Gearing Up For The 2017 Fall Conference: MAFLA’s 50th Jubilee

Start planning now to attend! MAFLA is proud to host its 50th annual conference, *Languages Transform Individuals into Communities*, at the Sheraton Springfield Monarch Place Hotel, in Springfield, MA.

Keynote Speaker

**Dr. Edward (Ted) Zarrow**

Dr. Zarrow earned his PhD from Yale in Classics & Ancient History. His primary fields of research are Roman history, coinage, and epigraphy. He has served as the President of the Classical Association of Massachusetts. Currently he serves as MAFLA’s Advocacy Coordinator. The winner of several teaching awards including the 2016 National Language Teacher of the Year by the ACTFL, Ted currently teaches Latin at Westwood High School.

Pre-Conference Workshop Presenter

**Thomas Sauer**

Thomas Sauer is the Director of Design and Communication for AdvanceLearning and an independent consultant. He previously held positions as world language specialist in the Fayette County Public Schools and Jefferson County Public Schools for almost ten years and taught German at the University of Kentucky, Georgetown College and Kentucky Educational Television. He has directed a variety of state and federal grants, most recently as

Pre-Conference Workshop Presenter

**Dr. Nicole Sherf and Tiesa Graf**

Nicole Sherf is a Professor, Master of Arts in Teaching, and Secondary Education Coordinator at Salem State University in Salem, MA, and Tiesa Graf is a Spanish Teacher and Department Chair at South Hadley High School in South Hadley, MA. This dynamic duo has been actively collaborating for a decade through Board service, advocacy, and a variety of presentations and articles on world language pedagogy.
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MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Membership in MaFLA is open to anyone interested in the learning and teaching of languages. The basic membership runs one year from date of inception. There are four categories of membership - Individual, Student, Retired, and First-Year Teachers.

**Individual memberships:**
$45.00 for 1 year
$120.00 for 3 years
$25.00 for 1 year (new to profession teacher in first year)

**Retired memberships:** $25.00 per year

**Student memberships:** $15.00 per year

For more info and/or a membership application packet, contact:
Madelyn Gonnerman Torchin
membership@mafla.org
PO BOX 590193
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Now you can join, renew or update your profile online! Just visit mafla.org

The MaFLA Newsletter

The MaFLA Newsletter is the official publication of the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association. It is published four times per year - Winter, Spring, Back To School, and End of Year. Subscription is available through membership in the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association. MaFLA welcomes short articles, anecdotes, brief reviews of books and other teaching materials, and other items of interest to members of the profession. The opinions expressed by the authors of articles published in this newsletter are their own and are not necessarily shared or endorsed by MaFLA or its Board of Directors.

**Deadlines are:**

Winter - January 5
Spring - March 5
Back to School - August 5
End of Year - November 5

All submissions should be sent to:

Ronie R. Webster
Email: ronie@mafla.org
41 Glenn Drive
Wilbraham, MA 01095-1439
Tel: 413-596-9284

Congratulations, MaFLA Members!

Using your MaFLA membership, you were able to save funds and enjoy a wonderful conference in partnership with ACTFL. Thank you for your attendance and your participation in our MaFLA Core Practices and other rich professional development opportunities. Best for a wonderful Second Semester! Enjoy your April break!
Program Director and Consultant for several successful STARTALK programs. Thomas has served as President of the Kentucky World Language Association as well as on the Board of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, the National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages and the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. Named the 2011 Pearson/NADSFL Supervisor of the Year and a 2010 Global Visionary by the World Affairs Council of Kentucky and Southern Indiana, Thomas is passionate about helping educators making the shift from teaching to learning.

Workshop Presenter

Rita A. Olesak

Director of Foreign Languages/ELL for the Glastonbury Public Schools, Rita is currently President-elect of the Joint National Committee for Languages (JNCL-NCLIS) and Past President of the National Network for Early Language Learning (NNELL), National Association of District Supervisors of Foreign Languages (NADSFL) and The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). She is also a Past President of the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association (MaFLA) and former co-chair of the K-16 Foreign Language Teachers of Western Massachusetts Collaborative. She was awarded the NADSFL – Pearson Supervisor of the Year Award 2013 and the ACTFL Florence Steiner Award for Leadership in Foreign Language Education in 2015.

Dr. James F. Powers: An Appreciation

Editor’s note – When I first became a member of the board of directors of MaFLA, I had the opportunity many times to talk with Dr. Powers at the annual MaFLA conference. I always enjoyed my talks with him as he always had wise advice for me, a young teacher who was eager to become better at her practice. We also enjoyed talking about music. We shared our stories of our love of music and our own training on the various instruments we played. I feel blessed that I was able to get to know Dr. Powers and am most appreciative of the wisdom he shared with me. At this year’s Fall Conference, we will have a James Powers Endowment session on Intercultural Competency Exploring Intercultural Communicative Competence: Concepts, Components, Implementation & Assessment led by Dr. Alvino E. Fantini and Béckie Rankin. I am smiling to know that the influence of Dr. Powers will continue and impact a whole new generation of language teachers.

I first met Dr. James F. Powers on 5 November 1976 when he was chair of MaFLA Conference Committee. We met at the Sheraton-Tara Hotel in Framingham where the annual MaFLA Conference took place and became instantaneous friends. That friendship would last until his death on February 7, 2008 in Dedham.

Jim was an extraordinary human being respected for his great integrity, clear-minded intelligence, generosity of spirit and fairness to all. He was always civil, kindly, humble and caring. He was the founding father of MaFLA in 1967, served as First Vice President, and was second to receive the Association’s most prestigious award The MAFIA Distinguished Service Award. Upon his death in 2008, he bequeathed funds to MaFLA. His will stipulated that “the annual interest income shall be used for the support of sessions on Theory and Research.”

He received the Degree of Doctor of Education at Harvard University, and his thesis was entitled “The Reform of Modern Foreign Language Teaching in the Public Secondary School of the United States, 1890–1930.” Throughout his long and successful career as a French teacher at Arlington, and later as a French professor at Tufts University, he was a sensitive, discerning and articulate voice for languages and language study. It was hard to imagine a more disciplined and determined teacher and professor, and one whose enthusiasm and support of all language teachers was both boundless and legion. In addition, he was a cultural ambassador par excellence who helped young teachers in their desire to ameliorate their language ability, and, in doing this, he left behind an incredible legacy which continues to this very day.

Jim was also most passionate about music, and loved nothing better than getting a seat at a Boston Pops concert. He was a frequent performer with the North Shore Philharmonic Orchestra, a member of its Board of Directors, and the Arlington (Massachusetts) Philharmonic Orchestra and the Boston Civic Symphony.

Lastly, Jim Powers, was a consummate friend and mentor, and I feel truly fortunate to have had the felicitous opportunity to meet him and work with him on many important issues vis-a-vis the teachers of our good and noble profession. He shunned the title of leader and trailblazer, but that was exactly what he was.

Jim Powers was indeed the quintessential Renaissance man, and will always be remembered as such.

Mel Yoken, Ph.D., Chancellor Professor Emeritus of French language and Literature, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Happy Spring! I love this time of year when you can feel the warmth of the sun coming through the March winds and breezes. It also makes me happy when I arrive at the school parking lot and as I am approaching the school I can see a beautiful sunrise on the horizon (that is on clear days). It always brings a smile to my face.

This issue continues with a look into the past of MaFLA. We hear from three additional past presidents (to see the first of this series check out the Winter Newsletter). Jean-Pierre Berwald brings us back to his thoughts and memories of MaFLA in the early 1980s. Also sharing her memories of MaFLA in the mid-eighties is Kathleen Riordan and finally we have some remembrances from Nicole Sherf who chaired her conference in 2008 and again co-chaired with Cherie Baggs in 2013. Nicole still serves the board and works tirelessly with her group on advocacy and on the Seal of Biliteracy. Be sure to check out the article on the Seal Update (p. 28 Reading through these historical pieces, I have come to realize that through its entire existence MaFLA has had a tremendous impact in the state. MaFLA has worked to create top-notch and informed cadre of teachers, department chairs, curriculum leaders who have in turn trained others to make Massachusetts foreign language programs some of the best in the nation. Yes, MaFLA has led the way always providing the best professional development for its members and connecting and encouraging collegiality in the state and the nation.

