

10 Tips from the ToY

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I have been teaching French at Sharon High School for the past 19 years. Ten Tips from the ToY is a compilation of my own advocacy strategies as well as some that my colleagues have used to build a thriving foreign language program in the Sharon Public Schools.

We currently have a 5th grade FLEX program in the elementary schools. Over the course of the year, students have a quarter each of Chinese, French, Spanish, and culture / geography. They choose one of the three languages and continue their studies at the middle school level. When students are in high school, they can continue to learn the same language, select a different modern language, or opt for Latin or Ancient Greek.

1. Engage your students!

- ❖ Speak the target language as much as possible! When you are in the classroom, strive to create an environment where students are immersed in the language. When you see students outside in the hallways and at school events, speak to them in the target language so that they can practice authentic speech.
- ❖ Use the target language when you talk to your colleagues who teach the same language. It is important for us to be good role models for our students – and to show them that language is real!
- ❖ Provide additional input for your students with ambient decorations. Hang maps, posters, and pictures, of settings in target language cultures. At the beginning of the school year, have students make flags and signs with expressions they will need to communicate their basic classroom needs.

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart.”

- Nelson Mandela

- ❖ Make connections other disciplines as you teach language and culture. If your schedules permit, team up with a colleague to teach a unit together. Art, music, history, science... the options are endless! You can integrate other subjects into your everyday lessons. Use word problems to review numbers; show works of art to identify colors, seasons, people, and places; have students play the role of famous people from the target culture when they are doing greetings, nationalities, and professions; or ask students to tell what it was like / would have been like if they lived / had lived in a certain historical period of a target culture to practice verb tenses.
- ❖ Don't underestimate the power of music! Play catchy tunes when students come into the classroom, put on something subtle in the background while students are working in groups, and find songs with lyrics that fit thematic or grammatical lessons that you are doing. White out some of the lyrics (verbs tenses or specific vocabulary) and have students listen and fill in the blanks. Students will go home and continue to listen to these songs – and will mostly likely suggest new ones for you to play!
- ❖ Set up pen pal or email exchanges for your students, either individually or as a class.
- ❖ Work with students to create essays, posters, and videos for submission to local, state, and national foreign language competitions.
- ❖ Tell students about your own travel experiences. Your enthusiasm is contagious!
- ❖ Encourage students to share stories about their cultural heritage and/or their non-English language experiences (at home or when traveling).

“To have another language is to possess a second soul.” - Charlemagne

2. Create extra curricular & community service opportunities!

- ❖ Sponsor language clubs, an international club, or foreign language national honor society chapters.
- ❖ Coordinate a peer-tutoring program. Upper-level students can tutor beginning students before school, after school, or during study hall.
- ❖ Ask upper-level students to be teaching assistants.
- ❖ Arrange for high school students to teach enrichment classes in an elementary class either during or

3. Reach out to younger students in your district!

- ❖ If your district has an elementary or middle school language program, set up partnerships between beginning classes and high school classes. Students could write letters or cards, Skype, or visit each other.
- ❖ Send high school students and/or teachers to do presentations for middle and elementary school students before they select a language for future study. They can do short skits, teach a song, or talk about the importance of learning languages.

“One language sets you in a corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way.”

- Frank Smith

4. Involve parents & community members!

- ❖ Contact parents or members of the community who grew up in another country, who learned English as a second language, who did service or volunteer work in another country, or for whom knowing more than one language is essential in their line of work. Invite them to speak to your students about their cultural and linguistic experiences.
- ❖ Request that parents contact administrators or School Committee members to tell them about positive experiences their children have had in foreign language classes or to petition for an increase in language programming in the district.

5. Stay in touch with former students!

- ❖ Set up a Facebook page so that former students can keep in touch about their experiences using foreign languages or studying / working abroad. Share their stories with administrators, colleagues, and current students.
- ❖ Invite some of these students who to speak to your students (in the target language, if possible!).
- ❖ Suggest that former students write to administrators or School Committee members about the value of their language learning experiences in your district and how they have used their skills post-graduation.

“Language is the road map of a culture. It tells you where its people come from and where they are going.”
- Rita Mae Brown

6. Host events!

- ❖ Designate days to have language tables in the cafeteria at lunch. Invite students of all levels to join you to chat informally in the target language.
- ❖ Observe Foreign Language Week or holidays with cultural significance.
- ❖ Show international films after school or in the evenings.
- ❖ Celebrate the languages that you teach or the cultures that your students represent. If there are resources available, host an evening event. Students can make decorations, plan skits, and learn songs. Ask for volunteers to bring authentic food and drink. Don't forget to invite administrators!

7. Organize outings!

- ❖ Take your students to other parts of your building or outside to learn vocabulary in context. Go to the music room, the gym, or a science lab. Walk around the parking lot to examine the parts of a car or a downtown area to identify buildings and professions.
- ❖ Go to a local restaurant with your students. Students can sample new dishes and practice speaking in the target language. You may be able to meet the chef or even have a cooking lesson.
- ❖ Attend a foreign film, a museum exhibit, a play, or a concert.

8. Travel!

- ❖ Travel with your students! Trips make language and culture come alive. Contact a company specializing in student travel to investigate itineraries and options: anything from a long weekend to Québec or New York City or a week or more in an overseas destination to an exchange with another school.
- ❖ If you cannot travel with your students, provide them with materials about doing study abroad during the summer, for a year of high school, or as a gap year before going to college.

9. Publicize! Publicize! Publicize!

- ❖ Post your students' work throughout your school – especially on Parents' Night.
- ❖ Invite colleagues, administrators, and School Committee members to see your students in action.
- ❖ Enlist students to write articles for the school newspaper, the district website, or a local newspaper after you have hosted an event, planned an activity, or returned from a trip.
- ❖ Publish a foreign language newspaper and include articles representing all of the languages taught at your school. Students can write about current happenings at school or submit poems, short stories, or reviews of restaurants, books, or movies.
- ❖ Sell foreign language merchandise in your school store.

10. Don't go it alone!

- ❖ Join forces with colleagues at your school, within your district, and across the state to carry out advocacy strategies that work for you.
- ❖ Sign up for list serves or online discussion groups to hear what other teachers are doing to promote the study of foreign languages.
- ❖ Become a member of a professional organization, attend conferences, or subscribe to language educator publications to stay abreast of current trends.
- ❖ Consult the advocacy section of MaFLA's website (www.mafla.org) for ideas and suggestions!



Please use, adapt, or share any of these tips! If you have other ideas, send them to MaFLA for the website.

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