

The Professional Journal of the National Network for Early Language Learning

LEARNING LANGUAGES

spring/summer 2014 volume 19 issue 2

***Advancing
Student
Proficiency***



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Final Score: Spain 2, China 1

A Mother's Reflection

By Stacie Nevadomski Berdan

My twin daughters just finished eighth grade and will be moving on to high school in the fall. As we reviewed the course selection and discussed each's four-year plan, Betty confirmed that she will continue taking both Spanish and Chinese. Connie, however, said she only wanted to take Spanish, which she has been studying since kindergarten. She added Chinese in seventh grade after having spent two summers attending STARTALK summer camp in elementary school. She has a strong foundation for a critical language that takes years to learn – and one that would undoubtedly enhance her career prospects. I didn't want her to throw that learning away.

Since we had a few weeks to submit the final course selection, I asked her to think about her choices, and Connie asked me to consider her perspective: She doesn't particularly like Chinese in the same way she enjoys Spanish. Although she excels in the class, she's not enjoying herself, despite being one of only four students receiving the "Mandarin Chinese Award" in her eighth-grade class. To be sure, Chinese can be very difficult for native English speakers to learn with the confusing nature of characters and tones; some experts say it can take four times longer to learn than a Romance language such as Spanish. Moreover, once a certain degree of proficiency is attained, it's critical to keep practicing to maintain that level. Language speakers, especially young ones, must like the language to be inspired to keep at it.

Connie has witnessed the benefits of hard work and practice in Spanish. After all her years of studying, she can make herself understood on just about any topic to any native speaker. She has experienced first-hand how communicating in another language opens up all kinds of interesting avenues to explore, and she's excited about it. That's a powerful feeling and an especially important milestone in language learning. Connie has set her mind on becoming proficient in Spanish, which is, arguably, the most valuable language for most Americans as it has far more day-to-day relevance and presence than Chinese.

When our children were young and

began elementary school, it was much easier to bring languages into their lives through songs, picture books and fun conversation. As I've written in past columns, it's important that our children study languages. But, as I also wrote, they have to enjoy the process. If they don't, it will be more labor than love. By the time they enter high school, we must allow them to make their own decisions about their futures. Connie began studying Chinese in seventh grade to try it out and continued in eighth grade to please me. But as a teenager, she feels entitled to make her own decisions, and she's very clear on this one.

It's not very difficult to understand her perspective. Connie is an excellent student who takes all available honors-level classes and participates in the accelerated math program our district offers. She also loves Spanish, scored a 98 on the most recent National Spanish Exam, and tested at a very respectable Intermediate 4 on the ACTFL Assessment of Performance Toward Proficiency in Languages Interpersonal Speaking Listening test. She was the recipient of numerous Spanish awards this year, including the eighth-grade "Excellence in Spanish" award and the prestigious Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NECTFL) award. She is spending two weeks this summer at Concordia's Spanish language camp, El Lago del Bosque in Minnesota, in full immersion. We're considering repeating a language-immersion vacation this summer, similar to our trip to Mexico last year but this time to Chile. Connie has also talked about adding French in high school – after she fulfills her "technical elective" of equine horse science (she loves horses, too) – and has begun studying German on her own, using free apps online.

For the sake of long-term career options, I would have preferred that she pursue both Spanish and Chinese through high school and college. But since she's not, I'm glad she's choosing the one in which she's more interested. And although Spanish may not

seem as "prestigious" as Chinese (in that fewer children are studying it and it's more difficult to learn), it's far more practical in the United States with the rising number of Hispanics estimated to grow toward a third of the population by 2050, according to the

Parent's Corner

Pew Research Center.

Beyond the U.S. border, the strong economic fundamentals and sound regulatory systems in many Spanish-speaking countries offer plenty of career possibilities. As Latin America continues to grow – some countries at near double-digit growth annually – there are plenty of opportunities to use Spanish as part of an international career, whether as an engineer, an NGO worker or a small business owner.

With Spanish, Connie will still have plenty of options, and her journey will be that much more enjoyable – and the benefits longer lasting – because she will have chosen the path that most interested her.

It's what we've taught them to do, es verdad?

Stacie Nevadomski Berdan is a seasoned global executive and an expert on international careers. She has authored four books on the intersection of globalization and careers, her most recent being *Raising Global Children*, which was published by ACTFL last November. www.stacieberdan.com



build proficiency in language learning. In Donna Clementi's article, "Meaningful and Purposeful Practice," she explores different elements of the ACTFL's book *Keys to Planning and Learning*. Jennifer Eddy shares key points in how to get students to transfer tasks in order to demonstrate the flexibility required when facing new situations in her article "Turnarounds to Transfer: Design Beyond the Modes." Peggy Boyles shares her perspective on the importance of paying

President's Message

attention to the characteristics of each proficiency sub-level in order for teachers to quickly realize the importance of asking the right questions and to develop appropriate activities. I also thought it would be a great time to reprint Issues 8 and 9 from *Parents' Connection*, which talk about communicating in languages other than English.

I look forward to hosting Early Language Learning teachers in Glastonbury, Connecticut from July 11-13, 2014 for our National NNELL Summer Institute. Presenters include: Mary Lynn Redmond, ACTFL President; Helena Curtain, author of *Languages and Children: Making the Match*; and Paul Sandroek, Director of Education for ACTFL. Be sure to check out the information in this issue on the ACTFL fall conference in San Antonio, Texas and the NNELL events! Finally, please consider writing an article for our fall-winter 2014 issue the theme of which is "Teaching for Global Competence."

Have a great summer and happy reading!

Rita

Dear Readers:

In this issue of *Learning Languages*, we explore the theme of "Advancing Student Proficiency." This is a topic that we have worked on all year in the Glastonbury Public Schools. As a district, and within the state of Connecticut, we have embarked on a new evaluation plan and teachers developed student learning objectives (SLOs) for the year.

One of the suggested SLO's for our department involved students moving up the ACTFL proficiency scale by participating in appropriate performance based tasks using one or more of the modes of communication – interpretive, interpersonal or presentational – in the target language.

Another possible SLO teachers could focus on was student demonstration of growth in the different modes of communication at the specific sub-levels for a particular proficiency level. This was accomplished through lessons that supported an alignment of the National Standards for Learning Languages with the Common Core State Standards. Teachers used the ACTFL Common Core Crosswalk document to align the standards.

A third SLO focused on increasing student target language proficiency by using 21st century skills: collaboration, creativity, critical thinking and intercultural competence. This was the stimulus for creating new learning opportunities in the language classroom.

Some of the action steps included:

- Engaging students in communicative activities in the foreign language on a daily basis.
- Students participating in bi-weekly interpersonal speaking prompts in our digital labs.
- Regularly providing students opportunities to write across the curriculum.
- Reviewing sub-levels within a proficiency range as a form of professional development in order to design appropriate activities that would help to move students up the proficiency scale at all levels of instruction.
- Incorporating 21st century skills as stimuli for creating learning opportunities.

The articles in this issue provide us with a glimpse into how colleagues across the country are working to

PHOTOS FROM THE 2014 NELL SUMMER INSTITUTE



NELL

Thank you!
NNELL Summer Institute

Keynote Speaker:

Manuela Wagner: *Early Foreign Language Learning-Yes, We Can!*

Presenters:

Marty Abbott: *ACTFL New Public Relations Campaign*

Helena Curtain and Tori Gilbert: *Engaging Imaginations and Building Proficiency Through Play and Pattern Stories*

Barbara Lindsey: *Resources for Digital Storytelling*

Mary Lynn Redmond: *Update on National Initiatives, and Relating Cultural Products and Practices to Perspectives Using 21st Century Creativity and Innovation Skills,*

Paul Sandrock: *Exploring the Modes of Communication (with Emphasis on the Can-Do Statements)*

Marcela Summerville and Kate Krotzer: *- Building Foreign Language Advocacy*

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Andy Buckley,
New England/Upstate NY



Meaningful and Purposeful Practice

by Donna Clementi

When asked how to build proficiency in a world language, the response might be similar to the old joke: Question: How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Response: Practice, practice, practice.