In this issue we also continue with the theme of Celebrations as we approach the celebration of MaFLA’s 50th conference, our jubilee. Some of our articles focus on how MaFLA members celebrate and recognize student success in our classrooms. This is an important aspect to our teaching. It doesn’t even have to be elaborate. Celebrate sometime special a student has done. Grab the phone and share the good news with the parents or guardians. Write a note. Parents and students love these surprises. There are lots of ways to celebrate students! Just be sure you do! The rewards to you and the program are tremendous.

This issue also has some new voices which you should not miss. We also have some of our regulars including Dr. Marcel LaVergne who always shares some profound ideas on the teaching of languages.

Since our last issue, we have lost a great friend and colleague, Terry Caccavale. Terry has had such a strong influence in the foreign language profession. I am pretty sure that in some way Terry has impacted you and/or your language program. I have such fond memories of my dear friend and colleague Terry. Her love of languages, her advocacy and passion for strong language programs K – 16 and more, her modeling of professionalism and her kindness and friendliness will not be forgotten. I will always cherish my connections and work with Terry, and our telephone conversations. Whenever Terry was traveling on the Mass Pike and passed the Wilbraham, Home of Friendly Ice Cream shrubbery sign, she would give me a call. We would talk about our lives and what was going on until we got disconnected as she got out of cell coverage. I will truly miss those calls and will miss the friendship and wisdom of a very special lady, Terry Caccavale.

Please remember we want to hear from you. Our next issue focuses on Communities so that we can connect to our conference theme – Languages Transform Individuals into Communities. We have some potential questions you might want to consider.

**Theme – Communities –**

How does the study of foreign languages transform individuals into communities?

How do you incorporate the Communities Strand of the World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages into your curriculum, units of study and lessons? Share some ideas with your colleagues!

How do you connect your students to the target language communities?

How do you connect yourself to the target language communities?

How have your foreign language skills made you a part of another community?

How are your students engaging in the global community?

All articles are welcome. Send them to ronie@mafla.org. The deadline for the Back to School issue is August 5!
With the passing of Terry Caccavale on March 5, 2017, MaFLA has lost one of its most prominent and inspiring members. Director of Foreign Languages K-12 at the Holliston Public Schools for many years, 2016 MaFLA Distinguished Service recipient, Past President of NNELL, Officer in the Order of the French Academic Palms, keynote speaker on the national and state levels and workshop presenter par excellence, Terry exemplified the integrity, the passion, the intellect and the dedication of the best of our profession while remaining unpretentious, gracious and generous to all who crossed her path. Heaven is now bilingual - the angels are speaking French! Adieu, chère amie! We will hold you forever in our hearts.

Joyce Beckwith
Jean Pierre Berwald

What year did you serve as President?
I was president of MaFLA in 1983.

What were some of the issues and/or initiatives at the time i.e. National Standards, Mass. Frameworks, New Certification Regulations, English-only movement
I believe that Mass Frameworks may have been the issue at that time. I'm not sure; you'd have to consult prior issues of MaFLA publications. (newsletters)

What are your memories of the conference you chaired?
I was conference chair on two occasions, in 1976 and 1983. The 1976 conference was held in Framingham at the Sheraton Hotel, the hotel that one can see on the Mass Pike. The 1983 meeting was at Sturbridge.

My memories are not very strong. I remember inviting Stephen Krashen as keynoter from the University of Southern California for the later meeting. Krashen was one of the leading applied linguists in the country at that time.

I remember with great affection those with whom I served on the Board. We met quarterly (I think) at the Hogan Center of Holy Cross College in Worcester. I was to remain in touch with fellow board members for many years after my tenure.

One obstacle I had to face in Sturbridge was wrestling away an exhibit hall from a competing conference and getting expert advice from others on the Board.

What was one of your proudest moments/triumphs as President?
There were several proud moments-- (1) being elected to the Board, (2) being elected president of MaFLA and (3) receiving the Palmes Académiques during the MaFLA session in 2012 with several of my dearest MaFLA colleagues in attendance and (4) receiving the Distinguished Service Award from my MaFLA colleagues.

How did your participation in MaFLA affect/impact your career?
MaFLA has been my second family for most of my professional life. I joined the organization in 1963 when I taught at Newton South High School and rejoined when I began my teaching career at UMass. I never missed an October meeting, made many presentations and was always encouraged by my MaFLA colleagues. Even after I served as president, I continued as publicist 1975-1989, sending out presenter notices and publicity blurbs to newspapers throughout the state. MaFLA always gave me a chance to make presentations on ideas that I developed in the classroom. On a more personal and poignant note, I was so grateful to so many of my MaFLA colleagues for visiting me at the time my wife, Julie, passed away in early 1987.

Shirley Lowe

What year did you serve as President?
I was president of MaFLA in 1989 and my Conference took place on October 28-29, 1988 at the Sheraton Sturbridge Resort and Conference Center, Sturbridge, MA.

What was the theme of your conference?
The theme of the conference was Languages Bring Us Together.

Did you have a keynote speaker?
Diane Birckbichler from Ohio State University was the keynote speaker with the title of her talk being Communication Roadblocks: It's Not Just All Talk.

What were some of the issues and/or initiatives at the time i.e. National Standards, Mass. Frameworks, New Certification Regulations, English-only movement
Proficiency! That was one of the big buzz words at the time and we were all interested in how to incorporate the movement into the classroom with proficiency-oriented activities from listening and speaking to reading and writing to testing. Teaching culture was also an important theme at the time for addressing stereotypes and understanding different values. (Not so different from what we need in the world now!). Computers were just being introduced into the
What are your memories of the conference you chaired?

My memories of the conference and of serving on the MaFLA Board of Directors center around the people with whom I was privileged to work. Bess Harrington was always at my side to advise and offer helpful suggestions. Wonderful role models for me were Mary Hayes, Kathleen Riordan, Joy Renjilian-Burgy, Fran Lanouette. They encouraged and supported me and were always there when I needed help.

How did your participation in MaFLA affect/impact your career?

Being a part of MaFLA definitely impacted my career. Attending the Fall Conferences made me a much more aware teacher. Gleaning ideas over the years for use in the classroom was so important! My students always wanted to know what new thing we were going to try on the Monday after the Conference and there were always several activities or books or other materials to share! My colleagues and I often would have a round robin of sharing what we learned from the various workshops and sessions we attended which enabled us to truly get the most out of the bountiful offerings at each one. MaFLA also provided the venue for us to share our own ideas by being presenters at MaFLA Conference Workshops and Sessions. Learning from other teachers around the state helped me to reflect on my teaching practices and to become a more student-oriented teacher.

What was one of your proudest moments/triumphs as President?

My MaFLA colleagues also nominated me to serve on the ACTFL Board of Directors and then worked hard to make sure I had the votes. I was honored to represent all teachers and students there. This led to working on the Standards Committee for the World Languages Other than English Standards.

Do you have any messages to MaFLA as the organization prepares to celebrate its 50th Anniversary Conference?

My message to all current and upcoming foreign language teachers would be to stay connected to your professional organizations in your language(s) on the state, regional and national levels. There is a joy and affirmation in sharing what is happening in our classrooms whether it be Elementary, Middle, High School or College/University! I encourage everyone not only to attend the Conferences, but also to become active participants by presenting, serving an organization in some capacity and being an advocate for World Languages.

Kathleen Riordan

What years did you serve as President?

Not 100% sure but I think it was 1985.

What were some of the issues and/or initiatives at the time i.e. National Standards, Mass. Frameworks, New Certification Regulations, English-only movement

The standards were in development and presented in ’95 at the Anaheim conference when I was ACTFL President.

In Massachusetts the Frameworks development began after the Ed Reform Act in 1993. In the early ’90s Helen Cummings and I worked very hard on the phone and she in person on the Hill to have foreign language included in Ed Reform which is why we were able to develop our framework along with the other subject areas.

What was the theme of your conference?

