President’s Message

Dear Colleagues:

This past year has been one of the most difficult I can remember, with many changes that were an impetus for intense learning and growth. As we have just surpassed one year of teaching in a hybrid or virtual environment, I am reflecting on my learning and also beginning to look forward to the next school year. I have learned an incredible amount as I have worked to improve my practice in a new learning space and also to navigate the additional considerations brought by the current circumstances, with social change and unrest, the pandemic, and political strife. I am exploring four key questions:

1. How do I ensure an equitable experience for my students?
2. In CT COLT, are we including and reaching all voices?
3. How can I engage all learners in a hybrid or virtual learning space?
4. What do I need to learn to weave layers of intercultural competence and social justice into my curriculum?

I am working to explore these key questions through work in various district committees, with my PLC at my school, attendance at conferences, involvement with various CT COLT projects and groups, and additional resources to help with my own learning.

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| How do I ensure an equitable experience for my students? | In the United States, it is clear that there are educational disparities amongst students. At my school, to think more deeply about this topic, we looked at data disaggregated by income and race/ethnicity to clearly see what these inequities look like in our community, and to work to achieve equity for students. Personally, I am doing much listening to comprehend my own privilege and the implicit biases that shape how I view the world. I am also exploring the Learning for Justice Goals. | - Learning for Justice website  
www.learningforjustice.org  
- ACTFL’s web page with resources that address issues of race, diversity, and social justice.  
https://www.actfl.org/resources/resources-language-educators-address-issues-race-diversity-and-social-justice |
| **In CT COLT, are we including and reaching all voices?** | At ACTFL’s Assembly of Delegates in November, members of our board discussed key ideas tied to inclusion and representation, including questions such as:  
- Do our PD and conference offerings support marginalized groups and languages in concrete and actionable ways?  
- How are diverse voices included in our awards and various roles within the organization?  
- How inclusive is our organization? | The Board of Director continuously revisits our Strategic Plan, and our Diversity & Equity Committee is meeting regularly to give recommendations for opening up various organizational processes. We are working with ACTFL and our members to continually evolve our organization to meet the needs of all stakeholders. |
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| **How can I engage all learners in a hybrid or virtual learning space?** | This year, student engagement has been one of the hardest challenges to overcome, and students in many schools are underperforming compared to the time before the pandemic. I’m thinking deeply about connections and supporting student’s individual experiences. I’ve learned about the importance of using virtual tools to “chunk” information and tasks for students, such as forms with sections for assessments, or using interactive activities to divide up reading or listening tasks into smaller parts. I’ve also learned about tools for asynchronous interactions. I am thinking about what this knowledge will mean as I move forward, perhaps remaining “paperless” but with more students in my face-to-face classroom. | • I’m exploring and using a number of strategies to support social and emotional learning, including those from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence: [https://www.ycei.org/ruler](https://www.ycei.org/ruler)  
• Check out this presentation from Rebecca Blouwolff, “Going Virtual with Interpersonal,” along with other materials, on her website: [https://mmeblouwolff.weebly.com/presentationsarticles](https://mmeblouwolff.weebly.com/presentationsarticles)  
• ACTFL has some free resources on their distance learning page: [https://www.actfl.org/resources/teaching-and-learning-remotely](https://www.actfl.org/resources/teaching-and-learning-remotely) |
| **What do I need to learn to weave layers of intercultural competence and social justice into my curriculum?** | As I have grown more comfortable teaching with a proficiency mindset, I have been thinking more deeply about what it means for students to be global citizens, and I have realized that the nature of the world language classroom, and our focus on identity and worldwide issues, necessitates the inclusion of social justice and interculturality in our curriculum. I am learning now about how to add critical layers into the curriculum, and thinking about how to make the work in the world language classroom connected to the community and world. | • I just purchased two books from ACTFL:  
  *Teaching Intercultural Citizenship Across the Curriculum: The Role of Language Education*, by Wagner, Cardetti, and Byram, and also *Words and Actions: Teaching Languages Through the Lens of Social Justice* by Glynn, Wesley, and Wassell.  
• I learned recently about Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, which describes the way in which people interact with cultural differences, and am looking to learn more about this model. [https://www.idrinstitute.org/dmis/](https://www.idrinstitute.org/dmis/)  
• I am exploring the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which, “are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership.” [https://sdgs.un.org/goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals) |
What have you been working on this past year, and how are you reflecting and moving forward? What are your considerations for both this year and next year? I hope that we can connect soon, perhaps at an upcoming CT COLT or ACTFL event, such as the Summer Proficiency Institute from 6/23-6/25, or the Fall Conference, to discuss complex topics and to share resources, in order to work collaboratively to ensure that all students have equal opportunities and are empowered as global citizens.

Amanda Robustelli-Price
President, CT COLT

**Social Justice**

*Building Community in Our Home Cultures with a Simple Yard Sign*

Signe Damdar
Vernon Center Middle School

A couple of years ago, while driving to an appointment, I first saw the sign “No matter where you are from, we’re glad you’re our neighbor” in Spanish (first), English, and Arabic proudly planted in a yard. I parked my car to inspect the sign—I needed one of those signs! I ended up ordering not one, but five signs at [https://www.welcomeyourneighbors.org/](https://www.welcomeyourneighbors.org/) for my yard, some friends’ yards and the hallway right outside my classroom door. If there’s one message I want my bilingual and bicultural students to understand, especially in this time, it is that we, as educators, welcome them. We embrace and celebrate the rich cultures and languages that each of them
Where Language and Inclusion Intersect

Liv Drazen- Senior, William H. Hall High School

Foreign language is ever-present in my life. My mother teaches Mandarin; our home is filled with the trappings of China’s history, culture and language. My travels to the Middle Kingdom elucidate a disturbing truth: we tend to respect what we know. Our cultural competency shifts when faced with foreign concepts like squat toilets, cicadas as a side dish and waltzing in the park. Without exposure to the “other,” we default to viewing different people, practices and paraphernalia as weird or wrong. Western arrogance prevents us from embracing and appreciating diverse ways of living and communicating.

Over the past year, COVID-19 has exacerbated intolerance of the “other.” Asian Americans face widespread discrimination as an alarming number of people blame them for the pandemic. This treatment reflects the ignorance many people typically revert to when considering those who are different from ourselves. I believe difference should trigger curiosity, not fear.

Those whose language and culture differ from the mainstream are often misunderstood and expected to assimilate. Similarly, Americans with disabilities are expected to fit the archetype that neurotypical counterparts create for them. Many people look negatively on their peers with disabilities and observe their “cannots,” rather than accentuating their “cans.” Without taking time to observe and understand each individual’s ability set, this disenfranchised group remains unseen.

My dream job, first scrawled on a thought cloud in fifth grade, is to be a special education teacher. The intersection of my language, cultural and inclusion interests lies in translation. We communicate in myriad ways. For some students, language and adaptive tools replace the spoken word, just as diverse cultures convey meaning in distinctive ways. When we take the time to focus on how divergent perspectives improve our lives, we grow. Homogeneity is uninspiring and stagnant. Language is the perfect tool for diversity.

