President’s Message

By Lea Graner Kennedy

Summer brings us time to recharge our batteries and create new memories. It is also a time to reflect on our past practice to improve our teaching. To kick off summer, CT COLT had 100 educators from the NECTFL region gather for the annual Summer Proficiency Institute. This opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and learn how to better teach for proficiency with Greg Duncan, was an inspiring way to begin summer. Thank you to all that attended and look forward to working with more of you again in June of 2020.

When not teaching at Stonington High School, I am lucky to serve as a World Language Consultant working with districts around the country that are making the important shift from a traditional to a proficiency-based curriculum. Their work, as a department or district team, is crucial to building proficiency so students leave our programs with functional use of language for work and career readiness. It is critical to make this shift as we assess student proficiency levels for the Seal of Biliteracy (SoBL). At a time when so many states, around 40 as of this summer, are demonstrating publicly the proficiency gains of students by awarding the SoBL, it is important that we, as a profession, deliver results. By increasing the percentage of students exiting our programs with the ability to communicate in another language, we provide data, through external assessments, demonstrating the community’s return on investment. We can use these gains to illustrate to stakeholders why maintaining and growing language programs is an important part of educating students in our global society.

For programs to increase the percentage of students earning the SoBL, it is paramount that we build highly effective programs. Through our Proficiency Institute we spent time understanding the proficiency levels and the importance of setting proficiency targets. With targets, both the teacher and the learners chart a pathway to move up levels in the proficiency scale. Greg Duncan shared that the districts making the shift to teach toward proficiency with proficiency targets are seeing increased gains with data from external assessments. With the proficiency level of Intermediate Mid as the Connecticut minimum to earn the SoBL (Intermediate High in many other states), both the teacher and the learner need to have clear pathways toward the proficiency targets in all three modes of communication (Interpersonal, Presentational, Interpretive). Much like any journey, it is reflection on the progress toward a goal (where am I on the pathway?), that is key to student motivation and the desire to continue with language learning.

To support the setting of proficiency targets, districts need to have a proficiency mindset for curriculum design. Helena Curtain, author of Languages and Children Making the Match, discusses the following principles for curriculum design:

- Communicatively Purposeful: Building toward proficiency
- Culturally Focused: Developing interculturality
- Intrinsically Interesting: Relevant to learners
- Cognitively Engaging: Requiring thinking and rigor
- Standards-Based: Reflecting goals for learning languages

As we reflect on our lessons, units, and instructional practices, we need to consider how we addresses these principles in our curriculum design. If there are activities devoid of these proficiency-based goals, we need to improve or remove them. Each and every class provides us as teachers the opportunity to build the bridge from comprehensible input to comprehensible output. To that end, we must look for a variety of ways to meet the learners where they are and provide I + 1. Stephen Krashen’s Comprehensible Input Theory helps learners to negotiate meaning by bathing them in input. We then guide the learner to produce comprehensible output, helping learners to process more deeply through speaking and writing channeling Merrill Swain’s Comprehensible Output Theory.

As with any content area, teachers need to help the learners move regularly from input to output by providing scaffolding and strategies that help learners process the learning and create with language. Beginning with the Novice level students, limited to rote memorized and formulaic language, it is crucial that teachers allow students to negotiate meaning in real world contexts. It is through varied input, with rich, authentic texts and sources, that teachers guide learners to process in the interpretive mode. Providing opportunities to
process language in all three modes allows for more effortful learning, gradually moving them to the Intermediate level where they create with language. It is through communicatively purposeful activities, that are culturally focused, that teachers have an opportunity to increase student motivation and guide them to produce comprehensible output which is cognitively engaging and helps make the learning stick. Comprehensible Output Theory is critical to our larger body of language acquisition research as it illustrates that comprehensible input is necessary, but insufficient on its own. It is only through effortful learning, through output, that learners will have functional use of language.

The research is unequivocal; comprehensible input in the Zone of Proximal Development, comprehensible output, and feedback are crucial components to the learning cycle needed for students to deeply process language. As teachers, we need to provide extensive opportunities for comprehensible input and comprehensible output in authentic contexts in order to see proficiency gains. The research from Lev Vygotsky also points to the importance of providing feedback in the Zone of Proximal Development, just beyond the learner’s ability that is understandable. This appropriate feedback pinpoints what the learner is doing well and provides strategies to improve. John Hattie’s work illustrates the importance of timely, descriptive feedback. He explains that the “single most powerful way to improve learning is through dollops of feedback.” Thanks to this body of research, we can move our departments forward considering the learning cycle in all lessons and units.

Wherever you and your department are at on your journey to teaching for proficiency, I challenge all of us to ground our work in the entire body of research surrounding second language acquisition to inform teaching practices. As we collaborate with our colleagues, let’s leverage the past decades of research so we can build programs that prepare a new generation of youth with intellectual competence and the ability to create with language for work, travel, and enjoyment.

**Teacher Spotlight**

Kazumi Yamashita-Iverson

1. **Who are you? What and where do you teach?**

My name is Kazumi Yamashita-Iverson. My students call me Kazumi-Sensei and I teach at Maloney Interdistrict Magnet School in Waterbury.

2. **How long have you been teaching?**

I have been teaching at Maloney since 2001. I just finished my 17th year teaching.

3. **What has inspired you in this profession and what is a belief that you hold near and dear?**

I was an exchange student when I was in high school in Michigan for a year. I didn’t speak much English at the beginning even though I had studied English for 5 years by then.

During the time, many people asked me about Japan. I felt like I didn’t know much about Japan in order to explain reasons and backstories. I started to seeing Japan objectively and wanted to learn about it more. Also, the experience made me wanting
to do something I can help to bridge Japan and other countries. I ended up majoring Japanese language education in Japan.

When I was in junior in a University, I applied for a program called JALEX, Japanese Language Exchange Program. JALEX placed me at Maloney where I teach now. This was the first time I taught Japanese for elementary students and I loved it. It was one year program so I went back, but Jessica Haxhi, my mentor offered a position in 2001 and here I am!

I believe language education is more than teaching/learning a language. It gives opportunities to nurture qualities such as tolerance, empathy, respect, and understanding of others and self. I believe these are important quality as a global citizen and a future leader. My students are young and from a place where they may not have a chance to explore the world, so I try to show not only Japan, but also other cultures from the world in my class with a hope that they learn there are people who may live differently, but there are always similarities and we treat everyone with respect.

4. Favorite place you’ve ever traveled and why?
Hawaii. I love the scenery, weather, culture, food, everything! It is closer to Japan so it is easier for me to see my family and friends also.

5. Favorite cultural dish?
Sushi. Japan is such a food nerd place that everything is great. It is a food metropolitan that you can probably eat every cultural dish there. Though there are so many to choose from, I have to go with Sushi. The real Sushi in Japan is very different from what you get around here that you just need to try in Japan.

6. What do you do when you’re not being an educator?
I am a mom to 10 years old who is starting a Middle School in the fall. I am pretty occupied with being educator and being a mom. We are going to be in Japan for whole summer so I hope her Japanese would improve!

Advocacy

The Benefits of Memorizing Poetry
When high school students spend time memorizing and reciting a poem, they develop confidence by engaging deeply with language.

By Erin Medeiros
June 24, 2019
Edutopia

When I first read Marge Piercy’s poem “To be of use,” I fell in love with the last lines: “The pitcher cries for water to carry / and a person for work that is real.” The analogy resonated with me, with the desire I’ve always felt to have a purpose that goes beyond my own pleasure or entertainment. It also resonated with my belief that students crave this too. I find something surprising and alive in the poem each time I read it, but this year it reminded me of the students I introduce to Poetry Out Loud, a program that “encourages students to learn about great poetry through memorization and recitation.” These students want to do real work, create
something with a result, and hammer away at a project they can count as complete. And memorizing poetry is just the thing.

To many students, the work of learning in the language arts classroom can feel amorphous, indefinite, everlasting, but rarely immediate or complete. For me, that’s a joy; I love the endless source material and challenges we can tackle to advance our learning through language study.

For a lot of teenagers, though, language arts classes can be frustratingly open-ended. I hung Roland Barthes’s observation that “literature is the question minus the answer” above the board in my AP English Literature class for the several years I taught it. Every year, I know, there were kids who just wanted to finish something, get a right answer, open and shut the book.

Poetry can quench this thirst yet leave students with lingering wisdom.

Introducing literature and language to students who are not naturally drawn to language arts or who struggle with lower reading skills in a way that meets them where they are can be a tremendous challenge. The reading level or subject matter of a typical informational or literary text may fit just a few learners in a classroom. But poems—which are meant to exist out loud, to be spoken, heard, remembered, and passed on—enter “the heart without the gray matter getting in the way,” in author Brad Kessler’s phrase. And their brevity means that reluctant readers are less likely to feel overwhelmed before they’ve even begun.

I sometimes hear audible groans when I first mention poetry in my classes. Those complaints simultaneously worry, frustrate, and embolden me. I know that performing poetry—as opposed to studying it or reading it silently to analyze it—can have a transformative effect on individuals, and I’m certain that my students will grow more confident, adept at understanding language, and personally invested in the course if we all perform.