Foreign Languages In Massachusetts - 1984 And Beyond.

Where was it held?

The Marriott Hotel in Worcester.

Did you have a keynote speaker?

Yes, Senator Gerard D’Amico of Worcester

Do you remember who it was and/or the theme of the Keynote?

He spoke about the Education Bill, H.B. 6262.
I think that MaFLA has made an incredible contribution to the professionalization of foreign language teaching in MA. MaFLA has provided professional development to help teachers remain current.

A special memory for me: MaFLA members helped me earn my doctoral degree by participating in a survey on professional development opportunities. The survey provided the raw data for my conclusions. The participants were overwhelmingly positive about the role of MaFLA in their professional life. We knew this but it was wonderful to have data to prove it.

What was one of your greatest challenges as President?
The challenge was being sure that we responded to national and state initiatives to place foreign language with other content areas in importance.

What was one of your proudest moments/triumphs as President?
It was a pleasure to work with such a fine team of board members to move ahead.

How did your participation in MaFLA affect/impact your career?
MaFLA helped me to see that foreign language could be a major player if we all worked together.

Do you have any messages to MaFLA as the organization prepares to celebrate its 50th Anniversary Conference?
Keep the faith and keep up the great work.
and developed a new student contest that year; the Video Podcast Contest. Finally, in 2009, we decided to “go green” with our Newsletter to save money and help conserve resources. You can find back copies and archives of the quarterly Newsletter back to 2008 under the Member Services tab.

What was the theme of your conference? Where was it held?
I was so proud of my leadership in the 2008 Conference, which was held in the Sturbridge Host Hotel and Conference Center from October 30 to November 1, 2008. My theme was The Foreign Language Standards: Creating Life-Long Learners, chosen in honor of the dozen years since the Standards were first published and a (then) recent ACTL 10-year needs assessment that had been completed to see how the Standards were being implemented nationally.

Did you have a keynote speaker? Do you remember who it was and/or the theme of the Keynote?
The 2008 Keynote Speaker was the dynamic and engaging national leader Miriam Met who elaborated on “How Good is Good Enough?” To kick off the day Friday, I created a special opening session given by Jennifer Eddy who discussed her recent national needs assessment for designing well-articulated K-12 program. I also created the first of four complimentary “Non-Foreign Language Administrator Workshops” over the last decade, for which district superintendents were invited to hear from world language experts on the special needs of world language supervision, programming and assessment. I was thrilled with the line up of national figures to present the series of 6-, 4- and 3-hour workshops on my conference theme. As a special detail, I ran a competition through a Typology course at my University to develop the conference logo and program cover. I paid for a full-page advertisement in the Conference program with a thank you and a picture of my beautiful family who put up with so much of the conference at home during the two years I planned it!

What are your memories of the conference you chaired?
It was so much work, attention to detail and fretting over the big picture and tiny details of the conference. It is a labor of love, for sure, but something that you only ever want to do once. I never would have believed it, but only eight short years later, I was back, co-chairing the 2015 conference with my dear friend Cherie Baggs!

What memories of MaFLA would you like to share?
I have so loved all the components of the work I have done with and for MaFLA! I feel that a strong foreign language organization is essential to K-20 programming in the state, especially when the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has not been very active in supporting or promoting our discipline. Through all these years of advocacy, we still have no statewide world language requirement, no dedicated world language coordinator and a Framework that dates to 1999. Advocacy is baby steps, a few steps forward and a few steps back, but all the steps are important. I am so grateful to MaFLA for giving me the opportunity to participate so fully in the profession that I love.

Do you have any messages to MaFLA as the organization prepares to celebrate its 50th Anniversary Conference?
Happy 50th Anniversary, MaFLA! The Jubilee Conference celebration is going to rock!
March 7, 2017

Dear MaFLA Colleagues:

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) congratulates MaFLA on 50 years of dedicated service to the language profession! We appreciate your long history of providing high quality professional development through your annual conference, summer institutes, and other opportunities. Your advocacy for language education issues has been significant as your members have worked hard to advance the language agenda at the state and national levels. As a strong state organization, MaFLA has developed many leaders for the language field who have contributed their time and effort to national initiatives such as the World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning, the ACTFL Performance Guidelines, the 21st Century Skills Map, and many others. We have been pleased to collaborate with MaFLA around our joint convention when we meet in Boston and appreciate the warm camaraderie and positive spirit of our colleagues in the Bay State.

ACTFL salutes this historic moment in MaFLA history and, on behalf of the ACTFL Board of Directors, celebrates your past accomplishments and wishes you many future successes!

With best regards,

Desa Dawson
2017 ACTFL President

Marty Abbott
Executive Director
Advocate for Your Language Program
By Celebrating Student Success
by Catherine Ritz

The front line of defense for language program advocacy can and should be our students! By providing students with a high-quality, interactive and engaging learning experience in every class, we take the first and most important step in creating ambassadors for our languages. But how can we make sure that the community at large sees that our students are successful and that our language program is valuable and worth investing in? In Arlington Public Schools, we’ve added a number of programs in the past few years to make student success a visible and important part of the community.

National World Language Honor Societies

With five languages offered at the high school -- French, Italian, Latin, Mandarin, and Spanish -- we wanted to make running multiple language Honor Societies a simpler task. As the department head, I decided to combine the various Honor Societies into one: the National World Language Honor Societies of Arlington High School. Under this banner, we include:

- la Société Honoraire de Français
- National Latin Honor Society
- National Chinese Honor Society
- la Sociedad Honoraria Hispánica
- Società Onoraria Italica

We looked at Honor society requirements from each of the associations to come up with one “constitution” that reflected all these requirements. In our first year, we inducted over 70 students in each of the languages! The officers of the National World Language Honor Societies are responsible for promoting languages, and have helped make posters for the elementary schools, make announcements during Discover Languages Month, and tutor beginning language students, among other things.

2016 Inductees into the Spanish Chapter of the National World Language Societies of Arlington High School

Seal of Biliteracy

In the 2015-2016 school year, Arlington High school was a pilot district for the Seal of Biliteracy. We formed a small committee to look at the requirements for the Seal and develop guidelines for Arlington. We then promoted the program to our juniors and seniors and were amazed when we had over 50 students sign up for testing. Students were required to show proficiency in English and one other language, with most students taking either the AAPPL (the ACTFL Assessment of Performance Toward Proficiency in Languages), the STAMP (Standards-Based Measurement of Proficiency), or the ALIRA (the ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment). Depending on their final score, students were awarded either the Platinum Seal (Advanced Low), the Gold Seal (Intermediate High), or the Silver Seal (Intermediate Mid). Now in our second year, we have awarded over 75 seals at all levels and in the following languages: French, Italian, German, Japanese, Mandarin, Portuguese, Polish, Western Armenian, and Spanish. Students receive recognition on their transcripts, a certificate, and a special pin to wear at graduation.

One of our first Seal of Biliteracy awardees: AHS student, Alice Tracey, who was awarded the Platinum Seal in French.
Global Competence Program

Also launching in the 2015-2016 school year, a Global Competence Program was established as an interdisciplinary certificate program to promote language study and intercultural understanding. We had five seniors complete the program this fall, which is composed of required coursework, travel abroad, and a “Global Engagement Project.” Students chose a country of focus for their projects, and investigated an area of interest within that country, such as gender roles in Peru, the rise of Nazi Germany, and comparing the “two Koreas.” This year, we have over 30 students enrolled who plan to finish the program by early next year. As with the Seal of Biliteracy, students will receive recognition on their transcript, a certificate, and a special pin for graduation.

Language Awards Night

With so many language students to honor, the time has finally come for us to offer a Language Awards Night, which is in the works for April, 2017. We plan to combine all our awards into one exciting evening. Students will be inducted into the National World Language Honor Societies, be awarded their certificates for the Seal of Biliteracy, and receive their certificates for the Global Competence Program. We’re also planning a “World Language Expo” following the ceremony where students will host tables for each language that highlight student work and share information about studying languages at Arlington High School.