Hall High school peer, Greta M, employs her love for language to promote inclusion. Greta began learning American Sign Language sophomore year, as a way to connect with Hard of Hearing and Deaf peers. Each day of junior year, we ate our lunches with our friends with special needs, providing Greta with an opportunity to practice ASL. Her vocabulary came to life as she and Jimmy, a Hard of Hearing student, signed back
If we look at what I’ve heard language teachers call “grammatical gender” with inanimate objects. As much as we may understand that The first difficulty I mentioned is that of connecting gender to describe themselves. Gender, then, in the language classroom can be challenging to teach and to learn. For many of us who teach gendered languages, the concept of gender can be fraught with many difficulties - difficulty for students to understand what makes an object feminine or masculine - or event neuter, difficulty in helping them get into the habit of making nouns and adjectives agree, and for students who are working to understand their own gender identities, the difficulty of not knowing which adjectives to use to describe themselves. Gender, then, in the language classroom can be challenging to teach and to learn. The first difficulty I mentioned is that of connecting gender with inanimate objects. As much as we may understand that what I’ve heard language teachers call “grammatical gender” is not connected with personal gender, this can be challenging for students to connect with. Add to that the seeming senselessness of gender. “Chair” for example is a feminine word in the Romance languages (as it was in Latin), but in German and Russian is a masculine word. For students, then, I’ve taken to referring to “el” words and “la” words, talking about them in the same exact way that I would talk about “masculine” and “feminine” words. This simple change eliminates a connection with a confusing construct, removes societal ideas that students bring to such language, and to students who are processing their gender identities differently, offers language that is not as anxiety inducing for them. Additionally, with words that refer to people but grammatically belong to one gender (such as “la persona” the Spanish word for “person,” always feminine), it reduces confusion for students who often stumble with applying feminine words to male people. Another increasingly discussed topic is how students whose gender identity does not align with the binary structure are able to describe themselves in the languages they are learning. Engaging with this topic is complex. Many language educators and speakers of gendered languages recommend using existing words and structures to avoid gendered language. For example, using again Spanish, instead of “los estadounidenses” or even “los and las estadounidenses”, they might recommend “las personas de Estados Unidos.” This is a functional option but does become bulkier when you start using adjective clauses to describe people - las personas que leen (the people who read, instead of the readers), for example. There is some advocacy for new language structures. Again using Spanish as an example, where gendered adjectives generally end in -o for masculine and -a for feminine, there are adjectives that end in other letters with varied rules. Adjectives that end in -e, for example (such as inteligente and elegante) maintain the same form for masculine and feminine. Advocates for language that support people with nonbinary gender identities offer the -e ending as one option for more inclusive language. This topic is not without controversy, as some suggest that this is an imposition of US American values on another language. This is not wholly true; this use is gaining ground in Argentina, among other places, where even the president has been heard using it. The language department at my school, where we offer French and Spanish - has made it our policy to teach these neologistic nonbinary structures in both languages at all levels. While our decision was spurred by the enrollment of our school’s first openly nonbinary student, I think about the words of Dr. Kris Knisely from a recent webinar that I attended, “We cannot know and we do not need to know that trans students exist in our classrooms to do the necessary work of a trans affirming language classroom.” Whether our students are not yet openly nonbinary or whether they want to learn affirming language to talk about their friends, we must be helping students see the languages

Socially Just Language for All Gender Identities

Joseph Parodi-Brown, Ed.D., Marianapolis Preparatory School @SenorParodi

For many of us who teach gendered languages, the concept of gender can be fraught with many difficulties - difficulty for students to understand what makes an object feminine or masculine - or event neuter, difficulty in helping them get into the habit of making nouns and adjectives agree, and for students who are working to understand their own gender identities, the difficulty of not knowing which adjectives to use to describe themselves. Gender, then, in the language classroom can be challenging to teach and to learn. The first difficulty I mentioned is that of connecting gender with inanimate objects. As much as we may understand that what I’ve heard language teachers call “grammatical gender” is not connected with personal gender, this can be challenging for students to connect with. Add to that the seeming senselessness of gender. “Chair” for example is a feminine
they’re learning in ways that connect with who they are and how they are moving in this world.

While my examples have been in Spanish, I do have a Resources page that includes resources for other languages, as well. Please reach out by email (on the resources page) or Twitter (above) if you have any questions.

**Language and Social Justice in the Spanish Classroom**

by Amy Nocon

I never wanted to become a teacher. If you had met me as a student at UConn in the early 1990s and had asked me what I wanted to do after I finished my Master’s in International Studies with a focus on Latin American history and literature, I would have told you that I planned on working for a Non-Government Organization. Had you pressed me and inquired whether or not I had ever considered teaching, I would have given you an absolute, “No.”

I graduated with my undergraduate degree in May of 1993 and finished my masters in December 1993. I applied for a Fulbright and left for Chile in January 1994. I received news that I had been accepted to the Fulbright program to return to Chile in September of 1994 while still living in Chile. I returned to the United States for two weeks at the end of March and then departed for Italy where I spent another two and a half months before coming back to Connecticut to work a bit at whatever until I began my Fulbright.

At least, so I thought. At the end of July 1994, I received a letter from the Fulbright Student Scholarship Program informing me that, due to a downturn in the economy, and a lack of funding, all Fulbright scholarships to Latin America for the 1994-1995 academic year had been rescinded and “please try again.” Frantic, I began applying for jobs with non-profit organizations determined to land a position somewhere and start a career. Week after week, I received personalized rejection letters encouraging me to apply again in the future once the economy had improved. I was incredibly discouraged and desperate. I placed ads in the local paper The Yankee Flyer explaining that I was available to tutor Spanish or Italian and I would take babysitting positions. Yes, I was twenty-four years old and begging people to hire me to babysit because I could not find employment elsewhere.

The phone rang. Would I be interested in doing some mother’s helper work and, oh, might I also be interested in interviewing for a part time teaching position at a local private school? I interviewed for both positions a few days later and was hired a week before classes were to begin. I was given a small apartment as part of the slim salary that I was offered as an intern. The housing and the pay were terrible, but I discovered that I loved teaching. I remained at the school for three years and earned my Master’s in Education during that time as well as my CT certification.

So where does social justice fit in? In terms of social justice and the classroom, I was immediately interested in finding ways to create opportunities for my students to use Spanish in authentic, meaningful settings. One of the first moments this happened was when a group of recent Cuban refugees who were being assisted by local non-profit organizations in Hartford came to share their experiences with my students. Students listened attentively as three individuals spoke about their makeshift raft and the way they prepared to leave their island home. Students later helped organize a clothing and toiletry drive to help support recent arrivals.

And that was just the beginning. From then on, my students have been involved in relief efforts for victims of hurricanes in Central America; have had direct conversations with people who lived through civil conflict around the world; have listened to guest speakers in Spanish who address topics pertinent to current units of study (most recently, Professor Anne Gebelein from El Instituto at UConn gave a Spanish talk on the history of United States/Central American relations); have participated in Early College Experience competitions on numerous social justice and human rights topics; have experienced several years of a sister-school project which partnered primarily Spanish speaking ELL elementary school students with high school Spanish learners and the arts; have had conversations with authors about their work connected to promoting social justice; have made contributions to a primarily bilingual class-run blog on which students share both creative entries and more serious posts about the environment and human rights (Perdidos en sus pensamientos: Lost in [his, her, your, their] Thoughts); have worked on community engagement on school trips; and, two years ago, one group of ECE students of mine even had an opportunity to speak to the Vice-President of El Salvador and to interview him about his own interest in social justice and international affairs. With the exceptions of the ECE competitions and the bilingual blog, these involvements have all occurred in Spanish.

Additionally, I run a Deliberation and Discourse Project at school which similarly promotes social justice and civic engagement. As such, we are involved in quite a bit of community outreach. In fact, at the end of February, we ran a Narrative 4 story exchange event and one of my students, Lexi Esparza-Finsmith, ran an exchange in Spanish for Spanish speakers. Her room was a tremendous success and allowed some non-English speaking community members to participate in a function that they otherwise would not have had access to given their limited English proficiency.
In my Spanish 3 class we just finished watching the documentary *Landfill Harmonic* as part of a study on the environment and education. This month’s blog entry will focus on environmental issues and challenges that the students are wanting to tackle. In their unit assessment, they will mention organizations that also support their areas of environmental concern. My ECE students will finish analyzing *NN12* by Gracia Morales today and will then craft questions for our upcoming interview with the playwright next week.

My goal has been to give students opportunities to work and learn with Spanish speakers while interacting in basic human ways, through telling stories, asking questions and getting to know one another. As much as possible, I seek to make the exchanges beneficial for both parties in that we are all learning from one another in the hopes of creating a tiny space where we might all feel a sense of belonging and purpose.