5 CS OF MEMORIZING AND RECITING POETRY

Here are my five Cs—things I’ve observed from several years of coaching students in grades 9 to 12 through Poetry Out Loud, from selecting a poem to performing at the state competition:

1. Choice: This is the heart of the exercise. Students learn how to search for poems, and they have complete discretion over the poem they will perform. Students often gravitate to poems that fit their reading level and also match a personal interest or philosophy, which is great. But there are also lots of serendipitous mismatches that end up stretching students’ skills in ways a teacher could not devise.

2. Concrete learning task: Learning just one poem well gives students a finite and concentrated experience with language. Any and every student can learn one poem. I’ve seen students with all manner of challenges get up and do something they thought was impossible, in large part because it involved a single discrete, repeated exercise.

3. Confidence: Recitation is the perfect introduction to public speaking skills. All students need to be able to speak effectively in front of others. Performing a poem is a bit like acting: Students learn elements of physical presence, voice, articulation, speed, volume, and tone without having to present their own work, which is more intimidating for most students.

4. Continuing learning: Students learn a poem that will likely stay with them for years, if not forever. Poems contain mysteries and complexities that reveal themselves slowly—
and sometimes even suddenly—over time. I often rehearse previously memorized poems to myself and marvel at their subtle surprises years after I first encountered them.

5. Challenging memory and recall: Students are not asked to memorize much anymore, yet many of them take pleasure in the act of repetition and remembering. They like testing themselves and realizing that they can in fact recall lines. For English language learners, many students with IEPs, autistic students, and other exceptional learners, reciting poetry is an especially powerful way to understand language and build confidence. For our kids who need small victories, mastering one poem is a welcome vindication and relief.

The unglorified labor Piercy references throughout “To be of use” mirrors the learning of a poem: “The thing worth doing well done / has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.” When, after weeks of practicing, the students stand up and for just a few minutes perform with grace, contrary to what many believed they could do, they understand anew that their voices, minds, and bodies were “made to be used” for such art. They “become natives of that element” we call language.

Students Say...

Teen Talk: ‘Hablo español’ or ‘Parler français’? Why not?

Published in The Day on July 17. 2019

Maria Proulx, Special to The Times

A fair number of foreign exchange students attend my high school, all of whom speak English fluently. I’m amazed and a bit jealous at how quickly they picked up this new language.

Like many teens, I thought the golden window of opportunity to learn a different language would be long gone by high school. But recent studies show that the ability to learn new languages stays strong until the late teenage years.

This summer, my companions and I found ourselves in a Spanish speaking country. Since I, like many teens, have studied a few years of Spanish, I was designated as the communicator after a member of our group exclaimed “buenos morning” to a passerby on the street. Figuring that I got all A’s in my Spanish class, I accepted the position without thinking twice.

My first brush with this new country was the food. Stopping at a restaurant in the airport, I ordered sandwiches for my group. My confidence faded as I stuttered my way through the order in what I’m confident was very broken Spanish.

When trying to pay for the food, I realized that I didn’t know any Spanish number over 15. Although I easily passed my high school class, I never experienced putting my Spanish into practice. Regardless, I left the restaurant unduly proud, food in hand.

Although I learned the basics of the Spanish language in school, I never practiced the conjugations or vocabulary that I learned, and never broke through the barrier of self-consciousness. I knew that I had poor pronunciation and presentation, but in the classroom, this never really mattered. None of my peers cared that I wasn’t rolling my r’s properly, or that I was pronouncing the “h” in Spanish vocabulary words when it should be silent.

However, throughout the trip, I remained terrified that I would sound like a fool in this new country. And I’m certain I did.

I remember saying something in what was likely a bad accent to a shop owner that caused him to burst out in laughter. But most of the people I met appreciated my effort.
Though my trip lasted only a few weeks, my Spanish continually improved and I was able to meet amazing people and experience the vibrant culture.

One in five teens — around 12 million people total — are raised bilingual. So the rest of us teens who want to speak a second language have to struggle through a high school language class just like anyone else.

Many teenagers will graduate from high school and let those four years of Spanish or French slip away. But the benefits are irrefutable. In the future, we could get paid up to 15 percent more in our jobs by becoming fluent in a second language.

Language skills also boost test scores and increase empathy. They allow us to communicate with more people. But, perhaps most important, speaking a foreign language increases cross-cultural understanding.

It is often thought that the way we see the world is shaped by the language we use. Learning a language offers us new viewpoints of life.

*Maria Proulx of Ledyard is a student at St. Bernard School in Montville.*

**Personal Perspectives**

**Back in the Game**

By: Signe Damdar
Vernon Center Middle School

I have always loved making learning relevant and exciting for my students and kept to the 90% Target Language goal. I taught all levels of French for eight years at both urban public and independent schools in three different states. Then, I took a mama sabbatical of eight years to raise my young children at home, where I only had 2 students: my daughter and my son. I spoke lots of French to them, dragged them with me to France and Montreal in the summers, and watched lots of French videos in order to keep my French level up and to try to raise my children bilingual. Last August, with my two children now both in elementary school I returned to my full-time teaching career which I love so much.

While I felt prepared having kept up my language skills and having followed some language bloggers, what I soon realized is that so much has changed within the past 8 years! If I use the metaphor of teaching a world language to equate the sport of basketball, the ball changed (less of a reliance on textbooks—authres, CI, can do statements), the court size has changed (1-1 technology is common, desk-less classrooms are becoming popular), the height of the hoop has changed (proficiency-based assessment, IPAs), even the coach has changed (the latest researchers and experts in the field.) I THOUGHT I knew how to be an effective player in the game of teaching French, but there have been many times over the past year that I have felt quite overwhelmed as I adjust to this new way of teaching. Don’t get me wrong—I am completely in favor of what is best for our students, and I never liked textbooks anyway. I have seen the research and marveled at the proficiency results of colleagues who are today’s all-stars in world language teaching.

So how does someone like me and perhaps someone like you adjust to the changes of the world language teaching profession? The answer is found in an acronym: CT COLT, and the amazing educators who make up our organization. We are extremely blessed to have effective professional development several times each year: from the CT COLT Conference in October with its many workshops and seminars to the spring Saturday conference at CCSU to the hands-on May EdCamp to the Summer Proficiency Institute with Greg Duncan. I have attended all of these within the past two years and am SO GLAD that I did. At these conferences colleagues presented and modeled how they made the transition from the old to the new, sharing examples of lessons and providing samples of student work. They patiently explained new acronyms and assessments, demystified communication modes and grading systems, and modeled strategies and technology apps. Some dear colleagues have even shared their entire libraries of authentic resources with me! I am so grateful that I have such support as a Connecticut language teacher who is returning to the field.

I encourage anyone who feels lost or overwhelmed to reach out to colleagues and not to be afraid to ask questions. It IS worth your time to attend conferences and to read the newsletter (ha!) and to participate in programs provided by CT COLT and to just dive in and try new things. You’ll find, as I have, that you’re not alone. We’re all striving to play this new game as effective world language teachers so that our STUDENTS are the real winners. It is new and exciting and vital. And it’s great to be on the CT COLT team!

**I LOVE My New Lenses – ALL OF THEM**

by Kristin Duchscherer

As a Teacher of the Deaf, the lenses I have previously applied to teaching ASL as a World Language (L2) were heavily shaped by teaching and working from an L1 perspective, as well as my own language learning experiences (L2: ASL/German). This is only natural, right? As human beings and as teachers, we apply
what we’re exposed to that has ‘worked’ for us, in the effort to help our students have the same successes that we have had. Having the privilege to attend the recent COLT/RIFLA Conference on Teaching for Proficiency with my World Language colleagues, I feel as though I have at least three amazing, new sets of lenses that will improve the learning outcomes for ALL of my students both, short and long term.

As a Teacher of the Deaf, I am always working with urgency, so that my special education students can obtain language fluency in their L1 before their window (‘critical period’) for obtaining communicative competence ‘closes’. In this effort I’m always analyzing inputs/outputs, meaningful exposures, contexts, ‘critical elements’ and mean length of utterance. I approach my teaching in a much more ‘micro-’ way, though still working backward (IEP targets), working to build ‘communicative competence’. Having now been exposed to this corpus of ‘Teaching for Proficiency’, I’ve realized that I have been teaching ASL with my high school students driven more by ‘content’ (what worked for me as an L2 learner) than by ‘proficiency’. Teaching for proficiency will, I truly believe, make the teaching and learning more enjoyable for all of us because it will be more ‘real world’.

But teaching for proficiency also means we are assessing for proficiency. Previously, I have taught with a ‘content-driven’ approach, using ‘quantitative’ assessment to tell me how well students were learning the language. Even though their scores were connected to ‘proficiency targets’ (accuracy in demonstrating what they understood and could do with the language), having qualitative proficiency targets and feedback for students in the short and long term is going to more meaningfully illuminate how they are doing with learning the language. It will do this because it informs us what they can and cannot yet DO with the language. I believe that this will allow more students to recognize and feel those ‘little successes’ along the way. I think it’s that kind of successive positive feedback that keeps them coming back, wanting to learn more.