The need for practice cannot be denied. However, we know that practice alone does not result in increased language proficiency. For practice to be helpful, the tasks or activities have to be meaningful to the learner, and they have to be purposeful. The graphic (opposite page), designed by Clementi and Terrill, the authors of American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL's) *Keys to Planning for Learning* (2013), visually represents the components that contribute to meaningful and purposeful practice in learning a world language, practice that leads to greater proficiency.

The entire graphic is centered around the letter *i* representing three key elements that motivate learners to practice using the language in order to build proficiency. We know that motivation varies from learner to learner depending on many factors including age, interests, past experiences. We also know that if we can awaken the curiosity of learners by introducing a thematic unit with interesting props, stories, images, artifacts, questions, they are more likely to become engaged in exploring the theme over the extended time needed to internalize the new vocabulary and linguistic patterns.

Motivation to learn a language is often based on a desire to talk with people who live in different places around the world and speak different languages. When learners approach these interactions with interest, open minds, and curiosity, they are developing skills in interculturality, defined as the interaction of people from different cultural backgrounds using authentic language appropriately in a way that demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the cultures (LinguaFolio, 2010). Through multiple encounters over time with people from around the world, language learners grow in their ability to reflect on their personal feelings, thoughts, perceptions, and reactions to these encounters, and they also grow in their ability to reflect on their own life and culture. Thanks to programs like ePals, Skype in the Classroom, and iEarn, connecting with people around the world is possible and addresses the Communities Standard that requires learners to use the target language both within and beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their community and the globalized world. These connections

make the language come alive, sparking curiosity and a need/want to know more among learners.

Since the introduction of this graphic, the *i* in the center of the graphic has expanded in meaning because of thoughtful comments from teachers who interpreted the *i* as a reminder of a learner-centered classroom: All the components in the graphic are intended to engage learners in meaningful and purposeful interactions designed to improve their ability to communicate in the target language and deepen their understanding of themselves and the world. Giving learners the choice to explore aspects of a theme that are of personal interest increases motivation and engagement.

The *i* in the center of the graphic has one final meaning: immersion. In order for learners to increase their abilities to communicate in the target language, there must be meaningful and purposeful use of the target language by both teachers and learners. ACTFL recommends that the target language be used meaningfully and purposefully in the classroom by learners and teachers for 90 percent or more of the class time. A rich target language environment that includes not only the teacher's modeling but also authentic written, oral and visual texts is essential for learners to build their communication skills in order to increase their proficiency in the language. When learners are in a classroom environment where using the target language is the principle means of communication, they know they need to understand the language. Motivation increases when there is a real need that must be met.

The rest of the graphic identifies context and content for meaningful communication. The Venn diagram with three circles surrounding the *i* reflects the interconnectedness of the contexts in which the learners communicate and of the understandings that learners gain. Communication is meaningful when it is personally relevant, helping the learners better understand themselves (Knowing Myself). Communication is meaningful when it relates to the communities to which the learners belong, increasing understanding of those communities (Exploring Communities). Communication is meaningful when it connects to the world to foster interest in, and understanding of, the issues that transcend boundaries (Engaging with the World).

The three modes of communication — Interpretive, Presentational and Interpersonal — are written on the blue watermark of a globe as a reminder that meaningful com-

munication takes place in the real world with people representing a variety of languages and cultures. The three modes are also intended as reminders that a strong unit of instruction includes practice in all three modes: Each mode “specializes” in different skills that work together to strengthen learners’ ability to communicate.

The five Cs of the World-readiness Standards for Learning Languages — Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities — encircle the blue globe. The five Cs outline broad learning goals to guide the development of world languages curriculum, instruction and assessment. The overarching goal of the five Cs is to prepare learners to apply the communication skills, knowledge and understandings of the standards beyond the classroom to real-world experiences and future careers where global competence is increasingly important. The five Cs encircle the globe to indicate that the learning through the five Cs transcends a single language and culture.

Viewed in its entirety, the graphic represents motivation, content and context that guide the design of curriculum, instruction and assessment of world language programs. Thematic units that are based on the elements in the graphic facilitate learners’ growth in proficiency.

DESIGNING A THEMATIC UNIT TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION

A thematic unit that encourages meaningful practice towards proficiency begins with a question, one designed to prompt curiosity and a desire to know more. Thomas Sizer, in his work with the Coalition of Essential Schools (1992), called these questions designed to encourage exploration and deep thinking “essential” to learning. Essential questions became a fundamental concept of Understanding by Design (UbD) by Wiggins and McTighe (2004). McTighe and Wiggins (2013) state that a thoughtfully crafted essential question guides the learning goals for a unit of instruction, encouraging learners to explore a topic in order to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Adapted from McTighe and Wiggins (2013), a good essential question:

- Is open-ended without a single, final, and correct answer;
- Is cognitively engaging encouraging learners to share thoughts, ideas, additional questions;
- Draws on all levels of thinking in Bloom’s Taxonomy — remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, create; it cannot be answered solely by



RATHER THAN BEING FOCUSED ON, AND PERHAPS FRUSTRATED BY, WHAT NOVICE LEARNERS CANNOT SAY, THINK ABOUT THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH AN ESSENTIAL QUESTION EXACTLY AS THAT: A FIRST ENCOUNTER.

- remembering;
- Connects to other disciplines;
 - Sparks curiosity and additional questions about the theme;
 - Needs evidence and reasons to support opinions and possible responses related to the question, and;
 - Can be revisited at more advanced language levels to deepen learners’ understanding of the topic or issue.

An important caveat to creating essential questions to guide instruction, especially for novice language learners, is that the learners have to be able to share thoughts and ideas related to the question. Therefore, the questions have to be within the linguistic range of the learners. Good essential questions provoke conversation. If the learners are not able to talk about the question, its purpose is lost in terms of motivating learners to communicate in the target language.

Note that the final characteristic of a good essential question is that it recurs over time. Rather than being focused on, and perhaps frustrated by, what novice learners cannot say, think about the first encounter with an essential question exactly as that: a first encounter. It can be revisited again and again over time as a learner’s proficiency in the target language increases. It is important to think about what learners *can* say and understand in their first encounter with the essential question in order to guide the choice of learning experiences for the unit. For example, think of the concept of communities. Essential questions could be created at different levels reflecting both the increased linguistic skills and the developmental level of the learner. Here is a possible spiral:

- Who are the people in my community who help others?
- What makes a community a good place to live?
- How does the history of a community influence the community today?

Note that the theme of communities does not need to be addressed every year but can be revisited periodically as appropriate to the curriculum, the linguistic level, and the interests of the learners. McTighe and Wiggins (2013) remind us that the purpose for asking the question is more important than how it is phrased or how serious it is. They suggest that purpose, audience and impact ultimately determine if a question is “essential.”

The question “Who are the people in my community who help others?” is intended to show how a theme can begin with very simple lists of service providers (police officer, firefighter, librarian, teacher, doctor, etc.) and what they do, characteristic of the language of a novice learner, while encouraging the learners to think more deeply beyond the simple vocabulary list to how these people help others. In subsequent years this basic question can be revisited in a way that uses prior knowledge and adds more detailed responses moving the learner to higher levels of proficiency.

Here is what the overview to this thematic unit might include:

Grade Level: First Grade	Language Level: Novice
Theme: Families and Communities	Essential Question: Who are the people in my community who help others?
Topic: Helpers in my Community	
Goals: Learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify people by role in their community who help others (police officer, firefighter, etc.)• State where the helpers work in their community• State what the people in their community do to help others• Compare helpers in their community to helpers in (X)	

Now consider how the final performance assessment for this unit allows learners to demonstrate their communicative abilities to interpret, present and share ideas in response to the essential question. To assess the Interpretive mode, learners could view a video clip or images showing different places in a city in a country where the target language is spoken, then circle images of the helpers who work in the places. In the Presentational mode, learners could prepare a video or series of images identifying different places/helpers in their city and share the presentation with a partner school in a country where the target language is spoken. To assess the Interpersonal mode, learners could work in pairs to create a Venn diagram asking and responding to simple questions as they place images of places/helpers in either the Venn circle for their community, the Venn circle for the community where the target language is spoken, or in the overlap area of the Venn circles indicating that the place/helper is found in both places. Throughout this unit, the learners are developing their understanding of other people and cultures: interculturality.