**Language Teaching and Learning is an Act of Humility as well as a Political Act**
Dr. Yvonne Fariño
Vernon Center Middle School

Have you noticed that when you watch the news and you hear about another country it is often because of political chaos or tragedy? This portrayal of tragedy and chaos disempowers its citizens because it leaves an impression on the viewers that the inhabitants have no voice. Moreover, it portrays its citizens as having no history aside from those who are constructing their culture, language and country in the lens of tragedy or criminal activity. This misrepresentation type of activity has the potential to (mis)identify the desire of its citizens. The generalized information in portrayed in the news about other countries (probably due to time constraints) do not include the contributions of the inhabitants prior to the aftermath of any sociopolitical disruption. In this sense, the people are identified as “pobrecitos” (i.e. poor little ones), as lacking culture, linguistics, or social capital. My curiosity behind these experiences are what led me to graduate school, where I focused on applied linguistics, critical pedagogy and critical language awareness in the Spanish classroom.

I am a first-generation immigrant, from Ecuador, and the only one who attended college and beyond. My mother was of indigenous descent and my father’s roots were primarily African. As a bilingual and biliterate person, and a Spanish language educator for thirty years, I have learned that teaching and learning a language is not just about learning a prescribed language, culture and geography. One becomes proficient in a target language, by using and understanding that language in the manner in which its speakers use it and with the underlying cultural meaning that is intended by its speakers. I have also learned that how we interact and share resources with those we construct as the “other”, has real consequences for our students, and the quality of life they may lead.

Language teaching and learning is a complex activity that requires learning about the language as well as its speakers, including the meaning making processes to comprehend the text of its speakers. This is where I see students becoming proficient, in that meta-cognitive processes is how students are developing the skills to understand the multiple ways speakers of a target language communicate. In this context, language teaching and learning is an act of humility and a political act.

As a Spanish language teacher, and teacher-educator, I have had the opportunity to infuse my curriculum with social justice themes from K-12 and with teachers and administrators. At the secondary level, where I began my career, I tried to undo the misrepresentation of what I called, the “pobrecito” syndrome. I began by infusing my curriculum with history through music and art. After a few years, I began to examine how I was informing my students. Questioning whether the content of my lessons brought meaningful content to the students. Were my efforts coming across in a healthy way for their learning of culture as well as language? Colleagues commented, “That’s great that you are showing so much about them!” Later I would learn that this “positive” prejudice is called reverse racism, and it is still oppression. It turns out that my colleagues were right, I was focusing on the “them” in my lessons. I quickly realized that I had been imagining my students as empty vessels waiting to be led with the political, cultural, historical, and geographical knowledge instead of asking them what they knew, including some of their heritage language knowledge into my lesson plans.

I began to realize that I needed more training to include my students’ voices as well as cultural and linguistic knowledge. Teaching critical comparative analysis so that they could view how we are all similar in the struggle for basic human rights and resources. Thus began my journey into graduate school in the Language, Literacy and Culture program at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, MA. As I progressed in my doctoral studies, I learned how to create project-based assessments and how to collaborate with my students to develop my curriculum.

At the beginning of the academic year, and throughout the year, especially as the beginning level students are learning question words and the verb “gustar” (to like) for example, I use them as an opportunity to learn about their talents, or
Funds of Knowledge. Luis Moll et al define Funds of Knowledge as “the skills and knowledge that have been historically and culturally developed to enable an individual or household to function within a given culture, and argue that integrating funds of knowledge into classroom activities creates a richer and more-highly scaffolded learning experience for students.” (Moll et al, 1992). I summarize Funds of knowledge as the multiple intelligences concept but its focus is on the various home knowledge and skills students develop at home. These rich tools illuminate students’ access to learning and the challenge for us teachers is to help them identify and use them as a resource as we teach content.

This application of Funds of Knowledge has allowed me to reconceptualize every project as an opportunity to learn who my students are becoming as learners; providing the arena to experience their potential identity, as well as their potential future self. Often students believe they are the surroundings from which they are temporarily living. I apply the Funds of Knowledge concept in the teaching of Spanish as an opportunity not only for students to learn about the culture of the target language, but also a space to experience hope and humility when both the educator and the student imagine themselves as developing a future identity based on the resources they are equipped with, whether from home, culture, or out of everyday experiences.

The application of Funds of Knowledge have afforded me to include social justice themes because it has allowed me to view students as being equipped with resources. Many cultural points that are referenced in the textbook have allowed me to develop a further richness, and with a critical lens, which I now am able to share with my students. From this perspective, there are many opportunities for including social justice themes at the basic levels, especially in public schools. Even though it is understood that teachers face many challenges daily in the classroom; especially for non-professional status teachers because these decisions have real consequences. The following are just a few examples of what colleagues have told me as to why they do not address social justice issues in the classroom:

a. Students do not have the language to understand authentic text, and complex themes that arise from discussions of racial identities, historical facts, in the target language.

b. We, as teachers, may not feel prepared to include the voice of those who have been disenfranchised, and may be afraid to do more damage as a result.

c. Parents misunderstand, holding beliefs that the teaching of a language exists in a vacuum (i.e. teaching just the words and not the meaning processes of its speakers). For this type of parent, language is apolitical, meaning it is isolated from the sociocultural and sociopolitical construct and representations of the speakers’ cultural identities.

d. Teachers may be overwhelmed with all of the demands of teaching, and potentially compounded with the consequences of parents not understanding why social justice is taught in a language class.

e. Teachers may be afraid that they will not be supported by their administrators.

This year, in my efforts to honor African heritage, I decided to embark on teaching history through music of the Caribbean. As you may know, the teaching of a language encompasses the cultural identity that has been created and redefined via history, geography, and climate and that (de)value is transmitted via language use. In this sense, language, culture and history cannot be separated. In other words, I cannot just teach about the music genre without including the history of how Bomba, Merengue, and Salsa came to be the voice of its creators, and how it was born out of the suffrage of the enslaved and disenfranchised people. It was their tool of expression.

I opened February African heritage with the video AfroLatinidad by Lala Anthony. She goes over the history of how AfroLatinos have contributed to the shaping of U.S. history, and explains how such contributions are often overlooked. She delves into the question of why there are so many misconceptions about Black Latino community. Ms. Anthony leads the viewers into exploring the history of colonization and how those historical events have shaped our cultural identity. She states that because “European colonies were founded in White Supremacy, their different approaches to race have had a huge impact on how the colonized people self-identified.” This statement caused anger for a parent of one of my students. She said I was teaching divisiveness. There were other statements that Lala Anthony touched upon in video. She talked about colorism, the expression “mejorar la raza” (to better the race) and where it stems from, and did a comparative analysis of how the U.S. and Latin American countries still struggle to recognize AfroLatino contributions. My goal for showing this video was for students to see how we are part of a history which constructs who we are and how we view the world. Later the parent had a conversation with my administrator and asked, “why is she teaching about race? That should be done in a Social Studies class.”

Upon reflection of the conversations with the parents and administration, I decided to create a “Mi huipil” project. My training as an anti-racist educator informed me that often the anger stems from feelings of shame or “discomfort when
confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice” (DiAngelo, 2011). My goal for creating the Mi huipil project was for students to engage in conversations with their families, especially their elders, to learn about their heritage and roots. The two-day lesson, in which students practiced their reading comprehension skills, introduced the Mayan indigenous groups, how the weaving is a form of cultural identity, the challenges indigenous groups face in a global economy, and the efforts to protect their intellectual property and designs. At the end of the lesson, as an exit ticket, I asked students “what did you learn today?” and “What do you think was the most important part of today’s lesson?” All of the students said that they learned what a huipil was, how the design represents their indigenous group. They said that the most important part of the lesson was that huipiles represent a cultural group, and they mentioned the efforts that the indigenous groups were doing to keep their designs from being stolen by the fashion industry. I was ecstatic to read these accounts because the text was in Spanish. I had chosen an article that had a lot of cognates. The students did not only read an authentic text but also understood the group’s struggle while seeing their empowerment and working towards justice to keep their designs within their communities.