The last set of lenses I obtained while attending the conference comes from more of an outreach and advocacy perspective. As the only teacher of ASL in attendance, and then having the tremendous opportunity to attend the ASLTA (American Sign Language Teachers Association) immediately afterward, it’s opened my eyes to the fact that, in CT and New England, we have work to do with regard to building our ASL teaching community and our ASL corpus. They say that the best time to plant a tree was 10 years ago, but the next best time is today. I think that analogy applies perfectly.
After attending my first NNELL Summer Institute last year, I knew that I had to make this conference an annual event. The National Network for Early Language Learners (NNELL) is an organization that supports and promotes early language teaching and learning. NNELL is more than a group of teachers who share best practices and research; it’s an organization of educators who have a passion for world languages and want to share to group in our field.

Additionally, if you become a NNELL member there are bi-monthly “chats” to discuss topics relevant to World Language educators as well as regular webinars. This year’s Summer Institute was held at Rogers Park Montessori School in Chicago, IL from June 22-23.

My journey as a Spanish teachers evolved. I started as a classroom teacher and my husband was provided with work opportunities which resulted in moving four times in twelve years. Our relocations led me to accept a position as Spanish teacher. I knew that being a World Language educator was very different than being a classroom teacher and I was excited to learn and grow as a Spanish teacher. I’ve attended several conferences over the years and nothing compares to NNELL. I feel apart of a community when I attend their conferences and know that this group of educators get me. I also walk away inspired and with concrete ideas which I can implement in the classroom. Lastly, NNELL focuses on early language learners and this holds a very special place in my heart. Before moving to the United States, I thought that all elementary-aged students had the opportunity to learn a second language. My father was in The United States Army and I spent my early and middle childhood living between Germany and Belgium. Being raised outside the United States afforded me with the opportunity to learn several languages and an appreciation for various cultures, traditions and customs.

If I had to summarize NNELL’s 2019 Summer Institute in one word it would be connection. Every presenter shared the importance of connecting in at least one of the following ways:

- Connecting with every single one of our students
- Connecting with educators and administrators in our school
- Connecting with world language educators inside and outside our school
- Connecting with the real world

Helena Curtain, Ph. D. was our opening keynote speaker on Saturday. She is an internationally known expert on second language teaching methodology, curriculum development, and bilingual immersion education. Her special interest is in teaching language to young learners. She is the co-author of Languages and Learners: Making the Match, a book used in universities throughout the USA for preparing language teachers to work in grades K-8, now in its fifth edition.

Dr. Helena Curtain has a wealth of knowledge and the majority of her presentation focused on the elements of a deep and rich curriculum. However, her session began with reminding us that we do not have to do it all alone; reach out to others. Dr. Curtain also stated, “It’s who we are that makes the difference; they feel the love and caring and that is most important.” She also shared, “students want to do well when they are seen.” Once our students are seen, we can hook them through a deep and rich curriculum which includes:

- Thematic teaching on topics that are engaging to students, rather than a curriculum with a list of topics such as colors, numbers, animals, etc.
- Themes which are intrinsically interesting, cognitively engaging, and culturally connected
- Develops proficiency through setting clear proficiency goals
- Be sure the scope of a unit is cognitively and developmentally appropriate, i.e. “less is more”.
  - “Milk” the activities your students already enjoy to develop greater proficiency; add a new layer to the activity or put a new spin on it

Lastly, Dr. Curtain emphasized the importance of assessing when something is not working. First, begin with yourself, then the environment and lastly the student. These steps will help you identify areas of improvement.

Our second presenters on Saturday were Denise Clivaz and Elizabeth Roberts, who teach K-8 French at The Avery Coonley School in Downers Grove, Illinois. Together they share over 35 years of world language teaching experience. Denise and Elizabeth have presented their curriculum at numerous regional and national conferences, including ACTFL. They believe, “It is never too early to get students speaking in the target language!”
Highlights from Denise Clivaz and Elizabeth Roberts session include:

- Modeling of their curriculum “REAL LANGUAGE right away!”
- The importance of having our students connect with us and their peers in the target language
- Empowering students to engage in basic conversations with the classmates
- Designing learning activities that allow students to move around the room, making interpersonal tasks less formal and creating a sense of security

Our Saturday was rounded out with a tour of World Language classrooms with Valerie Shull and Siobahn Moffitt, both early language teachers at Rogers Park Montessori School. Valerie and Siobahn are passionate about working toward language proficiency with children, improving her own practice and supporting teachers in their journey. They are veteran presenters at ACTFL, ICTFL and Central States Conference.

Highlights from Valerie Shull and Siobahn Moffitt session:

- Drawing inspiration from Maria Montesorri, who believed in raising citizens of the world
- How the Montessori model provides choice and independence for students in the classroom
- Create learning environments that include a variety of authentic resources, books, games, and additional materials that meet the needs and interests of their students
- The teachers are seen as the facilitators and their role is to create an atmosphere which promotes curiosity and learning

Our day on Sunday opened with a second keynote and session from Connecticut’s own Rebecca Aubrey, the 2019 ACTFL World Language Teacher of the year. With 20 years of experience teaching Latin American studies and 10 years in Spanish instruction, Rebecca is the Advocacy Coordinator for CT COLT, the Connecticut representative to NNELL, and serves on the Board of Education in Mansfield, Connecticut. She will be teaching middle school Spanish in South Windsor, CT in the Fall.

Highlights from Rebecca Aubrey:

- The power of connections, beyond the World Readiness Standards (“5Cs”) to include connecting with our students, connecting them with the real world, and connecting with each other
- Drawing inspiration from Rita Peason’s TED talk “Every kid needs a champion”. I highly recommend it if you haven’t seen it yet.
- Student wants to be seen and heard and it make take longer than you’d hoped but once you develop that student-teacher connection there’s also an opportunity to engage the student in the subject matter
- Examples from student projects on Guatemala and Puerto Rico to demonstrate how students are more engaged when they can make real world connections with language learning.
- Using essential questions or unit focus questions to help develop and drive meaningful curriculum
- Strategies for using authentic resources and interpersonal communications tasks that help students develop circumlocution skills

Our final formal session on Sunday was from Ryan Rockaitis, a high school Spanish teacher in Chicago. He has taught all levels, from introductory courses to advanced placement. He frequently presents at state and national level conferences, sharing practical practical applications of the proficiency guidelines that teachers can implement immediately. He currently serves on the Board of Directors of the Central States
Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and is President and Communications Chair for the Illinois Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

Highlights from Ryan Rockaitis:

- We don’t have to get rid of the fun to develop greater proficiency
- The activities he shared provided several opportunities for students to connect with peers and teacher in the target language
- Ryan’s interactive presentation provided us with an opportunity to experience how his enthusiasm, creativity and patience hooks his students during these games/activities
- Ryan class foster community and teamwork in his students which are building blocks of connection
- Be flexible about having students take oral and written activities in their own direction, as this will engage and motivate them more

My name is Kathy León-Lacourt and I moved to Stamford, Connecticut two years ago from Chicago, Illinois with my husband and dog, Chicles (bubble gum in Spanish). I currently work at Greenwich Country Day School in Connecticut as a World Language teacher. Specifically, I am a Spanish teacher and feel fortunate to work with students in kindergarten through third grade.

Postcard from ACTFL’s LILL in Nashville

By: Matthew Mangino

Wethersfield High School

I have just returned from ACTFL’s Leadership Initiative in Language Learning outside of Nashville, Tennessee. It was a two-day workshop learning and networking with the best and brightest world language teachers and leaders from around the country. I am a member of Cohort 2, so that means that my experience started in 2017 in Chicago. There, we read StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Tom Rath and learned about strengths-based leadership. I learned about my top 5 strengths (Responsibility, Restorative, Learner, Arranger, and Harmony), and how to use them to influence others in my leadership spheres--my department, my school, my district, my state, and my region. We concentrated our efforts on ACTFL’s Core Practices during our time in Chicago.

In 2018, a group of Cohort 2 members traveled to Dallas to continue to build a nationwide network of language leaders. We read The Truth about Leadership by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. We learned about “Leading for Change” from the inimitable Leslie Grahn and “Intercultural Competence” from Connecticut’s own Dorie Conlon Perugini. We used this learning to continue to promote proficiency-based instruction through ACTFL’s Core Practices.

This year, we welcomed the members of ACTFL’s newest cohort to the LILL family. There were 15 members of the previous cohorts who attended the sessions in Nashville. There were 48 members of Cohort 3, most of whom are just embarking on their leadership journey. We read Crucial Conversations by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler. This text gave us tangible skills for dealing with those high-stakes, high-emotion conversations that can quickly turn into confrontations. It left us with a number of protocols that will come in handy when advocating for languages in general, or advocating for best practices in language teaching, or dealing with any intense conversation.