It has taken time to build up these various ways to honor our language students, but the time and energy spent has been well worth it. Parents and students are excited to have ways to celebrate progress in the language, and students feel valued by the program. Plus, we’re able to show off our students (and our language program) to the community at large!

Catherine Ritz is the Director of World Languages for Arlington Public Schools.

Celebrate Student Success (conc.)

Eataly and Opera Come to WHS

Each year, the first week of March is dedicated to World Language Week throughout the country. This year the Massachusetts Foreign Language Association’s theme is Languages Transform Individuals into Communities. The Consul General of Italy and Centro Attività Scolastiche Italiane (C.A.S.iT.) joined Winchester High School in celebrating the 60th anniversary of this event.

On Wednesday March 8, the Consul General of Italy and C.A.S.iT., collaborated with Anna Tirone, Director of World Languages to bring “Eataly” to Winchester High School. “Eataly Boston” is the new Italian food market with restaurants located at the Prudential Center in Boston. A representative of “Eataly” presented a class on Italian food to over 90 students of Italian and Culinary Arts. After the presentation, the students feasted on Parmigiano Reggiano cheese and freshly made focaccia. A repeated exclamation was, “This is the best bread I have ever eaten!” The students also came to understand and taste the difference between a product marked D.O.P. and D.O.C. and one that cannot bear these prestigious designations. After the presentation, students participated in a short quiz and received gift bags from Eataly, for answering questions correctly.

In the afternoon, Winchester students, teachers and community members were treated to “An Afternoon at the Opera”. It began with Winchester’s own, talented, Olivia Minchello, who welcomed our guests by singing acappella, the aria, “Vittoria, Mio Core!” Olivia is a senior who has studied Italian and music at Winchester High School. She exemplifies the interdisciplinary connection between the Italian language and culture and music.
Next on the day’s agenda was a professional performance of a shortened version of the opera La Traviata adapted for students. Winchester students Mia Carazza, Maria DiBenedetto, Morgan Lopez and David Williams participated in narrating the scenes in English to help the audience understand the story of the opera. For many students, this was their first experience attending an opera and it proved to be a very positive introduction to opera and the world of bel canto. One teacher described the experience as, “Education as it should be.” Another said, “It was an amazing experience for all.” Art students brought their sketch pads and illustrated as they listened.

We are grateful to the Italian Consul General of Italy, Nicola DeSantis, the Education Officer at the Italian Consulate, Domenico Teker and Gioconda Motta, president of C.A.S.iT., and the “Patrons of the Italian Language and Culture”, for their generosity and kindness to the Winchester Public Schools. We also thank Eataly and the Afeltra firm for magnanimously providing an abundance of Pasta di Gragnano, I.G.P. and cans of D.O.P. San Marzano Dell’Agro Sarnese-Nocerino tomatoes to our students. Both of these products are the gold standard in Italy and throughout the world. They carry the seals I.G.P. and D.O.P to certify that their origin and quality are protected.

Submitted by Anna Tirone

Humanities and Italian students enjoyed the music and the story as they made connections to prior knowledge. Both students and teachers were indeed transformed into a community through this sensational event.
It’s well known that being bilingual has cognitive benefits: switching between two languages has been compared to mental gymnastics. But now, research suggests that mastering two languages can fundamentally alter the structure of your brain, rewiring it to work differently than the brains of those who only speak one language.

“Bilinguals are really a model of cognitive control,” Pennsylvania State University cognitive scientist Judith F. Kroll told Quartz, citing bilinguals’ ability to both hold two languages in their head and expertly switch between them at the right times. Kroll presented her work at the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting held in Washington, DC last weekend (Feb. 13). If you speak two languages and have ever found this task to be difficult—choosing the “right” tongue based on the context you’re in—it’s because both languages are always “on” in the brains of bilinguals, as Kroll and other cognitive scientists have seen. In other words, the brain is continually processing information in both languages.

The mental struggle of selecting and switching between two languages actually helps reshape the brain’s networks, according to Kroll. One study looked at four-month old, eight-month old, and one-year old infants—60 of whom were bilingual and 60 monolingual—and found that, as they grew older, infants who were exposed to both Spanish and Catalan started looking at speakers’ mouths instead of their eyes when listening to someone talk. The monolingual infants, however, only looked at mouths more than eyes when they were listening to someone speak their native tongue.

Kroll told Quartz this study is a great example of how being bilingual can improve speakers’ cognitive abilities. “Babies who are listening to two languages [growing up] become attuned to those two languages right away,” said Kroll. “It’s not

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Written by Frida Garza
Editorial Fellow, Quartz
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Advocacy: It’s Really Up To YOU

“I’m not sure I’m going to take my language next year … I mean, it is really going to help me?”

The Value for our Students of the AAAS (American Academy of Arts and Sciences)
Commission on Language Learning
Dr. Edward Zarrow

The week after my students return from February vacation, as I scan my classroom pretending to reward those who spent the most time in the sun “Ah, tū recēpistī multum solis, et tū nimium solis, et tu … nihil solis – mē paenitet” (i.e. you got a lot of sun, you got too much sun, and you … none at all – sorry :), conversations about next year’s course selection typically begin. Even as someone who has spent much of his adult life around teenagers, I’m still intrigued by what they say. Some are looking for a challenge. Some are looking to do the minimum – an unfortunate reality! And still more are guided by what they and their parents think is practical or relevant, especially in terms of the few elective choices that they actually have.

I have argued at many conferences (as well as in print for that matter), that the classroom teacher is the lynchpin to successful world language advocacy in this country. We share the value of studying languages with our students every day – and even the most challenging students can at times be surprisingly receptive to messages of humility, tolerance, acceptance, and the value of being biliterate and inter-culturally competent in a connected global society. Even so, getting our students to recognize these things in the moment when they are being pulled in so many directions by parents, friends, guidance counselors, and others can be a real challenge when it comes time for them to choose whether to stick with their language study or not.

On February 28, 2017, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS) released its final report and recommendations of its Commission on Language Learning entitled “America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century.” This is the first study on languages requested by Congress (a bipartisan group no less) since the Carter administration in 1978. This Commission examined the current state of language education in the United States with a view to determining the nation’s future educational needs and to offer specific recommendations for ways to meet those needs.

In the initial press release, the American Academy President, Johnathan Fanton, had this to say: “This report arrives at an important moment in our history … While English continues to be the most commonly used language for world trade and diplomacy, there is an emerging consensus among leaders in business and government, teachers, and scientists that proficiency in English is not sufficient to meet the nation’s needs in a shrinking world. And parents are beginning to understand that there are real benefits to teaching their children a second or third language in addition to English: cognitive benefits, important habits of mind, and new and valuable perspectives on the world.”

In addition, the Director of the Columbia University Global Center in Paris and Chairman of the Commission, Paul LeClerc, spoke about the critical need for ALL students to have access to languages and for those students to have that access at an earlier age: “The Commission recommends ways to organize existing resources so that we can teach more Americans to speak more languages at an earlier age. We also want to make sure that language education is available to people of every cultural and socio-economic background.” The impact that this study can have to strengthen our programs, to put world languages where they belong – at the center of the curriculum! – to establish longer well-articulated sequences of languages, and to gain recognition of language study as a 21st century skill cannot be underestimated. It is essential that we, language teachers, work to share the outcomes and the recommendations of the study as widely as possible.

Advocacy Action Items:

I. Share the study with your superintendent, curriculum coordinator, and principal.

The AAAS study offers the impetus that many districts need to take languages and the humanities more seriously. After
Advocacy: It’s Really Up To YOU

representing ACTFL and traveling last year as a language advocate, I was supremely impressed by so many districts across the country who served students in poverty and placed a value on preparing all students to be participants in a globally connected and multilingual world. The idea that having more languages in schools is simply too expensive or that cuts in languages are needed to make room for more essential skills is a false premise. Rather, it is simply a question of where a community and a school district places value. This begins with the central administration. If the superintendent believes in making language learning a core feature of a district and fostering an environment where globally competent students thrive, then language programs thrive as well. Rather than thinking of the cost of having a strong program, school leaders must think about the cost of not having one. If anyone in your central administration seems intrigued by the study, offer to present a synopsis of the findings at a school committee meeting, and invite members of the school committee to sit in on your classes. The experience that most decision makers about school budgets had in a language classroom is often quite different than the one that we now give to our students!