Once students learned about the significance of a huipil, they designed a Huipil that represented their own cultural identity and honored their heritage. I envisioned this project as a way for students, and hopefully their families, to understand how any text or image is contextualized to who we are and how we identify ourselves, are part of a community and history. More importantly, I wanted my students to engage with their parents in conversations about who they were and the history of their heritage.

At the beginning of the project, when students started their design, they would write to me that they did not know anything about where they came from, and neither did their parents. Some told me that they only knew some of their heritage. I took for granted that I come from an oral history culture, and have heard many stories about my grandparents and ancestors from childhood. I also realized that I assumed there were family conversations and discussions from my students regarding family roots. I noticed that for students who did not know about their ancestors, their design was that of the flags of their ancestors. The students who are immigrants, however, made connections and explained that in their country, they make a similar dress: “In Albania we have our own version of a huipil called dimiq tirane.” (from a student).

I have noticed that after the Mi huipil project, students are now more open to talk and share more information about themselves. I am seeing more participation from them too. Recently when we had our parent-teacher conferences, some parents mentioned the project and how it was fun; providing good P.R. for the World Language Department and, I am hoping, more trust from both students and their families.

The best lesson I have learned from my students and from language teaching and learning is the understanding that language often plays a pivotal role in the transmission of knowledge and of how others are identified. In this sense, “language is the means for effecting or maintaining an equal allocation of power and resources” (Phillipson, 1992:55). Thus, for me, teaching Spanish means addressing linguistic and cultural diversity as a resource in ways that students examine the impact and the importance of the diversity and knowledge from the disenfranchised. As a bilingual and biliterate educator, who was once an emergent bilingual student, I know that when such knowledge and diversity is left unexamined, and because we live in a society where dominant discourses permeate every strand of our culture, it means that our students can then re-inscribe those dominant discourses of individualism and superiority. There are many affordances for including social justice themes at the basic levels, especially in public schools, the goal is to look at our curriculum and view spaces where we can include the voices, history, and/or facts about the disenfranchised. I encourage you to have fun, and work with another colleague, and to continue to learn from the gifts that students bring to the classroom with their Funds of Knowledge.

References


First Year Teacher Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

D’Lanie Pelletier

Throughout my teacher preparation program at UCONN, I always knew that my first year of teaching would be challenging. However, I never could have imagined the challenges that the year 2020-2021 has brought. This year has brought students in masks with shields over their desks, hybrid learning, block schedules, fully online students, and the struggle to keep students engaged despite the uncertainty of their outside world. All of the teaching and classroom management strategies that I learned in my teacher preparation program now seemed distant as all teachers learned how to adapt and teach in this new learning model.

Although this year was far from what I expected, I have learned and grown a lot since the first day. I went into the first week nervous and unsure of how the lessons were going to unfold. Through many trials and errors, I have found new ways to connect with and engage my students, some of whom I have never even met in person. Applications such as nearpod, edpuzzle, kahoot, and quizlet live have become an integral part of my lessons. I have found that these apps keep the students, whether at home or in person, engaged and participating in the classwork.

Another quality that I have learned in my first year is patience and compassion. Just as many adults are tired and struggling this year, our students are feeling this same way. They are behind screens all day and are unable to hang out with their friends as they could years before. Sometimes as a teacher, we forget that our students can feel the same burnout and exhaustion that we feel. I learned that being patient with students and showing them that you understand can go a long way. The students have been more than patient with us teachers trying to figure out the new technology, so we owe it to them to be patient as well.

I spoke about being patient with students, but something that was much harder for me to learn this year was how to be patient with myself. As a first year teacher, I often feel as if I have to prove myself. I want to prove to my students, colleagues and the administration that I am capable of this job. However, this led to a massive amount of overthinking and stress that wasn’t good for me or my students’ learning. I had to see that it is okay to make mistakes. As a first year, it is expected. These mistakes are what help you learn. The students don’t expect you to be perfect, just as you don’t expect them to be. I also had to learn that it is not a weakness to ask for help. Asking for input on a lesson or activity will simply just make it better. The more perspectives that you have, the better the lessons will be.

Although I wish that teaching could go back to “normal”, I am grateful for all of the lessons that I have learned this year. It has allowed me to reflect as an educator as to why I chose to be a teacher, and how I will best serve my students moving forward. Pandemic or not, our students need to learn, and it’s our responsibility to be there for them through it all.

Inspired by Wisconsin FLESFEST… Envisioning OURS

Marisa Lewis
Elementary World Language Teacher
Orchard Hill Elementary School, South Windsor, CT
NNELL State Rep

Here is the story of a lovely elementary world language teacher who was teaching a world language on her own (sing this line to the tune of the Brady Bunch theme song) until she met one lone ranger and then another until the zoom tiles could not fit in the screen anymore (read this line to the tune of the Lone Ranger...minus the gun shots). Who knew there were as many of us early language teachers and that we could gather all in one place!! Just as fun virtually as I imagine in person all the more merry it would be and with as much energy as the elementary students that we teach. The essential elementary Spanish world language teacher trademarks singing, rhyming, and finding fun creative ways to engage students. “No contaban con mi astucia” y “siganme los buenos” as Chapulin Colorado would say as he saved the day. (Please check him out...he is my favorite super hero.) When we find each other, early language teachers, we cannot help but to stick together. On March 8th the newly formed CT/MA/RI FLES FEST committee met to discuss the initial steps to create the annual early language event in our area starting in the spring of 2022.

All members in the committee had attended WI FLESFEST on February 20th. The WI FLESFEST was a remarkable one day conference for best practices at the novice level. A big highlight of the conference was Rebecca Aubrey’s inspiring, genuine and heartfelt keynote speech on the joy of connecting with our students and each other. The opportunity to network and collaborate in the breakout sessions was another highlight in this virtual conference. Whether we attended an event like this for the first time or not, all of us in the committee were inspired and energized at the dream and vision to start our own. The WI FLESFEST started in 1989. In New York the Dalton School has been hosting an annual FLES FEST for the past 6
Noteworthy was the discussion about the name and title of our conference. Since the majority of programs in our three states go by Elementary World Language rather than Foreign Language in the Elementary School the question of choosing a different name came up. Do we name our conference the traditionally well-known name FLES FEST? Or do we give our conference a name that more accurately reflects how we name our elementary programs and our vision for early language in CT, MA, and RI.

In planning our conference we agreed it was important to prioritize the need for networking and collaborating among colleagues in our field. Since there are few and far in between elementary world language programs this need is magnified. Ironically, the pandemic has afforded more opportunities to connect with colleagues from all over the USA at virtual conferences and events. The fact that our committee can meet monthly without having to find a midpoint location to meet in person, is very convenient. Our current situation has allowed for us to feel comfortable with virtual meetings. Although, we all agreed we look forward to meeting in person sometime soon as well. Why not have the best of both worlds?

Another important point of discussion at our meeting was the question of hosting in person conference or a hybrid conference that would allow for in person and virtual participation. Many of us committee members would have not been able to attend WI FLESFEST had it been an in person event or for that matter many of the other conferences we have attended this past year. Hosting a hybrid event would open the opportunity to so many more people. Interacting with colleagues from all over the US at WI FLESS FEST brought more perspectives and ideas to the conversations at our breakout sessions which was valuable and most informative. Elementary world language programs are unique and different from one another across the US. There is multiple variations such as the frequency of instruction per week, and whether to start world language at pre-K or at K, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 5th grade. The list could go on. Elementary world language teachers can learn so much from all the different unique experiences that can be found in our field. The lone rangers and Brady bunches can meet and exchange ideas so that they do not have reinvent the wheel over and over again.

