

# PENNSYLVANIA LANGUAGE FORUM



Pennsylvania State Modern  
Language Association

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## ABOUT

*Pennsylvania Language Forum (PLF)* is the semiannual online publication of the *Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association*. It features articles on teaching strategies, lesson plans, project ideas, and research by and for world language teachers in Pennsylvania.

PSMLA Members will receive an invitation to view the journal online through the publications section of our website. A digital archive of previous issues is also available online. Visit <https://psmla.org/pennsylvania-language-forum> to access *PLF* online.

## SUBMISSIONS

Article submissions are accepted on a rolling basis but must be received by February 15 to be considered for publication in the Spring issue of *PLF* or by August 15 for the Fall issue.

Contributors have the option of submitting their article for peer review. To learn more about that process, please see page 7 and 8 for further details. All other submissions should follow the guidelines outlined below.

### Submission Guidelines

- PSMLA members may submit titled articles related to teaching and language education.
- All submissions must be written in English, though examples of lessons or student work may be in the target language.
- All articles must be submitted as a Microsoft Word document or a Google Doc, formatted using Times New Roman 12-point font and be double-spaced. PDF article submissions will not be considered for publication.
- Scanned documents and photographs that accompany the article submission must be clearly identified and labeled. They must be submitted as a JPG or PNG.
- All documents of the submission must include the following information:
  - Name(s) of author(s)
  - Affiliation(s)
  - Language(s) taught
  - Intended levels, when relevant
  - Release Form(s) for any *photographs* or *student work* (available [online](#) )

Submissions must be submitted online using the submission link on the [PSMLA website](#).

All authors and any co-authors must be current PSMLA members. PSMLA members whose work is chosen for publication will be notified via email and will receive a final copy of their submission for approval before publication.

## Contact PLF

Vendors wishing to advertise should consult the Advertising Manager's page on the PSMLA website ([www.psmla.org](http://www.psmla.org)). All other questions may be directed to Christina Huhn or Nathan Campbell, Co-Editors of *PLF*, at [PALanguageForum@psmla.org](mailto:PALanguageForum@psmla.org).



Pennsylvania State Modern  
Language Association

*INSPIRING MULTILINGUAL  
COMMUNICATION AND  
INTERCULTURAL  
UNDERSTANDING*

**The mission of the Pennsylvania  
State Modern Language Association  
(PSMLA) is to enhance world  
language education throughout  
Pennsylvania by:**



Promoting the teaching  
and learning of world  
languages and culture at  
all levels (Pre-K through  
university)

Providing  
opportunities for  
professional growth  
and networking



Recognizing excellence  
in the field

Collaborating  
with local, state,  
and national  
organizations







Nathan Campbell & Christina Huhn  
Co-Editors, *Pennsylvania Language Forum*  
Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association

Welcome to our Spring 2023 issue of the *Pennsylvania Language Forum (PLF)*!

Education is at a critical juncture. Fewer students are pursuing education as a career, teacher training programs are under threat, and some in the political arena are determined to impose their restrictive viewpoints on our curriculum. Thankfully, the dedication and hard work of teachers like you are advocating for world language programs across the state. We are inspiring young teachers to join the profession and ensure a strong future for Pennsylvania. Read Thomasina White's stirring "Call to action" on page 16 as she implores us to advocate for K-20 support for world language programs.

Responding to the need of advocating for our programs, Sister Mary Kashuba and Kathleen Stein Smith offer their thoughts on how to build clearer understanding, strengthen connections, and establish community. They offer their in-depth insights on page 49. It is in that same spirit that we read from Michael Bogdan on page 32 about ways to improve attrition in our programs by making our curriculum more relevant to our students.

As one novel way to improve teacher retention and assist new world language teachers to face the challenges of the classroom, Dr. Rich Madel initiated a new mentor program this past summer that brought together veteran and novice teachers. As the first year of this program comes to its end their powerful and insightful reflections are shared on page 18.

Reading the reflections of two educators, one at the start of her career and the other at the end, it's easy to see that the passion and dedication that our teachers strive to offer the very best to our profession. Check out their articles on pages 38 and page 40.

Our spring edition of the *PLF* includes a special interview with PSMLA 2022 Teacher of the Year, Karyn Senita. Edith Guay took the time to sit down with Karyn and discuss the inspiration to become an educator and what strategies and tricks she uses to engage her learners. Enjoy their exchange on page 10.

Continuing the reflection of the challenges facing educators today, Kelly Lynch calls on world language educators to answer the call and fill a void that few other educators are able. Kelly discusses how we are uniquely empowered to be advocates and teach challenging topics in a way that avoids scrutiny and controversy. Read more on page 43.

Finally, while this year has been full of challenges and we have more to overcome, we continue to celebrate the work that many of our members do every day to advocate for their programs. One new tool available to world language teachers in Pennsylvania is the Seal of Biliteracy. Cherie Garrett offers a reflection on the inaugural year of this exciting opportunity. Learn more about it on page 14.

Please enjoy this Spring issue - and we hope to see you at Seven Springs November 2-4!



Isabel Espino de Valdivia

President

Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association

I hope you, your family, your students, and colleagues are well. It seems that being an educator is even more demanding than before, and I want to remind you of a quote by Pablo Neruda: “Podrán cortar todas las flores, pero no podrán detener la primavera.” (*“They may cut all the flowers, but they will not be able to stop the Spring.”*) This quote reminds us that despite any obstacles we may face, there is always the promise of new beginnings. As educators, you have the ability to inspire and nurture the growth of young minds. Your dedication, hard work and unfaltering commitment to your students is appreciated more than words can express. You, the members of PSMLA, bring me excitement for the future.

The PSMLA Conference held last year in Lancaster was a success and featured engaging and thought-provoking presentations. The atmosphere was energetic with teachers happy to attend the conference, learn and meet their colleagues face-to-face again. As always, the Executive Board members have been working diligently to advocate for our World Language programs and to provide opportunities for professional development. This Spring, PSMLA is offering two webinars and two in-person regional workshops: The Seal of Biliteracy webinar and the Advocacy webinar are free and led by Cherie Garrett, PSMLA Advocacy Committee Chair. One of the face-to-face workshops is at Chestnut Hill College and the Central PA workshop is at Messiah University. Please check our [website](#) for more information. In addition, PSMLA continues to offer the PSMLA-Vista webinars series and networking sessions, named “Coffee hours,” where teachers can share ideas and resources using the target language in a relaxed virtual space.

Please, join us at our Fall Conference at the **Seven Springs Resort** in the Laurel Highlands of Southwestern Pennsylvania on November 2-4, 2023: ***Reset, Recharge and Reconnect-Rediscover Yourself in the Language Teaching Community***. The Conference Committee wants to provide you an opportunity to renew yourselves, restart your passion for language teaching, and connect with other World Language educators. The Conference is also a chance for you to share your expertise, knowledge, and experience to inspire your colleagues and contribute to the advancement of the World Language profession. Please consider proposing a presentation at the Fall Conference, ***the call for proposals is open now*** on the [PSMLA website](#)

PSMLA welcomes three newly elected PSMLA Executive Board members: returning member Jennifer Campbell of Manheim Central High School, Olivia Grugan of Appalachia Intermediate Unit, and Sarah Thatcher of Jenkintown Middle/High School. As we face teacher shortages and other challenges in World Language Education, I encourage you to take an active role, share your voice and participate in our organization. It is more important than ever to support one another and advocate for our World Language programs and students. Please nominate yourself or encourage a colleague to run for the Executive Board.

I thank you for your support as a PSMLA member. I am looking forward to seeing you at future PSMLA events.



# Demystifying Classroom Research and Peer Review

## WHY CONDUCT CLASSROOM RESEARCH:

- \* Professional literature lacks longitudinal studies that would support a deeper understanding of what really happens in a classroom.
- \* Understanding what happens in the “real world” language classrooms informs stakeholders, and supports the change that is essential in our educational system.
- \* Completes the circle of teaching and learning (not unlike assessment)
- \* Advocates for languages and showcases your classroom and your program!

## WHERE SHOULD I LOOK FOR IDEAS?

- \* Interpretive authentic text reading lesson
- \* Interpretive authentic text listening lesson
- \* IMAGE model lesson
- \* PACE Lesson
- \* Traditional form focused quiz
- \* An exit ticket
- \* A self-assessment using the can-do statements
- \* Draw a representation of a concept or vocabulary
- \* Write an essay on a topic or about a picture
- \* Start small – a pilot study of a small group makes a great publication and then leads to larger studies!

## WHY PEER REVIEW?

- \*Independent review of your research by others in your profession.
- \* Can occur in many ways:editorial boards, single or multiple reviewers
- \* Goal of good peer review is to offer feedback and improve the final research article
- \* Most academic journals are Peer reviewed; Peer review lends credibility to your work.

## HOW DO I SEEK PERMISSIONS?

- \* University: Institutional Review Board (we don't make a move without it!)
- \* Talk to your administration to find out what the school policies are / permissions needed.
- \* Partner with a colleague – i.e. K12 – University collaborations are excellent, or within your own school

## WHAT SHOULD I RESEARCH?

Some examples:

- \* What is that thing that inspires you about your student's work that you find exciting, or that shows the effectiveness of what you do in the classroom?
- \* How well do students perform on a final oral exam after engaging in small group mid-semester practice?
- \* Which is more effective – interpretive reading activities or interpretive listening activities?
- \* How do students perform on an IPA?
- \* How well do students retain a grammar concept after a PACE lesson
- \* What does the work of true language beginners look like over the course of 2 semesters?
- \* Why do my students seem more motivated by one particular activity?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Madel, R.(2021) Classroom Teachers' Rolei in Bridging the Research Gap in SLA: A Guide for Conducting Classroom Research . Pennsylvania Language Forum (Vol 92, p.32-45).  
Retrieve from: <https://psmla.org/sites/default/files/PLFSpring2021.pdf>

<https://coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/assessment/>

<https://carla.umn.edu/assessment/vac/index.html>

<https://blog.sanako.com/formative-and-summative-interpersonal-speaking-assessments-webinar>

<https://www.actfl.org/assessment-research-and-development/actfl-assessments/actfl-k-12-assessments>

<https://methods.sagepub.com/book/classroom-based-research-and-evidence-based-practice>

## Call for Submissions – Peer Reviewed Articles

### Pennsylvania Language Forum: Peer Review Process

**Aim and Scope:** *Pennsylvania Language Forum (PLF)* is PSMLA's annual publication. The journal features a selection of original scholarly articles that are chosen by a peer review process.

The Editorial Board of *PLF* welcomes original scholarly, research-based articles that address issues directly related to world language teachers in Pennsylvania. Topics may include original, empirical research studies and application of high-leverage practices in the World Language Classroom. Peer Reviewed articles should maintain a classroom relevance for world language educators at all levels in Pennsylvania. Articles focusing on language proficiency development are also of interest. Articles on literary topics or interdisciplinary topics are welcome, provided the article is focused on classroom applications. Dissertations should be refined and re-focused, as dissertations are too long and detailed for a published article. Research conducted in the K-12 classroom is highly encouraged.

**Peer-Review Process:** All manuscripts follow a blind review process and are first reviewed by the editor(s) of the journal and then sent for blind review by members of the Editorial Board.

Manuscripts must follow the submission guidelines below.

#### Manuscript Preparation Guidelines

1. Submissions must be original work that has not been previously published or be presently under review by another journal.
2. Submissions must be written in standard academic English. Authors should follow APA guidelines consistently. Use [https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/apa\\_style/apa\\_formatting\\_and\\_style\\_guide/general\\_format.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html) as a reference as needed.
3. All submissions are initially read by the Editor(s) (first review) and then if deemed appropriate and *all* guidelines were followed, sent out to a group of appropriate experts for blind review. Submissions should include a title page as a separate document that includes:
  - a. Article Title
  - b. Article abstract
  - c. Name(s) of author(s)
  - d. Affiliation(s)
  - e. Language(s) taught
  - f. Intended level(s), when relevant
  - g. Release Form(s) for any images or materials (available at <https://psmla.org/pennsylvania-language-forum>)
4. The anonymity of the author(s) *must be ensured* by removing all identifiers from the manuscript. This can be done by referring to any identifying information as "Author X, University X, etc.)
5. All manuscripts must be submitted as .doc, docx, or rtf files. Use Times New Roman 12 point, double space.
6. Tables and Figures will be numbered sequentially and need to be prepared as either WORD or *jpeg* files. (Do *not* use *pdf* files for tables and figures.) They need to appear at the end of the article following References. Place a note [insert Table X/ Figure Y here] in text to indicate their suggested locations.
7. All in-text quotes require page numbers or paragraph sources for nonpaginated sources. Use *italics* for emphasis; not quote marks.
8. Word limitations are as follows: Title [15 words]; Abstract [150 words]; Key Words [5]; full article, [approximately 5,000 words (roughly 15 pages)].
9. Submissions must be submitted online using the submission link on the [PSMLA website](#).