The interconnectedness of the tasks in three modes strengthens the learners’ knowledge and ability to use the target language. The Interpretive mode provides authentic language models and authentic content. The Presentational mode enables learners to work with vocabulary and linguistic patterns in order to create a product that showcases their learning. The Interpersonal mode gives learners the opportunity to share the knowledge and language they have learned with others in an unrehearsed conversation. All three modes work together to increase proficiency among learners.

MEANINGFUL AND PURPOSEFUL LEARNING

With the essential question in place along with the final performance assessment reflecting all three modes of communication, the teacher is able to plan a variety of activities and experiences that give the learners multiple opportunities to practice the target language in meaningful ways. For example, for this thematic unit on communities, the learners might:

- play a matching game where they pair a place in the community with the helper who works there;

- listen to a story about the helpers in a community and what they do;
- place images of different places where helpers work on a map of their community;
- look at a map of a community in another country to find places where helpers work that are similar to the ones in their home community.
- pick a prop or item of clothing that represents a helper in the community and say who they are (ex: I am a bus driver);
- sing a song about the people who are helpers in their community;
- view images of places where helpers work in a community in a country where the target language is spoken and identify who works in the various places;
- create a mural of places in the community where helpers work.

The learning experiences are purposeful in building skills that prepare the learners for the final performance assessment. They are formative in nature, telling teachers and learners how well they are able to understand and use the target language at various points during the unit. These formative assessments help teachers and learners make any needed adjustments such as reteaching, more practice, different types of practice to improve performance.

PERFORMANCE TOWARDS PROFICIENCY

Through the final performance assessment for this unit, the learners demonstrate how well they can interpret authentic oral, written and visual texts, how well they can share their findings with classmates in real conversations, and how successfully they can showcase what they learned through the creation of a product to share with an audience outside the classroom. This performance assessment is a snapshot of how well learners can communicate in the target language on the unit’s topic after focused classroom instruction, multiple opportunities to practice the language and ongoing feedback on their communication. Completing several thematic units provides the purposeful practice that learners need in order to increase their proficiency in the target language.

Performance based on these units may be an indicator of a learner’s proficiency level.

However, their true proficiency level can best be determined by an outside evaluator specially trained in assessing proficiency. True proficiency is independent of specific classroom instruction, unpracticed and not tied to a single topic. Proficiency reflects sustained performance across all tasks and contexts that are appropriate for that level and, therefore, cannot be determined by one thematic unit. The more meaningful and purposeful practice that learners complete, the stronger their performances will be on individual thematic units as they work toward increasing their proficiency in the language they are learning.

How do you increase proficiency in a world language? Meaningful and purposeful practice, practice, practice.

RESOURCES

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Donna Clementi, PhD, is currently a world languages methods instructor at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisc., and a national consultant specializing in best practices in world language curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In 2013, she co-authored *The Keys to Planning for Learning: Effective Curriculum, Unit, and Lesson Design*, an ACTFL publication. Since 2006, she has been co-leader of the CARLA Summer Institute on Second Language Assessments at the University of Minnesota. Clementi taught French and was the World Languages Program Leader in the Appleton Area School District for 33 years. She also spent 38 summers working at Concordia Language Villages at the French Language Village and leading professional development seminars for world language instructors.



THE STORY OF SAM

Advancing Proficiency in Reluctant Learners

By Tammy Dann
GETTING TO KNOW SAM

From the first time we met, it was clear that Sam hated Spanish. He joined my class in third grade, with no desire to learn the language. He was the master of avoidance and could side-step all of my efforts to teach him Spanish. At the end of the year, he transferred to a different school having learned much less than I wanted him to know.

Sam struggled in all of his classes. He changed schools three times in seven years and was absent often, creating gaps in his education. When he was in school, everything about him screamed out that he did not want to be there. Teachers were more accustomed to seeing the top of Sam's head or the scowl on his face than his smile.

Sam was different from my students who struggle to learn or have difficulty paying attention in class. With those children, close proximity, adaptations to tasks, or more support helped them find success in Spanish class. None of those strategies worked for Sam because he was a reluctant learner; one who not only had difficulty learning the content but also did not want to learn it.

MAKING THE MOST OF A SECOND CHANCE

Sam was not the first reluctant learner I have taught, but he was one of the most difficult to figure out. I was given a second chance to make a difference with Sam when he returned to my school for fifth grade.

From previous experience with Sam, I knew that I needed a way to get Sam's attention all the time and motivate him to learn, so I worked on improving our relationship. I wanted him to realize that I was an adult in

his life who cared about him. I hoped, with a better relationship, he would work harder in my class and make the growth I knew he was capable of making.

The only problem with my plan was that he hated Spanish.

I was fighting against negative comments he heard at home about Spanish speakers and years of being forced to learn a language he did not want to learn. To overcome those barriers, I did something I never do: I spoke in English.

I am the hard-core, Spanish 99 percent of the time Foreign Language in Elementary School (FLES) teacher who speaks English in class once or twice a year and only in fourth through sixth grade. Even in the hallways during the day, before and after school, I speak with the kids in Spanish. Desperate times called for desperate measures, and I knew what I gained by using English with Sam outside of class would ultimately benefit his Spanish skills in class.

I watched for Sam in the hallways and chatted with him in English each time we crossed paths. We eventually got to the point where I could joke with him and he would smile. It took a while, but I saw results in Spanish class. Sam paid closer attention and performed most of the requested tasks without the passive-aggressive behavior he had used during third grade, but I wanted more than just compliance; I wanted Sam to have an active role in his education and be more motivated.

THE AH-HA MOMENT

I use LinguaFolio Jr. with my students in fourth through sixth grade because I want

to create more reflective learners who take ownership for their learning. The language biography packet is where children record their personal language learning history, their preferred learning activities and the evaluation of their progress through the use of can-do statements: unit and program objectives written in child-friendly language. Children monitor their Spanish progress throughout the year by revisiting the can-do statements at the beginning of the year and the end of each trimester.

Looking through Sam's language biography and his reflections on the unit can-do statements in fifth grade showed me that, even though he made measurable growth, he did not see it. He performed fairly well in class and on assessments but marked that he could not do the task when reflecting on the can-do statements. I reminded him of his success, and he changed the response but did it so I would leave him alone and not because he believed he was successful. It was then that I realized the root of the problem was his negative self-perception. He did not view himself as a good student in any area and especially not in Spanish. I needed a new tool to change his self-concept.

While Sam was in sixth grade, I added a list of effective learning strategies to the language biography (see table on opposite page) that I created after analyzing the strategies used by the successful learners in my class. I developed the list because my struggling and reluctant learners needed a better tool for identifying the right strategies and even my successful learners need a reminder sometimes. Like the can-do statements, the

children would evaluate their use of the strategies four times a year. For the first round of reflections, I knew I needed to guide the students through the process and discuss with them why these strategies were vital to their success in my class, and I knew that talk needed to be in English.

I speak in English so rarely that many of my kids forget that I speak English, and any time I switch to English during class the response is the same: jaws drop, eyes are wide open and there is silence. When it was time to talk about effective language learning strategies in English, I capitalized on their undivided attention to present my thoughts.

I began my speech explaining that there are not children who are "good" at Spanish or who are "bad" at Spanish; instead, there are kids who use the right strategies and those who do not. If they believed they are "bad" at Spanish, they needed to change the strategies they used and they would be more successful. After my speech, I asked the children to reflect on their own use of the strategies. I read through each reflection and when a child's reflection did not match the behavior in class, we discussed each of our perceptions of the use of the strategy.

After our focus on strategies, I was sure that was the key to turning things around for Sam. I was wrong. I saw many of my struggling learners start to make changes that led to more success in class, but Sam continued to do the minimum and did not apply himself or seem to enjoy class at all. A few Spanish classes later, I asked Sam to talk with me in the hallway. I told him that during the next Spanish class I wanted him to focus on the strategy "I will watch Sra. Dann" and I did not care if he did anything else for the rest of the class period, just watch me. I promised him that if he used that strategy, Spanish

strategies	beginning of the year	end of trimester 1	end of trimester 2	end of trimester 3
I watch Senora Dann when she is talking.				
I watch my classmates when I do not understand.				
I listen when it is not my turn to speak.				
I listen for words I already know.				
I use my resources to help me understand.				
I ask for help when I do not understand.				

class would be less torturous for him.