Here is what I sent – please feel free to use or adapt it for your own district:

“I wanted to share with you some important and new information about the value of studying world languages in terms of being college, career, and citizenship ready.

In 2014, Congress commissioned a study on America’s language capacities for the first time since the Carter administration “America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century.” That report was just published on February 28, and our national language advocacy group (ACTFL) is launching a campaign in conjunction with the study called “Lead with Languages.” It’s an incredible resource with great facts about how students will use their languages and cultural competence (as well as the skills they develop in the process) in college and beyond – I encourage you to check it out, and the 1.5 minute video is worth watching!”

II. Share the study with your guidance counselors.

Guidance counselors have incredible influence on what courses students will choose, and parents also rely heavily on their expertise. It is our responsibility to work with and to educate our guidance counselors as to the benefits of bilingualism, especially since much of the current material about trends in education – take for example Reimers & Chung, Teaching and Learning for the Twenty-First Century (2016) – despite comparing the educational systems of other multi-lingual countries to our own, completely ignores the place that languages ought to hold as a 21st century skill in the United States. Moreover, the ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) a large and powerful, as well as invaluable and at times provocative, resource for curriculum development, rarely includes languages in its online literature. It’s up to us to initiate positive discussions about what we do with our students and the value of language learning. When I shared the study with my own guidance counselors, here is a note that I received in reply:

“Definitely some useful information to share with students and parents when they are on the fence about continuing with a language and how it might benefit them down the road. I think helping to promote opportunities for students to learn languages and also gain a better understanding of other cultures is key.”

III. Write a brief press release for your local community newspaper about the AAAS study.

Many local newspapers (i.e. Wicked Local, Hometown Weekly, etc.) welcome press releases to help fill content. Consider writing a short blurb about the study, or even you can submit the original press release itself from the AAAS website. The more people in a community who are talking about languages the better, and the benefits of studying languages do not receive much press compared with those in STEM. It’s time for us to take more responsibility for steering the conversation.

IV. Read a synopsis of the study yourself!

The AAAS study should be required reading for every language teacher in the Commonwealth and beyond, and I would personally encourage all directors and supervisors to allow time for teachers during PD sessions to explore the full content or parts of it that they find the most compelling. We as language teachers at all levels must not only be skillful practitioners in the classroom – we must also be standard bearers of our profession whose responsibility it is to push back against the often gross misconceptions of what we do. Whether it’s discussing how nearly half of all U.S. States offer special recognition for bilingual high school graduates (alas, Massachusetts is not yet among them), or how being bilingual enhances overall cognition and allows for better attention and task-switching capacities, or how dual language immersion programs are helping to close the achievement gap in many districts, or how the demand for bilingual workers in MA has doubled over the past decade – we are all advocates.

To access the full study, click here. To provide more momentum for the release of the AAAS report, ACTFL has launched its Lead with Languages national public awareness campaign which further highlights the importance of developing language proficiency and the significant link to meaningful career opportunities.

Your Shining Moment . . .

Check out this video where an English teacher shares a classroom routine that celebrates student success.

www.teachingchannel.org/videos/celebrating-student-achievement
Should Your Student Take Four Years Of Foreign Language?

by Brannon Lloyd | Dec 6, 2014 | Blog, College Admissions, Featured, Financial Aid | DSCN0680

A few days ago, I was talking with one of our clients about their daughter’s Spanish classes. She is struggling (a little… she currently has a “B”) with the class and they wanted to know if she should drop the class and take a different elective, perhaps one in which she could easily get an “A”. Many students (and parents!) struggle with this question. They often wonder if taking two years of one language in high school is enough. Here’s the thing – it’s not just about the grade; it’s about what your transcript is telling the admissions office. It’s about the message you’re sending; the message beyond what any transcript will ever show.

I was on the Texas Classical Society’s website and came across a number of quotes from admissions personnel that specifically address this issue. Any time you can get inside the head of an admissions officer it’s a valuable exercise. Remember, scholarships and grants are greatly influenced by how much interest the college or university has in your son or daughter. Any time you can give yourself a leg up over the competition you not only increase the likelihood of admission, you also increase the likelihood of receiving free money for college. I can’t emphasize this point enough. Financial aid is often used as MARKETING.

So… having said that, here’s what college admissions personnel are saying when they look at the language section of an applicant’s high school transcript.

“[. . .] the student studying for four years has a genuine interest in knowledge and education, not just in fulfilling minimum foreign language requirements.” – Matthew Potts, Admissions Counselor, University of Notre Dame

“We give the most consideration to students who have taken the highest level language available at their school.” – Robert Killion, Office of Admissions, Haverford College

“Our recommendation is that, in terms of high school preparation, students take 4 years of a single language, believing that achieving proficiency in a language is preferable to not quite achieving proficiency in two.” – Steve LeMenager, Director of Admissions, Princeton University

“[. . .] the more years of a language, the better—it shows that the student has gone beyond the minimum requirement.” – Lia Brassord, Assistant Director of Admissions, Smith College

“While most colleges do not require four years of a language or a science for admission, dropping a discipline can be detrimental to a student’s chances of being admitted. Admission Officers are looking for students who have challenged themselves in many areas. At the most competitive colleges in the country, Admission Officers are making distinctions between thousands of overly qualified applicants. In speaking with students about senior year course selection, we encourage students to think carefully before dropping a language.” – Andrea Thomas, Assistant Dean of Admission, Hamilton College

“[. . .] depth and mastery are important in the serious study of any discipline. The student who is willing to do more than the minimum is always more appealing.” – Ray Brown, Dean of Admissions, Texas Christian University

“We look for at least three years of study of the same language for many of our programs. If not completed before admission, it must be made up with a year of college-level study.” – B.J. Ore, Sr. Associate Director of Admissions, University of Pittsburgh

“Ideally a student will present at least 4 years of the same language (classical or modern) if the curriculum allows.” – Terry Cowdrey, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, St. Lawrence University

“The more years in one language the better it shows commitment and desire for proficiency.” – Dennis O’Driscoll, Director of Admissions, Creighton University

“Three to four years of a language shows follow-through and a deeper level of interest.” – Michael C. Behnke, Vice President for Enrollment, University of Chicago

© 2012, Texas Classical Association. This survey was made possible by support from the American Classical League. Permission to copy and distribute is granted and encouraged. Originally seen at http://www.thecollegemoneyguys.com/should-you-or-your-student-take-4-years-of-foreign-language/
The Northeast Conference this year was held again in New York City on February 9-11, the weekend of one of our biggest snow storms of the season. I arrived Wednesday night in clear weather and thankful that I had outsmarted the storm and had arrived before it started. Thursday morning, however, when I awoke and looked out my window, the NYC I had seen upon my arrival was blanketed in white and I could hardly see the building across the street due to the blowing snow which was coming down and accumulating quickly. And so began my 2017 NECTFL Conference experience.

Did it really matter that it was cold, windy and snowing like crazy outside? No, not at all. I was going to spend the next three days inside the New York Hilton Hotel with colleagues from throughout the east coast attending sessions on the teaching of foreign languages. I would be connecting with colleagues, learning from their expertise and skill sets and I would be safely tucked away talking about some of my favorite topics totally oblivious to the cold and snow outside. I was definitely in my “happy place.”

My Thursday workshop proved to be a great start to the conference experience. The workshop, Essential Core Practices in Language Teaching, focused on three high leverage teaching practices. We first learned what high leverage teaching practices are and how they are different from best practices. With the guidance of our two facilitators, Richard Donato, University of Pittsburgh and Eileen Glisan, Indiana U. of Pennsylvania, we came to understand the key tenet of high leverage teaching practices. We discovered that

1. they can be used across all languages and all levels of instruction.
2. they improve the achievement of all students.
3. they occur frequently in all instructional contexts – They are tools in your teacher toolbox and are used all of the time to construct learning.
4. they are learnable.
5. they are complex and not reduced to a slogan.
6. they are not as extensive in number as best practices.
7. they are what accomplished novices need to know and can be used to improve teacher and student performance.