10. All submissions will be acknowledged by the Editor(s) within 2 weeks of receipt.

11. Authors are responsible for securing publication rights when using images.

Submissions of empirical research for the peer-reviewed section of the journal should generally include the following sections

- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Methodology
- Discussion or Results
- Implications for the Classroom
- Conclusion
- Acknowledgements
- Reference / Works Cited

Additional article types may be accepted but should follow the general constructs of academic research and be applicable to the World Language Classroom in Pennsylvania.

	<b>Exceeds</b>	<b>Meets Expectations</b>	<b>Further Development Required</b>
<b>Relevance</b>	Article is very relevant and timely both to the Aim and Scope of the PLF and World Languages.	Article is relevant to Aim and Scope of PLF but some improvements should be considered by the editor(s).	Article topic not relevant to Aim and Scope of PLF.
<b>Citations</b>	Article is well cited, following APA citation guidelines as identified in the Author instructions.	Article is well cited, following APA citation guidelines, but there are a few errors that will require attention from the editors,	Article is missing citations or citations are largely inaccurate.
<b>Mechanics</b>	Article is very well-written, free of typographical or structural errors.	Article is well-written and free of typographical errors but may have a few sections that will require the editor(s) attention.	Article contains significant typographical errors or structural errors beyond what the editorial process can support.





Edith Guay, PSMLA ExCo Member (left) and Karyn Senita 2022 PSMLA TOY (right)

# Conversation with PSMLA Teacher Of the Year, Karyn Senita

## Conversation avec Karyn

Editors' Note: We asked PSMLA ExCo member, Edith Guay to interview the 2022 PSMLA Teacher of the Year to learn more about her and her insights on teaching.

**Edith: First, congratulations on your award. Félicitations! Karyn, why did you become a teacher?**

**Karyn:** The funny thing is that I definitely did NOT want to become a teacher. My high school French teacher, Mrs. Shirley Seth, recognized how easily language came to me, and she encouraged me to continue with my studies. When I was at Thiel College, an education professor sought me out to encourage me to go into teaching. He was an energetic and engaging professional ... and the rest is history.

**Edith: In a concrete way, what is your teaching philosophy (your fundamental beliefs and values)?**

**Karyn:** Every student has the ability to acquire language. Making language interesting and relevant keeps students motivated. Staying connected to my progressive and enthusiastic colleagues ensures that I don't become stagnant in my teaching practices.

**Edith: What is your most rewarding teaching experience?**

**Karyn:** In every situation where I've taught, I've been the only French teacher in my building. I have the unique experience of seeing growth - linguistic, personal, educational - through pivotal years in their development. My most rewarding experience comes when they come back to me, often years later, with stories of their lives, travel, education, and ability to appreciate cultures.

**Edith: In a few words, according to your experience what is/ are the most efficient, interesting, and fun?**

**Karyn:**

1. Technology tool: Gimkit
2. Assessment activity: IPAs (Integrated Performance Assessments) ... I modify the format depending on my specific goals for my students.
3. Speaking activity or tool: Flipgrid... so many fun uses!
4. Listening activity or tool: TV5Monde

5. Reading activity: FVR (Free Voluntary Reading) library that I continue to stock every time I'm in a francophone country.
6. Writing activity: Free writes with a theme - never graded for anything other than "how well do I understand your message."

***Edith: What is your advice to all the World Languages teachers considering the current state of education in PA?***

**Karyn:** We have to keep advocating! Connect with PSMLA, ACTFL, and your language's professional organization (AATF for me!) and keep your languages relevant in your district. Advocate to expand your programs, to travel, to strive for recognition through different programs like Global Scholars, PEP Awards, the Seal of Biliteracy.

***Edith: In a few sentences, how would you convince students to pursue a career as a World Language teacher?***

**Karyn:** Being a World Language teacher is opening the world to your students! We get to teach about the most exciting pieces of literature and history, discuss current events, share perspectives, travel, and continue learning and growing in our own cultural identity.

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*Karyn was just one of several award recipients to be honored at this fall's annual conference. To learn more about the PSMLA Teacher and Student Awards programs please visit the [awards section of the PSMLA website](#).*

## Member Survey: COPING WITH A SHORTAGE

As Pennsylvania teaching certification has declined nearly 66% over the past decade, our schools are left to grapple with the crisis of finding teachers to fill essential positions. We asked our members how their schools have been handling the teacher shortage and what they wished administrators knew, specifically, about world language education.

– Nathan Campbell, co-editor, *PLF*

My district has decided not to offer classes that don't have a minimum of 20 students signed up. They have combined classes to have sections of over 35 students and study halls over 50.

In our district, the middle school level has taken to staffing introductory language courses with teachers who are not certified in the language.

Our district recognizes that there is a shortage, but we have been able to fill most full-time positions even though there are far fewer candidates. We now have an HR director. We have increased substitute pay, as our subs often apply for our permanent positions.

They are rather certain that we have a recruitment problem, not a retention problem. I am afraid that they will learn that this is not true at the end of this year.

They are paying existing teachers in the same department to pick up extra classes. This is voluntary, this is also in our contract and the teacher earn their hourly rate based on their specific salary. At one point this year I had two French teachers teaching their classes in person and livestreaming to another school where there was no teacher - the courses were the same and the teachers did this voluntarily for compensation and for a limited amount of time.

How has your district responded to the teacher shortage?

What creative solutions have you or has your school implemented?

Our principal recently told us that he would consider anyone with a bachelor's degree. Our Assistant Superintendent thinks we have a recruitment problem, not a retention problem. I fear that he is to be horribly surprised in the next few years.

I have been speaking with high school students about becoming a teacher. I speak to my students and to students in FEA (Future Educators of America).

Teaching a WL from a book, page by page, is the most inefficient to gain proficiency. Students perform better when theirs an organic curriculum that isn't a sweeping generalization. Teaching a WL in the TL, as much ad practical and follows ACTFL guidelines, will produce the most proficiency and growth with students at all levels, even elementary and middle school.

We need people who are willing to become a part of the fabric of our schools and our communities. WL teachers are among the last who can speak the truth to power and teach true history and advocate for the respectful treatment of all students and families. We need brave people who see teaching as a vocation, not just a job.

In what ways has your knowledge of another language (or multiple) helped you to better understand and connect with others in your community (or beyond)?

It's valuable! It's not just interpretive and interpersonal communication. We are preparing global citizens, which cannot be done without instruction in a world language.

That we are doing TWICE the work as other content areas!!! Delivering content in another language...these are two separate skills. They also need to understand that they should be offering incentives to respond to the cutting of WL programs at the higher-ed level.

Having multiple preps every day is exhausting. It's the nature of WL...we teach many lessons every day and MANY, MANY every week. Planning and prepping is a lot of work even if you have a low enrollment (which has happened to many programs since COVID). Sure, grading is fast with small classes, but what we do when we teach and present the lessons takes hours of time. And, if we want to change things or try new things, like more Comprehensible Input, it is even harder. Ditto for adding current events or new information that might interest the students (things not in the textbook).

WL teaching is very rigorously academic, yet it is as creative and product oriented as most electives. We teach our students to process many levels of grammar, vocabulary, culture, and context at the same time. We don't need a "warm body," we need a genius!

World language is so important because being able to speak, read, write, and listen in another language shows that you are willing to understand the world or another culture. Students go out of their comfort zone to want to understand and be able to communicate with others and that's a beautiful thing. They are taking tasks and creating another way to communicate and compete for their future jobs. The Spanish language is on a rise and continues to grow here around Lancaster County. Students at our school will be able to make a difference in society using their Spanish to help others.

# PA Seal of Biliteracy: One Year Later

Cherie Garrett

Dallastown Area School District

In March of 2022, PDE announced the adoption of the Pennsylvania Seal of Biliteracy (PASB) to recognize students who develop intermediate-high proficiency or higher in English and a second language upon high school graduation. According to the PA Seal of Biliteracy Toolkit (pg. 6), several goals of the PASB are to encourage students to acquire proficiency in English and a second language, to affirm the value of cultural and linguistic diversity in our schools and communities, and to provide employers and universities with a way to identify bilingual candidates.

In the past year, PSMLA has promoted the PASB by offering informational webinars and Zoom meetings, by hosting several sessions at state conferences, and by serving as a resource for those with questions. Prior to the passing of the PASB, a school or a school district could offer the Seal, and only three school districts in the state were offering that opportunity to their students. At the conclusion of last school year, just one year after the PASB was passed, five school districts offered the PASB to ***130 students who represented 19 different languages***. This school year, the number of schools offering the PASB is expected to triple.

Since the passing of the PASB, schools are now expressing interest in offering both the PASB and the Global Seal of Biliteracy to their students. Where the PASB is awarded for intermediate-high or advanced proficiency, the Global Seal of Biliteracy recognizes students for intermediate-mid proficiency in English and a second language. Students who earn a "3" on the AP World Language Exam or intermediate-mid on the AAPPL or STAMP4S proficiency exams can still be recognized for their accomplishment through the Global Seal of Biliteracy for "Functional Fluency." This past school year, ***143 high school students in PA were awarded the Global Seal in 26 different languages***. Since schools are already applying for the Global Seal for students with intermediate-mid proficiency, they are also applying for those with intermediate-high and advanced-low proficiency. Students with intermediate-high proficiency earn the Global Seal for "Functional Fluency," while students with advanced-low proficiency qualify for a "Working Fluency" designation. Thus, students with intermediate-high or advanced-low proficiency can earn both the PA Seal of Biliteracy and the Global Seal of Biliteracy. As there is no age requirement for the Global Seal of Biliteracy, it can also be earned by children, college students or adults.

What impact has the PA Seal of Biliteracy had in the state? Foremost, it has required that schools offer extended language programs with a minimum of five consecutive years of language



study. Secondly, it supports proficiency-based programs that require students to read, write, listen, and speak the target language in a natural context. Thirdly, it provides incentive to EL students to become proficient in English while maintaining their fluency in their native language. Furthermore, it recognizes and celebrates the diversity in both the school and the community. Finally, it provides recognition for the importance of world language programs that create bilingual and multilingual students by high school graduation, thus preparing them for upper-level college language courses and even more importantly, the workplace.

Currently in Pennsylvania, there are approximately 7,000 vacant bilingual jobs (indeed.com). As world language teachers, we are charged with producing candidates for these jobs to support economic growth. Undoubtedly, speaking a second language is essential for healthcare professionals, social workers, construction workers, customer service representatives, secretaries, hospitality managers, interpreters, etc.; however, we also need to teach our students the soft skills that are essential for success in the workplace. Through communicative-based instruction and a collaborative approach, our students develop those soft skills necessary to excel in the workplace.

For high school students who attend college, the PA Seal of Biliteracy may also lead to college credits. ACE (American Council on Education) now recognizes the Avant Assessment STAMP4S Test for proficiency, which means that many colleges now offer college credit for proficiency in a second language. In PA, there are more than 100 ACE institutions, while there are 1500 across the United States. For intermediate-high proficiency, 12 credits are recommended, while advanced-low proficiency may qualify for 14 credits. Moreover, colleges may even offer 8 credits for intermediate-mid proficiency.

Clearly, the PASB has already had a positive impact on world language and EL programs and their students. It has provided recognition of students who are proficient in English and a second language upon high school graduation, and it has resulted in college credit for many students. Moreover, it has recognized proficiency-based programs in the state and has provided incentive for districts to extend their language programs so that high school students can reach a minimum of intermediate-high proficiency by graduation. Lastly, it has reaffirmed the importance of language proficiency and has created excitement for language-learning in the Commonwealth among students, families, and language educators.



## **A call to action: A task force to reinvigorate World Language study/teacher preparation K-20**

Thomasina White, PSMLA Past President

There is a teacher shortage.

As stated on Scholaroo.com:

"In Pennsylvania # of teachers =119,936; total population =12,964.056; [in other words],

**Teachers per 1000 population = 9.25"**

"Professor Richard Ingersoll of the University of Pennsylvania states that 44% leave the occupation within the first five years and 10% leave in year one". (Gerald, 2019)

Our teachers need help. Educators have always faced challenges in pursuit of their goal to teach effectively and encourage student learning. In our post-pandemic world, the challenges have become unique. The strategies and instructional techniques we use in our classrooms need to be reflected upon and evolved based on the current status of our students. We work longer hours with fewer breaks and little rest. We are totally exhausted. There is little time to de-stress and engage with our colleagues; to share experiences, to get advice or just appreciate a listening ear or an understanding comment.