My charge now is to work to identify some leadership project that affects language teaching and learning throughout our state. For example, some members of the cohort are organizing a language advocacy day at their state capitol. Other states have instituted online professional development for teaching with ACTFL’s Core Practices. Still others have used their newfound leadership skills to shift their department toward proficiency teaching and their school toward the Seal of Biliteracy. We all reside in several spheres of influence, and we can all implement our leadership in a variety of ways.
From June 24 to June 26, a group of language teacher-leaders from across the country gathered in Nashville Tennessee, and it wasn’t just for the great music and food! These teachers formed part of the 3rd cohort of the Leadership Initiative for Language Learning, or LILL. As many teachers were letting out a long sigh and putting their feet up after wrapping up the school year, these teachers spent three days collaborating to share common struggles and solutions with language learning in their states, identifying their individual leadership strengths, and began to develop action plans to tackle a variety of initiatives to promote language learning.

LILL is a collaborative project to identify, train, and support emerging leaders. Partners include ACTFL, each of the five regional language associations, the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NADSFL), the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NADSFL), and the National Network for Early Language Learning (NNELL). State associations identify and nominate emerging leaders, who are then sponsored in part by their respective collaborative partner organization. Each cohort is capped at 50 emerging leaders and requires a two-year commitment.

Having the opportunity to step outside the realm of state-level language learning discourses and interact with teachers from across the country is incredibly enriching and eye-opening. There is a lot that we can learn from each other’s experiences, yet it is also affirming to hear how similar some of the challenges are across the country.
There are three main challenges that stand out. First, as in education more generally, states are struggling with recruiting and retaining new teachers. Many states described processes in place to provide emergency, temporary licensing for teachers, yet expressed frustration with how these teachers do not have access to proper training. This can hinder the development of strong language programs, and also leads to retention problems. A second, related problem is access to professional development on high leverage teaching practices to build proficiency for new and experienced teachers alike. Due to the large geographical size of most states, teachers are unable to travel for annual conferences or professional development organized by state associations, so there is a need to provide high quality professional development remotely. Several teachers noted the need to create a repository of the professional development that already exists, in order to make it accessible to all, and avoid recreating the wheel. Thirdly, teachers from several states discussed divisions that are occurring nationally over teaching methodology. In some states, this has resulted in the creation of separate conferences, which has been divisive, and many leaders feel is detracting from our common goal of providing our students with opportunities to develop proficiency in another language and intercultural competencies. A fourth interest area that many emerging teacher leaders shared is in promoting social justice and equity in language learning. Minorities are underrepresented in education generally, and students should have role models who more accurately represent our society. Many teachers also view the language classroom as a sphere for exploring issues of social justice and equity as thematic content.

Prior to attending LILL, participants were asked to read the book “Strengths Based Leadership”, from Gallup, written by Tom Rath. They also took the Clifton Strengths Finder to see what their individual leadership strengths were. This informed a discussion of what each emerging leader brings to the table, how to capitalize his or her strengths, and how to identify collaborators to round out areas of weakness. Participants also identified their personal values and wrote a mission and vision statement that then informed an action plan to implement with their state and/or regional collaborative partner organization.

In the final day of LILL, cohort 3 was joined by emerging teacher leaders from cohorts 1 and 2. Members of these cohorts shared their experiences with their own action plans and provided advice to participants based on those experiences. One thing that many of the veteran “LILLians” emphasized was that many plans failed initially, but that this served as a learning opportunity to adjust and continue moving forward.

To give an example of what an action plan might look like, CT COLT President Lea Graner Kennedy was part of LILL Cohort 1. Lea developed a committee through CT COLT to learn about research-based core practices and freely share resources to improve educator effectiveness. She led the development of a series of webinars, including one she facilitated providing an overview of the core practices. This rich series includes webinars from nationally renowned leaders and trainers on topics that include facilitating interpersonal communication, interpreting authentic texts, empowering target language use, providing feedback, setting functional goals, and teaching grammar as a concept. Copies of each of these webinars are available for free on the CT COLT website, along with accompanying resources, and would make great virtual learning experiences in districts that struggle to provide targeted professional development for language teachers. As part of my LILL action plan, I plan to continue to develop and promote this series, as well as explore other modes of providing professional development on building proficiency for Connecticut teachers.

*Rebecca Aubrey is the 2019 ACTFL World Language Teacher of the Year, a member of the CT COLT Board, and part of LILL Cohort 3. She will be teaching Spanish at Timothy Edwards Middle School in South Windsor in the fall.*

**Where the Road Leads**

by Meiching Chang

Glastonbury Public Schools

I still remember how I first began my association with the STARTALK program. I took a year off from teaching to stay home with my newborn boy in the 2006 school year. That was an incredibly rewarding experience and provided many memories that I will always cherish. However, I also recall that after one year of full-time motherhood, when I heard about the opportunity to be trained in an advanced language immersion program over the summer, it sounded less like a difficult summer job and more like a much-needed vacation from baby talk and diapers.

STARTALK is a National Security Agency initiative and the goal is to help more students learn the critical languages. When the program started in 2007, it became such a success in the nation that the one-year-funding program extended to two and now it has been 13 years. The grant now supports teachers and students in 11 languages: Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Hindi, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, and Urdu.
CT COLT
FALL CONFERENCE 2019
10/20 & 10/21
THE JOURNEY: BUILDING PATHWAYS TO PROFICIENCY

WHERE ARE YOU ON YOUR JOURNEY?
I participated in the STARTALK Glastonbury program. It is a combined program for a teacher-training program and two student programs for Chinese and Russian. Each year there are about 80 students participated in the Chinese student program, about 30 in the Russian student program, and 30 teachers in the teacher-training program. The students are in grade 1 to 12. Like COLT’s past president Jimmy Wildman said, it is like running a small school in the summer. The team consists of an administrative team and an instructional team. The clear and focused job description has helped us to get excellent master teachers to come join our instructional team in the summer from all over the state of Connecticut. It is not only a job we do but also a professional development we do for a month in the year to learn from all the master teachers in the program.

I did not enter STARTALK as a new teacher, though many respected teachers have started their professional careers in our program. Before taking the year off, I taught as an elementary classroom teacher in Philadelphia Public Schools for four years, in addition to several years as an English language teacher in Taiwan prior to that. Therefore, when I entered STARTALK I was in the somewhat ironic position of being a Chinese teacher of English who was totally new to teaching Chinese. All language teachers know it is different to teach your second language than to teach your first language. As native speakers, we did not learn the language but acquired the language in the environment. In effect, we have not had the experience of acquiring the foundations of our own language in a formal learning environment. Because of this, how we deliver what we know in the first language to our second language learners is always something we have to plan carefully.

As a trainee that year, I encountered the first and greatest challenge in teaching a language: to use only the target language to teach the language. How do I teach Chinese to English speakers without using English? Will students understand the lesson? I was lucky to have excellent teachers to demonstrate how to use can-do statements and backward designs to guide the curriculum. I learned about Krashen’s “i+1 comprehensible input” and also learned to translate that theory into classroom practice because the rigor of STARTALK required it. The STARTALK program follows the principles in “implementing a standards-based and thematically organized curriculum”, “conducting performance-based assessment”, “integrating culture, content, and language”, “using the target language and providing comprehensible input”, “facilitating a student-centered classroom”, and “adapting and using age-appropriate authentic materials.” As I started implementing these teaching theories and practices I learned into my classes, I observed the progress made by both my students and myself. The lessons are more relevant to my students and can be used in the real world.

I was hired as a teacher at the STARTALK program for the next two years and as an instructional lead after that. My work at STARTALK opened up an opportunity for me to join the Glastonbury Public Schools several years ago. Using the same techniques I learned at STARTALK, I continued exploring the challenge of creating a student-centered classroom and using age-appropriate authentic materials. With the requirement of standard-based curriculum and no textbooks, I had the freedom to create my own lessons that are relevant to the students using what I have learned in all these years. I remember when I led the China Exchange group of students to China this April, I purposefully observed my students’ interaction with the locals. I paid extra attention to what most people talked to my students about and checked if I had provided the language in those topics in my lessons. The locals
were very interested in knowing about my students and mostly asked my students questions about their family, school, daily routines, and interests. The locals also wanted to know about what America is like in my students’ points of views. All these topics are relevant to my students, and it was like an external real life assessment for me to exam my curriculum and lessons. Language is for communication and the trip worked as an assessment for me on the authenticity of my lessons and if the students can communicate with native speakers. As teachers, we know this job is very time consuming. However, it is the relationships that we forge with students and the stories they bring back as they explore the world using the languages that they have learned that is what keeps us interested, energized, and ready to take on new challenges.

It is a blessing to work with so many master teachers in the summer at STARTALK each year, so we extended the experience into a year-round teachers’ workshop in Glastonbury high school and CCSU two years ago. I will definitely continue to bring what I learned from STARTALK to my classroom and implement my successful work from my classroom to STARTALK. It is a long journey, and I am glad to be following the road STARTALK leads. I hope all the teachers could find a program like STARTALK to help them in professional growth. Good luck, everyone!