As I walked by Sam during the next Spanish class, I whispered, "Remember, all you have to do is watch me." For the entire class period, I saw something other than the top of his head from across the room; I saw his eyes and the spark of understanding. He understood what I said! He was far from loving class, but he experienced enough success that day to try again the next Spanish class. The successes began to build, and I saw him producing more and better Spanish than ever before.

My favorite Sam memory happened near the end of his sixth grade year. In the fall I administered a writing assessment where the students wrote a friendly letter, entirely in Spanish, to a pretend child in Mexico. They could not use any resources, just what they remembered. In the spring, the students took the assessment again, and once it was scored, I passed back both the fall and the spring assessments. Sam wrote one sentence for the fall assessment. He filled three-fourths of the page with text on the spring assessment. Before I collected the papers from everyone, I asked Sam to hold up both of his assessments and show the class why he should win the award for most improved. He showed his peers both papers and smiled shyly as they all clapped for him, some of them with mouths gaping open.

Not every day is a perfect Spanish class for Sam. If he misses several days of school, getting back into the groove requires a prompt from me: "Remember to watch me, and you

will understand better." The bad days are now few and far between, but I know when I see the top of his head instead of his eyes I have a better tool to get him back on track. He occasionally raises his hand and gives answers, which is progress. More importantly, he has learned that when he applies the right strategies he can be successful in my class, and I hope it is a lesson that he applies to other areas in his life.

APPLYING WHAT I LEARNED

Sam taught me a lot about how to better reach my reluctant learners. I am now much more proactive than reactive. I pull the kids aside much sooner and talk strategies, and then I pile on the positive reinforcement. When they slip, we immediately start talking strategies to get them back on the path to learning. Some kids catch on right away and others need more time, more attention and more love. I am grateful for the second chance to teach Sam because it made me a better teacher for all of my students.

Tammy Dann has been a Spanish (FLES) teacher in the West Des Moines Community School District since 1999. She served NNELL as a state and a regional representative and Early Language Learning Advocate. She is currently NNELL's membership secretary.



Communicating in Languages Other Than English Part I

by Tammy Dann

STANDARD 1.1: STUDENTS ENGAGE IN CONVERSATIONS, PROVIDE AND OBTAIN INFORMATION, EXPRESS FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS, AND EXCHANGE OPINIONS.

This standard focuses on interpersonal (between people) communication. If you visit your child's language class you may see methods, strategies and activities that were not used when you learned a foreign language.

Total Physical Response combines listening with physical movement. Actions are used to represent vocabulary taught in the target language. This is a very engaging way to introduce new vocabulary in a meaningful way.

With the *Natural Approach*, teachers work to make the language meaningful and memorable. In the beginning, the focus is on listening. The teacher uses a sequence of questions that gradually shift students from the listening to the speaking mode. This method is similar to the way in which your child learned his/her native language.

Some teachers use *passwords* or *language ladders*. These are selected phrases that are memorized as chunks. They are taught, and then posted with a visual to help the children remember the meaning of the words.

Rhymes, chants, and songs are fun ways to teach children chunks of language. Often when a child cannot remember a word in the target language, the teacher only needs to hum the song where s/he learned the word and the child will be able to produce the forgotten word. These also provide insight into the target culture.

In the early second language class, you may see *partner and small group activities* that are designed to allow your child to practice the language with different peers. There can be information exchanges where the children are interviewing or surveying each other, finding similarities and differences, or following and giving directions. These

activities are student-centered and build on students' language skills and interests.

What can I do at home?

- Have your child teach you the actions and vocabulary that s/he is learning at school.
- Request a list of vocabulary from your child's teacher and create your own passwords or language ladders in your home.
- Have your child teach you any songs, chants, or rhymes s/he is learning at school.

STANDARD 1.2: STUDENTS UNDERSTAND AND INTERPRET WRITTEN AND SPOKEN LANGUAGE ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS.

This standard focuses on the interpretation and understanding of written and spoken language. It involves one-way listening and reading in which the learner works with a variety of materials.

Listening is considered by many teachers and researchers to be the cornerstone of language development (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004). As children are beginning to learn a language, their teacher will focus on developing their listening skills in the language. In order to develop students' listening skills, teachers must use the target language for classroom instruction.

Storytelling is often used in a language class. At the beginning of a child's language experience, the story will contain a large number of visuals and actions to help convey the meaning. By introducing stories in the target language, the teacher is able to introduce vocabulary in a meaningful way and he/she can also teach certain aspects of the culture from which the story comes.

Reading allows children to draw on their own experiences. They will often work with longer texts and authentic materials. Many of the pre-reading strategies used by the classroom teacher are used by the language teacher.

What can I do at home?

- Look for authentic literature such as newspapers, websites, and magazines in the target language to share with your child.
- Look through the materials together to find familiar words. Make a list of words you both recognize.
- Use a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words.
- Listen to songs or watch TV shows in the target language *with* your child.
- Simply buying videos and asking your child to watch them alone will not help to develop any second language skills on his/her part.
- Listen for and write down for familiar words. Discuss with your child what you hear.

CONCLUSION

The three modes of communication do not occur in isolation during instruction. Your child's teacher will have a variety of activities that help your child develop his/her interpersonal and interpretive skills in the target language.

Information about the methods, strategies, and activities discussed in this newsletter were taken from: Curtain, H. & Dahlberg, C. A. (2004) *Languages and Children: Making the Match*. Boston: Pearson.

NNELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today at http://www.nnell.org/state_reps.shtml. We would love to hear from you!

This article was written by Tammy Dann. It is full of tips and resources that can be found at www.nnell.org. Teachers may reproduce it and send it home in their students' backpacks. Send suggestions and comments to Janine Erickson, NNELL's Early Language Advocate: jerickson@nnell.org.

Communicating in Languages Other Than English Part II

by Tammy Dann

STANDARD 1.3: STUDENTS PRESENT INFORMATION, CONCEPTS, AND IDEAS TO AN AUDIENCE OF LISTENERS OR READERS ON A VARIETY OF TOPICS.

In the past, many foreign language programs focused solely on reading, writing, and verb conjugation. Students left the programs knowing a lot about the language, but not necessarily being able to communicate in it. Today, it is vital that language learners are able to speak, read, and comprehend a language. As with the interpretive and interpersonal modes, language teachers are creating opportunities in their classrooms that allow students to develop real-world skills in the presentational mode. Most often the presentational mode is one-way speaking and writing.

In the beginning of his/her second language experience, your child will likely produce written and spoken language that contains learned patterns and will appear similar to English. As he/she progresses through the second language program, your child will begin to acquire authentic patterns and use appropriate styles, pronunciation and intonation patterns for the language.

Speaking performances can include plays, songs, student-created skits, short speeches, and even Power Point presentations. After learning a story, students can write their own versions and then orally share their stories. These stories can be performed by the students themselves or through the use of puppets. Commercials for products or advertisements for vacation destinations can also be created and performed as students develop more advanced language skills.

Speaking performances can take place both within and outside of the language class. The students can perform for their peers in their own class, other classes, as part of a school assembly, or for their parents. Their presentations can be recorded or taped to be shared later. These performances are

often considered to be a culminating activity for a unit.

Writing in the presentational mode goes beyond doing an assignment for the teacher and allows students to mimic writing experiences that happen in the real world. As with speaking, the audience for the writing is changed from the teacher to other students, native speakers of the language, and even family members. Students' written performances can be in the form of poems, letters, postcards, stories and emails. In the beginning your child will reproduce writing he/she has copied from the teacher or another text. As he/she progresses through the language program, more creativity and personalization will be seen in your child's writing.

What can I do at home?

- When your child is preparing for a speaking performance in his/her second language class, have him/her perform for you.
- Have your child retell you stories he/she is learning in class.
- If possible, write each other notes in the target language.
- If possible, write poetry together in the target language.
- Have your child teach you the songs he/she is learning in class and sing them together.
- As his/her second language skills continue to develop, try to create skits together in the target language and have the entire family perform in the skit.
- Have your child write letters in the target language to family members in other parts of the world/United States.
- Put on puppet plays of stories your child has learned in his/her language class.

Information about the methods, strategies, and activities were taken from *Languages and Children: Making the Match* by Helena Curtain and Carol Ann Dahlberg.

You can read more about the Communication Standard in Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century, available from ACTFL.