Advocating for Languages in Connecticut and Nationally: 2021 Language Advocacy Days

Michele Back
Advocacy Coordinator, CT COLT

The Joint National Committee for Languages and the National Council for Languages and International Studies (JNCL-NCLIS) sponsors an annual Language Advocacy Day in which advocates for world language teaching and learning meet with their state’s members of congress to discuss key bills and initiatives related to world languages education. The “Day” is in fact several days of planning, presenting to state representatives and senators, and recapping what took place during the meetings. Due to the pandemic, this year’s Language Advocacy Days (February 3-5) were held virtually instead of in Washington, D.C. Although I was disappointed to not visit one of my favorite cities, the virtual format had its advantages. This year, language advocates participated from all 50 states (a first for the event), and our group from Connecticut was able to connect with several members of congress and explain how world language learning was so important to the state of Connecticut and to the nation.

The CT team consisted of CT COLT members Jimmy Wildman, Lea Graner-Kennedy, Joseph Parodi-Brown, and ACTFL president Jessica Haxhi, as well as Kaitlyn Tagarelli, Head of Research and Linguist at Mango Languages. Our first afternoon was spent reviewing the key “asks” of JNCL-NCLIS, which included support the America’s Languages Caucus, as well as how each of these initiatives would benefit the state of Connecticut, we were ready for the main event the following day; a series of half-hour meetings with the offices of our CT senators and congresspeople.

This year’s large team offered us access to several members of congress, including in districts with whom we had previously not been in contact. While many of these meetings were with well-informed staff members, we were fortunate to meet with two congressmen: Rep. Joe Courtney (D-2) and Rep. Jim Himes (D-4). We presented a slideshow that included maps of the Seal of Biliteracy’s growth in CT school districts and the impact the Seal has had on our students (see below). We also
discussed how initiatives such as the Native American Language Resource Center Act were important initiatives for indigenous communities in the state, such as the Mashantucket Pequot community in Rep. Courtney’s district.

Figure 1: Growth in the Seal of Biliteracy’s implementation in CT, 2018-2020

The staff members and the two congressmen were all extremely gracious and expressed interest in supporting the initiatives we presented. They were particularly impressed with the growth in the Seal of Biliteracy’s implementation over the past few years, as well as the importance of world languages for the state’s business sector. They urged us to keep in touch with their offices and to invite them to language-related events in the state. A highlight was meeting Rep. Himes for the first time, who is bilingual in Spanish and English and spent his childhood in Peru. He was very receptive to the initiatives we discussed, knowing firsthand the importance of multilingualism in advancing the economic and social needs of the state. We came away from an exhausting day of meetings with new contacts and a renewed belief in the power of advocacy!

If you are interested in any of JNCL-NCLIS’s advocacy initiatives, please visit their website. Your involvement can be as small as reaching out to senators and representatives about language-related initiatives that are close to your heart, or you might want to consider joining us next year for Language Advocacy Days. As CT-COLT’s Advocacy Coordinator, I also plan to send out periodic emails to members on issues that need your support. Politics can sometimes seem a million miles away, especially during a pandemic. It’s important to remember that our senators and representatives work for us and love to hear from their constituents!

Distance Learning

**Zoom with Confidence and Breakout with Assurance**
by Sarab Al Ani, Yale University

It is almost impossible to believe that we have been teaching online for a year now. It was not what we had planned or intended. Nonetheless it was the situation we found ourselves in and made the best out of. During the past year, some of us have been using Zoom to hold class meetings. Whether we had intended to or not, we have by now become self-proclaimed Zoom experts. Zoom has
now become part of our lives not only in teaching. Zoom Class, Zoom Meeting, Zoom Call, Zoom Wedding, Zoom reunion, Zoom Happy Hour and Zoom Birthday became the new normal.

Despite it being used to held different types of meetings, Zoom was actually designed with the educator in mind (Li et. al. 2021). From the very beginning Zoom meetings were valued differently by different educators. Some educators could not help but notice how these meetings were lacking the paralinguistic cues and nonverbal communication that is key in teaching a face-to-face class (Guillén et. al., 2020). In her article titled Why We’re Exhausted by Zoom, Susan Blum says; “Over my decades of teaching, I've learned to read a room pretty well: the harmonized posture, the breaths, the laughter, the eye gaze. My classes are successful when everyone is so excited that they want to speak over each other out of sheer exuberance (…). Technological platforms such as Zoom provide some imitations of face-to-face interaction, what I notice the most is that I miss the three-dimensional faces and the bodies and the eyes and the breaths” (Blum, 2020). The lack of paralinguistic cues could be the reason behind students’ reluctance to self-nominate themselves to respond to questions or provide opinions during a class meeting held on Zoom (Kohnke et. al., 2020).

It is not all bad though. Zoom does have its advantages as well. Amongst the features that Zoom has, and a one that is designed for education purposes, is having a virtual main meeting room as well as the possibility to create separate virtual breakout meeting rooms (Serembus et. al., 2020). Zoom breakout rooms were often used in the classroom to create spaces where learners can “meet”, work and collaborate in smaller numbers (Kohnke et. al., 2020). These rooms where students can meet and work in smaller numbers did help a little in addressing students’ reluctance o participate. Just like in the main Zoom meeting room, students can share screen in the breakout room in order to have a common point of reference and facilitate group or pair work and maximize interaction (Li et. al. 2021). Students can also click a specific button to ask the educator (the meeting Host) for help if they have a question (Li et. al. 2021).

Moreover, as breakout rooms are in session, educators can enter the breakout rooms to monitor students’ progress (Dharma et. al., 2017).

Zoom breakout rooms were viewed favorably by language educators and used readily by them due to the following reasons (Gruber, et. al. 2020, Nurieva et. al, 2020):

1. Ease of transition from face-to-face teaching to online teaching because small group work is key in traditional language classrooms
2. Pair and small group interaction that Zoom breakout room provides is essential in foreign language learning because it increases individual learners’ speaking time and creates a collaborative environment.
3. Any collaborative activity done in class promotes language interaction among learners, maximizes engagement with the task, and builds a community of learning.

Some students expressed favorable opinions as well. One student reports that “Zoom breakout rooms helped us to smoothly transition. Though transitioning to online learning was going to feel differently and reposition our classroom pattern of behaviors, this new process of learning became more fluidly accomplished with the use of Zoom breakout rooms. Using breakout rooms allowed me to feel connected and aided me in remaining academically focused to finish the semester successfully” (Romero-Ivanova et. al, 2020, page 85).

Like the favorable opinions you just read above, I too perceived Zoom breakout rooms as a feature that would bring about various benefits to my class. At the same time, I kept an open mind with regards to the challenges that this new method of teaching was presenting us with. One of these challenges is the fact that while I can enter breakout rooms to monitor students’ progress (as was mentioned above), I could only do so one room at a time and inevitably some time was lost as I hopped from one room to the other. In my face-to-face class on the other hand, I was standing there amongst the students as the pair work was taking place and could easily see the process unfold. I could also easily tend to their needs and/or questions. As far as student-student interaction is concerned, I experienced firsthand the decline that took place as we moved classes online.

Below are some approaches I started adopting as I continue to use Zoom breakout rooms.

   When students go to breakout rooms, they usually need sometime to start tackling the task in hand. Therefore, visiting the rooms as soon as students populate it is not ideal as they will still be getting started. It is best to leave 2 to 3 minutes between the time the last students enters the room and the first room you start to visit.

2. Be the bug on the wall.
When visiting *breakout* rooms, it is important to have good and clear understanding of the purpose behind the visit. When I visit the breakout rooms, my intention is not to interrupt nor to participate in the interaction. Rather to observe and support when/if needed. Therefore, I visit the room with the camera turned off, the mic on mute. I am the bug on the wall. I also let students know that I am here to answer any questions they may need. I might occasionally intervein if needed. I also maintain

3. Let your *reactions* show.
   When visiting *breakout* rooms and despite the fact that I am the bug on the wall, I make sure -when appropriate - to let them know that they are doing well when they are proceeding to complete the task as required, when they are engaged in functional fruitful interaction by using the Zoom *reactions* button (see image below). This feature provides with an emoji of a hand with thumbs up and an emoji of clapping hands. When clicking the emotion button these emojis show up on the top corner of the screen. They can be used even when the participant is mute, and the camera is turned off. Since I wish for my visits to cause as little interruption as possible, I often use these emojis to let the students know that they are doing a good job.