**Methods, Materials, Resources**

**How to Include Poetry in Your Spanish Lesson Plans**

From [www.speakinglatino.com](http://www.speakinglatino.com)

Expand your students’ cultural knowledge by introducing them to Spanish-speaking poets and their poetry (National Poetry Month in April is a great time to begin). You’ll find a few activities at the end of this article to capture your students’ imaginations and who knows… your students just might find poetry more interesting than they expected! It’s a great tool to engage them in language learning without your typical textbooks and worksheets.

**Why Teach Poetry in Spanish Class?**

As a teaching tool, poetry offers students a way to make connections between language and emotion, which can lead to greater insight about people and places. These connections mean that poetry has a natural role in Spanish class, as learning any foreign language is a richer experience for students when the language is placed in some kind of relatable context, like the feelings described in poetry.

As well, studying poetry encourages students to look more closely at language and develop analytical skills. This kind of academic practice helps students develop a foundation from which different kinds of learning can take place. And finally, poetry is a beautiful and important piece of culture, no matter where you are from or what language you speak. By exposing your students to poetry in Spanish, you are giving them a piece of the poet’s individual culture.

**How to Include Poetry in Your Spanish Lesson Plans**

When introducing poetry to your students in Spanish class, remind them of all the times you emphasize correct pronunciation and correct placement of emphasis on certain syllables. Explain that these practical matters are important both to successful communication in Spanish and to poetry in general. This discussion around familiar topics will give students more confidence when starting with poetry in Spanish class, and you will get a glimpse into their prior knowledge which will help you guide them along a new area of study.

Here are some ways to remind students of what they already know about poetry in Spanish:

- Draw your students’ attention to the rhythm and music of the Spanish language whenever you speak in Spanish or ask them to speak in Spanish. Every time they pronounce a word in Spanish, they are creating sounds and meanings that are unique to the language, and recognizing these sounds is integral to the appreciation of poetry.
- Bring in songs in Spanish to play in class. Music is often important to young people, and some students may recognize more mainstream songs like the Christmas
song *Feliz Navidad* and the Cuban patriotic song *Guantanamera* which is also popular with English-speaking listeners. If your students are at an intermediate or advanced level, you can even distribute the song lyrics in Spanish for them to read, emphasizing that songwriting is a kind of poetry.

- Ask students to complete easily achievable tasks like listing words in Spanish that rhyme, or ones that are alliterative. Make connections to other poetry terms like metaphor and meter; they will have likely have already learned these in English class so they may be able to apply what they remember to poetry written in Spanish.

Here is a list of Spanish-speaking poets you and your students can explore together, as well as their country of origin and the time period in which the poets lived and wrote:

- **Rubén Darío**, Nicaragua, 1867-1916
- **Margarita Carrera**, Guatemala, 1929-
- **Federico García Lorca**, Spain, 1898-1936
- **Jose Luis Borges**, Argentina, 1899-1986

### 3 Poetry Spanish Class Activities for Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced Students

Below, you will find three different poetry activities that you can try, for example, during National Poetry Month. When introducing your students to Spanish-speaking poets and poems in Spanish, remind them that poetry, in a sense, has its own unique language. It looks different on the page than other forms of language, like a novel or a news article, and it sounds different too when you read it out loud.

**1. Rhyme: A Poetry Activity for Beginning Spanish-Speakers**

*Learning objective:* Students will read out loud a poem by Cuban poet José Martí and identify rhyming words in the poem.

*How to do this activity:* Introduce the 19th-century Cuban poet, José Martí, with some brief biographical information as well as some historical detail about Cuba during the time of his life. If you played *Guantanamera* to the class, mention that the song was adapted from Martí’s poetry. Tell students that they will need three different colored pens, highlighters or markers during this exercise.

Distribute copies of the poem *Cultivo una rosa blanca* and define for students the different types of rhyme you will discuss:

a. *eye rhyme* (where words look as if they would rhyme, but don’t actually sound similar)
b. *perfect rhyme* (where the ending sounds of the words match perfectly)
c. *internal rhyme* (where words that rhyme exists within the line of poetry instead of at the end).

Ask students to read the poem silently to themselves once before you slowly read the poem out loud to them. As the students read the poem silently to themselves a second time, ask them to underline and color-code the different types of rhyme they observe in the poem.

As students to share their responses; they may have different responses to this task, but as long as the rhymes they identify meet the definitions you presented in class, they are correct.

Finally, ask students to read the poem out loud together, in one voice, so that they can pronounce the words and experience the rhymes and the rhythm of the poem for themselves.

Discuss together the vocabulary of the poem, especially any words that might be new to them in Spanish and/or English, and then ask students what they think the poem might mean.

If you would like to extend this activity, try doing the same exercise with the English translation of the poem, and see if the English version helps your students to understand the poem.

**2. Imagery: A Poetry Activity for Intermediate Spanish-Speakers**

*Learning objective:* Students will make connections between the visual imagery of Spanish artist and writer Pablo Picasso’s visual art and poetry.

*How to do this activity:* Start by showing students a few images of the work of the Spanish artist and writer Pablo Picasso. Students may recognize his most famous paintings and sculptures, so when you mention to students that Picasso was also a poet, emphasize that some artists can make beautiful things with words as well as colors and textures.

Give students a list of ten or fifteen relevant art vocabulary words that they can learn and apply to this activity in addition to their knowledge of color words, body words, and other
adjectives and nouns.

Either project onto a wall of your classroom an image of Picasso’s famous painting Guernica or give the students paper copies of the painting. Ask them to describe one of the images you presented to them in five complete sentences using any variety of vocabulary words.

Then, after the students complete their sentences, distribute copies of Picasso’s poem 28 de noviembre XXXV. Ask students to read the poem silently to themselves, underlining phrases and images for the poem that echo any of the details in Guernica.

Discuss findings as a group, and finish the activity by asking a volunteer to read the poem out loud to the entire class.

3. Emotion: A Poetry Activity for Advanced Spanish-Speakers

**Learning objective:** Students will practice reading comprehension skills and discuss the connection between words and emotions while reading Soneto XLV by Chilean poet Pablo Neruda.

**How to do this activity:** Distribute copies of Neruda’s sonnet to students, and explain the structure and purpose of a sonnet as well as its popularity as a form of love poetry.

Read the poem out loud slowly while your students read the sonnet silently to themselves, underlining any phrases or word combinations that they find particularly evocative of emotion.

Give students time at the end of your reading to look up new words. Before discussing the words and phrases the students have selected, ask students to reflect on how the poem as a whole made them feel.

Ask students to write down a few notes in response to this question, and then ask them to look again at the words they underlined to make the connection.

You can extend this activity by asking them to write a personal response to the poem, or even by asking them to write a love poem of their own that answers or responds to Neruda’s poem.

If your students seem a bit reticent at discussing their feelings out loud, simply ask them to respond in writing for some extra writing practice in Spanish.

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**What Makes Me Me?: Creating Student-designed infographics**

By: Lara Dolphin
Pine Point School, Stonington

How do you motivate students to speak in your classroom and teach for proficiency? The “Art of Data” is a project that incorporates culture, as well as the four skill areas of reading, listening, writing and speaking, in order to give students the tools to showcase their learning. This simple project allows students to develop visual language that makes data captivating, expressive and meaningful. By developing an engaging task where students create their own infographic to describe themselves, students are highly motivated and eager to share their learning.

If you are not familiar with the “Art of Data” you are probably wondering how to begin. I suggest starting with the book, Observe, Collect, Draw: A Visual Journey, by Giorgia Lupi and Stefanie Posavec. You may be thinking, “I am not an art teacher and I do not know how to guide my students to create an infographic.” Those were some of my first reactions, but I...
am here to let you know that it is fun and easy and students love it! Start with an essential question, for example, “What makes me me?” To introduce the project, consider reading a children’s book such as, Alma and How She Got Her Name, by Juana Martinez-Neal so you can incorporate culture into your lesson.

To create an infographic each student simply needs a sheet of paper. Any size will do. Next, have students come up with questions in the target language and a symbol to represent their answer. For example, “¿Cómo te llamas? or ¿Cuál es tu nombre?” and the symbol maybe drawing the initial of their first name on their paper to represent this question. Other questions that students might include could be, “Where do you live? How old are you? When is your birthday? How are you feeling? etc.” Students then brainstorm symbols to represent their answers to these questions. To answer the first question, “Where do you live?” students in my class decided to use a tree to represent the Nutmeg State and waves to represent the Ocean State since we have students from both Connecticut and Rhode Island that attend our school. They used dots to represent their age and flowers to represent their birthdays, using the petals to show their birthday month and leaves for the day in which they were born.

Once the students have all created a personal infographic, they can use it for the rest of the year as a springboard to ask and answer questions about themselves and even investigate students in other classes. Students can also add to their infographic as their proficiency builds. Novice level students use more concrete examples of memorized questions while intermediate levels create more challenging and higher-level-thinking questions.