NNELL can assist teachers, parents and administrators with learning and advocacy efforts. Contact your State Representative today at http://www.nnell.org/state_reps.shtml. We would love to hear from you!

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Turnarounds to Transfer

DESIGN BEYOND THE MODES

By Jennifer Eddy

Quite often when a teacher asks a question and changes it, even slightly, from how the concept was originally taught, a student will say, “You never taught us this or we never learned this.”

Experience with typical testing creates learners accustomed to plug in, memorized answers, therefore expecting to be assessed exactly the way they were taught. The danger here is a learner that will not be able to demonstrate the flexibility required when faced with new situations or deal with real-world contexts that are often ambiguous and require critical thinking and a repertoire thoughtfully engaged. Teachers still ask students to fill, drill and repeat, focusing on individual items rather than the concept that created the item.

When prompted exactly as they were taught, students might fill in the space. However, they cannot use the language with flexibility and security, engaging in tasks they will likely encounter in real life. Drills, fill-in and rote responses may give the appearance of understanding but not the reality of trans-

fer (Eddy, 2006).

Transfer is defined as using knowledge and skills in new and unanticipated situations different than how they were originally learned, on one’s own, without many cues or supports (McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. 2005). In the curriculum design model, Uncovering Content: Assessment Design Aligning Performance and Transfer (2006/2007), Understanding by Design is aligned with the World Readiness Standards (1996/2013), unfolding cultural perspectives with recursive themes along the lifespan within the three communicative modes assessing for Transfer. Using a language appropriately in a given culture requires high adaptability, tolerance of new situations and contexts, dealing with incomplete information and problem-solving without cues. Assessment tasks that most closely meet these criteria will be your best evidence of true performance. Teachers need to create these tasks for the learner as transfer will not occur by chance and never from drills alone. Communication is not only proof of transfer but proof you need transfer.

Transfer requires inference and nego-

tiation of meaning, not just collecting facts, repeating a skill and completing a drill. Without transfer, the language learner forgets, misunderstands a concept or only knows it in the rigid, predictable context in which it was taught. Transfer involves using materials the student may not have used before and solving a problem with complexities or variables. If students understand the concept, it should not matter if the teacher poses it differently or suggests different variations on the same. Unfortunately, most students when faced with a problem, posed slightly differently, cannot solve it, recognize it or reach for the concept to solve that problem. This is because there were no transfer tasks along the way to give students the tools for the inevitable unexpected. Transfer tasks should happen as soon as possible, early and often, however small, at all levels of proficiency.

ARE YOU PLANNING FOR PRACTICE OR DESIGNING FOR PERFORMANCE?

Even performance assessments (Glisan, et. al. 2003) can fall flat if students cannot transfer what they learned to a new situation or context, solve a problem or create some-

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Complexity and Variation

Key Characteristic of Transfer

- The **more complexities or variables** the task contains, the more it demonstrates transfer.
- Thoughtful use of a repertoire as opposed to just cued, fill-in, memorized or rote responses.



Eddy/WLP (2009)

Interpretive Task Travel

Using the different travel brochures and websites from various towns and cities in _____, categorize on your chart which towns or cities are the best places to visit for the following:

Music
Historic Sites
Easy transportation
Special Events
Places great for families
Shopping
Low cost or free places to go
Art or local crafts



Eddy/WLP (2007)

Turnaround to Transfer



Drills give the appearance of understanding but not the reality of transfer.

Without transfer tasks, the learner will not be able to demonstrate the flexibility required when faced with new situations in the real world cultural contexts.

Eddy/WLP (2006)

Performance Tasks in the Three Modes Should Assess for Transfer

Transfer requires inference and negotiation of meaning, not just amassing of facts and completing a drill.

Without transfer, the language learner forgets, misunderstands a concept, or only knows it in the rigid, predictable context in which it was taught.

- Performance Assessment for Transfer
- START with the End in Mind
- Source
- Task
- Audience
- Role
- Transfer



Eddy/WLP (2007, 2014)

Activity: START with the End in Mind Turnaround for Transfer

- Take a task you already have and turn around

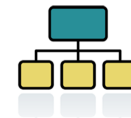
Key Characteristics for Transfer

- Go beyond self and own needs
- Move away from obvious in text
- Complexity and variation
- Solve problem, create a product of use
- Value beyond the classroom
- Source
- Task
- Audience
- Role
- Transfer

Eddy/WLP (2007,2014)

Interpersonal Task Travel

- Using the chart, tell your partner the towns or cities you would like or not like to visit, based on the information from the categories.



Eddy/WLP (2007)

START with the End in Mind Turnaround to Transfer

Source: Authentic Material you will use for your task.

Task: The problem the student will solve or product to create

Audience: Who will receive it

Role: The role in real life

Transfer: Characteristics of Transfer

- Source
- Task
- Audience
- Role
- Transfer

Eddy/WLP (2007, 2014)

Turnarounds for Transfer

- Theme: Travel
- Objective: To know the tourist sites in ____.
- Task: Matching column to test locations of tourist sites

Turnaround:

- Where people choose to travel depends a lot on their interests and needs.
- How do we choose where we want and need to go?

Eddy/WLP (2007)

Presentational Task Turnaround for Transfer

- You are a travel agent specializing in travel to _____. Your clients are all different. Create an itinerary suited for each group, keeping in mind the possible interests and needs of the client.

- 1. A family of 5 with young children.
- 2. A person who is a history buff.
- 3. Three students with a limited budget.
- 4. Grandparents who love small towns, local crafts, and music.



Eddy/WLP (2007)

thing relevant and culturally appropriate. In Turnarounds to Transfer, teachers design a collection of tasks toward the summative performance goal but go beyond the Communicative mode criteria: they must assess for transfer.

Transfer design criteria must include a complexity or variation that make learners engage critical thinking skills and call upon a repertoire of knowledge and skills. Learners also must move beyond themselves or immediate interests to solve the problem or create a product (Gardner, 1983/1993) that has value beyond the classroom with someone else’s needs in mind. The task should move learners away from finding answers directly in the text, rather to use inference or create their own questions for an interpretive task. The more complexities or variables the task contains, the more it demonstrates transfer and moves students toward the summative performance goal. Drills and predictable prompts alone cannot do this no matter how often they are practiced; thus, they are the paradigm that wastes time.

To design for transfer, **START** with the end in mind: **Source**: find the authentic material you will use for your task, material made by and for the speakers of that language; **Task**: design the problem to solve or the product needed; **Audience**: who will receive it; **Role**: a role in real world; **Transfer**: *Incorporate the Criteria for Transfer*. (Eddy, 2014)

When designing new tasks in the three modes, always assess for transfer, particularly in the presentational mode. Teachers can also turnaround a tired, textbook task or give an

Turnarounds for Transfer	
(Eddy 2006)	
START with the End in Mind	Transfer Tips
Source	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Move away from text• Give students a role and audience• Complexity and variation• Solve problem, create a product of use to someone else• Value beyond the classroom
Task	
Audience	
Role	
Transfer	

“upgrade” to a task they designed that does not quite transfer on its own. Below is a typical textbook example. This task does not move students toward transfer and is not indicative of the thinking skills required for flexible language use:

Objective: To know the tourist sites in X.

Drill Task: Matching column to test locations of tourist sites

Below is a Turnaround for Transfer sample IPA requiring students to acknowledge and accept complexities and variables and plan to adjust accordingly. Also note the Enduring Understanding for the program theme of Travel.

Where people choose to travel depends a lot on their interests and needs.

Interpretive Mode Task: Using the different travel brochures and websites from various towns and cities in X, categorize on your chart which towns or cities are the best places to visit for the following: Music, Historic Sites, Transportation, Special Events, Family Fun, Shopping, Low Cost or Free Places to Go, Arts or Local Crafts.

Interpersonal Mode Task: Using the chart, tell your partner the towns or cities you would like or not like to visit, based on the information from the categories.

Presentational Mode Task: You are a travel agent specializing in travel to X. Your clients are all different. Create an itinerary suited for each group, keeping in mind the possible interests and needs of the client:

1. A family of five with young children,
2. A businessperson who is a history buff,
3. Three college students with a limited budget,
4. Grandparents who love small towns, local crafts, and music.

The following are examples of tasks that appear performance based but lack transfer criteria:

After reading some itineraries, share your travel plans with a partner.