Once we had a deep understanding of the value of knowing these high-leverage teaching practices we delved into the components of three specific ones – creating a discourse community, making communication comprehensible and focusing on cultural products, practice and perspectives in a dialogic context. The day was so informative and collegial that the raging storm outside was totally out of my thoughts. It was only when we went out to dinner that the severity of the storm and the depth of the snow became evident. Snuggled deep in my PD “cocoon,” I could not have asked for a better way to spend my “snow day.”

Friday I attended another variety of great sessions. There was the Best of PA: Achieving Proficiency through the Three Modes of Communication where I learned about numerous sources for authentic resources and some applications (technology) of which I was unaware. I also greatly enjoyed a session entitled Make it Comprehensible! Narratives and C1 in the Language Classroom in which the presenter explained how he uses narratives to jump-start student production of the target language even at the lowest levels of novice study. Friday evening was time for awards and I was so proud to be there supporting our Massachusetts Teacher of the Year Kristin Gillett. Saturday’s concurrent sessions proved to be equally engaging. Katrina Griffin, the National Language Teacher of the Year, shared a wide variety of strategies for engaging learners. Another session – Amazing Technology for Assessment and Feedback - focused a variety of applications to provide faster feedback to students. Another session focused on Piecing Together the Proficiency Puzzle. Of particular interest in this session was the presenter’s suggestions for informing parents about “proficiency.” These suggestions were recently incorporated in an evening meeting my department had with parents. And how can I forget the session on Getting all Your Cs and Modes In – With Music! which was presented by Billie Hulke who had the entire audience singing and engaged in the songs.

Being a Mentor! The BEST!!

Approximately 4 weeks before the conference, I received an email stating that the conference committee was still looking for mentors for the new teachers who had received scholarships to the conference and would be first-time attendees. I applied and was chosen. This was the best thing I could have done. It was so energizing. My mentee, Ting Zhang, is a Chinese High School teacher in the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District in New Jersey. We started our communication via email a few days before the conference and met early Friday morning at the conference. We hit it off immediately. On the train ride in, she had already cho-
sen some sessions and one of my tasks was to help her find appropriate and good sessions. I was amazed that we had chosen several of the same sessions especially in light of the fact that I teach Spanish. We had a great time attending sessions and sharing notes and materials all day long. We talked shop throughout lunch and I was so amazed at how reflective she was already as a novice teacher.

Saturday was just as much fun as all day long we talked about foreign language teaching and learning. I helped her navigate through the Exhibits and helped her to make some great connections for materials in Chinese. At the end of the day on Saturday, we had to attend a mentor/mentee debriefing session. I shared how Ting had been a breath of fresh air to me. I enjoyed her enthusiasm, her reflective nature and her desire to be the best language teacher she could be. She stated that having a mentor made her feel connected and part of the language community. We have already been sharing materials and ideas via email. Mentoring at NECTFL was such a rewarding experience. Ting is now part of my foreign language community and continues to inspire me.

And even Better! Good NEWS!!

To support the NE Conference I bought some raffle tickets to bid on various state prize baskets and other donated goodies that were being offered. Of the various possibilities, I put most of my raffle tickets into the series of books made available by our National Organization ACTFL and into the grand prize which was 2 nights at the Hilton Mid Town Hotel – to be used anytime in the upcoming year. Now anyone who knows me, understands that I love to shop and had spent the whole weekend about 8 minutes away from one of my favorite stores Saks Fifth Avenue and had not skipped out to do a “little bit of shopping.” You can imagine my surprise when I (who has rarely won anything in her lifetime), received a text message stating that I had won a raffle prize and to proceed to the table and pick up my prize. I not only won the entire set of professional books (ACTFL series) but I also won the Grand Prize. Maybe it was my reward for not skipping out on a session and heading down to Saks. Now I can plan another weekend in NYC and get in my shopping fix plus enjoy the outdoors as I do not plan to go during a big snowstorm. As I was carrying my book series prize around, I got to thinking “What am I going to do with these? I already have all of them and I have two copies of some of them.” It was at that point that I decided to present them to my new mentee and colleague who has yet to begin her professional library. She was so delighted and grateful for her gift. So in spite of my blizzard worries, the NECTFL conference was superb. Be sure YOU ATTEND next year. But in the meantime, attend your state conference where you can Connect, Learn and Have Fun!
A Model Of Collaboration
In Language Programming
by Nicole Sherf and Kimberly Talbot

The reality is that only a small percent of students have access to the ideal model of K-20 programming. Nationally, only about twenty percent of schools have any type of elementary foreign language programming and, by the college level, a great number of students start all over again, going back to the 101 level of programming to complete a language requirement. We all know that it takes time to develop language proficiency. A few years of language study in high school, which is the national norm, is not enough to develop a functional level of proficiency that benefits the student as a college- and career-readiness skill. In light of this current state of student involvement in programming, it seems more critical than ever that the various levels of programming from the elementary grades on through the college and graduate levels cooperate and collaborate to align practices, goals and outcomes.

This is exactly what is happening between the Department of Global Languages at Melrose High School and the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Salem State University. With the support and encouragement of our administration, a new conceptualization of foreign language programming that is based on the K-20 ideal is being forged. Though Melrose doesn’t actually begin foreign language programming at the elementary level (yet?), a variety of mutually beneficial collaborative efforts and programs have been established between one district and the local state university.

The cooperation began when several of the Melrose Spanish teachers received their Master of Arts in Teaching Spanish from Salem State University. Melrose then began to be a site for pre-practicum observation hours and student teaching for the prospective undergraduate teachers-in-training. Additionally, Melrose became an internship site for one of the required undergraduate community service courses; SPN 380 Peer Tutoring. In this course, undergraduate students in all concentrations of the Spanish Major create an internship project for the semester in which they teach or tutor the language that they are themselves learning.

This school year, Melrose began offering the SPN 351 Advanced Conversation in Spanish course at the high school. It is supervised by the Salem State Department of World Languages and Cultures, and taught by the high school teachers for college credit to the high school students in place of the Advanced Placement class. It is an exciting experience for high school students to have the opportunity to receive actual college credits at the high school level, which may be more easily accepted and transferred when they go to college. Next year, the partnership will expand to offer the college credit for their Italian, French and German students.

It ends up being an incredible collaboration and cooperation opportunity for all involved! How exciting it is for all involved to have college BA students intern in the high school to help with classes, pre-service teachers observe and complete student teaching at the junior and senior high school, and high school faculty participate in the university graduate programming. High school students watch their teachers working with their graduate professors whose BA students are involved in supporting their learning.

Interestingly, both the college and high school departments are active participants in the Seal of Biliteracy Pilot in Massachusetts. (See the Advocacy Update on the Seal of Biliteracy for more information). The inter-departmental collaborative effort is the most exciting part! Inter-level collaboration provides impactful programming and strong learner outcomes for all involved.
How To Engage Your Students? Ask Them!

by Ryan P. Casey

For one of my courses this year, Honors Spanish II, I have been revitalizing a stagnant curriculum: Gone are the units about the post office (I had at least one student ask what a P.O. box was), car parts (I can't name most of the components of my RAV4 in English), and talking on the phone (A textbook reading on how to use a pay phone had elicited little enthusiasm from millennial students). Though I injected humor where I could and tried to remain focused on the global themes, those chapters bored me as much as they bored the kids. Volunteerism, travel preparations, and career planning are some of the refreshingly contemporary themes delineated in our textbook, which I am using to redesign the class and create thematic units that are grounded in ACTFL’s World-Readiness Standards and supported by performance assessments.

I am developing the curriculum as the year progresses, experimenting with different ideas and resources, trying to have the next few weeks mapped out at any given time. As we finished the unit on volunteer work several months ago, I looked ahead to the following chapter and saw that the theme was the environment – something that, save for what I read in the news, I did not think I could discuss very well on my own. So I told my students the next day that we were going to be studying the environment soon, and I wanted to know: What did they want to talk about?