“The Art of Data” is also a fun project to share with other students and schools. For example, my students sent a copy of their infographics to their pen pals at Colegio Álamo in Celaya, Mexico, and to their partners from the Sewickley Academy in Sewickley, Pennsylvania. Students at these schools used critical thinking skills to try and figure out which questions were asked according to the symbols on the infographic, all the while learning more about their penpals. There were many learning outcomes from this project. Not only did students become experts at asking and answering questions in the target language, but the infographics became a highly effective tool to teach grammar concepts in a fun and interesting way. Furthermore, students were proud of their work and always eager to use their infographics to share information in the target language. If you are interested in learning more about the “Art of Data” which combines a heavy dose of student interest with lots of target language speaking, look for a presentation that just might be coming to October’s CT COLT Conference!

Seal of Biliteracy News

The Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy
by James Wildman

The Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy, which was signed into law by Governor Dannel P. Malloy in 2017, was just awarded to students across the state for the second time, as seniors walked across the stage at high school graduations across the Nutmeg State. The pins that adorned graduation robes and seals affixed to the diplomas were the only visible representations of the years of hard work and determination that these credentialed seniors had. But the years of study in language classes across the state had led to this moment, one of celebration and distinction.

In its first year, 2018, the Seal of Biliteracy was awarded to students in 28 school districts. Students, who studied both modern and classical languages, totaled more than 900 in 2018. With a second year of state-wide implementation in the books, the totals from 2019 are even more impressive! With more than 35 school districts submitting data to CT COLT for their implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy, over 1225 students earned the distinction.

We are excited with the growth of the program, with an increase of more than 300 students earning the seal, it’s clear that schools across the state are joining the proficiency movement. Teachers who have attended the Summer Proficiency Institute have commented that the institute has greatly benefited their practice in the classroom and has helped to increase student proficiency levels.

First Bite out of the “AAPPL.”

By Amanda Robustelli-Price

Introduction

This past school year, I taught French 4 for the first time in my new school. In the 2018-2019 school year, my district was in its first full year of giving the AAPPL test to all level 4 students (after a pilot year with a couple of classes), and thus, this is my first group of students to ever take the AAPPL assessment. My district has now had two years of assessing students for the meeting the requirements of the Seal of Biliteracy. I learned a lot this year. I’d like to share my experiences with others in the
hope that they may be helpful to teachers and districts, who like ours, are shifting to a proficiency focus.

What is the AAPPL test?

AAPPL stands for, “ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages®” and is offered through Language Testing International (LTI). Here’s information about the test, directly from LTI’s website https://www.languagetesting.com/aappl: “The ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) is a performance assessment of standards-based language learning across the three modes of communication (Interpersonal, Presentational, and Interpretive) as defined by the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning. The AAPPL assesses Interpersonal Listening/Speaking, Presentational Writing, Interpretive Reading, and Interpretive Listening, and ratings are assigned according to the ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners.”

Why did we give the AAPPL test?

Our district chose this test to assess for the language requirement (other than English) for the Seal of Biliteracy and to help us to analyze our progress toward program targets. There are several proficiency-based assessments that share useful data and can be used to show that students have met the language other than English requirement for the Seal of Biliteracy. You can check out a list of these assessments and requirements by visiting http://www.ctcolt.org/pages/sealofbiliteracy.asp and clicking, “Eligibility Criteria about the Seal of Biliteracy.”

What is the Seal of Biliteracy?

From the CT COLT brochure about the Seal, “The Seal of Biliteracy is an award given by a school or district, in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in English and at least one other language. It is a recognition of students’ academic efforts, to see the tangible benefits of being bilingual and biliterate, and of being prepared for the 21st century.” For more information about the Seal of Biliteracy, please visit: http://www.ctcolt.org/pages/sealofbiliteracy.asp

What are our program goals?

In my district, we made our first set of proficiency-based goals two years ago and will continue to modify them based on student performance.

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<th>Course Level</th>
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<td>8th grade, Level 1B</td>
<td>Novice Mid-Novice High</td>
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What did I do to prepare students for the test?

I prepared the students for the test in a variety of ways. Most importantly, I worked diligently to improve students’ abilities to communicate in French, always focusing on proficiency. I looked at our program goals and worked to design tasks that were engaging, tied to authentic resources, and encompassed all modes of communication. Our district uses rubrics for assessments that are based ACTFL guidelines, which helped me to focus on key areas such as vocabulary, sentence structure, comprehensibility, and language control. Some specific strategies I used included:

- I strived to create an immersive French environment, where 90% or more of our interactions in class were in the target language. For example, I carefully planned how to write and display directions for student comprehension (which often included visuals), incorporated routines and procedures to facilitate the use of French, and carefully designed posters and word walls for the classroom walls.
- I incorporated authentic resources into every unit design and wove them into many lessons. Scaffolded tasks included a focus on both reading and listening strategies.
- I regularly asked for student feedback on ways that I could support their use of the target language in the classroom, and incorporated student recommendations into daily practice.

What types of practice tests did we do?

I used the practice AAPPL assessment (https://www.languagetesting.com/aappl2-demo) with my students, so that they would know what to expect from the test itself. This was helpful, although students were disappointed because the practice tests do not include
answers or scores. In addition, each of my units throughout the year includes multiple authentic resources, and interpersonal speaking tasks, interpersonal writing tasks, and presentational writing and/or tasks.

What work did the teachers and administration do in advance of the test?

In my school, we were lucky that our department coordinator registered students for the test, and printed out individual labels, which were attached to notecards, with their access information for the test. In advance of the assessment, our department coordinator also worked with the district technology team to ensure that all technology components would work during the test itself, which they did. We used our language lab for the testing.

How and when did my students take the assessment?

Students took the assessment over a few classes during class time only. Our initial aim was for students to take two assessments per block scheduling period, for a total of two classes (which for us is about 160 minutes). We did find that some students took longer than others to take the exam, so we gave them additional time to complete the test. There were a few stragglers at the end (due to absences, field trips, or just longer focus on the test) who ended up finishing the test on laptops in the classroom, in the back, during typical class time.

How did the assessment process go for them?

The test itself is very user friendly and easy to follow and take. On the written tasks, there is a button for students to add accents, which was useful. During piloting last year, we found that students were self-conscious if they did the speaking at different times, so on the second day of testing, we asked students to do the speaking all at the same time, which seemed to reduce anxiety.

How long did it take for test results to come in?

Test sections were graded as they were completed, with reading and listening having the shortest turnaround time, which was typically less than a day. The grading time for the other sections varied widely, from the same afternoon to almost a week in some cases.

How did my students perform?

Of my fifteen students who took the test, two of them received the score of I3 or higher on all four of the tests, and thus are eligible to earn the Seal of Biliteracy (as long as they meet their English graduation requirements as well). Four of my students missed I3 in only one test section and will retake that part again next year. Four other students earned I3 or higher on two tests. When I compare the scores in French this year to the students who took the assessment last year, I do see a slight uptick in overall performance, which I believe is a result of department-wide changes in assessment and instruction. I hope to see the same trend in the coming years.

What did I learn from the results of the assessment?

Within my own class, I was able to see that student areas of strength were the interpretive reading and interpretive listening sections. The lowest scores, with five students performing in the novice range, were for interpretive listening and speaking. I need to think more deeply about the productive skills and specifically about the types of activities I am doing, as well as the feedback that I am giving students about their performance.

Most importantly, the AAPPL scores have provided an excellent analytical tool for discussing instruction throughout our department. Our district coordinator for World Languages can see and analyze the trends of performance in a variety of ways, such as through the categories of the test or through instructor. For example, we discovered that certain teachers had significantly higher scores in certain areas of the test: Interpretive listening, presentational writing, and interpretive reading. My own scores did not show a clear pattern like this. I am excited to learn from my colleagues who exhibit strengths in instructional practices that can help me to improve my own instruction in certain areas, and thus student outcomes.

How did I share the results with my students?

AAPPL tests include an individual report, where students were able to both see and analyze their results. The report includes tips for moving to the next proficiency level. (Interested in seeing a sample score report? Visit: https://www.languagetesting.com/aappl-scores.) I printed out the individual student reports, and had students complete an analysis of their score and of my performance throughout the year— what went well in preparation for the exam across different categories, and what could be done better in the future. Student feedback about classroom instruction was insightful. For example, I learned that I need to work harder to include different accents from the francophone world in the interpretive listening tasks.

What did I learn about the structure of the test?

Here’s a quick primer on the four sections of the test:

- **Interpretive reading**: Students read a variety of texts and complete tasks such as matching key ideas with pictures or words.
- **Interpretive listening**: Same as the reading task, but with texts they heard.
• **Presentational writing:** Students responded to a series of prompts, which became progressively more complex. Here’s a prompt from the practice test:

  Please write about four friends here at school. Write their names and say why you are friends with each one of them. Write at least two sentences about each one.

• **Interpersonal speaking and listening:** Students were able to listen to a video prompt two times, then had a set time period to respond to the prompt.

I was really interested by the prompts given for the speaking and writing portions of the test, which I found to be broader in scope that those I typically give in class. These prompts have made me rethink what types of questions I am asking students throughout the year.