This task doesn’t move beyond simply reciting the travel plans. There is no exchange,

negotiation, or consensus. Consider this Turnaround: You have limited time on your trip. Come to agreement with your friend about how to balance the “must see’s” (museums, monuments) with the “must do’s” (music, events, adventures) during your visit.

Students read authentic menus and answer questions about the restaurant.

This task falls flat because students have not shown they can do anything relevant with the information. Consider this Turnaround:

Better—Near Transfer: Students read menus or hear menu options and write their choices based on a budget.

Best—Far Transfer: Students read several authentic menus and identify which dishes would be appropriate for different people based on likes/dislikes and special dietary needs: Vegetarian, vegan, no pork, dairy-free, low-carb, etc. (Eddy, 201v2)

It is important to accompany transfer tasks with other learner supports, such as Can-Do statements (NCSSFL/ACTFL 2013) which the teacher derives from the performance assessments and transfer tasks. These coax the learner to shift their mindset to what they can do rather than a self-limiting mission of repeating mechanized forms. They help the learner to self-assess and adjust. Remind them of the summative performance goal at the end of the unit or course, so that they know every formative task you do moves them closer to transfer. Provide a variety of materials and variations on a task.

Transfer asks the learner to use judgment and strategies on what and how to use a repertoire of knowledge and skills. Students will realize that the call to use prior knowledge can have many faces and flexibility is required to tap reserves for use in any context. Students will understand that transfer is the goal of learning and the key to becoming a flexible, self-directed, lifelong language learner.

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ADVANCING STUDENT PROFICIENCY

by Peggy Boyles

As I was leaving an elementary Spanish classroom, an excited little girl named Emily bounded up to me and said, “Do you want to know what I can do in Spanish?” Before I could answer, she announced, “I can tell you about things I like to do after school.” Without skipping a beat, she told me, “Me gusta ir a la biblioteca para sacar nuevos libros y me encanta ver ‘Wizards of Waverly Place’ en la tele con mis amigas.” (I like to get new books from the library and I love to watch ‘Wizards of Waverly Place’ on TV with my friends.) The student had a clear understanding of what she should be able to do and was proud when she knew she could do it.

Emily’s teacher beamed but later confided that a few years ago most of her students would only express themselves in words or phrases.

So what had changed in that teacher’s classroom? The teacher reported that she used to focus on teaching students vocabulary and was thrilled when they could recite numbers from 1-100 or could list at least 10 food words.

However, the difference in her instruction now is her deliberate attention to the identified proficiency targets in her district’s new curriculum and to the intentional use of strategies she now uses in her classroom to move her students towards the next sub-level of proficiency. Equally importantly to setting district proficiency targets, both students and teachers now have measureable evidence that progress is being made. Emily was tracking her progress with her personalized “can-do” statements and the teacher was measuring progress with formative assessments along the way.

The key to advancing student proficiency

throughout an articulated World Language program is to establish proficiency targets for each level of instruction and to create instructional units that intentionally provide pathways to meet proficiency goals. The 2012 ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners can serve as the guiding principle for the development of communicative, proficiency-oriented curricula and assessment.

The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements can give teachers even more specific support when planning units throughout the year as students advance in their proficiency in all modes of communication. For example, teachers can clearly see the type of questions that are most representative of a particular proficiency sub-level. Whereas a Novice-Low student will be able to respond to yes/no questions or either/or questions, a Novice-High will be able to ask for and give simple directions.

By paying careful attention to the characteristics of each proficiency sub-level, teachers quickly realize that it is their responsibility to ask the right questions and to develop appropriate activities that advance their students to the next proficiency sub-level. For example, Emily’s teacher is aware that to advance her students from Novice-Mid to Novice-High proficiency she needs to push her students with questions that elicit responses beyond one-word answers and phrases. She will not just ask students questions that require a list of single words or phrases, but rather she will pose questions that begin to push students to take charge of the conversation with more extended answers for a more interactive conversation. For example, Emily did not simply list words

or phrases such as “ver la tele” or “ir a la biblioteca” when telling me what she liked to do after school. She was beginning to put together simple sentences by combining words and phrases that she already knew to give me a more personalized account of what she likes to do.

Teachers now have the tools to plot a steady course to advance their students’ proficiency through the resources provided by ACTFL and NNELL. Through teachers’ collaborative planning and purposeful activity and assessment design, students will not only advance in their proficiency, but they will be more attuned to their ability to use language in real-life settings than to merely get a particular letter-grade for their course.

Peggy Boyles During her foreign language career of more than 35 years, Peggy Boyles has taught elementary, secondary and university students and has served as a K-12 district curriculum supervisor in World Languages. She served

as a national consultant for Utah’s Secondary Dual Language Immersion program. Peggy is currently the President of Peggy Boyles Consulting, a company providing assistance to schools, universities and other organizations of foreign language education in the areas of curriculum, assessment, professional development and program evaluation. She is a frequent presenter at national and regional conferences. Peggy is the 2004 recipient of the ACTFL Florence Steiner Award for Leadership in Foreign Language Education and is a past president of the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Language.

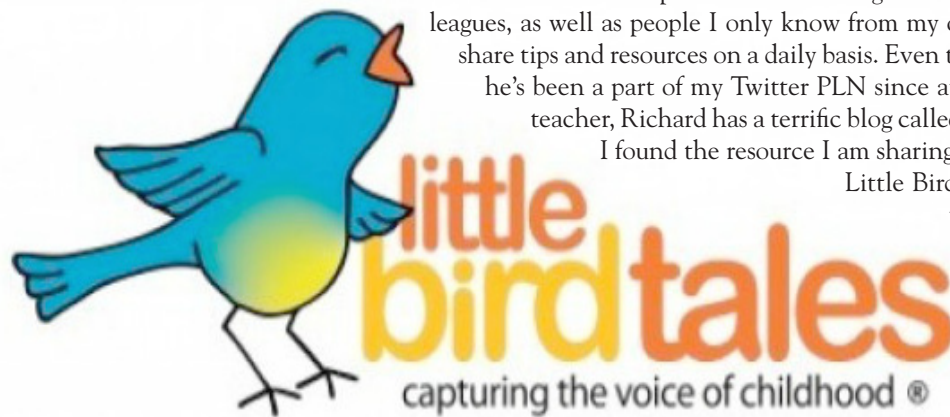


SEE IT! HEAR IT! SAY IT!

Technologies that advance student proficiency

by Barbara Lindsey

I have an incredible professional learning network (PLN), comprised of former and current colleagues, as well as people I only know from my online networks. They improve my practice and share tips and resources on a daily basis. Even though Richard Byrne is someone I've never met, he's been a part of my Twitter PLN since at least 2008. A former high school social studies teacher, Richard has a terrific blog called "Free Technology for Teachers," which is where I found the resource I am sharing with you here.



Little Bird Tales is a digital storytelling site that helps advance our students' proficiency in a variety of ways. With Little Bird Tales you can upload your own drawings or images, use their Art Pad to create your own drawings, record your own voice and write your own text. You can embed your tale on your class website or link to it or share your tale via email. When you sign up for the free teacher account using your school

email, you can also create student accounts that you can then manage from your account.

Little Bird Tales can be created by the teacher, for the teacher, and with the teacher. In addition to showcasing what students know and are able to do, teachers and students can use Little Bird Tales to create multimedia flash cards to practice vocabulary; to create an abc book to help with pronunciation or a book to practice songs and rhymes. If you have the appropriate fonts installed, you can create your tales in Chinese and Japanese. It does not, unfortunately, support right to left languages such as Arabic and Hebrew, but you could import your text as images to work around this limitation. The resources below will give you some ideas for how you can use Little Bird Tales to advance your students' proficiency!