Our professional organizations are working hard to provide professional development opportunities for our teachers. PSMLA, the Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association, diligently supports our World Language teachers with webinar sessions, conferences, workshops and a mentoring program for our novice teachers.

We live in a global society yet global education is under attack. Learning diverse languages and understanding diverse cultures and communities contributes to empathy and respect for our global neighbors. Students will learn to appreciate diverse perspectives as well as their own. Our students are part of a unique world with unique people. They need to know and understand their role in this world. The need for World Language educators is great and the need for effective teacher preparation programs is even greater.

Programs in which they can study the research-based theories of second language acquisition and investigate the modalities of world language methodologies. Many of our colleges and universities offer such programs, but there is a need for more.

As in any profession, the novice candidate needs guidance and preparation. Novice world language teachers need prior knowledge of the expectations of the students, the school, and the community. They need to learn the innovative strategies and techniques to deliver the content to ALL students. They need to hone instructional skills and interact with veteran educators to ensure that they are learning their craft. They need ongoing support. They need guidance. They need mentoring. They need consistency and honesty. They need all of this prior to entering a classroom.

Teachers provide a valuable service in educating our children. We prepare them for the future, their adult future in which respect, responsibility and understanding is extremely important. We are responsible for their social and emotional growth. We cannot do this alone, now is the time for world language educators from kindergarten to doctoral program to come together and work to effect real and lasting change.

What is the state of World Language education in Pennsylvania?

In my opinion, and I hope you agree... "There is more work to be done, together."

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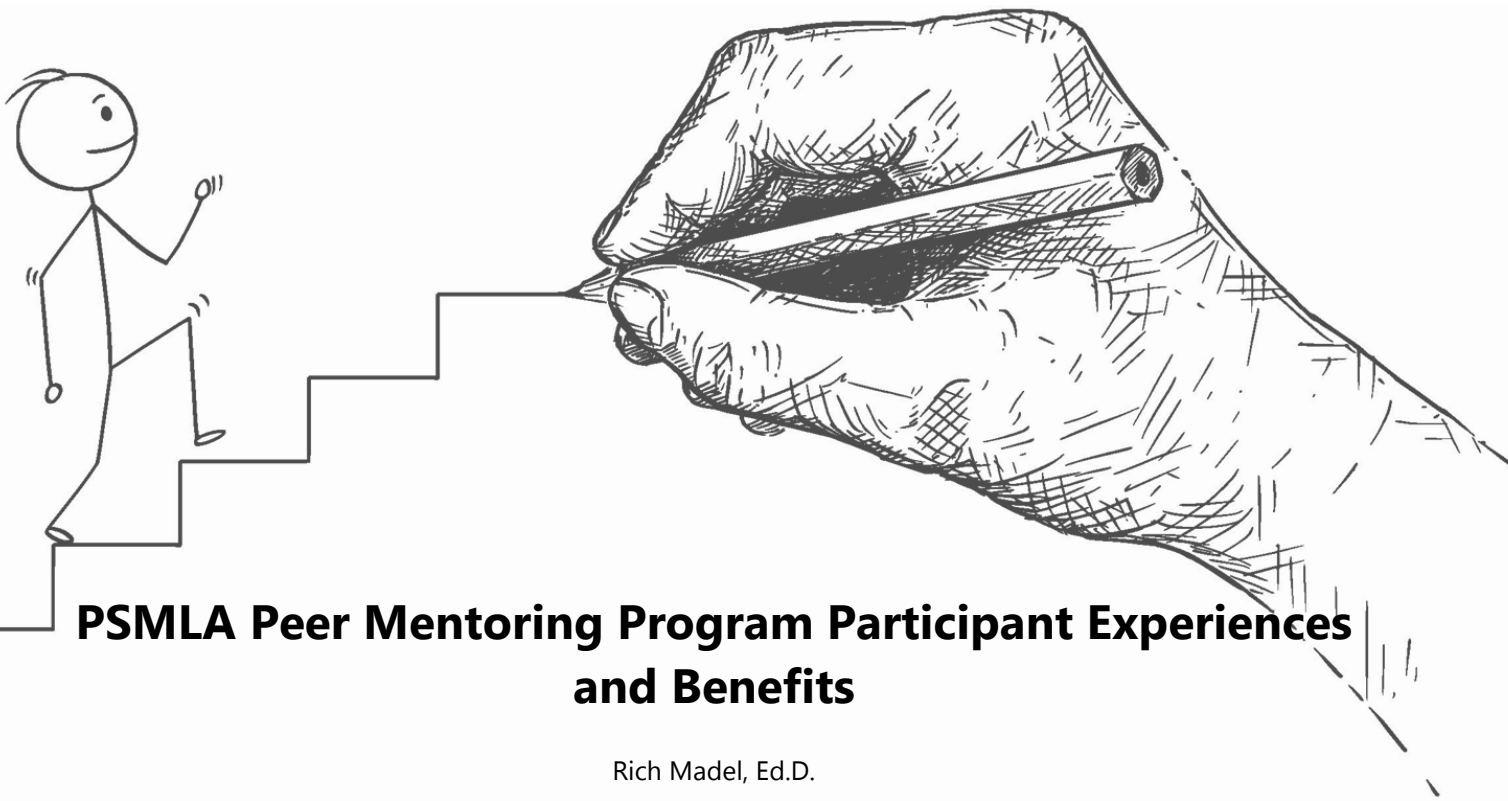
*Editors' Note: Thomasina I. White served as president of the PSMLA from 2012-2014. She currently serves as an adjunct professor of Spanish at Chestnut Hill College, a Spanish Methods Instructor at the University of Pennsylvania, and is serves on the NECTFL Board of Directors.*

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Learn more about how you can support world language learning locally, state-wide, and nationally on the [Advocacy section](#) on the PSMLA website.





## **PSMLA Peer Mentoring Program Participant Experiences and Benefits**

Rich Madel, Ed.D.

PSMLA Peer Mentoring Program Coordinator

As the 2022-23 school year began, the PSMLA Peer Mentoring Program welcomed its first cohort consisting of five pairs of experienced communicative language teaching mentors and their respective novice teacher mentees. This program has been designed to specifically target the needs of Pennsylvania language teachers new to the field while simultaneously recognizing and elevating the wealth of expertise that can be found in language classrooms throughout the Commonwealth<sup>1</sup>. To date, mentors and mentees have maintained monthly contact with each other to develop, track, and reflect on personalized goals (à la Brown, Leonard, & Arthur-Kelly, 2016), attended and collaborated during the PSMLA Fall Conference, and gathered virtually twice as a whole program to connect and learn together. The most recent virtual gathering included a presentation from Maris Hawkins, co-author of the publication *Common Ground: Second Language Acquisition Theory Goes to the Classroom* (Henshaw & Hawkins, 2022).

To better understand the experiences of both mentors and mentees during the inaugural cohort, four current members of the program were invited to share their perspectives. Their thoughts are focused primarily on their overall experiences as mentor or mentee and also what they perceive to have been benefits that they have personally experienced as a result of their participation thus far. Their thoughts are presented in the sections below.

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<sup>1</sup> See Madel (2022) for a description of the research-based development of the PSMLA Peer Mentoring Program.

## Participant Experiences

First, PSMLA Peer Mentoring Program mentors and mentees were asked to simply describe what their experience has been like as a participant in the program. Luisa Mina, Spanish teacher from Jenkintown High School detailed her experiences as a mentee:

I was fortunate enough to be paired with a mentor who is the same age as me. We have many things in common, and despite my mentor teaching another language than the one I teach, she has provided me with a lot of ideas and materials for my classes. This experience has been enriching because I have learned techniques that are helping me with classroom management, students' behavior and students' motivation to learn the language. My mentor has taught me different effective techniques that she uses in her classroom to help students to improve their classroom behavior, allowing them to learn the content better. Being part of this program is helping me to be a better teacher by creating meaningful connections with the students, and providing me with great teaching techniques and tools. (L. Mina, personal communication, February 16, 2023)

Adam Fisher, French Teacher at the Parkway Center City Middle College in the School District of Philadelphia also shared his experiences as a mentee. He described his own insecurities as a learner of his target language and his hesitancy of joining the profession, but ultimately how the peer mentoring program was able to provide guidance:

I began teaching French because I loved the language and I could not imagine spending my days doing anything but sharing my passion with others. While this is obvious to me now, it took me a long time to realize teaching French was something I was capable of doing. I had written it off as a potential career because my obsession to master French led me to feel insecure about my language abilities and the belief that I would never be "good enough." It took the pandemic and the falling through of a job opportunity teaching ELA at a charter school that forced me to reconsider my path to teach the thing I was most passionate about as a student myself.



The self-doubt I felt about my own language capabilities followed me into the classroom but in a different form. Having two years of teaching under my belt, I no longer felt insecure about my skills. But with so much to learn about language education, I felt overwhelmed, lost, and insecure in my capacities to provide students with the best and most effective education. This self-doubt affected me personally and professionally, and I needed a way out of my own head and an “educational compass” to get me going in the right direction.

That is why I applied to the mentorship program through PSMLA, and that is ultimately what I have found in the guidance of Christine and other mentors. I am only one of two language teachers in my school, so Christine offers invaluable guidance when I’m lost about teaching. She has helped me cut through the constant noise by providing me with useful tools and resources, by discussing issues with me and providing solutions and advice, and even by offering to come observe me on site -- which I feel will be highly beneficial to my growth as an educator. (A. Fisher, personal communication, February 12, 2023)

From the mentor perspective, Christine Yardey, Spanish teacher at Souderton Area High School shared the following:

Being a mentor in the PSMLA program has been a positive experience of connections. My mentee and I met in August and have continued with monthly video calls and emails and texts interspersed. Our monthly meetings are centered around the SMART goal for the current phase, and this framework has provided direction and focus for our discussions. It is also a good reminder to work on one goal at a time. We may have lots of ideas for improving our craft, but we need to do it one step at a time, no matter where we are in our teaching career. Because my mentee teaches in an urban school and I teach in a suburban school, I observed his classes in February so that I could better understand his unique challenges and provide more support and encouragement. After the observation, I was able to give positive feedback as well as specific strategies for improvement. (C. Yardley, personal communication, February 26, 2023)

Kaytlyn Byers, French teacher at Lewisburgh Area High School, also described her experience as a mentor participating in the program:

Participating in the PSMLA Mentor program has been a good reminder of the basics of teaching a language that transcend the language I am teaching. I was nervous because my mentee teaches Spanish. I have learned over the years being the only French teacher in my building how to share ideas with the other language teachers and modify them for my language. This experience helped me make my ideas more useful for my mentee. We communicated monthly via Zoom and text because she teaches near Philadelphia, and I am in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

Being a mentor has been an unexpectedly useful experience for me. I enjoy helping other teachers because I had an incredibly supportive world language department at my first job teaching at Southern Lehigh High School. I know I would not be the teacher I am today without those people lifting me up. Being a mentor has allowed me to see that not everyone has the fortunate circumstance that I did with their department, so I am really happy to be the supportive teacher for someone who does not have anyone in their school. It has also been a chance to realize how much I have learned about classroom management and pedagogy over my 10 years as a French teacher. It was really nice to share my experience and share strategies for teaching materials or classroom management that have worked or have not worked for me in the past. As I progress through my career, I have been wanting to start presenting at conferences. I think being a mentor gave me the confidence to see that I truly do have something to share and my ideas are solid and people can benefit from them. It also helped me decide where my areas of strength for presenting may lie in creating a warm classroom environment and target language use. Sharing with my mentee has given me a chance to see my ideas applied in another classroom and has shown me the value of my ideas. You never know when what you consider a simple idea will change the life of another teacher. (K. Byers, personal communication, February 15, 2023)

### **Participant Benefits**

The participating language teachers quoted above were also asked to share what they believed to be the benefits of this program from their respective positions as either a mentor or mentee. From Mina's perspective as a mentee, she shared:

Being a new teacher in the middle of a global pandemic has not been easy. Due to the pandemic I was not able to complete my students teaching for that reason I lost valuable instruction and practice time since I was not able to finish it. Also, my first experience as a teacher was in a virtual environment where I did not have contact with students and classroom behaviors were limited to students not turning on their cameras, or falling asleep during class time, I did not have to deal much with classroom behaviors. Once the schools where I landed my first job decided to do a hybrid schedule, I was faced with this for the first time with the reality that I did not have enough training and experience with classroom management and behavior. For that reason, I think that the biggest benefit of this as a mentee is getting valuable techniques about classroom management in world language classrooms. My mentor has taught me different techniques that have been very useful in my classroom now that we are back to normal, and students are attending school every day. Moreover, I am currently teaching in a small school district where I am the only one teaching upper levels, and the other Spanish teacher is new into the field. I cannot observe more experienced teachers at the school, nor receive feedback or guidance. Having the opportunity to have a mentor is really beneficial because she has the time to guide me, listen and provide feedback on my teaching skills even though she is not in the same school where I teach. (L. Mina, personal communication, February 16, 2023)

From Fisher's perspective as a mentee, he connected the benefits of a program like the PSMLA Peer Mentoring Program to the broader context of language education in the state:

I often reflect on our introductory meeting where Rich [Madel] highlighted the dire state of language education in Pennsylvania. Fewer and fewer people are going into the profession, and more and more are leaving<sup>1</sup>. The Department of Education has always put world languages on the backburner, and I especially feel this neglect working in a Title 1 school. In order to have a thriving and sustainable program I'm realizing I will have to do more than just "show up." I need the tools, confidence, and network to truly fight for this oft undervalued field of study.