Their suggestions came rapidly, with a heartening realization that this was a topic for which they had a genuine interest: pollution, climate change, deforestation, Teslas, reusable energy. I nodded when a student said “bioluminescence” and wrote “Para la vida, no para el papel” (“for life, not for paper”) – that is to say, it was actually helpful and enlightening, not just something to regurgitate on a written assessment.

It inspired me to try a similar exercise with my AP students; the six global themes are so broad, it is a challenge every year to decide what to cover. But by more frequently seeking students’ interests and evaluating their schema, I can craft a more meaningful, personalized course. (With so much of our contemporary culture driven by customization and personalization, why can't my classes benefit from these impulses, too?) I can also vertically align these two Spanish courses more easily and ensure clearer scaffolding. For example, although bioluminescence did not find its way into my freshman curriculum, their mention of it inspired me to consider how I could fold it into an environment for the Global Challenges unit of my AP course – and thus was born an “alternative energy fair” project in which students presented their research on different forms of alternative energy in their communities versus the Spanish-speaking world.

My biggest takeaway was that I observed what appeared and felt like true student engagement – especially in comparison to previous years – and that I sensed the same level of excitement in myself. I recognize that I was generous in structuring the unit this way, that I cannot always take suggestions, like an educational disc jockey, and craft them into a new unit every time. But by involving them more transparently and frequently in the design process, I can explore different ways of giving them voice and choice in the classroom, moving toward more student-centered exploring and learning.

I might even be excited enough to find an authentic resource on bioluminescence for next year!

Ryan P. Casey is a Spanish Teacher at Lexington High School. Outside of academia, he is a nationally recognized dancer and choreographer as well as a freelance journalist.
What Is To Know A Language?

by Marcel LaVergne Ed.D.

When I got my first job as a French teacher in a junior high in 1958, I had no idea what “to know” a language meant. I was hired because I could speak French. I met with the principal who congratulated me, gave me a copy of the textbook to be used and told me to teach the book cover to cover. I had not done any student teaching, never had a foreign language methodology course, and had no idea what to do. For me, it was sink or swim. You could say that I learned how to teach by teaching through the trial and error method.

In those early years, there was a great divide between my goals as an L2 teacher and those of the L2 students, namely I wanted them to learn the grammar and the vocabulary that was in the textbook but they wanted to be able to speak in the target language. Eventually over the years, I realized that teaching a foreign language consisted in more than helping the students put words together in a sentence correctly by acquiring vocabulary lists and grammar rules, it also consisted in helping the students use the language appropriately according to the context. I learned that there is a science and an art to the process. This article which complements the one that I wrote entitled “Language is” (1) will attempt to define the “science” involved by answering the question “What does it mean to know a language?” by exploring the concepts of competence and performance, by identifying the different levels of proficiency, by specifying the role and the importance of input, and by offering implications to L2 teachers.

Jorge Allen, 2017 MaFLA Conference Chair, recommends that we get back to the basics and describes language as being “at the core of who we are as human beings. Language allows us to share information and communicate feelings. The power of language is what allows us to connect with other people and create societies that have empowered us to thrive. In every culture, language is the medium with which individuals feel connected to supreme powers and with their fellow people. Our brains are wired to be social and to be connected to others, and languages are the vehicle and expression of that brainpower. Therefore, let us make 2017 the year during which we remind ourselves that acquiring a language is what makes us who we are.” (2) Hopefully, this article will help L2 teachers to get back to the basics by exploring what it means to know a language.

In 1965 Chomsky (3) theorized the difference between competence (the speaker-listener’s knowledge of language) and performance (the actual use of language in real situations).

**Competence**

It’s the implicit or explicit knowledge of the words and the rules of the languages, i.e., what one knows. It’s the speaker’s / hearer’s unconscious knowledge of language, i.e., sounds, meanings, syntax. It’s the ability to distinguish between “grammatical” and “ungrammatical” expressions, as well as to recognize ambiguity; it’s the capability of understanding and producing sentences we have never heard before. It is not observable.

Chomsky speaks of a “language acquisition device” (LAD) that all humans possess from birth that allows us to acquire the rules of the language without being taught them in an informal or formal-type setting. It explains how we know that “I am going to the movies with my friend” is syntactically correct but that “With my friend to the movies I am going” or “To the movies with my friend I am going” are syntactically incorrect albeit meaningful. However, “To with movies, I the friend going am my” is both syntactically incorrect and totally meaningless.

Many other linguistic researchers extrapolated on those notions, i.e., Hymes, Savignon, Canale and Swain, Bachman. Each added other components to Chomsky’s theory of language competence.

Hymes (1967, 1972) adds the notion of communicative competence as “the aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts.” (4) In addition to its vocabulary and grammar being correct and accurate, the language must also be contextually appropriate. This addresses the issue of language registers.

Savignon (1972) goes a step further when she defines communicative competence as “the ability to function in a truly communicative setting- that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors….It is an interpersonal trait that involves two or more persons negotiating meaning together whether through oral or written communication.” (5) Language does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in a context and usually involves two or more people in a communicative setting. The LAD allows us to interpret what is being said and to negotiate meanings. It involves spontaneous and ad-lib language in known and unknown situations. Communicative competence is the ability to function in a truly communicative setting.

Canale and Swain (1980) identified the following as subsets of communicative competence (6):

1. **Grammatical competence**: It concerns words and rules and involves understanding the skills and knowledge necessary to speak and write accurately: vocabulary, word formation, meaning, sentence formation, pronunciation, and spelling. According to Bagaric & Dijugovic, “It concerns the mastery of the linguistic code and it enables the speaker to use knowledge and skills needed for understanding and expressing the literal meaning of utterances.” (7) It is the mastery of the rules, i.e., knowing which words to use and how to put them into phrases and sentences.

2. **Sociolinguistic competence**: It concerns the appropriateness of language and knowing how to produce and understand the language in different sociolinguistic contexts, taking into consideration such factors as the status of the participants, the purpose of the interaction and the norms or conventions of
the interaction. It is the knowledge of the appropriateness of language to the context in which it is used, i.e., knowing if the words respond to the social situation at hand.

3. **Discourse competence:** This is the ability to combine and connect spoken utterances and written sentences into a meaningful whole. It ranges from simple spoken conversation to long written texts. It concerns cohesion (the grammatical and lexical linking within a text or sentence that holds a text together and gives it meaning) and coherence (what makes the text semantically meaningful). It is the ability to combine ideas to achieve cohesion in form and coherence in thought, i.e., knowing how to put the words, phrases, and sentences together in the format at hand.

4. **Strategic competence:** It concerns the appropriateness of communication strategies. It is the manipulation of language in order to meet communicative goals. It involves both verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Speakers employ this competence for two main reasons: 1) to compensate for breakdowns in communication such as when the speaker forgets or does not know a term and is forced to paraphrase or gesture to get the idea across or 2) to enhance the effectiveness of communication such as when a speaker raises or lowers the voice for effect. It is the ability to compensate for gaps in the knowledge of the code and for breakdowns in communication because of performance factors, i.e., knowing how to fill a speech gap caused by misunderstanding, misinterpretation, unfamiliar vocabulary, and lack of cultural knowledge.

At this step, language competence involves more than interpretation and negotiation; it involves the knowledge of how to produce grammatical utterances, sentences, paragraphs, etc.; it is knowing how to adapt the language to the audience, to the specific purpose of the interchange, and to the cultural demands by using the appropriate register; it is knowing how to connect the language logically and coherently; and it’s knowing how to use circumlocution, gestures, and paraphrasing to complete the message.

Bachman (1990) added the notions of organizational and pragmatic competence to language competence as follows (8):

1. **Organizational competence:** the ability to control formal language structures:
   a. **Grammatical competence:** the ability to control vocabulary, syntax, phonology/agraphology.
   b. **Textual competence:** the ability to organize cohesive conversation and imaginative language which allows one to tell stories and jokes and to create an imaginary environment.