RESOURCES

Little Bird Tales
Little Bird Tales: Create a Tale!
How to Use Little Bird Tales for
Digital Storytelling in Elementary School

EXAMPLES

Nursery Rhymes:
https://littlebirdtales.com/tales/view/story_id/3319/
Our ABC Book:
https://littlebirdtales.com/tales/view/story_id/3319/

Barbara Lindsey currently teaches for the ACTFL/UMUC Online Graduate Certificate in Instructional Technology Integration Program. Early experiences working with students struggling to read started Barbara on a journey to discover how we can help make learning accessible, meaningful and empowering for all learners. A former German teacher, Barbara transitioned to educational technology in 1996 and directed the Multimedia Language Center at the University of Connecticut until 2012. Her work centered on supporting language educators' use of mediated technologies to provide students an engaging and relevant global context for their linguistic and intercultural competencies. While at the University of Connecticut Barbara designed and taught a graduate level course on the use of social networking environments for language, culture and civilization courses. She participated in the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education's Universal Design for Instruction in Postsecondary Education grant and co-authored a book chapter with Professor Manuela Wagner on the role of mediated technologies in foreign language education. Barbara has served as project director on three federally funded grants, is a past president of the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers (2004-2006) and is currently a member of the NECTFL board (class of '16).



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NNELL Events at ACTFL 2014

Thursday: November 20, 2014

- 1:00-4:30 p.m.** *NNELL Board meeting*
- 5:00-6:00 p.m.** *NNELL Membership meeting. ALL NNELL members are welcome to this meeting at the Grand Hyatt Hotel.*

Friday, November 21, 2014

ACTFL Awards Ceremony
NNELL Award

Saturday, November 22, 2014

- 7:30-9:00 a.m.** *NNELL Breakfast. Keynote Speaker: Leslie Davison – Breckenridge, Colorado*
The NNELL annual breakfast provides attendees an opportunity to network with other early language learning professionals. Join us for conversation on the latest in early language learning from leading professionals in the field. Sponsored in part by Santillana USA.
- 7:00 p.m.** *NNELL Get Together (location TBD)*

NNELL Sessions

- #162: Multi-Dimensional Thematic Units with a Global Perspective
#2259: Connecting with the Common Core in the Early Language Learning Classroom
#1867: Common Core and FLES: Language Learning with Nonfiction Texts

NNELL Breakfast
Keynote Speaker
Leslie Davison



Leslie Davison is a National Board Certified World Language teacher with over 15 years of experience at both the elementary and high school levels. She was instrumental in starting a successful K-5 dual immersion program. Passionate about culture and global education, Leslie has taught in both Singapore and Honduras. Leslie shares her love for language acquisition by presenting at national and international conferences as well as offering workshops on CI/TPRS methods and technology integration. Leslie was recently awarded Colorado's World Language Teacher of the Year. When not teaching and learning, Leslie can be found running or skiing in the mountains with her dog or kitesurfing around the world. Currently, Leslie is teaching Spanish and serves as a Dual Immersion K-12 Coordinator and Instructional Technology Coach in Colorado.

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The Optimum Conditions of Foreign Languages in Primary Education

by Christina Nicole Giannikas, Cyprus
University of Technology, Cyprus

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to review the primary language learning situation in Europe and shed light on the benefits it carries. Early language learning is the biggest policy development in education and has developed in rapid speed over the past 30 years; this article considers the effects and advantages of the optimum condition of an early start, the objective of which it is to reinforce the European education scene.

Keywords: early language learning, language education policy, professional development, review.

INTRODUCTION

In order to facilitate communication and interaction, strengthen and promote co-operation, mobility, trade and the European economy, language learning is essential. However, English has overwhelmingly become the main focus of Foreign Language Learners (FLL) across Europe in recent years (EACEA, 2008). The developing interest in early language learning is a mirror image of the growing number of children learning languages at primary level. The selection of a particular early language learning model is allegedly decided by a combination of aspects, such as “the time available for language learning, perceived and realised intensity, material and financial input, starting age, social and geographical settings, as well as the language competence of the teacher” (Edelenbos et al., 2006: 14).

This paper will review concepts of the early language educational practice and effective policies that could bring out the advantages of early language instruction to the surface. The main aim is to shed light on the benefits of early language learning when its implementation is handled in such a manner that children and teachers can enjoy its positive outcomes.

THE LANGUAGE LEARNING BACKGROUND WITHIN EUROPE

Early foreign language learning has become a priority within the European Union. National governments throughout Europe, government agencies and Ministries of Education are committed to promoting the concept nationwide. The commitment to the early commencement of language learning and multilingualism (reiterated in the European Commission’s White Paper, 1995) and the development of life-long learning as a vital concept in Europe’s educational policy have made early language learning a point of great interest amongst governmental programmes and actions.

According to EACEA (2008), in many European countries, the notion of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) at primary schools, implies relatively limited amounts of time per week from teachers who are neither highly fluent nor specialise in language learning, with the goal of developing an initial competence. However, the situation seems to be steadily improving in various countries (ELLiE, 2011). Even though the plan of including a foreign language in the primary curriculum is beneficial since it entails a global perspective, positive attitudes to other cultures assist overcoming prejudice and discrimination. Great complexity can occur due to diverse approaches, views and aims. There may well be an ideal scenario in terms of the age of the child, the allocation of time and the skill of the teacher “but if we are to succeed in giving primary children the benefits of MFL, we have to be realistic and accept that practice has to be shaped by actual circumstances”. This focal point is worth considering since many language learners practice the Foreign Language (FL) within the limits of the classroom. The European Commission Action Plan 2004-2006 has

recommended that “member states should move towards ensuring that foreign language learning at primary should be effective” (Commission of the European Communities, 2003:7) and it is essential that the learning process be handled in such a way that it will benefit children learning languages. There are European countries that are characterised by top-down research projects, in which decision-makers have aimed to develop appropriate curriculum programmes for young learners and have traditionally wanted to gain insights, whereas, in other European countries, foreign language learning is introduced as a result of pressure from parents, politicians and/or other interested parties. Lessons may be obligatory upon schools and carried out with minimal supervision and control from educational authorities (Nikolov & Curtain, 2000). There is no doubt that the trend of an early start is more complicated than some may acknowledge. What makes it so complex is not just teaching practices and the methodology used in the language classroom, or any debate about the most appropriate age to begin learning an FL, but the fact that behind the linguistic exterior hide political and sociocultural perspectives, which influence the success or failure of the field. Enever and Moon (2009), have stated that political demands and changes of leadership can influence or change stable policy formation and continuity. The questions we must prompt ourselves to ask are, whether these perspectives include pedagogical language learning methods successful enough to equip children for the future and benefit their present, and how political and socio-cultural perspectives affect the progress of early language learning in each country.

THE EFL POLICY AND OPTIMUM STARTING AGE

Despite the increasing interest in early

language learning, there continue to be difficulties in the processes of implementation and debates regarding the appropriate starting age and the necessary conditions for ongoing success. Early attempts of foreign language instruction are often based on the claim that ‘younger is better’, and that the child is likely to prevail in competency because he/she is “endowed with certain language learning abilities that will allow him/her to become a more proficient user of the language” (Legutke et al, 2009:15). On the other hand, Nikolov (2009:2) argues that:

[...] young learners are widely perceived to acquire languages in a qualitatively different way from adolescents and adults. Children, before a certain age seem to pick up a new language with ease and success, whereas older learners often fail to do so.

Studies of Foreign Language Learning (FLL) have occupied neurolinguists who support a neurofunctional perspective on language which “attempts to characterise the neurolinguistic information processing systems responsible for the development and use of language” (Lamendella, 1979:5). The study of a foreign language in primary school, and perseverance in such a study for several years, increases students’ chances of developing a high level of proficiency, meaning that students reach an advanced level of communicative competence and cultural understanding. Furthermore, Curtain (1990) argues that the challenge children face when exposed to a foreign language at school enhances cognitive development. The young learners experience a certain learning strategy that is foreign to their area of understanding, a conflict, which becomes the mechanism of new thinking. Children are believed to be cognitively open to learning a foreign language, as opposed to adults. Johnstone argues that young language learners have extra time available overall, which gives them ample opportunities to form fruitful links between their L1 and the L2, a procedure that can assist in the development of metalinguistic awareness. Furthermore, language learning at a young age can allow children to integrate their learning of an L2 into their cognitive, social, emotional and cultural growth, hence, to exercise a positive and formative influence on their sense of identity. With older beginners, by contrast, their identity may have already largely been formed, in which case, language learning and L2 exposure will have little influence if for-

eign language learning begins later on.