On a large scale, the recent landmark lawsuit declaring Pennsylvania's funding unconstitutional makes me hopeful for the future of strengthening the language programs that children need. In my personal sphere, I'm grateful for the PSMLA mentorship program and its mission of helping me provide a more fulfilling experience for the deserving students I see every day. (A. Fisher, personal communication, February 12, 2023)

While it has been well established that novice teachers can benefit from working with experienced and knowledgeable members of the field (e.g., Kissau & King, 2015; Mason, 2017; Podolsky et al., 2016), it is clear that the mentors also find the experience rewarding. Yardley described how she has benefited from this program as a mentor:

Through my work as a mentor, I have learned a lot by reflecting on my own teaching practices, observing what works in the classroom, and sharing successful strategies. By supporting my mentee with resources, I have better organized my materials, created longer and more-easily accessible lists of brain breaks and no-prep communicative activities. I also revisited some materials that I haven't looked at in a while and got new ideas and perspectives from my mentee. In addition, the mentorship program prompted me to go to the annual PSMLA conference. Meeting all the mentors and mentees in person was energizing and fun. The enthusiasm for teaching world languages among this group of teachers is amazing and provides fuel to keep creating and connecting. Finally, being a mentor brings me joy and satisfaction, knowing that I am helping another teacher and his students. (C. Yardley, personal communication, February 26, 2023)

Byers also described tangible benefits and takeaways for her as a mentor:

One of the most beneficial parts of the program was attending the PSMLA conference in October. Spending time with my mentee in person and connecting with the other mentees and mentors was absolutely invaluable. We are all facing more similarities than differences in our lives as teachers despite teaching

different languages and spanning the entire state in location. It was also very beneficial to hear how the other mentors and mentees have been interacting and working on their mentees' SMART goals. Those conversations were affirming and inspiring to continue helping my mentee in new ways.

The focus of my mentee's SMART goals has been classroom management and target language use. Working through the problems that she is having in her classroom reminded me of classroom management strategies that I had forgotten about or stopped using. Through conversations with my mentee about classroom management and target language use, I have implemented SMART goals in my classroom by having my classes create SMART goals for their target language use. The ownership that this gives the students over their language use has worked better than any other type of reward or punishment system I have used for keeping students in the language.

My mentee and I have also been able to vent to each other about the shared struggle of teaching five different courses. Having taught five preps my entire career, I could offer her tips on how to manage the workload. We also connected because I am teaching at a new district this year, so I feel a little bit like I am in a new teacher's shoes at times. These are just a few examples of our similarities we have despite teaching different languages in different areas. I have been really proud to be able to offer suggestions across all areas of managing life as a teacher. My confidence in my knowledge that I have amassed over the past 10 years as an educator has grown exponentially via mentoring. (K. Byers, personal communication, February 15, 2023)

## **Conclusion**

The perspectives shared by the four participants underscore key stated goals of the PSMLA Peer Mentoring Program. For example, supporting novice world language teachers in the development of successful communicative language teaching practices, recognizing and elevating the presence of world language teacher leaders, and introducing novice world language teachers to the Association and encouraging a continued relationship with the statewide professional learning community. While the program also touts specific benefits for participating



mentors and mentees such as complimentary registration for PSMLA's Annual Fall Conference, a free publication to guide and inform mentor-mentee discussion and practice, Act 48 credit for professional development service, and more, the benefits described above by the participants are tangible, classroom-oriented, personal, and highly rewarding.

Are you interested in joining the PSMLA Peer Mentoring Program as a mentor or a mentee? Visit [psmla.org](https://psmla.org) for more information about the program, expectations for participants, a month-by-month timeline of activity, and how to apply. Applications are accepted through June 30.

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# Removing Barriers to Language Learning: Equitable Practices

Lennie Amores  
Albright College

While we can lament the changing nature of language learning – online translators, both artificially intelligent and human essay-writing programs, and the seeming inability of students to memorize verb conjugations and vocabulary lists--we will have to live with this new normal. I believe that while a few students rely on technology just to pass their language courses, most students genuinely want to communicate in a new language, but the barriers to learning seem insurmountable. We know our students can love language learning because when we teach them a phrase that is funny, inappropriate, or that personally relates to their interests, they are quick to use it. How many times do you need to teach a student the sentence: *Me gusta jugar a los videojuegos*. (I like to play video games)? You only need to teach it once or twice because the statement affirms the student's identity, especially if they see themselves as a gamer.

Removing barriers to learning a new language for students is about helping them figure out how they can communicate their own identity and learn about people who have different but also similar cultural and personal experiences from theirs. By removing or at least decreasing the number of obstacles they face, language instructors create learning experiences that encourage engaging in the processes of language learning instead of overwhelming them. If we want our students to meet the learning objectives without compromising the rigor, then our grading practices, assignment choices, and assessments need to help students identify and consequently reduce the barriers they face to learning a new language. Moreover, we must consider what barriers our teaching practices and materials might create for students. For most students, in my experience, the goal is to communicate who they are in the world and how their experiences both match and diverge from others. For example, a Chinese American student might be more interested in learning about the Chinese diaspora in Spain and how it is similar and different from that diaspora in the United States. Students have questions and interests related to their identities and experiences that we can incorporate into our classes.

The stakes of not actively removing barriers for students are mostly felt at the level of class engagement and assignment completion. At the college level, we see increased classroom incivilities because students feel frustrated and lost during class. They are more absent, may become disengaged, earn non-quality grades, or even withdraw. These realities ultimately increase our workload as we try to hold on to students who have already given up on their language learning journey. To avoid or at least reduce the number of these cases, we must listen to students' concerns and make our lofty humanities goals relevant to them. At the language level, students cite barriers such as deciphering sentence structure to be able to build their own sentences, pronouncing words with more native-like sounds, memorizing verb conjugations, and knowing which tense to use. Weaker and stronger students alike express a real interest in becoming a fluent Spanish speaker, but often the weaker students have limited beliefs about (in) their capacity to learn a new language.

Another set of barriers relate to students' mental bandwidth for language learning, which competes with everything else going on in their home, social, and academic lives. Many of my first-generation college students cite a lack of time, motivation, and support. Moreover, learning a new language for many students is a luxury activity for those who will have opportunities to study, travel, or work abroad. College graduates can surely find a decent job without speaking another language or possessing a deep cultural awareness about the Spanish-speaking world. The career-related argument for language study is lost on students who are struggling to finish the current semester. For some students, the language class itself feels like a barrier to graduation instead of one that is supposed to enrich their experience and broaden their knowledge. As teachers, we can build our goals around the goals students have for themselves, encourage them to overcome self-limiting beliefs, and provide practical strategies for managing the real-life obstacles they face.

Some students, especially black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), neurodivergent, and LGBTQIA+ students, don't feel like they belong in the classroom. In a webinar I attended, "Where Are the Black Students: Race and Racism in the Spanish Language Classroom," the panel discussed the reasons why black students do not feel safe in the foreign language classroom including inaccessible textbooks, not recognizing and validating black students' cultural and linguistic differences in language learning, not including representations of Afrodescendant-Spanish speakers in instructional materials, and over-correcting grammatical errors (which is a trauma they may have experienced growing up when speaking African American Vernacular English to their teachers). Adam Schwartz (2023) similarly addresses these issues in, *Spanish So White: Conversations on the Inconvenient Racism of a "Foreign" Language Education*. Representation matters, so our learning activities, instructional materials, and performance tasks must provide mirrors that allow for students' identities in the target culture, even if that means creating content outside the curriculum provided to us.

To help remove the barriers to language study, I believe instructors can build a learning experience that aligns with the goals students have for themselves, engages them in the world as they see it, and builds

language confidence. In *Design for How People Learn*, Julie Dirksen (2015) notes that “your learners want to not feel stupid” (p. 65). We must identify learners’ knowledge gaps, give them small wins that scaffold the content, and provide compelling stories to contextualize the content in ways that create a sense of urgency, surprise or suspense, emotional resonance, and reward. In the language classroom, this means designing an engaging learning experience where students can build skills and apply them immediately to solve a problem or tell their own compelling story using the structures and content they have been learning.

On a practical level, we can build in the following practices in our learning experience design. The following list provides practical tips for language teachers.

- Gamify the practice of learning lexical and grammatical items by including surprise elements and immediate rewards. Perhaps a sum of digital tokens can be redeemed for the permission to turn in a late assignment or to leave five minutes early from class. Games make risk-taking easier for students with performance anxiety, and the repetition and recycling of language items increases learning retention.
- Use Universal Design for Learning to give students choices about how they would like to explore the content and what kinds of products they want to create in order to demonstrate their learning. Provide a menu of options for students that reflect real-world cultural products outside the school setting. Although a standard argumentative essay might be an option, include options for giving a TedTalk, a Shark Tank (Tu oportunidad, in Spain) business proposal, or a political campaign speech. By changing the audience from the teacher to an imaginary real-life public from the target culture, students feel like they are engaging in the world in a more authentic way.
- Make language-learning less overwhelming by mixing up simple and complex activities and focusing on the most difficult cognitive work during the class period. Flipped classrooms work when the practice work is fairly simple to complete and are lower stakes because small wins build learners’ language confidence. In *Bandwidth Recovery: Helping Students Reclaim Cognitive Resources Lost to Poverty, Racism, and Social Marginalization*, Cia Verschelden notes that students’ academic capacity for new learning is greatly diminished when they are financially and emotionally overwhelmed. By doing the harder work in class, we can give immediate and meaningful feedback in a way that both challenges and affirms them.
- Give clear instructions with examples, troubleshooting guides, and tutorials. If you assign a video, they must produce themselves, assume that they know nothing about making a video or determine exactly what skills each student already has. My language goal for students is not about producing a video, so I endeavor to reduce their anxiety by curating

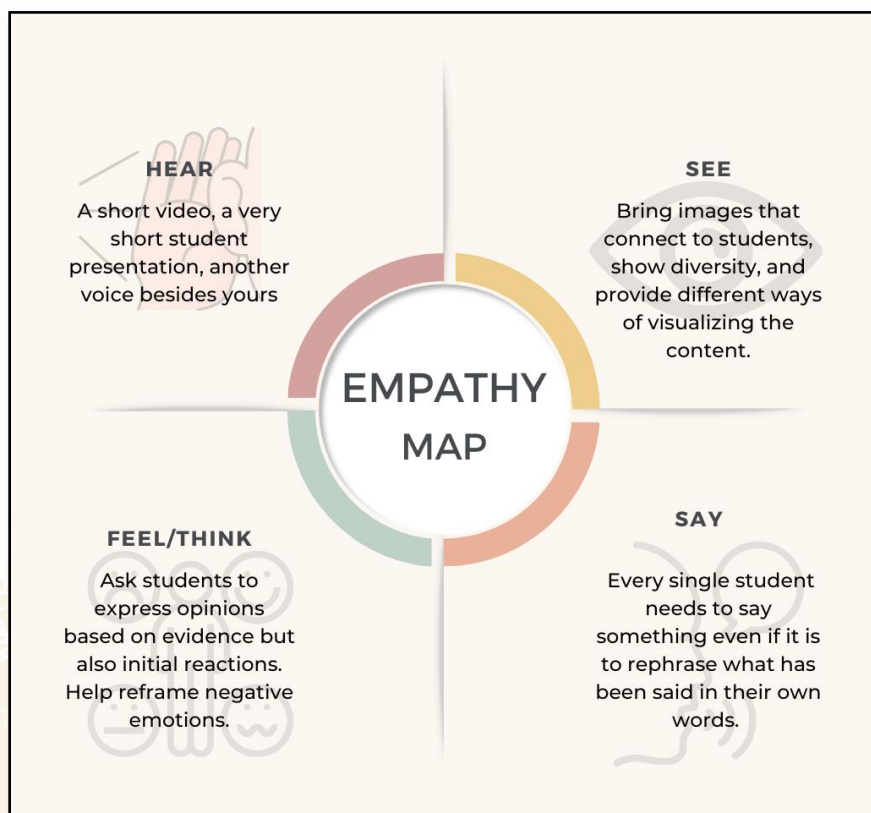


all the resources they need to complete the task. I will often have them make a lower stakes practice example to demonstrate they have the skill before they have to submit the higher-stakes cultural project.