**What are next steps for students?**

Students who want to retake sections whose scores did not meet the non-English language requirements for the Seal of Biliteracy can retake the AAPPL test, at the earliest, three months later. This is relevant especially for students who took the test in their junior year or earlier, who would still have time to qualify for the Seal of Biliteracy before graduating.

**What would I change for next year?**

Next year, I am going to make a few changes, such as:

• I will work to increase the variety of the francophone world included in our authentic resources, especially video and audio clips.
• I want to connect feedback not just to a rubric level but also to a proficiency level and want to work harder to share with students what they need to do to move to the next level.
• I am going to incorporate more of the video-style speaking prompts into our class practice, where I or another speaking asks a question, students can listen twice, and then they must record their response.
  • I am going to rethink assessments and the types of prompts I am giving to students.

As is the culture in our department, we will also continue to update the curriculum and daily class practice through meaningful discussions and data analysis.

**In Conclusion**

My first experience with the AAPPL test was positive, and I learned a lot this year about test logistics and format. Through departmental discussions, sharing of practices, changes in curriculum, and a clear focus on student proficiency, I do believe that, over time, I will continue to improve my teaching skills to give students such an important skill: The ability to communicate meaningfully in another language.

**Announcement of the Winner of the 2019 Essay Contest**

This year CT COLT conducted the seventh (8th) annual WORLD LANGUAGE STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST. For 2019, students explored the following theme: **The Journey to Proficiency.** In a formal essay-response, students researched and wrote about the following subtopics related to proficiency in the learning of foreign languages:

(1) Consider the difference between proficiency and performance, as well as the case in support of proficiency-based language learning to better argue and support your contentions. Give specific and precise evidence to support your claims.

(2) How has your proficiency-focused classroom differed from any language instruction or language learning that you have experienced in the past?
3. What are the benefits of proficiency-based language learning for language learners? Which benefits have you seen in your own school and/or with your own language learning?

4. How have you personally felt more empowered and engaged in the language-learning process as a proficiency-based language learner? How have you been personally involved in charting your journey to language proficiency? How informed are you about your language-learning progress and of areas where you need to work (speaking, writing, viewing, listening, reading)?

5. How has proficiency-based language learning helped you to reach your personal and academic goals thus far? How will it assist you in reaching your professional goals in the future?

6. Do you have any recommendations or advice for students and teachers in a school district that has not adopted proficiency-based language learning? Is this something that should be embraced by the entire US?

Students were required to craft well-organized arguments, constructed from objective, fact-based information, in addition to drawing upon personal experience from their own learning of foreign languages. The essays were submitted by world language students from only one (1) school in Connecticut - Stonington High School and read by the CT COLT Essay Contest Committee. The essays were then scored according to the 2019 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 teacher for participating in this year’s contest. All students who submitted essays for this year’s contest will receive a 2019 Certificate of Participation from CT COLT.

This year’s committee is proud to announce that the winner of the 2019 CT COLT Essay Contest is Heidi Chappell of Stonington High School. The committee and CT COLT applaud Ms. Chappell for her excellent essay which references both fact-based arguments and personal experience. In a well-organized essay, Ms. Chappell incorporates her own life experience in her proficiency-based language class, alongside objective evidence that validate such events in her life. For example, Heidi mentions the importance of making mistakes, taking risks, using circumlocution and doing various other classroom activities and methods, utilized by her teacher, to build her linguistic proficiency. She reflects on how she has come to assume more responsibility and accountability in her language learning, in addition to building self-confidence and belief in her own linguistic abilities. One result has been her practice-teaching at the elementary schools in Stonington as a member of the National Spanish Honor Society. She closes her essay, commenting on the need to promote proficiency-focused language on the learning to ensure that schools are preparing informed, confident and language-proficient global citizens.

We are pleased to present Heidi with a $50 award. In addition, we are happy to provide her teacher, Mrs. Lea Graner-Kennedy, with a $50 Carlex or Teacher’s Discovery voucher. CT COLT would like to thank all students and their teacher in this year’s contest and look forward to next year’s CT COLT Essay Contest. The text of the winning essay follows directly after this article.

John R. Rook, Chair for the 2019 CT COLT Essay Contest

The Winning Essay
by Heidi Chappell, Stonington High School

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

Learning another language and about other cultures is essential to become a global citizen. No matter what profession one goes into or how much traveling they wish to do, learning another language can help broaden a person’s horizons. If this is the case, then why do so many high school students loathe learning it or feel it’s not “productive”? This is because in order to truly learn a language, the goal must be proficiency, not just performance.

While it is one thing to be able to successfully fill out that worksheet or fill in the blanks on the test in class; that is not proficiency, that is performance. Before this year I do not think I could have said what the difference was yet this past year through being in a class that is truly proficiency-based learning I have a renewed interest and new confidence in my language skills. In previous language learning classes we looked at a book, wrote specifically about that one topic using words we knew already and filled in blanks. In the proficiency-based class, right from the beginning we spent the first few minutes of class speaking only in the target language. Coming from a performance-based class I was instantly worried about my grade and messing up yet as time went on, I grew more comfortable with making mistakes and saw the benefit. The mistakes prompted by the proficiency-based learning work to greatly improve learning. Studies have shown that after making a mistake “The brain also increases its attention during the next decision... When this happens, people are much more
likely to improve their performance and learn from the mistake” (McGonigal). The opportunity to make mistakes is essential for students to learn a language. By having a very broad topic to discuss at the beginning of class I have been forced to discuss topics I may not have otherwise, working to expand my ability to communicate on a broader range of topics. In addition, this allows students to practice circumlocution, talking around a word we may not know using ones we already know in order to still get the meaning across. This is a skill that is essential on the path to proficiency as when speaking with a native speaker of the language being studied the chances of you knowing all the vocabulary needed are small to none. In order to communicate, the language learner must be able “talk around” words to still portray their meaning in a conversation. In addition to this practice, when we do a recorded speaking prompt, then we do a transcription afterwards. This helps you to think back on what your strengths and weaknesses were in order to work on improving your language skills.

Although being in a proficiency-based class has been extremely beneficial this year, I believe that this needs to start at a younger age. Studies have shown it is easier for younger children to learn languages so by starting language learning at a younger age it will both help to provide a more productive result and be in a more positive light (Lang).

This year, with a group of other Spanish Honors Society students, I was able to teach Spanish at the elementary schools. Through doing this I was able to witness firsthand the excitement with which the kids wanted to and were learning Spanish. To me this showed the importance of exposing younger kids to language learning. In addition to helping the students, teaching also helped my fellow “teachers” and I to feel more confident with our own language skills and see a real-life use for them.

It is essential that learning be proficiency based in order for students to feel and be successful when speaking with a native speaker. By teaching ways to progress along the path to proficiency, students will be more confident, committed and well versed within the target language which will help them be global citizens and who are confident enough to step outside their comfort zone.

Sincerely,
Heidi Chappell

Works Cited
Lang, Susan S. “Learning a Second Language Is Good Childhood Mind Medicine, Studies Find.” Cornell Chronicle,


2019 CT COLT Poetry Recitation Contest

By John Rook

The 2019 and 38th CT COLT annual World Language Poetry Recitation Contest took place on April 9th at Rockville High School in Vernon, Connecticut. Congratulations to all of the 592 student participants who worked so very hard to prepare their poem(s) and to their teachers for their guidance and support.

The CT COLT Contest Committee Members (Elizabeth K. Lapman – Past CT COLT President, John R. Rook – Recording Secretary; Paul M. St. Louis – CT COLT Treasurer) would like to thank the all the administration, faculty, staff and students at Rockville High School. The contest chairpersons at Rockville HS were Eliza González, Alba Osorio and Amy Schlett who all did an amazing job to organize and host the event. Special thanks to the administration at Rockville HS and Vernon Public Schools (Dr. Joseph Macary – Superintendent, Vernon Public Schools, Robert Testa, Assistant Superintendent, Vernon Public Schools, Susan Czapla, Principal, Rockville High School, Allayne Sundt, Assistant Principal, Rockville High School, Daniel Pichette, Assistant Principal, Rockville High School for agreeing
to host this year.

Additional thanks to Melody Mooney, Karen Miklas, and Faith Luginbuhl for the design of the front cover art for the poetry contest booklet, as well as to the RHS Spanish National Honor Society and student volunteers.

Lastly and very importantly, the Poetry Contest Committee would also like to extend their sincerest gratitude to the more than 130 returning or new contest judges who devoted their time and expertise to chairing the various contest rooms. The Poetry Contest judges are typically teachers or professors from Connecticut schools, colleges and universities who are committed to the study of poetry and verse of various foreign languages.

At the contest, there were a total of 592 recitations and 52 different schools were represented. Student participants arrived at Rockville High School and then proceeded to their assigned rooms to present their poem before a panel of 2 judges. After their recitations, students enjoyed snacks in the RHS cafeteria and then transferred to the auditorium for light entertainment. The afternoon ended with the presentation of awards to those students who placed in either 1st, 2nd or 3rd place in their particular language. The languages and levels that were represented at the contest are listed below. Please note that there were no ASL recitations at this year’s contest.

