Spanish Honors Society at AITE is proof that you can take the worst situations and turn it into good.

La Sociedad Hispánica Honoraria Celebrates Latino Heritage Month for Both Cohorts

By Lauren Goebel, SHH Executive Board Pura Vida Chapter

Latino Heritage Month is a celebration of Hispanic heritage, culture, and history that Stonington High School’s Spanish Honors Society consistently makes an effort to recognize. The celebration lasts from September 15 to October 15, and this year we
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honored this time of year with different celebratory displays of music, art and lots of fun!

The cafeteria and hallways of the school were beautifully decorated with colorful flags from different Hispanic countries and posters about famous Latinos, which were all created by Spanish Honor Society students. Upon entering the school, the Spanish Honor Society also designed a beautiful altar, decorated with candles and papel picado, that students could place their own pictures on to honor those who have passed.

During the last week of the celebration, students were greeted in the mornings by music in Spanish playing over the loudspeaker to start off the days with celebration. Songs by artists like Lin-Manuel Miranda, who is from Puerto Rico and is the creator of Hamilton, Carlos Vives, and other famous groups were all played for students to listen to on the way to their first period class. The music continued into lunch, where a Spanish Honor Society mariachi band played the song “El Rey” for students to enjoy.

Spanish Honor Society also created a fun and engaging Kahoot game filled with fun trivia facts about the Spanish-speaking world for students and teachers to play in their homebases. Because of the unprecedented circumstances of this school year, we wanted to be sure to do something that got all students involved in the joy that is celebrating Latino Heritage Month!

Stonington High School’s Sociedad Hispánica Honoraria takes great responsibility and pride in honoring the time that is Latino Heritage Month, and this year we wanted to fill the school with celebration for both cohorts. The music played, art hung, and games enjoyed by all of the students and staff was our way of celebrating the heritage we are privileged to honor. It is important to the Spanish Honor Society members that we expand the knowledge of Latino heritage to everyone that we can, and we’ve especially enjoyed this year’s commemoration of the culture.

Let the Students Speak

When we pause to let our students give us feedback we are pleasantly surprised and encouraged. Try it after a tough week! Here are a few answers from around the state.

I know my world language teacher cares because...

- she is supportive of my growth, whether I make a mistake or have a tiny victory.

- I fail a lot and she does not give up on trying to get me to understand and speak Spanish.

- she makes class so fun and makes fun jokes.

- she is very attentive to the needs of the students and takes the time to reach out if anyone needs additional help!

- she puts together these amazing lessons for us to learn and grow.

- she is always reachable and makes time for her students.

- she is always helping us out and finding new ways to make French more exciting and engaging.

- she pushes me to be my best.

- she always has something fun, new, and exciting for her students to do each and every day.

- she sets up extra breakout rooms for people who need help.

- every time I get into class a little early she always starts a little conversation with me that actually makes me feel comfortable and remembers things I tell her so I know she’s listening and actually cares about the things I say.

- she gives me a chance to rework my papers to get it right and she knows I’m doing/trying my best.

- she won’t let me give up.
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Open: ConnTesol & Alliance Française
Please check the CT COLT Website for information on upcoming events!

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