- Assign larger projects in mandatory stages, with feedback and reflection at every stage. That way, students can better manage their time and feel less overwhelmed responding to the guidelines. Sometimes I create project manager templates for students to plan and schedule all the tasks they need to create to meet the learning objectives and project guidelines. By teaching them to work out these details, they ultimately have a better sense of their role and take ownership of their learning process.
- Identify what terminology, events, background information they need to know to be able to think critically about a concept. What is the precursor knowledge that the most successful students have already mastered? By identifying the gaps in knowledge and their strengths, you can personalize your feedback and assignments.
- Create a culture of creative risk-taking. By valuing practice over perfection, students feel more comfortable communicating in the target language during class because instructors are interested in listening to what students have to say rather than listening for errors. Some ways to create a space where risk can take place is using design thinking to create an empathy map.

### ***Empathy Map***

- Teach students how to use online language resources wisely. Students will use online translators, so we must address the pitfalls and advantages with our students. They use translators because they have a deep desire to communicate without sounding dumb and to avoid feeling overwhelmed with figuring out sentence structure. For this reason, I ask them to use





LanguageTool.org (like a Grammarly spelling and grammar checker for multiple languages) before turning in an assignment. Then I ask students to analyze the corrections that LanguageTool recommends. For many writing assignments, I require them to revise the first draft and justify the changes they made based on a document of common grammar and a reflection sheet I have created.

- Automate critical thinking to some degree to habituate higher-order cognitive skills at all language levels. For example, true-false and multiple-choice items can have follow-up reasoning statements: "I chose True because A, B, or C." That way, you can easily see how students are assimilating the content.
- Encourage personal growth and career planning with language learning. You can assign personal essays for a study abroad scholarship, resumes and cover letters, recipe videos, court testimonies, fashion shows with commentary, and many other performance tasks that relate to their personal and professional goals. In the target language, have them explore how these products from the target culture are similar and different from their own culture.
- Ask students to reflect on learning objectives with examples from the products they have created. They can respond to these questions: What are you most proud of? What would you have changed if you had more time or more advanced language skills? Give an example of how you met each of the stated learning objectives by citing from your work. When students get an opportunity to reflect on the work they have produced, they begin to address their weaknesses in subsequent projects. I might even ask them to keep a list of what they struggle with and how they are working on overcoming them.
- Teach students to organize thoughts and structures through templates, graphic organizers, and demonstrate note-taking and organizational skills. Teaching different ways to organize the newly learned content will give them the patterns they can use as they work toward mastery of the content. During class, I often refer to specific organizers, infographics, or templates when assigning both low-stakes and high-stakes performance activities, thereby decreasing the practicability of using an online translator. Ultimately, the learning experience we design for language students that encourage students to overcome the challenges they face, so they can become confident communicators and culturally competent. When we design our learning activities, instructional materials, and assessments with equity in mind, we remove the barriers to language learning that push students away from continuing in the language.

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# Exceeding Expectations: Guiding Students to Increase Quality Language Use

Michael Bogdan

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Our students have so much potential, but sometimes our lessons and assessments cause them to plateau in their progress. What are some strategies for speaking and writing activities that not only increase language use but also promote creativity, personalization, and elaboration? Encouraging students to go beyond the minimum expectations and modeling what that looks like will guide them to the next levels of proficiency.

## ***Rubrics***

One of the challenges that our department faced as we continue to promote performance assessment over legacy practices of grammar and vocabulary-based evaluations is scoring on rubrics. Our students and staff struggled with what the “A” or “100%” or “Exceeding Expectations” highest column in the rubric should include. Some families did not understand why a student who is meeting expectations would “lose” points. We realized that we needed to show our students what we were looking for in each descriptor and make sure that students could achieve the top scores. Our department goal this school year is solely focused on developing common rubric language for interpersonal and presentational communication so that students have a seamless experience understanding our expectations as they move to the next course and teacher.

As I am also an AP teacher and Reader, I found the AP language rubrics (which are the same for French, German, Italian, and Spanish) helpful. The highest score is not “exceeds expectations” nor “excellent” nor “exemplary” but rather “strong.” Some of the key terms used in rubric descriptors for strong include: variety, elaboration, complex, consistent, clarity, and ease. For a Reader to give this score to a response, it must exhibit evidence of these areas.

As an example, a unit performance assessment in my level 4 class is to write a letter in the target language to our school board on how we can be a more environmentally friendly district. The vocabulary from the unit was related to sustainability in Colombia, and a grammar point was the conditional tense. It is possible to respond to this prompt using terms from previous courses and the present tense, and those responses are not incorrect. However, we want to push the students to incorporate vocabulary and grammar that are clearer and more complex. We can show students the following samples as a weak and strong response.

Basic response:

*We need to plant more trees and recycle more paper.*

Strong response:

*If we planted more trees, we would reduce energy consumption because it would be cooler. Furthermore, I recommend that we use fewer natural resources by posting more tasks online.*

Again, both responses are correct. The teacher is now demonstrating the expectation for going beyond just completing the prompt and how to show the traits of a strong response. The student incorporated the new verb tense learned, even though one could respond in the present tense. There are also transition words and details that make a simple response much more elaborate.

Novice students can also show strong performance. Remember that they cannot be compared to you or your higher-level courses but rather how they provide evidence of exceeding expectations. Let's say the expectation for this typical beginner task is to send a voice message to a new pen pal telling them three things that the student likes to do in their free time. The curricular elements here are verbs in the infinitive form and expressing likes. After practicing in class, the expectation is that all students can complete this task using the vocabulary and structures studied. For students to show a strong performance in this presentational speaking task, the teacher can provide these written or recorded examples:

Basic response:

*I like to run, swim, and play sports.*

Strong response:

*I like to run in autumn, swim in the pool, and play field hockey. I don't like to dance.*

This response is strong because it provides elaboration by recycling terms related to the calendar (typical in the first weeks of a course), locations in town, and being more precise with the sport. It also includes something that this student does not like to do, which provides additional context that was not required but still relevant.

## ***Vocabulary Development***

Regarding *field hockey*, I have never encountered that sport in any textbook or vocabulary list, but it is one of the most popular at my school. The same goes for track, crew, bocce, and many others. I provide my students with a blank, colored paper that I call their personal vocabulary list. This is where they can add terms that are relevant to them—words the teacher writes on the board, terms they look up in the dictionary, or expressions they encounter in authentic resources. For my level 1 students, I provide space directly on their chapter vocabulary lists for this, so it is all in one place. Therefore, when a student asks how to say something that is pertinent to them, we should encourage them to learn that term. It's much more realistic to say, "I play the drums" than "I play an instrument." Perhaps the rest of the class only needs to know how to say the latter, but for the drummer in class, that expression is relevant and should go on the personal vocabulary list. Using it in an evaluation allows them to be credited with more advanced, specific vocabulary than is the expectation for the class as a whole.

If you have the freedom to do so, consider developing some vocabulary lists based on student interests. For a unit on food, we have terms related to typical dishes of the target culture. However, I also ask students to complete a Google Form prior to the unit to indicate what they eat for each meal, what snacks they like, and if there are other terms they like to know. I then find the commonalities and develop a list. Most students are not eating lamb, radishes, or grapefruits, words that I previously taught and assessed. Now items such as chicken wings, shakes, leftovers, and hummus are on this year's list; once again, these terms are never in textbook lists of terms, but they allow the students to actually talk about what they eat and drink during the day. Next year, the list may be quite different as the group of students and the popular foods will change.

In addition to teaching words that are useful to the students, also consider how common other terms are. If you are teaching lessons on body parts, clothing, personality characteristics, or other typical topics, turn to a frequency dictionary. This type of dictionary will tell you how widespread a word is in authentic literature and websites of the target language. For parts of the body, many of us have students label the elbow and ankle, probably because they are easy to point out on an outline of the human anatomy. In Spanish, those words are much less frequently encountered compared to blood, brain, and eyebrow, terms that we never labeled in my classes. If the goal is to support students with the most useful terms that they may need or may come across, then we should reconsider the terms that we are expecting them to know. As they progress with the language, they will learn those less-frequent, more obscure terms as appropriate.

## ***Games***

We can model these expectations in the vocabulary, conversation, and circumlocution games that many of us incorporate. If we play a mystery word game such as Taboo, I provide students with levels they can reach for in their clues. If the example secret word is "garden," I show students the following:



Level 0 (unacceptable): Not using target language or using gestures.

Level 1: *Flowers, green, outside*

Level 2: *There are flowers. It's outside.*

Level 3: *There are many colors. It's big in the spring. It needs water.*

This models for a novice student that they could get their partner to determine the secret word using the Level 1 technique, but to attempt to reach for the Level 3 structures.

In an activity in which students need to define a term, color code the expressions depending on their difficulty to describe. For example, *museum* is worth 1 point, *art museum* is worth 2 points, *Museo del Prado* is worth 3 points, and *Triángulo del Arte* is worth 4 points. Alternatively, more tangible terms (*to clean, a broom*) may be worth less than abstract terms (*a responsibility, to accomplish*). This also provides differentiation for those students of lower-ability levels to still contribute to the team point total.

### **Questioning**

Most teachers routinely use questions related to the lesson theme to elicit responses from students. Typical questions might include:

- What chores do you do in your home?
- Who are the members of your family?
- What were you like when you were young?
- What are you wearing?

These questions are clearly linked to specific vocabulary themes common in most curricula. They do allow the students to respond to questions about themselves. However, the questions can often be answered in a few words, and we can predict many of the responses. Consider questions that are a bit deeper that will elicit more unique responses:

- How are chores divided among the people in your home?
- Who in your family do you most admire? Why?
- How are you similar and different now compared to when you were young?
- Why did you decide to wear today's outfit?

All these questions still necessitate the use of certain categories of vocabulary that the unit may require, but do not allow simple sentences as a response. *How* and *why* questions are more elaborate but do not necessarily require any additional grammar structures to respond. Moreover, there will be more original

responses that can be used to prompt further information. Teachers may need to rewrite questions and activity instructions in order to encourage students to go beyond the minimum.

### ***Just Before the Evaluation***

When using a rubric, share it with the students prior to the assessment. This ensures students know what is expected of them and therefore will see their results as fair. Read the rubric together with the students to point out the differentiating descriptors of each grading column. Provide models of reaching the highest level; when possible, show exemplars of previous students. Include examples with imperfections to not only point out frequent errors but also to show how students can reach a classification of “strong” without the anxiety of perfectionism.

After reviewing the rubric and providing models, have students practice. Using the evaluation prompt or similar, I have students each use a slide in a Google Slides presentation. They need to color code or highlight examples of transition words, verb forms beyond the present tense, unit or personal vocabulary, or whatever the task rubric may be looking for. Sometimes students think they understand what the rubric expects, but this will have them perform the task and self-evaluate. In this way when it is time for the actual evaluation, they will have practiced including the necessary elements. Having them code on the evaluation can even facilitate grading as they will have pointed out the key areas in which the teacher can find evidence of a score. In a speaking prompt, students can record their response and they or a partner can write examples of meeting each area of the rubric.

### ***Just After the Evaluation***

Following the evaluation and the receipt of the rubric and feedback from the instructor, the students can complete a self-evaluation. First, the teacher can point out some common strengths and areas for growth that were seen by the class overall. Students then review their own feedback and have the opportunity to ask questions; you may wish to provide the feedback first and then the grade on a separate form or the next day so that students focus on the former and not the latter. Students can then set a goal for the next unit with questions that could include:

- A vocabulary term or expression that I could have used instead of \_\_ is \_\_.
- A grammar error that I will avoid repeating is...
- My goal to improve presentational writing is...
- So far in level 2, I am proud that I have...
- One question that I still have for the teacher about this assignment is...