Arabic – Heritage MS, HS1-4, HS5-6, HS9-10, HS11-12, HS Heritage
Chinese – MS1-2, MS Heritage, HS1-4, HS5-6, HS ESOL/ELL – All levels
French – MS1, MS2, Heritage-MS, HS1, HS2, HS3, HS4, HS5-6, Heritage-HS9-10, Heritage-HS11-12
German – All levels
Hebrew – All levels
Hindi – All levels
Italian – MS1, MS2, Heritage-MS, HS1, HS2, HS3, HS4, HS5-6, Heritage-HS9-10, Heritage-HS11-12
Japanese – All levels
Latin – MS1, MS2, HS1, HS2, HS3, HS4, HS5-6
Modern Greek – All levels
Polish – All levels
Portuguese: Heritage-MS, HS1, HS2, HS4, Heritage-HS9-10, Heritage-HS11-12
Russian MS1-2, Heritage-MS, HS1-4, HS5-6, Heritage HS9-10, Heritage HS11-12
Spanish MS1-2, Heritage MS, HS1-4, HS5-6, Heritage HS9-10, Heritage HS11-12

A summary of the 2019 results by awards and language can be found via the following link:


For more information regarding the contest, please visit the following site:

http://www.ctcolt.org/pages/poetry_rec_contest.asp

For more information and/or suggestions regarding the poetry contest slates, please visit the following site:

http://coltpoetrycontest.weebly.com/

If you are interested in serving as a judge for the 2020 contest, please contact John R. Rook at rooki@glastonburyus.org and Beth Lapman at elapman@hamden.org

Thank you again to all participants in this year’s contest and we hope to see everyone at next year in 2020. Have a wonderful summer!

Edcamp CT COLT: A Great Morning for WL Learning and Connecting

By: Matthew Mangino
Wethersfield High School

For the fourth year, teachers from Connecticut hosted an Edcamp dedicated to world languages for their colleagues. If you’ve never been to an Edcamp, I’m sorry to say that this event didn’t involve s’mores or tents--although there was light breakfast fare. An Edcamp is a free professional learning experience for educators that is driven by the needs and expertise of the participants. There are no vendors or keynotes. This professional learning experience was a time to connect with other educators who are the experts in their classroom, and who are facing similar issues.
We were hosted by CCSU's Modern Languages Department in the beautiful new Willard-Diloreto Hall on their campus in New Britain. There were 39 teachers and educators who participated in 14 discussion topics over three sessions in this year's event. We started the morning with a blank session board. Then, participants posted their session ideas on the board, and the organizers arranged those ideas into coherent sessions. There was a wide range of session topics, such as proficiency assessment and early language learners. There were sessions dedicated to ACTFL’s core practices, such as using the target language and error correction. And, there were more foundational topics that are appropriate for early-career teachers, such as classroom management and applying for your first job. The conversations were rich and dynamic, and many resources were shared among the participants.

Participants said that they had a “wonderful time”. The group of “awesome language teachers” was “supportive and connected”. People described the experience as “a breath of fresh air” and that Edcamp CT COLT is like a “family reunion”, “a slumber party”, “summer camp for language teachers” and “a get-together with friends”. Certainly, this experience is like no other district-wide PD that I have ever been a part of. As you can see, we had a great day of learning with old friends, and making new ones. Edcamp CT COLT is a great way to join the community of world language teachers from around the state, and to learn from and with some outstanding colleagues.

Success at the CT COLT and RIFLA Summer Proficiency Institute!

Kathleen Archibald - Director, Summer Proficiency Institute

The 2019 Summer Proficiency Institute hosted by CT COLT and RIFLA was held in Stonington, CT on June 26-27th. Ninety-nine educators from Vermont to Washington DC attended with an eagerness to learn and a palpable energy that extended into the breakout sessions with the featured speaker, Mr. Greg Duncan. This was the third Summer Proficiency Institute and the second in a series of three with Greg. Attendance continues to grow each year and both CT COLT and RIFLA are proud to continue in 2020. We would like to thank all of those that attended and let you know that we appreciate you giving up part of your well-deserved summer vacation to attend.

Day 1 day focused on connecting curricular units to proficiency standards, Essential Questions, Can-do Statements and considerations for vocabulary, grammar and culture.

Attendees finished Day 1 with a lively Proficiency Party in Mystic at Lea Graner Kennedy’s residence and were able to socialize and network under the warm summer sun and enjoy the perfect weather.

Day 2 focused on assessment within the curricular units and considerations for performance assessments. Attendees were given many opportunities to apply new learning to their own units while collaborating with other educators either in their district or the same World Language. Many teams were able to leave on Day 2 with a working document that they could use as a model for future units.

Please consider joining us next year for the 2020 Summer Proficiency Institute on June 24-25 at Stonington High School. Greg Duncan will be back with a focus on lesson planning and proficiency targets. We look forward to seeing you next year!

Here are just a few comments from some of the 2019 attendees:

“The conference was very relevant, helpful to create student-centered learning to enhance and move students up the proficiency ladder.’

RIFLA member

“Greg Duncan led us through this obstacle course that is curriculum writing and supported us as we explored our unique paths. The process is now demystified, and although I am overwhelmed with the necessary work ahead, he gave me the confidence I need to make a good attempt and proficiency-based curriculum-writing.”

S. Damdar, CT COLT member

“Experiential learning that allowed me to collaborate and discover.”

A. Furgueson, CT COLT member

Organizational News

American Association of Teachers of French
Connecticut Chapter (AATF-CT)
2018-2019 Activities

Content provided by: Honore Radshaw, Secretary AATF-CT
Minor editing by: Brigitte Lange, AATF-CT Board, COLT Rep

- To start off the 2018 school year, the “Rentrée Gathering” was held at a former vaudeville theatre-turned-bar/performance space: Lyric Hall in New
Haven. Guests caught up with old friends, met new ones, and enjoyed hearing worldwide “Le Petit Prince” expert, Howard Scherry give a talk about his favorite author, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The Comité Executif also presented a fast round of teaching tips and tricks.

- Members of AATF-CT attended and supported the Connecticut Organization of Language Teachers’ Conference. They used the occasion to promote AATF and recruit teachers to join and participate. Jon Shee, the chapter president and Evan Downey, the chapter treasurer, presented an interactive workshop titled, “French Teachers Strategy Session: Advocacy, Promotion, Innovation.” They discussed ideas to support and promote French teachers and programs and shared interesting national survey data regarding the status of French teaching in America.

- The fabulous Connecticut Science Center was the venue for the fall meeting. Appropriately, organizers, Laura Faga and Geneviève Brand presented successful ways of integrating science-related themes into the French language curriculum. University of Connecticut representative, Jennifer Terni explained the “UCONN/Université de Toulouse Exchange Program,” a 5-year program for engineering students which includes a full year in Toulouse studying French and interning in French companies.

- Québécois/Sénégalais, hip-hop artist, Webster was the star act for a concert during National French Week. Over 1500 students and teachers came together at Southern CT State University’s Lyman Hall for an amazing, sold out performance.

- In January teachers headed to West Hartford to “Avert Brasserie” for the annual “unconference” conference: that is, an idea-sharing tip swap in the relaxing atmosphere of a French-style bistro.

- CT French students and their families gathered at Bridgeport’s Webster Bank Arena to cheer the Sound Tigers to victory during French Hockey Night, April 10th. Darien High School students made videos for the Jumbotron and attendees enjoyed a meet-and-greet with the francophone players.

- The fabulous “Reunion Printanière” for AATF-CT members and guests took place at Bar Bouchée in Madison. There was a mini workshop on Project-Based-Learning presented by Evan Downey, Susan Sarrazin and Jon Shee. They shared project designs for all levels. Some utilized songs and others were examples for final projects. The menu, wines, and authentic French atmosphere were amazing. Merci “Bar Bouchée! Susan Sarrazin and Geneviève Brand won the trivia contest and a $75.00 gift card to Bar Bouchée. Sandi VanAusdal and Honore Radshaw were re-elected as chapter vice–president and secretary.

- Awards Ceremony, May 14th at the Hopkins School in New Haven
  - The Grand Concours medal winners at all levels were honored.
  - Two monetary prizes were presented by the CT chapter. The AATF-CT Tom Betts Senior Prize of $1,000 was given to Connor Hartigan of the Hopkins School and the AATF-CT Alberta Conte Junior Prize of $500 to Amelia Warneryd of St. Luke’s.
  - Two $500 prizes offered by the Alliance Française of Northwestern CT were also awarded. The Senior prize was given to Sofia Mancinone and the Junior Prize was given to Sienna Moore; both are students of Heidi Edel at Shepaug Valley High School.

- Several Connecticut AATF members will be attending the AATF Conference in Philadelphia in July.

- Visit our Web site at www.aatfct.org

- AATF-Connecticut is on Twitter! Follow us at https://twitter.com/aatfct
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CT COLT Fall Conference
The Journey:
Building Pathways to Proficiency
October 20 – 21, 2019
Red Lion Hotel
Cromwell, CT

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Help us keep our membership records updated!
If you have moved or had a name change, please fill out the
Information update form at

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