4. One less click to press. One more room to visit.
   For the purpose of minimizing lost time, I started moving from one *breakout* room to the other directly between the rooms without the need to go back to the *main* room every time. This can be achieved by clicking the breakout room button on the lower bar on your screen. This will show a box of *Breakout Rooms – In Progress* (see image below). You will be able to see how many rooms there are, their numbers, who is on which room and a blue *join* option for each room. The join option enables you to move between the rooms without the need to return to the main room.
5. Broadcast message. 
   The Breakout Rooms – In Progress box, mentioned above, features a button on the bottom left-hand corner which enables the host to Broadcast a message to all. I try and use this feature to communicate with students while they are still completing their tasks to clarify a point, remind of remaining time, or give group feedback especially if I noticed a common issue as I visit breakout rooms while students are working on completing their tasks.

6. Mix it up. Literally!
   Another feature in the Breakout Rooms – In Progress box enables the host to move students to different rooms. In a task that involves relatively short oral interaction (such as pair role play activities), this is exactly what I do. As I visit the rooms, and when I notice that the task is coming to an end, I start moving some of the students to different rooms, thus creating new pairs. Before moving students, I broadcast a message to all to give them heads up about the move. Creating new pair revives the conversation, doubles students speech time, allows them to work with different partners and adds richness to the content of the post-task portion when all students are back in the main Zoom room to share their encounters.

There is no telling how much of a role Zoom is going to play in our professional lives as educators. Once the pandemic is over (which is not too far along now), we may never teach with Zoom again. That being said, Zoom is still a tech tool that we currently rely upon heavily, and still use to teach. Hence, for the time being, it is worth learning new strategies as we proceed giving our students our best.

References:


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**Summer Proficiency Institute 2021**

Greetings to all the CT COLT members!

Summer is right around the corner and better days are ahead with vaccinations in full swing and restrictions being lifted. Dare we say that we made it through one of the strangest years both professionally and personally? As we all prepare for our final units of curriculum, IPAs, final exams and/or graduation ceremonies, we can allow ourselves time to reflect on this unprecedented school year. How has Covid 19 changed our practice? How has distance and hybrid learning altered what we do as educators? CT COLT is dedicated to supporting teachers as learners and we strive to offer high quality, relevant professional development opportunities. This June we will continue that goal with the 2021 Summer Proficiency Institute with Greg Duncan and facilitators. In 2021, the focus will be on creating performance based assessments to support the curriculum. This 3-day workshop is intended to equip teachers with vital information about how to identify and create high-quality performance-based assessment tasks that connect to what students have learned and learned how to do in their class experiences. Participants will

- Enhance their understanding of the characteristics of good performance assessment tasks;
- Access existing banks of assessment tasks in order to distinguish between well-constructed tasks and weaker ones;
- Use new information and prior knowledge to develop interpersonal tasks directly connected to their curriculum;
- Delve into the challenges associated with developing listening and reading tasks based on authentic sources;
- Create performance assessment tasks for listening and reading that are directly connected to their curriculum;
- Connect interpretive and interpersonal tasks to the presentational tasks demonstrating the move from input to output;
- Have rich opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and mentors to share their products and both give and receive valuable feedback.

We hope to see you there!

Register today at CT COLT! Spaces are limited.

Registration Fee $100

Contact Kathleen Archibald with any questions

archibaldk@ctcolt.org

**Announcement of the Winner of the 2021 COLT Essay Contest**

This year CT COLT conducted the seventh (9th) annual WORLD LANGUAGE STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST. For 2021, students explored the following theme: *Celebrating languages and learners with inclusivity and diversity.* In a formal essay-response, students researched and wrote about one or more of the following subtopics related to inclusivity and diversity:

- Inclusive and diverse learning environments in schools;
- (Different points of view or perspectives, representing a diverse group of peoples and learners;
- A wide range of diverse educational teaching materials and topics utilized in classes, accessible by all learners;
• Celebrating diverse communities and diverse students, from diverse backgrounds, diverse cultures, diverse beliefs and diverse life experiences.

• Diversity as it relates to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability, age, religious belief, or political conviction;

• Diversity, as represented by the entire staff employed in schools and working with students.

Students were required to construct well-organized arguments, based on objective, fact-based information, in addition to drawing upon educational and personal life experiences. This year, the COLT Essay Contest Committee received a total of twenty-two (22) essays from students and their teachers across the state of Connecticut. The essays were read and scored according to the 2021 contest writing rubric which included the following criteria: (1) citations and accuracy of facts cited; (2) persuasiveness of arguments; (3) conventions of writing and (4) organization of essay. CT COLT and all Board Members would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank all student writers and their teachers for participating in this year’s contest. All students who submitted essays for this year’s contest will receive a 2021 Certificate of Participation from CT COLT.

This year’s committee is proud to announce that the winner of the 2021 CT COLT WORLD LANGUAGE STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST is Tristan Ward of the New Haven Academy and who also attends the Yale World Language After School Program for Italian. Our Committee and CT COLT applaud Tristan for an excellent essay that references both fact-based arguments and personal experience. In a well-organized essay, Tristan begins by framing the topic of inclusivity and diversity with a discussion about the pre-existing polarization in US society and the animosity that exists and targets oppressed communities. He continues by stating that the role of schools is crucial in fostering a diverse and inclusive climate and that ultimately serves to replicate this environment in US society. Another important point in Tristan’s essay concerns the differences that exist between various peoples and groups. Such differences are sometimes misconstrued and can divide groups in US society, instead of being a force for culturally enriching our society. From present day, Tristan takes us back through US history, characterizing it as being plagued by a severe mistreatment of marginalized peoples. This disturbing historical trend continues, even perpetuated by contemporary curricula that does not fully discuss or address the issue. Furthermore, these textbook histories that are taught in Connecticut (CT) classrooms do not pay adequate tribute to important minority figures who were innovators and catalysts for change in the US. Increasing the diversity within what is being taught in CT classrooms will provide our students with a better understanding of our society, our future and ourselves. Tristan closes the essay with the important notion that the presentation of an accurate historical narrative and subsequent discussions in schools will serve as initial steps down the path of creating a society that truly values diversity and inclusion.

CT COLT is pleased to present Tristan with a $50 award. In addition, we are happy to provide Tristan’s teacher, Mr. Luis Rivera, with a $50 Carlex or Teacher’s Discovery voucher. CT COLT would like to thank all students and teachers who participated in this year’s contest and look forward to next year’s CT COLT Essay Contest in 2021. Please visit https://ctcolt.org/wp-content/uploads/EssayContest/EC2021WinningEssay.pdf to download a copy of Tristan’s winning essay.

John R. Rook and Judith Ojeda, Co-Chairs for the 2021 CT COLT Essay Contest

An Immense Success for the 2021 Poster Contest!

Melissa Tubbs
AATF Organizational Director

The CT COLT 2021 Poster Contest embraced the digital nature of education, making lemonade out of pandemic lemons. Contest chairperson Melissa Tubbs reformatted the event with a digital option, allowing participating teachers to upload their students’ submissions online in addition to the option of mailing by post. Due in large part to the increased accessibility and ease of participation, over 150 posters were submitted, all of which were amazing. The theme of the contest “Languages Celebrate our Differences,” allowed students to reflect on all the positive aspects of diversity and inclusion in the world language classroom, and the contest winners showcased this brilliantly through their interpretations!