## ***Summary***

By providing students with clear rubrics, models, and opportunities to practice, teachers can facilitate proficiency gains of their students. Additionally, students will see classroom instruction and activities as important as they are related to succeeding on a future evaluation. Students will view their grades as fair because the rubric descriptors were explained, and students had time to practice in class. Finally, encouraging self-reflection and the recognition of not just errors but also strengths will help students develop life-long language learning habits.

## ***Resources:***

AP Spanish Language and Culture 2021 Scoring Guidelines. Accessible at

<https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/ap21-sg-spanish-language.pdf>

Davies, Mark, and Kathy Hayward Davies. (2018) *A Frequency Dictionary of Spanish*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Routledge

# First Year Teaching in Review: Entering the Unknown

Elizabeth Roderick

Red Land High School, West Shore School District

As first year teachers go, I am not what you would call a traditional educator. My degree is in Psychology, and I learned most of my Spanish while living in Argentina far from a classroom setting. Being a non-traditional teaching candidate has come with both its benefits and challenges, which are much clearer now that I am over halfway through my first year of teaching. I have the benefit of being confident in myself, my choices, and my life experiences. This confidence helps me understand both my students and myself better. However, unlike many of my colleagues, I received significantly less hands on, in-classroom preparation before becoming a teacher. I attended a two-year program during the COVID-19 pandemic and my observation placements were strictly virtual until student teaching. There is so much about teaching that one simply cannot know until one enters the classroom, and if I had to boil down my first-year experience to one sentiment, it would be this: You cannot know the things you do not know, but you can (and should) plan for a bit of chaos.

My student teaching experience at Manheim Central High School and time with my mentor, Mr. Nathan Campbell was incredibly valuable. Mr. Campbell was always willing to let me try new things and encouraged me to take the lead early on. I learned a lot about what goes into good teaching as well as what makes a school function outside the classroom.



*Liz R. assisting students during student teaching.*

I also learned that you cannot plan for everything and, at some point, you have to take all your beautifully laid plans and turn them into something new. You might find yourself without heat on a 35-degree day. You might have a student squirt ink all over himself in the middle of class. You might find yourself without the internet following a train derailment miles away. You cannot know what chaos, big or small, is just around the corner, but you should be prepared to abandon your plans at any given moment. So, when the power goes out, move; when the ink goes flying, pull out a stash of paper towels; and when the internet goes down, sing your favorite songs and get students engaged with a break from technology. Adapt and shift directions, especially when the unexpected happens.



Beyond the act of teaching, one of the greatest challenges new teachers face is finding their community. This can be especially difficult as a first-year teacher. You can learn a lot about the culture of a school and its staff during the interview process, but there is no way to know who your people will be, or where you will find your sense of belonging until you actually meet your colleagues. Communities are built, and I am deeply grateful to have found mine. I am a member of a World Language Department full of rockstar educators who are even lovelier people. My department head and mentor, Mrs. Lesley Spann, has helped me navigate my first year, from learning the curriculum to guided tours of our maze-like building, I have found a home with people from nearly every department, which may be the most beautiful part of the community (and chaos!) I have entered.



When I applied to teaching positions, it was important for me to work somewhere that valued diversity and empathy. As a part of the LGBTQIA+ community, I wanted to work somewhere that I knew would value my professional contributions, but also allow me to feel like I belonged. In the current political climate, there is no way to know if students, parents, or other staff members will accept me, and I struggled with how much of myself to share with my community. I wish I had known that I did not have to worry, because everyone I have met has made me feel as though I belong. I hope that every first-year teacher who comes

after me will find the same sense of belonging wherever they choose to teach, and that they won't struggle with the feeling that it may be safer to hide parts of themselves than to potentially be made to feel like an outsider. I could not have known that I would become a safe person for my students, or that I would be invited to be a club adviser for our diversity club on my second day of in-service. My best laid plans did not include any of this, but these are the experiences that I will treasure the most from my first year.

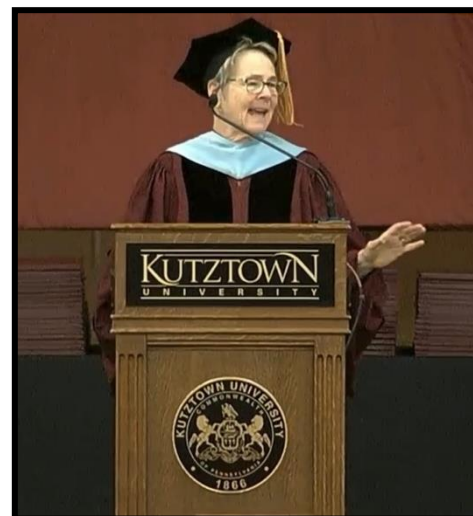
Yes, my first year of teaching has had its fair share of chaos. From uncertainties about where to park, to whom to ask questions, to how you will fit into the living tapestry of the school community and culture. But the first year has also been a year of beauty, growth, and creativity. So, my advice to first year teachers following in my footsteps is simple...when handed an exploding pen, simply laugh and pull out that extra roll of paper towels you now have on hand. These unexpected classroom events are where the real learning and magic happens for you, and your students.





## Commencement: A time to reflect and to begin anew

Dr. Nancy Zimmerman  
Kutztown University



Editors' note: In November of 2022, the President of Kutztown University asked Nancy Zimmerman to be the commencement speaker for the December Commencement.

Commencement December 17, 2022

Good afternoon, President Hawkinson, Trustees, Esteemed guests, and the December Class of 2022 of Kutztown University.

I am honored by this opportunity to address the almost alumni of KU! As you prepare to run out these doors for the last time and face a myriad of challenges, I too face similar challenges. Next semester is my last before retirement and my Magic 8 Ball has seen better days. So, as I contemplate the many zigs and zags of my professional life, and as I leave my most beloved career that has brought me much joy, I wonder not only about my next venture, but also what words I might give you to provide some insight into yours.

First off: Why Spanish? and Why KU? Almost no one asks me why I teach but I will tell you anyway. My first teaching gig took place in the cellar steps of the farmhouse where I grew up. I was about 7 or 8 and I decided to teach my cats how to read and write. My pupils were not especially motivated and frequently disappeared for days on end (and teaching cats to read and write was NOT the incentive I had for the classroom). Actually, I became a teacher because my practical and frugal parents said I had to come out of college with a profession, so I got certified to teach Spanish K-12 along with a BA.

Now, why Spanish? I owe this to my father (my very first mentor) and ironically, his health conditions. When I was young, my parents decided that they would someday retire to a warm place (PA winters can be brutal). They discovered the absolute perfect climate (except for hurricanes) of Puerto Rico and bought their future retirement house. We all started spending a lot of time on that beautiful island. My very pragmatic father decided that if he was to be a homeowner in PR, then it

would be a great idea to learn Spanish. He enrolled in Millersville State College's Spanish classes and quickly became involved in all the extracurricular activities that were offered. How do I fit into this picture other than getting to get to know firsthand the island of Borinquen? Well, my dad would pick me up from junior high and instead of taking me home, I would end up at Millersville – at one of these Spanish activities - and get to hang out with all the Spanish majors and minors (and my father) before getting to go home. My father quickly made friends with one of his Spanish professors, Mrs. Beatriz Killough, who helped him through his entire gamut of all the Spanish courses at Millersville. And no one was surprised that I joined them six years later, where I found myself majoring in Spanish (and I eventually had an upper-level course with my father).

Mentor #2: Mrs. Killough became my mentor, my professor, and a lifelong friend. When I graduated from Millersville, I really had no clue what I wanted to do but I was offered money to teach in an urban junior high and I took the job. I later switched to a rural school and taught high school Spanish, and then English as a Second Language to a group of adult male Marielitos, Cuban refugees in the army barracks of Fort Indiantown Gap. But I must admit that my best insight into teaching and learning came about with our two children (and now grandchildren); I was absolutely fascinated observing them as they learned to speak! And I regret that although I tried hard to bring them up bilingual, reading and singing to them in Spanish, they came home from nursery school and told me: "Mommy, English!" Today they both regret not learning more Spanish. And this is a conundrum that I cannot go back in time to solve. But I digress: Sixteen years after graduation from Millersville, two small kids, both my parents now gone (and us trying to settle their estate in PA and Puerto Rico), Mrs. Killough saw me floundering – I was a rudderless ship and had no clue how to proceed. Mrs. Killough encouraged me to apply to grad school at the University of Delaware – 45 minutes from home – get paid to teach as a graduate assistant and get an MA in Spanish literature in the bargain. This was my first professional moment of serendipity!

That day I stepped into a Spanish class at U of D as a college instructor, I knew it! I had found my joy! I also loved my major – reading copious quantities of tragic (and at times indecipherable) peninsular literature. Yet, I almost quit when I was trying to write a paper in Spanish about some literary theory that I had never heard of before. Four pages into this seemingly impossible task, we had a freak blizzard/thunderstorm, and the power went out. Every word of that miserable paper was lost. Of course, I cried and screamed at the gods of blizzard/thunderstorms – but I knew if I didn't hurry up and get right back to it, I would never be able to finish. Fast forward to when I graduated, Delaware offered me a teaching job and I spent the next year happily doing what I love! But then a

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zigzag: I was offered more money, good benefits and an opportunity to use my Spanish as a bilingual claims rep for a government agency. Money is seductive and it is very hard to resist. This job brought me no joy; I lasted there 3 years.

Which brings me to the next question: So why KU? KU offered me a teaching position and hence allowed me to gracefully leave the government job that I was never cut out to have. I started teaching here in 1998 (yes, driving 62 miles each way) and I loved it, found much joy but I knew that without a doctorate, I would have a very precarious future. So, thirteen years after I had graduated with my MA at U of D (and 37 years after earning my BA), I started a doctoral program at Penn State –researching the very intriguing topic of how we should be teaching Spanish to our heritage speakers – those that come to us with an extensive home background and already speaking Spanish. This was indeed my next moment of serendipity! I finished in 2011 (yes, only 11 years ago) and soon thereafter, wrote and taught the pilot course for Written and Oral Communication for Spanish-speaking Heritage Learners. I was also very involved in teaching, mentoring, and supervising our world language teacher candidates, and there is nothing more I love than getting them involved in our professional community, taking them to conferences for PA State Modern Language Association and the Northeast Council for Teachers of Foreign Languages. Watching my former students find their true profession has been an amazing experience and I try to keep in touch with as many as I can! One of my first heritage learner grads is now the recruitment coordinator for the PA State Police, and many others found their way to professions that utilize their bilingual skills including teaching. In fact, just this year, two of our wonderful alumni Spanish teachers were named Teacher of the Year at their respective schools (one in FL and one in NJ), and another was ordained into the Catholic priesthood in the Diocese of Allentown. I tell anyone who will listen: We have the best and brightest students right here at Kutztown University!

As I wrap up my KU teaching career and this speech – and after all my career changes, zigs and zags, joys and sorrows, mis-steps and mistakes (and the occasional serendipity), I offer you this advice: Find a mentor – Be a mentor like my dad and Mrs. Killough, embrace your failures – or mis-steps – and learn from them, if life gives you moments of serendipity, run with them! Accept the zigs and zags that you will face, learn from them as well - but above all, don't ever stop looking for the joy that hopefully awaits us all in our next venture!



# World Language Teacher as Diversity Advocate

Kelly Lynch

South Western School District

## *Being a World Language teacher in today's environment*

Being a world language teacher has always been interesting and challenging, but let's face it, it has not always felt important. Time and time again, we have seen our school districts, states, and our country deprioritize the value of language instruction. We have learned how to do our jobs well and focus on serving our students and communities, while staying under the radar. Now, in addition to the importance of enabling communication across the globe, it is up to us to effect change in our long-embattled educational system. Luckily, we are up to the task. World language teachers are in an unusual position in that we have our feet firmly planted in two worlds: those of our own communities and our target communities of study. This gives us an unusual vantage point which leads to more empathy for and a greater understanding of our students and the world around us.

Being ignored is both a blessing and a curse. Many of us have flourished in environments in which no one truly understands what we do. For example, I have taught Spanish at the same suburban high school for thirty-three years. We are a good school, and we are fortunate enough to offer four languages: French, German, Latin, and Spanish. Somehow, we are both an academic course and an elective. Language is not a graduation requirement, but our Guidance Department understands that students who want to attend college benefit from two consecutive years of language study and that students who want to apply to more selective universities, benefit from at least three consecutive years of world language study. In my school, administrators are traditionally monolingual and their lack of experience in the study of language is clear. Over the years, I have been asked by various administrators and community members if I could have my Spanish IV students interpret at the hospital (no) or translate business materials (again, no). What this communicates to me is that few administrators seem to understand that language is important, until they need to talk to someone. Even then, it is obvious that most have no concept of the difficulties of language acquisition or cultural competence.