Singleton (2005) argues that in language learning, younger is better in the long run; there are, nevertheless, many exceptions noting that an adult may be successful in a language even though they may have started learning it well into adulthood. Singleton and Ryan (2004) reach the conclusion that those who experience language learning at an early stage were shown to have reached higher levels of proficiency than those who had begun in puberty. Nonetheless, studies have demonstrated older children’s superiority in grasping L2 grammar, syntax and morphology where young learners are outperformed (Ekstrand, 1976). Moon (2005) suggests that the claim of ‘younger is better’ can be considered controversial, since there is evidence that adolescents and adults are more efficient learners than children. However, she argues that children have the advantage of having sensitivity to pronunciation. Pinter (2006:29) supports this argument and is in favour of the position that young children hold an “intuitive grasp of language and their ability to be more attuned to the phonological system of the new languages and enjoy copying new sounds and patterns of intonation”. Driscoll and Frost (1999) explain that young learners have an innate ability to imitate sounds more accurately, compared to older language learners. Nonetheless, there is a risk of not being given the opportunity to use this instinct if their teachers lack in fluency. On the other hand, Edelenbos et al. (2006), claim that an optimum starting age has not yet been established. An early start to language learning can offer the child an overall longer period of learning and a prospective of influencing their personal development whilst in a formative stage. Nonetheless, an early start is unlikely to make a spectacular difference. Children have more chances of becoming successful and motivated language learners if their early start comes with quality teaching.

THE LANGUAGE TEACHER OF THE YOUNG LEARNER

It is vital, when discussing the outcome of early language learning, to focus on those who deliver the language lesson and are responsible for the numerous children in Europe, and beyond, who embark on the journey of foreign language education. Ideally, the language teacher introduces the child to the foreign language and helps him/her become a successful foreign language user within a relaxed and comfortable environ-

ment. Singleton and Ryan (2004) argue that an early exposure to the foreign language will result to positive outcomes. Students will have to take on various stages in order to reach a level of confidence to become successful language learners. This cannot be achieved without the encouragement of the adults around them, starting from their families to their teachers at school (Giannikas, 2011). In order to achieve successful language learning in the primary level, the educator is required to supply pupils with the aspiration to acquire the knowledge and ability to engage in language learning tasks. All areas of education require teaching professionals that are well-trained. This is considered a prerequisite to quality education. As Legutke et al (2009) have argued, governments advocate the implementation of primary language learning, nevertheless, they are reluctant to offer funding to teachers of pre- and in-service level.

It can be argued that if language teachers do not undergo the necessary training to teach in the primary level, the optimum conditions to early language learning will not be met. The role of the governments’ and parents’ strong will to integrate language learning in primary schools cannot be ignored, however, it is up to the teachers to execute this challenging operation. Teachers cannot be expected to approach early language teaching without undertaking the appropriate pre/in-service training that would eventually benefit their students and prepare them for their next level of language learning in secondary school (Giannikas, 2013a). Language educators need to be aware of the suitable teaching methodologies and have a good command of the language to feel comfortable within the classroom, and positively affect their learners. According to Rixon (2000:4) the teachers’ command of the foreign language can affect the type of language the students are provided with and the methodology preferred and adopted. The correct approach of teaching children within a comfortable and pleasant environment and providing them with valuable knowledge can increase their levels of motivation and enthusiasm and benefit their language learning. It can easily be seen that a teacher who lacks confidence and fluency in the language is unlikely to be able to set up the occasions for genuine interaction (Giannikas, 2013b). These factors are crucial for the young learner. Firstly, it is widely accepted that one area in which young learners are

superior is in their ability to imitate a pronunciation model, as previously mentioned. There is a strong case, therefore, to ensure that the models available are acceptable ones. Secondly, without adequate opportunities to engage in genuine interaction with other users of the foreign language, another capacity of young language learning will go to waste.

Teachers have the responsibility of providing major language input to young language learners. It is necessary for language educators of this age group to have interactive skills with the purpose of introducing activity-based and interactive methods, as well as the appropriate teaching strategies that will generate interest in learning. According to Moon (2005), these methods are more appropriate for teaching children a foreign language. An early phase of appropriate language instruction can equip children with a positive outlook, so the methods in question need to be compatible with their linguistic and cognitive levels. Children are more than capable of learning a foreign language, however, depending on the age factor alone can be a risk with negative outcomes. According to Moon (2005: 5):

[...] there are many other important factors to consider when deciding whether to begin English early. Unless you have enough time, appropriate materials and curriculum, well trained and competent teachers, there is a high risk that very little is gained by starting younger and quite a lot lost in terms of resources, maybe frustrated teachers and young learners who get demotivated early and yet know they have to continue with English into secondary school.

CONCLUSION

This paper was meant to present a review of the theoretical perspectives of the optimum starting age of FLL and the optimum conditions that would provide great value to language education within the context of Europe. One could argue that there is no empirical evidence which proves that an early start is better than a later one (Nikolov, 2000), however an early start alone is not suffice to bring about the benefits of an early start and lead young language learners to a successful outcome. As Nikolov (2000) has argued, it is important to set realistic goals for the implementation of early language education. If the early language learning programmes are not well-planned and realistic, the integration of FL would not be success-

ful. Finally it is essential to emphasise the teacher's role in the success of early language programmes. It is necessary that primary language teachers undergo the necessary training in order to be able to apply relevant classroom techniques, which will motivate and intrigue their young learners. If certain measures are not met, the funds and efforts of integrating languages in the primary curriculum could be lost.

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Christina Nicole Giannikas holds a PhD in applied linguistics, specifically in the field of early language learning. She is a researcher for Cyprus University of Technology and the Social Media Coordinator of the IATEFL YLTSIG. Dr. Giannikas has extensive experience in teaching English to adults and young learners in the UK and Greece and was guest lecturer and seminar tutor at London Metropolitan University. Parallel to her doctoral studies, Dr. Giannikas participated in the ELLiE project as an assistant researcher. Her research interests are primary and secondary language learning, particularly linguistic, pedagogical, motivational and cultural aspects that inform student-student and teacher-student interactions and learning, L1 use in the language classroom, ICT in language learning and professional development.

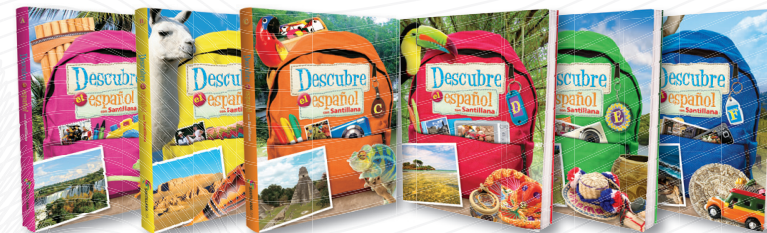


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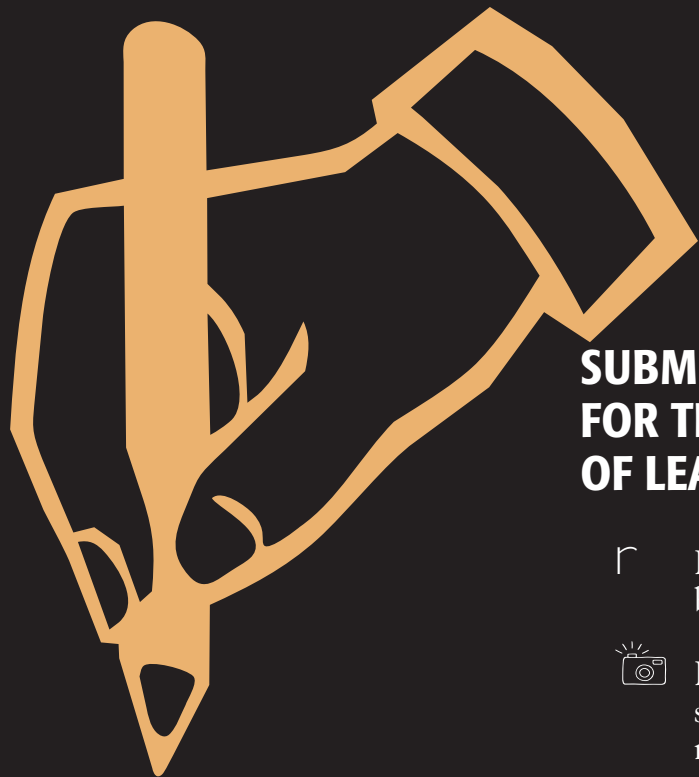
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