Lower Elementary Category
First place: Ariyan Mubashwir, Dorothy L. Goodwin Elementary
Second place: Ria Shenoy, West District School
Third place: Hope Gu, Annie E. Vinton Elementary

Upper Elementary Category
First place: Aarav Arora, West District School
Second place: Leah Lucey, Hopewell Elementary School
Third place: Alexa Pesarik, Pine Point School
Middle School Category

First place: Sneh Detroja, Timothy Edwards Middle School
Second place: Siona Christy, Smith Middle School
Third place (tie): Samishka Maheswaran, Timothy Edwards Middle School
Third place (tie): Cora Davia, Walter C. Polson Middle School

High School Category

First place: Hannon Stern, Greenwich High School
Second place: Carolyn Neugarten, Ridgefield High School
Third place: Leah Balser, Bacon Academy

And our GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Clara Steele, Simsbury High School

The contest also enlisted the help of a diverse panel of 10 judges from across the state, for whom we are very thankful! These selfless volunteers evaluated the poster entries on visual impact, creativity, neatness, relevance to theme, and connection to culture. Choosing from all the entries was no small feat!

- Eileen Frankel, Fairfield Public Schools
- Cristina Russo, Wethersfield High School
- Jane See, Ridgefield High School
- Joanne Johnson, E.O. Smith High School
- Karen Murano, Weston Middle School

Moving forward, Tubbs and the CT COLT Student Activities Coordinator, Judith Ojeda hope to expand the contest further by creating a committee for the growing event, and including additional media and categories for the artistic submissions. The enthusiastic response to the digital options this year have shown us that there is incredible potential for event growth, and to involve more teachers and students in various ways. Stay tuned for all this and more in next year’s contest!

Message from the 2021 CT COLT Poetry Contest Committee

Elizabeth Lapman - Hamden Public Schools
John Rook - Glastonbury Public Schools
Paul M. St. Louis - CT COLT Treasurer
Matthew Mangino, Wethersfield Public Schools

The CT COLT Poetry Contest Committee would like to congratulate all 233 student participants from 25 schools who prepared and recited poems at the 2021 Poetry Contest on Wednesday, April 21, 2021. We would also like to thank their teacher coordinators who arranged for their participation. As is the case every year, CT COLT is so very, very grateful for the commitment of our poetry contest judges who dedicate an entire afternoon to listen to and evaluate the recitations of our students. We would also like to thank the teachers in the World Language Department of Wethersfield High School (WHS), the students of the WHS Spanish Honor Society and WHS Assistant Principal - Tara Yusko, for her inspiring words and thoughts. Lastly, our committee would also like to thank the CT COLT Board Members - Amanda Robustelli-Price (Current CTOL President), Rebecca Aubrey (Current Vice-President and President Elect) and Judith Ojeda (Student Activities Coordinator) for their support and guidance in planning for and executing this year’s contest. We look forward to next year’s contest in 2022 - see you all then!

To see the list of winners of this year’s contest, please visit https://ctcolt.org/awards-contests/poetry-recitation-contest/.

Please check the website in early September for information about the 2022 Poetry Recitation Contest.
Organizational News

AATF CT News

By Sangeeta Dhawan and Melissa Tubbs

Spring brings three exciting events to the AATF community: one is a returning favorite, and two are brand-new! Jon Shee, chapter President, Sangeeta Dhawan, member of the Comité Exécutif, and Melissa Tubbs, AATF Organizational Director for COLT, are each spearheading the events to engage French students and teachers in CT!

The live theater production *Molière than thou!* took place once again on March 1st via Zoom. This immensely popular event that was performed live in 2015 for the AATF Connecticut garnered more than 75 registrants and was a huge success. Some teachers broadcasted the show to their classrooms, while remote learners joined directly via Zoom. Performer Tim Mooney perfectly embodied the famous comedic French playwright onstage, switching costumes and wigs as he bounced between Molière’s famous plays and characters. The show was interactive, with participants asked to call back certain lines during scenes. Even with the technological layer, seeing students’ laughing faces on the Zoom screens was a welcome sight for teachers; the performance provided the perfect comedic respite from the pandemic blues. A participating student had this to say about the show: “The actor was very adaptable and creative in the circumstances. He filled the whole room with his personality, and the performance was engaging. He had a great Zoom personality!”

Greens Farms Academy students led discussions on April 3rd around a film festival facilitated by Upper School teacher, Dr. Sangeeta Dhawan, and organized by Junior, Avery Woodworth. The films in the series were: *La cour de Babel*, *La guerre des boutons*, *Demain*, *Bande de filles* and *Visages villages*. Earlier this year, the French program also screened *Les misérables*, *Personal Shopper* and *Le portrait d'une jeune fille en feu* to rave student reviews. AATF CT membership and their students watched the films individually between April first and third, before the live student discussion. Audience members participated in asking questions and making comments directly to the panelist which made for several electric moments during the discussions.

During the discussion for "Visages Villages," Luke C. of Choate Rosemary Hall said: "I think part of the beauty of the art was the fact that it was in these obscure places, and it wasn’t an exhibit. These people wanted to share their stories, and the artists gave them a voice." A thoughtful question from Alec from Branford School: "Recall Jeanine’s story from the film. Should communities strive to remember and honor their past history, like the story of the old miners whose house Jeanine lives in??" Another excellent one from Liev (Branford Schools): "In the film, JR takes up the responsibility of being the person to show Agnes her last faces and visions of the world, would you be able to do what JR did?" Making a point about history in "La guerre des boutons," Nicholas P. from New Milford Public School said: "I think they admired the Greeks for being warriors and they (especially the younger ones) didn’t really understand the aspect of race that the guide was talking about. That’s why you see the youngest stand on a stone wall yelling about how he is a big strong Greek warrior. They didn’t understand the identity aspect because Lebrac had never even seen a Jew before." Luke H. from Brunswick: "I loved it because the child’s view was a new lens to look at devastating war through, and the community built through the suffering was heartening." Geneviève B. about "Demain": You know it’s still a documentary so I had a slight problem with one of the solutions that were being presented, we can do this, you know, but that’s because it’s on such a small scale." Panelist Jonty H.(GFA) responded: "I agree, but they also try to explain how these communities could potentially affect large cities in countries with huge populations, and I think one of the most interesting points was the fact that 70% of the food that we consume is coming from these small farms. I would assume that most of the food at the grocery store comes from these huge farms that you see on the map of America. So, I think they were trying to emphasize the fact that these very productive, small, biodiverse areas are shipping food out to our grocery stores in America."

“Bande de filles” (Girlhood) had few participants but probably one of the most memorable panelists. In response to a question from Candace S. (Yale) about the significance of the film title, Nancy D. (Greens Farms Academy) processed her thoughts honestly and eloquently: "Girlhood in a lot of ways is coming of age, but it’s also a time in your life when you are trying to figure out your identity and that’s what we really see with Myriam, you know, when she changes her name to Vic and also her look, her hair and her clothing and sort of comes out of herself a little bit, more like comes out of her shell. The French title "Bande de filles," I think there are two different meanings depending on whether it’s in English or French, like in English, when we think of gang, that word comes with a certain connotation, normally we think of, I don't know about you, but like sometimes it’s a negative thing or sometimes it’s a threatening thing, but I guess the use of the word "bande de filles" to say girlhood is about bonds between people. I think that the way that the gangs are shown in this movie, it's sort of like a family outside of one's own family, it's sort of how these girls have stuck together and stayed strong." In all, more than 150 students, teachers, students, and other active and
retired members of the French teaching community registered. Participating schools included, Avon, Branford, Brunswick, Choate, Crec, CTReg14, Danbury, E.O. Smith, Foote, GFA, Greenwich, Hopkins, New Haven, RSD17, South Windsor, SCSU, St. Luke’s, TPSRI, Trumbull, and Yale. Greens Farms Academy students are planning to host their second annual film festival next year.