This lack of understanding, while vexing, is what has allowed us to grow and respond to changes in methodology and social climate. When I started my career, I was expected to know everything about grammar and to pass that on to my students. Afterwards, I and many of my colleagues settled into the sweet spot between accuracy and proficiency. At first, culture (almost always big C Culture) was often presented as a monolith and existing in a vacuum. Now, we have a better appreciation of all the intersections of culture and identity and the complexity of presenting a more complete picture to young minds. Today, we have much better access to authentic resources that show original voices better than we could explain them. Many of us recognize that there is an inherent activism in constructing a more truthful depiction and deconstructing stereotypes, misinformation, and prejudice. Teaching world language has become political, even though we never intended it to be.

As we evolve into teachers of a subject that has layers of linguistic, historical, social, spiritual, and environmental concepts that need to be understood in connection with the other strata, we evolve into teachers of humanity. My job today is so much more complex than it was thirty-three years ago, but I am now teaching something so much more important than just grammar. First, a few caveats: I do try to hide my bias, although I am biased. You can't teach what you don't love. I am also not an expert in diversity, nor do I exist within a particularly diverse community. I am, however, a person who has spent a career learning about language and people, through my own educational journey, my travels, and my service to my community.

So, how will world language teachers save America? Our secret powers are based in the general lack of enthusiasm for the study of language and our comfort in appreciating and discussing multifaceted social phenomena without judgment. We can do what no one else can do at this point; teach that which we believe is important and help our students uncover truths about social and societal forces that have combined to create whichever culture we are highlighting and contrast them with our own. English and History teachers do not have the freedom that we currently have. When parents storm school board meetings and call for banning of books and legislators write laws to prohibit inclusive language and the teaching of uncomfortable history, they are rarely targeting us.

Since January 2021, there have been 122 educational bills introduced in 33 different states that aim to control what teachers are allowed to say to their students (Gross, 2022). Of those currently being debated, 84 target K-12 schools and 48 bills require mandatory punishment for teachers (Gross, 2022). From Florida to Alaska, teachers have been forbidden to teach about the roots of systemic inequality and forced to acknowledge cis and heteronormativity for both individuals and families (Greene, 2022). This has been challenging and frightening. Teachers have been instructed in several states to avoid teaching anything that might make a student feel "discomfort, guilt, anguish or any form of psychological distress (Greene, 2022)." Of course, all teachers can agree that we do not want to traumatize our students. It remains to be proven whether teaching bias-free history and making classrooms welcoming to LGBTQIA+ students and families is indeed trauma – inducing.



### ***What do World Language teachers do that other educators cannot?***

The one bright note in this dystopian state of affairs is that most of these laws and politicians are not focusing their invective on world language teachers. Sadly, the target of their ire is directed to librarians, language arts, and social studies teachers. Having already demonstrated that many do not value the teaching of world languages, this is an opportunity for us to shine. We can do and say things that other teachers are afraid to. As we



discuss the products, practices, and perspectives of target communities of study, we can talk about most anything. World language teachers routinely talk about culture, stereotypes, environment and stewardship of the earth, gender and gender roles, misogyny, prejudice, racism, colorism, classism, indigenous rights, religion, immigration, slavery, human trafficking, human rights, alcohol and drugs, death, economic and government systems, politics, colonialism, standards of beauty, renown and notorious people, holidays, and even cannibalism. Many of us have developed a comfort in discussing these contentious issues and we know that our students look forward to talking about these topics with us in our classes. We allow students the freedom to explore and then to contrast and compare these ideas with what they understand about their own lives and the overarching culture of the United States. We as world language teachers act in the spaces between what our students have absorbed from their families and friends and what we would like them to know about the languages that we teach. We also know that we have several years, not just a single course, to help students to understand more complex concepts. Better understanding may begin with something as simple as a Spanish I student recognizing that not all people who speak Spanish in the United States come from Mexico or that not all immigrants are undocumented. Later, when that same student is taking the Advanced Placement level, he may be able to justify amnesty for all undocumented immigrants or be able to describe the push and pull factors that might inspire an individual to migrate. This is not indoctrination; it is the culmination of an exchange of ideas and presentation of new viewpoints.

In addition to frequent discussion of (supposed) controversial topics, world language teachers also spend considerable time on social justice advocacy issues. For example, we talk about changes in gendered language, LGBTQIA+ identities as they relate to cultural practices, immigration facts and fiction, the beliefs and practices of world and ancient religions, the rights of vulnerable populations, etc. Often, these issues are brought up by students, but they can lead to productive class discussions or even research assignments. Through effective class discussions, we can encourage and support our students who may not feel included or represented in other

classes. The world language teacher mantra should be “Different is different. It is not good or bad. It is just different.” We can normalize, show the expertise of our students, and build empathy and understanding when we model and encourage respectful discussion of the treatment of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and LGBTQIA+ in our communities of study, immigration myths and misconceptions, the acceptance and recognition of the expertise of our heritage speakers, English language learners and the importance of having another language.

So, how do world language teachers address controversial topics? We speak factually and expertly after educating ourselves on the topics. We encourage our students to use primary sources and to confirm veracity through multiple sources to make sure that the information is accurate. We speak compassionately, neutrally (in affect, perhaps not in stance) and we remember the power of personal stories. Most importantly, we must give our students the right to disagree with us. This is difficult, but we must give them time to process the information and make their own meaning from what they have heard.

*“We speak compassionately, neutrally...and we remember the power of personal stories...we must give our students the right to disagree with us...we must give them time to process the information and make their own meaning from what they have heard.”*

*~K. Lynch*

In addition to regularly discussing topics that are taboo in other classrooms, world language teachers can also do things that other teachers cannot justify. We invite students to attend cultural and religious celebrations, such as La Misa de La Virgen de Guadalupe. We make ofrendas or classroom altars. We decorate our doors for all the holidays and celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, Día de Muertos, Women’s History Month, and Juneteenth. We put on assemblies and take our students into the community to work on cultural and service projects. Some may even teach ESL and citizenship lessons, and one of our favorite privileges, is that we can organize international travel opportunities.

### ***How can we connect our students to the 5Cs though our outside advocacy work?***

The ACTFL 5Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities) normally refer to instructional goals within the language classroom. We endeavor to go beyond teaching just vocabulary and grammar to helping our students understand the nuances of context and cultural practices. What we do in class is very important, but there are limits to what we can accomplish during a class period. The 5Cs relate directly to acquisition of language within an environment of appreciation and curiosity. There are many ways that we can use our understanding, respect, interest and empathy for other cultures and people within our school setting through clubs and volunteer work. Throughout my career, I have been an advisor for the yearbook, Key Club, National Honor Society and, most recently, the Diversity Club. Working with students outside of the classroom

is a great way to inspire curiosity and motivate teenagers to want to know more about different kinds of people. Recently, our Diversity Club sponsored a Black History Month assembly, presented a Multicultural Fashion Show, and organized a community-wide Juneteenth Event with the Hanover Area Diversity Alliance and the YWCA. Each year, I invite my students to volunteer at the Annual Diversity Festival, presented by the Hanover Area Diversity Alliance. I give ESL and citizenship classes on Saturday mornings to local adults, and I invite my students to come and help. Meeting real people helps my students connect the theoretical with the practical and it cements their comprehension of what we have studied and discussed in class through implicit and explicit comparisons and connections. Being of service also helps them to feel virtuous and develop compassion for people whose lives may be very different from their own.

Offering professional development opportunities is another way that we can advocate for our students. While I am not a member of a diverse group, I can talk to the students in my Diversity Club, the students in the Gay Straight Alliance, and the students in my classes and ask for their help. Each year, I hand out an anonymous questionnaire (sample questions below). Students are invited to fill out as many as they choose and give them to me, with the understanding that I will share out what they tell me with my colleagues and administration.

Questions:

1. What do you wish your teachers understood about you?
2. What do you wish your teachers did differently?
3. What do you wish we would teach you about in class?
4. What makes you uncomfortable?
5. What are some things that your teachers do that make you feel respected and cared for?
6. What do you love the most about yourself?

After receiving student responses, I generally divide them thematically into the categories of mental health, LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC issues. Then, I offer a summer Act 48 morning course in which teachers and paraprofessionals review what the students have shared (I remove any personal identifiable information) and then we discuss what we need to learn more about, what we are doing right and what we should try to rectify, either now or in the future, to make our school more welcoming to all.

Our profession has become much more demanding, and perhaps, a little less rewarding especially when it comes to parent over-involvement and lack of support (Chalkbeat, 2022). Our colleagues have been targeted for teaching inclusive American History, for having students read books that describe all people and family settings in a respectful and normalizing manner, and for questioning structural racism and acknowledging that the wealth of our country is largely based upon stolen labor. History and language arts teachers, school librarians, and elementary teachers have been subjected to legislation that precludes them from teaching traditional curricula, lending award-winning children's literature and showing signs and symbols that show acceptance and

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tolerance (Schwartz, 2022). World language teachers may be the only teachers who can teach the truth and provide our students and their families with the respect and understanding they need and deserve. World language teachers can save American education and help our students to feel connected, respected, respectful, empathetic, and interested through our conversations about communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities. It is not having another language that is our superpower, it is the comfort, compassion, and curiosity that we have and can share with our students as we stand (albeit maybe alone) and show our students how to examine all culture and history critically.

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# Language Advocacy – Building Understanding, Connections, and Community

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## Abstract

*Language skills play an essential role in exploring, understanding, and connecting with other cultures, yet fewer than 20% of K-12 students study another language and only 7.5% of college students are enrolled in a course in a language other than English. Postsecondary programs have declined in number, and many students – especially in public elementary schools – do not have the opportunity to learn another language. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges. Advocacy can help, and it is necessary for language advocates and supporters to work together – especially with parents and local communities – to expand access to affordable language learning. This article is inspired by our presentation at the 2022 PSMLA Conference.*

## Introduction

The advantages of language learning and use are well known. They include personal, cognitive, and professional benefits in terms of connecting with and better understanding others globally and locally (ACTFL, n.d.; NAE, 2017; ACTFL, 2019). In addition, multilingualism provides an unparalleled window into other cultures (Thompson, 2016; WEF, 2017). The challenge is to bring the advantage of multiple languages to our students and to our society, and to develop the most effective advocacy. Issues include identifying current and potential language advocates, along with their role and mission. In addition, it is important to consider the goals, as well as the methods and strategies of language advocacy, along with future directions in languages and in language advocacy.

## ***Current Perspectives on Languages and Language Advocacy***

While languages other than English are spoken in the home by 70M in the US, and form part of the family history of many millions more, most English-speaking Americans are not able to hold a conversation in a language other than English, and fewer than 20% of US K-12 students, and a mere 7.5% of college and university students, learn an additional language in school (Zeigler & Camarota, 2019; McComb, 2001; AMACAD, 2017; MLA 2019). This is especially unfortunate as language skills are in demand in the workplace and in our society (Jaumont, 2017; NAE, 2017; ACTFL, 2019).

Major issues in language advocacy include promoting language learning and use and defending language programs at risk. Challenges include the relatively small percentage of students at all levels enrolled in language learning and the decline of language programs, especially at the college and university level (AMACAD, 2017; MLA, 2019; Johnson, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges, both disrupting student learning and placing additional stress on educational budgets (Schwartz, 2022; Kuhfeld et al, 2022).

Language advocates and supporters need to consider language education in the classroom, as well as language learning and use in our communities and in our society, including heritage languages, language learning for online and distance learners, and for those not currently enrolled in an educational institution.

### ***Language Advocates – Role, Identity, and Importance***

While the term “advocacy” may seem abstract at first, it has been defined as “persuading people who matter to care about your issue.” This is achieved by “being at the table when decisions are made,” which includes “facing and overcoming resistance.” To be effective, it is also about “speaking and writing in compelling ways” (Daly, 2011).