Later in the semester, AATF is also offering a brand new event: a virtual “kit” of leveled activities for teachers, celebrating French language and culture! What began as a simple suggestion from a member of the organization has evolved into the Valise d’Activités de Culture et Compétences, highlights of which include: a Jeopardy-like quiz show, an extensive menu of pre-recorded and live cultural presentations, scavenger hunts, and a large dossier of discussion prompts... all created for the elementary/middle school, introductory high school, and intermediate/advanced high school levels! Melissa Tubbs, event creator, and Jon Shee, chapter President, wanted the top priority to be flexibility and accessibility for AATF members. While the event was originally intended to occur as a live competition, concerns about differing district schedules and learning models arose, and it was decided to package the activities like a “kit” for teachers to use at their own pace during a 2-week window in their own classrooms.

One of the best parts of organizing this event is the enthusiastic participation from AATF board members, UCONN French TAs and NEAG student teachers, and teachers around the state. The UCONN students filmed mini-cooking show episodes, while AATF board members worked together to film mini-culture lessons, interviews and workshops. While the pandemic has presented many challenges for educators, coming together to craft a day of fun activities was a wonderful reminder of what drives us in this profession as language teachers - engaging the students in real-world, FUN activities celebrating this language and its many cultures that we all hold so dear.

Le Grand Concours – Should I give it this year?

Laura Faga, French teacher, Lewis S. Mills High School, Region 10 (Burlington/Harwinton).

Bonjour! My name is Laura Faga and I am the new Directrice du Grand Concours for Connecticut. Last year was my first year in this position and I was busy planning our awards ceremony when the world stopped.

Today is March 29th and I administered the contest to 43 of my students today! Nothing like waiting until the very last minute.

Last year, I administered the contest to all of our students on March 12. I had randomly selected that date, on the earlier side of the administration window, so I would be better prepared to answer questions as they arose. Little did I know at the time how lucky I was to have selected that date! I was so fortunate that I did not have to figure out, like many of other French teachers did, how to administer le Grand Concours once schools closed. As schools shut around the country, the AATF was working hard to figure out how to handle this. Their solutions allowed teachers to administer remotely and also allowed for an extended testing period which allowed others to continue to test “hors concours” (meaning they would not be eligible for any national awards), but they could still participate.

This year AATF did a great job of figuring this all out ahead of time. They allowed teachers to proctor the contest to students over Zoom, Google Meets, and other similar platforms. By filling out a simple google form, teachers could apply to administer remotely. Approval was immediate and instructions for proctoring and an attestation that you had followed the rules followed soon after. Today this worked out for me as I had one student quarantined last week and two students who were quarantined today right before our scheduled test!

A colleague today asked me why we give the Grand Concours and I had to pause for a second because we do have so much to do and such a short time to do it. During a normal year, our job is hard! If you are like me, you are constantly asking yourself questions like: Did I speak enough French today? Did I balance class out with enough writing, speaking, listening, and reading? How can I incorporate more culture? Did I assess the right way? Did I differentiate my instruction to meet the needs of each kid? Did I post my learning target and could a student explain it to an administrator who might come in? This year we are asking even more questions. Do I feel safe? Are my students safe? Do I need to double mask? Do I need to quarantine? Are my kids appropriately spaced? How can they work together when they cannot be near each other? Am I doing enough to help their social emotional learning?

So why do we add in yet another thing? We do it because it is such a great opportunity for our students to show what they have learned! One of my students pointed out to me how important this contest was to him last year. “In this past year, when SATs were rendered virtually unavailable, we were able to prove our value on a standardized test that wasn’t even in our own language.” So, while this contest is always a good idea, it could mean even more to students this year and last.
This is a tough year to give a test, to add something else to our plates. Bénédicte Kaufman, a teacher at Xavier High School, who just returned to teaching this year after a 10-year hiatus, shared with me her concerns about giving this test. When she left French teaching 10 years ago, she left a paper test and returned to teaching during this crazy year to find an entirely online contest that she did not feel well prepared to deal with on her own. However, she found support and a caring community of French teachers here in CT. “It was amazing. It made me proud to be a French teacher, to have found my way again to a community of professionals and really interesting material to learn from.” Her students enjoyed the change of pace. “They especially enjoyed the listening activities. It seemed to be just what our classes needed at the end of a long winter: a change of pace and activities, a time to synthesize and evaluate what we had learned.” And she appreciated the flexibility of the testing. “The majority of my students are studying in person, but a few are still remote and log on everyday via Teams to stream in our class. I was able to administer the exams to all at the same time and seamlessly.”

I am so glad that the AATF kept this test available and made it easier for us to administer - no matter how we are teaching this year. They have been willing to work with every unique situation that comes up. Teachers from our state agree. Ariane Barrillon, a teacher at Westminster School, shared that her students who have been taking the Grand Concours for 4 years await this opportunity to show their skills and earn rewards. “Despite the challenging situation generated by the pandemic this year, the Grand Concours was extremely well organized. As usual, the support and help of the organizers was wonderful. Any questions or concerns I had were answered very quickly. The Grand Concours is a wonderful experience for both students and teachers.”

I hope you will consider giving the opportunity to your students next year. Please know that the AATF will be there to support you as you try it for your first, 5th, 10th time!

**News from CT Schools**

**AITE’s Sociedad Honoraria Hispanica Launches Tutoring Program**

Clerin John, AITE

During the fall, The Academy of Information Technology and Engineering’s Sociedad Honoraria Hispanica (SHS) launched their first tutoring program, called the SHS Study Buddy Program, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of this tutoring program is to provide freshman students in Spanish classes with an upperclassman tutor to guide them through high school and to assist them in their education.

SHS member and president, Trisha Lopez, has been meeting with high school freshman Jorge Reyes. Lopez and Reyes typically meet once a week for an hour and correspond through email. For many freshmen, starting high school can be very stressful and adjusting can be difficult, however, Lopez along with all the other Society members, have been serving as a helping hand. While Lopez mainly helps Reyes in starting his homework assignments, this program has allowed Reyes to be held accountable and to have the motivation to do his work. Reyes has nothing but the best to say of the program, “The tutoring program has helped me a lot with my work and it has helped me improve turning in better [quality] work and my tutor is very nice and helpful.”

Approximately 30-40 students are benefiting from this program and each member of the honor society is matched with one student. For many individuals, COVID-19 has changed the new norm of meeting with others. For AITE students, it has turned into virtual meetings on various video conferencing platforms. Tutors typically meet with their student buddies at least once a week to ensure that they are doing well in their studies and to check in with them on how they are handling this especially tough school year. Many freshman students seem to be benefiting from this program just like Reyes.

To better understand how the students feel about the program, a Google Forms was sent out to the students and the majority of the students rated the program highly. However, some students realized that they did not need as much help as they initially thought. Trisha Lopez is very happy to see where the program is going, however, she and her team are happily working on improving the program. If all goes as planned, the Sociedad Honoraria Hispanica would like to continue the program next year.
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Open: ConnTesol & Alliance Française
CT COLT FALL CONFERENCE
BY THE NUMBERS

Here are some numbers about our annual conference, our largest event for members.

20+
The more than 20 members of the Fall Conference Committee meet more than 20 times a year to plan the conference.

Celebrating Languages with inclusivity and Diversity
The 2021 Fall Conference Theme

This year, we expect to offer more than 60 sessions in our hybrid conference.

October 21-25
Dates of our hybrid conference in 2021

53 years
This year, 2021, will be CT COLT's 53rd annual Fall Conference.

2019
In-person

2020
Virtual

2021
Hybrid

103 members completed the survey we sent in April about the Fall Conference.

Look soon for information about our 2021 Fall Conference, October 21-25.

Please visit our website www.ctcolt.org for the most up-to-date information about events, awards, contests, and the newsletter.
Dated Materials: Please Rush

Connecticut Council of Language Teachers

Serving Connecticut Teachers Since 1968

Please check the CT COLT Website for information on upcoming events!

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Newsletter Submissions
Deadline for next newsletter: June 15, 2021.
Help us keep our membership records updated!
If you have moved or had a name change, please update your membership profile at www.ctcolt.org.