Advocacy is for everyone. While professional and other organizations have advocacy campaigns and initiatives, it is essential that as many languages educators and supporters get actively involved. This presents challenges due to the schedules of so many, but it is important to remember that while advocacy is a broad umbrella, each one of us can participate to the extent that we can. Within advocacy there exists a wide range of possibilities – different languages, grade levels, methods of instruction, types of programs, etc. Language advocacy is values driven, based on our belief that all languages are worthy of respect and recognition, and that the US is a multilingual society in a multilingual world (Grosjean, 2010, 2020; Jaumont, 2017)

Advocacy is important because of its goal of language learning and language use in the US, and in strengthening multilingualism in our society. It is also important because “advocacy is about empowerment” – both within our society and as global citizens (Daly, 2011). It is also about the empowerment of language educators and supporters as leaders – “influencing a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”

(Northouse, 2013). Language advocates play a vital role and deserve our support as they bring together “small groups that are loosely connected but united by a shared purpose” in order to “create transformational change,” a multilingual US in a multilingual world (Satell & Popovic, 2017).

### ***Teachers and Advocacy***

Foreign Language teachers have a wonderful profession. They share in many cultures, and they see the world from different angles. However, the rest of the world does not always view this as an advantage. Americans in particular resist learning other languages. In fact, the humanities in general have been declining steadily. As early as 2016, 44 states and the District of Columbia reported a lack of qualified K-12 foreign language and bilingual teachers. As a result, sections are combined, and languages, notably among them, French and German, are eliminated from the curriculum. Consequently, fewer students have access to language study, especially minorities. Today’s graduates tend to choose what they consider to be more lucrative employment. Unfortunately, this does not include teaching. Therefore, current teachers are faced with the challenge of defending their programs. We would like to share some ways of engaging in advocacy and promoting foreign languages in a society that needs them even more today than in the past.

Among the many goals of advocacy, we will note ways to participate in the following:

- Give access to minorities and heritage speakers.
- Promote Foreign Languages among policymakers and legislators.
- Recognize and publicize outstanding programs.
- Promote foreign language study in the media.
- Encourage students to continue Foreign Language study.

The National K-16 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey Report (March 2017) has indicated a renewed interest in language immersion, particularly dual language immersion. It notes that 20% of school age children are in Foreign Language classes, while only 8% of post-secondary students study a second language. There is also an increasing use of online classes, which enable access to more students. However, they emphasize the need for more financial support. Educators must keep policy makers aware of the situation and encourage federal and state legislation. It is important that language study be available to all, including minorities and disadvantaged populations.

The same survey made several recommendations. Among them:

(1) Identify schools that teach specific languages in order to encourage well-articulated language sequences from elementary through middle and high school and continuing through college,

(2) Identify schools that may be interested in a relationship with a teacher training institution (sponsoring student teachers, mentoring undergraduates, or collaborating in other ways),

(3) Identify schools that could serve as national model programs for their language taught and/or program design; and,

(4) Explore student participation in government-sponsored foreign language opportunities and investigate ways of promoting participation.

*The Dataset of Model Programs and Practices, A Product of the America's Language Initiative*, has produced a "Portal," which contains a limited registry of model programs and practices at specific schools and universities. Teachers and administrators seeking to increase enrollment of learners from historically underserved populations can emulate and adapt them. They can also use this registry to expand the number and levels of languages offered. Among the languages targeted are Native American, Urdu, and the Less Commonly Taught Languages. The population includes Native Americans, people of color, and economically disadvantaged students. It includes all levels of education, from Pre-K to graduate. It is also addressed to legislators, private funding groups, and businesses seeking to recruit underserved populations.

### ***Government-sponsored programs***

Government-sponsored programs that benefit students include the World Language Advancement and Readiness Grant Program, originally authorized in December 2019. Representative Young Kim (R-CA) with Representative David Price (D-NC) led a bipartisan "Dear Colleague" letter urging the House Appropriations Committee to support funding this program (WLARA) with \$15 million in Fiscal Year 2023. The House approved it on June 22, 2022. "World language skills enrich our students' education and help prepare our nation to compete in an increasingly globalized society," said Congressman David Price. "This year's Defense Appropriations bill jumpstarts the World Language Advancement and Readiness Grant Program, which will help the United States address its current language deficiencies by educating more elementary and secondary students in critical world language skills. The World Language Advancement and Readiness Grant Program is one step closer to reality." Senator Cory Booker led a similar campaign in the Senate. Both houses approved the Grant Program and it is included in the 2023 Federal budget. Other Funding will also target Native Americans, Hawaiians, and Alaskans. It is important to note the importance of communication with legislators to make this and similar action possible.

### ***Underserved Populations***

While this legislation begins to address the problem of minority education, a study from the University of Texas noted, "We are not reaching the nation's underserved bilingual communities as well as disadvantaged rural and urban populations. There is an increasing preponderance of underserved emergent bilinguals and People of Color in the nation's PreK-12 system." This is a question of Social Justice, as well as a curricular issue. Agnès Ndiaye Tounkara, representing the French Heritage Language Program, emphasizes, "It is our



responsibility as a society to give these students and their families the support they need, to build bridges to overcome the systemic inequalities they face on their road to success. It is the only path to a more equitable and diverse society."

One of the ways to address the underserved bilingual community is through the Community-Based Heritage Language Schools. They offer 39 languages and operate without government funding. There are more than 130 schools teaching heritage languages across the US. The program has served more than 4,500 young boys and girls over the past 15 years in New York City but also in Miami, Boston and Maine. The French Heritage Language Program is one of them. The French Embassy, as well as private donors support it. The students meet after school under the guidance of a teacher, to maintain or improve their French by working on cultural projects to keep them connected to their cultural heritage. (Ndiaye, 2022) The schools provide instruction in heritage languages for underserved populations, including recent immigrants. They include an International Network for Public Schools, in the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan.

Much of their success is due to the efforts of Fabrice Jaumont, author of *The Bilingual Revolution*. The program benefits more than 2000 students in 11 schools in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Much of this instruction takes place in public schools. (Smith, 2017) Its mission is to provide free French classes to underserved schools and French-speaking communities but also advocate for the teaching of heritage languages in the United States. (Ndiaye, 2022) The program was threatened in 2021, but through Foreign Language Advocacy, it has survived and recently added another school in West Harlem at the end of 2022. Lafayette Academy in New York City, a dual language middle school, came into existence in 2022. These schools continue to serve the immigrant population.

The French Heritage Language Program not only provides free French language training, "it also creates a space where these students can construct their identities as multilingual speakers and learn the value of their various cultural backgrounds." (Smith, 2017) While we may not be in a heritage language school, we all can share in this goal. Most teachers have heritage learners in their classrooms. They can help these students value their own cultural identity. Instruction goes far beyond simply teaching and learning a language.

### ***Publicizing Successful Programs***

Another excellent way to practice advocacy is to maintain and publicize a successful program. In Pennsylvania, the PEP (Pennsylvania Exemplary Program) Award recognizes schools with excellence in language education. There are several levels: Golden Globe, Silver Globe, Bronze Globe, and Globe. Criteria for the award include number and levels of language offerings, student success, contemporary methodology according to ACTFL standards, and teacher excellence. About 10-15 schools receive this award annually, but more are welcome. It is important to make everyone in the school aware of this honor, and to publicize it on

social media. Further details are available at [PEP Awards | Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association \(psmla.org\)](https://psmla.org)

Based on the PEP award, the AATF French Exemplary Program Award also has several levels: distinction, honors, and exemplary. [Exemplary-French-Programs.docx \(live.com\)](#) It uses criteria similar to those of PEP to identify the qualifying schools nationally, both secondary and post-secondary. Created in 2015, it has already honored 59 schools, most from public high schools, and some from private schools and universities. Here as well, publicity is important. The number of awardees is not limited and many more are encouraged. This award also responds to the recommendation made by *The National K-16 Foreign Language Enrollment Survey Report*, namely, to highlight schools that are successful in teaching specific languages.

One of the recent honorees commented: "All the world language teachers here at Highland work closely to create engaging, student-centered activities that encourage students to use the language as much as possible. Just over ten years ago, the French program was dwindling. . . Now there are six classes of French across four levels!" (Highland Regional High School, NJ, 2022) Another school noted: "The future goal of the French program is to continue to grow and to inspire others to respect diversity and other cultures while cultivating the skills required to succeed in the 21st century." (John Jay High School, NY, 2022)

One of the goals of these awards is to maintain programs in Foreign Languages that may be threatened or faced with elimination. All that have been honored are still flourishing. Unfortunately, others not among them have disappeared. The Modern Language Association has been publishing alarming statistics since 2016, with an average of only 7.5 students out of 100 enrolled in a foreign language. In August 2021, only 50% out of 400 of the most prestigious colleges and universities required a foreign language for entrance. Only 12 % of colleges surveyed from over 1,000 had a foreign language requirement for graduation, according to the 2020 American Council of Trustees and Alumni study.

### ***Encouraging Students to Continue Language Study***

Both high school and college teachers must encourage students to continue with their language study after completing their requirement or even without it. Some possibilities include offering a certificate, a minor or major combined with another area, and Culture and Language across the Curriculum. Foreign Language teachers should urge other departments to incorporate a Foreign Language in their majors. *Language across the Curriculum* integrates foreign language and culture into non-language courses through reading, research, or presentations. It involves collaboration with colleagues that will enrich all who participate. It will also encourage qualified students to continue their language study in a meaningful way, demonstrating its relevance in allied fields. It can help prepare graduates for a career, and add extra breadth to language majors.

Finally, the Seal of Biliteracy is a tool that all schools can use to motivate students to continue with language study. Approved by Pennsylvania in 2022, it is now operative in almost all the states. It is “an award granted by a school, district, organization or state in the United States of America . . . in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages by high school graduation.” The recommended level of proficiency is a minimum of intermediate mid. ([The Seal of Biliteracy](#)) In addition to providing an advantage to students in college admissions and employment, it can also serve as a tool to promote the study of languages. It is important to publicize the Seal of Biliteracy in all schools, but especially those serving disadvantaged students.

The PSMLA Global Scholars Program complements the Seal of Biliteracy. In addition to language proficiency, it also includes International Studies courses, extra-curricular and service activities. It offers high school students an opportunity to broaden their horizons and deepen their knowledge of language and culture. Beginning with two graduates in 2016, the program has expanded to 102 in 2021. It offers an opportunity for publicity in the media, promotion of foreign language study, and growth in international awareness for teachers and students.

It is important for all educators to advocate for foreign language study. They can remind students of the benefits of learning a language: global awareness, an asset in employment, better critical thinking skills, and many others. They can publicize their successes on social media, from a successful classroom activity to an award, such as PEP, the Seal of Biliteracy, or the Global Scholars Program. By encouraging gifted students and supporting beginners in the field, they can increase the number of teachers. They can join forces with other groups such as interdisciplinary programs and Language across the Curriculum. They can support language learning for all students, especially minorities and disadvantaged learners. Above all, they can be the very best teacher possible, since in the end, it is the personal touch that matters the most.

### ***Achieving the Goals –Organizations, Strategies, and Methods***

In order to achieve its goals of language learning and use, advocacy employs many strategies and methods, through many stakeholder groups, language education professional associations, stakeholder groups in business and government, and external partners in philanthropy and other areas.

Our professional associations play a key role, and advocacy initiatives exist at all levels, from local to national and beyond, and advocates can be involved in one or several initiatives depending on personal interest and availability. At the national level, ACTFL and JNCL offer many possibilities for engagement and involvement, as do specific language organizations like AATF, AATSP, etc., and organizations like NNELL, NABE, ATA, etc. At the regional, state, and local level, there are opportunities for professional engagement in NECTFL and PSMLA. Beyond our professional organizations, opportunities for involvement can be found in community-based organizations and heritage language groups.

Strategies can be based on theory and best practices inspired by varied disciplines, including marketing and public relations, and theories such as the psychology of persuasion, disruptive innovation, and blue ocean strategy.

Methods begin with everyday teaching in the classroom in order to sustain motivation, in interactions with prospective students and their parents to awaken the motivate on to begin language learning, and in in everyday conversations with local decision-makers. In addition, language advocates, stakeholders, supporters, and enthusiasts use online and social media, writing and research, to lobbying and social action in their advocacy.

### ***Next Steps and Future Directions – Partners in Advocacy***

In our nation that has historically been one of immigrant and indigenous languages, the current US foreign language deficit is both paradoxical and in need of immediate action. Advocacy is driven by both our values and the relevant data and includes advocacy by a broad coalition of language educators, advocates, and supporters.

Moving forward, advocates need to reflect on the past and on the future – on our multilingual history and on our multilingual present and future, along with our current and potential language capacity, in order to promote and defend language use and language learning, empower us to understand and to connect with other both locally and globally.

We need also to build a broad coalition of support for languages, language learning, and language use, and to ensure that languages are part of the public conversation.

L'Union fait la force! (*strength in unity*)

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