2. **Pragmatic competence:** the ability for creating and interpreting discourse:
   a. **Illocutionary competence:** the ability to say one thing but to mean another, i.e., when asking “Is there any butter?” one is really asking someone to pass the butter. Or when someone asks “What does an engine do?” one is not interested in the mechanics of an engine but is really trying to gain knowledge about one’s world. Or when someone asks “Honey, would you take the clothes out of the dryer?” one is not asking if the spouse wants to do it, but really is telling the spouse to do it now.
   b. **Sociolinguistic competence:** the ability to perform successfully in the varied world of language with its dialects and language varieties, its registers, and its natural and idiomatic expressions.

At this step, language competence allows the speaker to perform various language functions such as pretending, suggesting, warning, promising, requesting; it allows the formation of ideas or concepts; it allows the speaker to experiment, to evaluate possible answers and solutions, to learn, discover, understand, or solve problems; it allows the speaker to create an imaginary and fictitious world.

In sum, according to Krashen and Terrell, language competence is acquired naturally and subconsciously: “Acquiring a language is ‘picking it up’, i.e., developing ability in a language by using it in natural, communicative situations,” as opposed to language learning which “is ‘knowing the rules’, having a conscious knowledge about grammar.” (9) Knowing a language means knowing how to express oneself correctly, accurately, meaningfully, coherently, appropriately, logically, culturally, functionally, and creatively in spontaneous and/or written communicative situations. However, knowing does not guarantee accurate and appropriate performance.

**Performance**

It’s the actual production and comprehension of language in specific instances of language use, i.e., what one does. In this stage, the speaker/hearer must take the following into consideration (10):

1. **Global tasks/functions:** real-world tasks that the speaker can do in the language
2. **Context:** the circumstances or settings in which a person uses language
3. **Content:** the topics or themes of conversation
4. **Accuracy:** the acceptability, quality, and precision of the message
5. **Text type:** the structure of the discourse, i.e., words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs
6. **Fluency:** the ease with which the language is delivered

However, the implicit knowledge of the rules does not necessarily translate into an accurate and correct performance. According to Botha (11), some of the factors which influence linguistic performance are:
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by Marcel LaVergne Ed.D.

1. the linguistic competence or unconscious linguistic knowledge of the speaker-hearer
2. the nature and limitations of the speaker-hearer’s speech production and speech perception mechanisms
3. the nature and limitations of the speaker-hearer’s memory, concentration, attention and other mental capacities
4. the social environment and status of the speaker-hearer
5. the dialectal environment of the speaker-hearer, the way of speaking that differs from the standard variety of the language
6. the idiolect and individual style of speaking of the speaker-hearer
7. the speaker-hearer’s factual knowledge and view of the world in which he lives
8. the speaker-hearer’s state of health, his emotional state and other similar incidental circumstances

We tend not to produce what is in our “competence” because of memory limitations, distractions, errors, false starts, etc. Conversely, the incorrect production of language is not a sign that one does not know the language. The non-linguistic factors are completely independent of the actual knowledge of language, and establish that speakers’ knowledge of language (their competence) is distinct from their actual use of language (their performance). Although linguistic competence cannot be observed or evaluated, linguistic performance can be described in terms of levels of language proficiency.

### Levels Of Language Proficiency

The following define the levels of proficiency according to the syntactic stages that students have attained. (12) The corresponding ACTFL levels are included in parentheses.

#### Stage 1 (Novice)

1. Students use selected words, phrases, and expressions with no major repeated patterns of error.
2. Students perform simple communicative tasks using single words in naming or listing activities.
3. Students use common expressions and phrases to complete simple tasks.

#### Stage 2 (Intermediate)

1. Students use sentences, strings of sentences, and recombines of learned words, phrases, and expressions with frequency of errors proportionate to the complexity of the communicative task.
2. Students begin to create new combinations of the language they have learned in stage 1.

3. Messages are understandable but some patterns of error may interfere with full comprehension.

#### Stage 3 (Advanced)

1. Students use sentences, strings of sentences, and fluid sentence-length and paragraph-length messages with frequency of errors proportionate to the complexity of the communicative task.
2. As the complexity of the task or the message increases, errors and hesitation become more frequent.

#### Stage 4 (Superior)

1. Students use sentences, strings of sentences, and fluid sentence-length, paragraph-length, and essay-length messages with some patterns of errors that do not interfere with the meaning.
2. As the complexity of the task or the message increases, errors and pauses to find appropriate words become more frequent.

### The Importance of Input

Whether in L1 or L2 acquisition, the learners acquire the rules of the language by means of the linguistic input that surrounds them in their everyday life, i.e., they learn the rules of the language by hearing, listening, and interacting to all the language that is spoken to them and around them. According to Van Patten (13), the rules of L1 cannot be taught in the traditional sense of teaching. They are acquired subconsciously through interaction and stimulus with the other speakers that surround them. According to Krashen (7), the rules of L2 can be acquired by a careful manipulation of the complexity of the input that the learners are subjected to. He refers to this process as “the input plus 1” theory, i.e., the learners should not be exposed to language input that is too far above their level of proficiency. In addition, the input must be comprehensible if it is to be effective. The input which contains all the words and the rules of the target language enters into the L1 learner’s mind by way of the receptive skill of listening and into the L2 learner’s mind by the receptive skills of listening and reading. As a companion to the importance of input, Swain (14) developed the comprehensible output (CO) hypothesis stating that “learning takes place when a learner encounters a gap in his or her linguistic knowledge of the second language. By noticing this gap, the learner becomes aware of it and may be able to modify his output so that he learns something new about the language.” She also states that learners cannot reach full grammatical competence in a language from input processing alone, but must also produce spoken language output. In summary, competence comes from the input and performance comes from the output.

### Implications for L2 Teachers

The effect of the preceding theory of language on the work of L2 teachers can be reflected in the following areas:
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1. **Goals of L2 Teaching:** Do the goals that L2 teachers set match those of the L2 learner? The L2 teacher’s goals are most probably a linguistic goal, i.e., to teach the vocabulary and the grammar of the target language so that the students can communicate correctly and accurately whereas the student’s goals are most likely to be communicative, i.e., to be able to communicate appropriately and fluently in the target language. Consequently, the curriculum should be designed to develop the learner’s performance skills in L2 rather than increase his competence.

2. **Characteristics of Language:** Does the L2 methodology focus primarily on the development of grammatical competence, i.e., the linguistic aspects of language or does it conform to the development of the following characteristics of language? Language is:
   a. **Developmental:** Language acquisition is always preceded by a silent period during which time the language system is input into the learner’s subconscious. Does the methodology allow the learners time to develop the listening skill before jumping into the speaking skill? Are the learners asked to speak before they are capable to do so?
   b. **Acquired:** Language is naturally acquired through constant exposure to the linguistic system so that the learner is mostly unaware of the process. Does the methodology include opportunities for the material to be recycled, re-used, recombined, and repeated? Do the activities tend to encourage inductive reasoning (subconscious acquisition) or deductive reasoning (conscious learning)?
   c. **Social:** The language system is acquired through social interaction. Does the methodology provide for the learners to interact with one another in collaborative group activities, in small group work, or in competitive situations? How much time is spent in one-on-one situations with the teacher?
   d. **Functional:** Language production must have a purpose. Does the methodology make clear the goals to be attained, the reasons behind the learning, or does it include lesson plans designed to cover the material in the book? How much of it is busy work with no useful purpose?
   e. **Comprehensible:** Language must be meaningful. Does the methodology focus on enabling the learners to understand the language being produced? How many of the activities require that the learners understand the language in order to be successful? How many of the activities can be accomplished by having the learners match the words in the question to the answers in the text?

3. **Developmental Stages of Language Proficiency:** Does the methodology take into consideration the stages of language proficiency as listed above or does it focus primarily on the development of linguistic competence? Are the students expected or required to perform at a level beyond their capacity? Are the students required or expected to speak in complete sentences even if a one-word or short-phrase answer can satisfy the task? Does the methodology include narrative and descriptive type activities that require the use of complete sentences? Or does it include mainly interrogative type activities? Are students given the opportunity to create the language in spontaneous situations or are they mostly engaged in predictable question and answer activities?

4. **L1 competence’s effects on L2’s performance:** Although Chomsky stated that his competence/performance dichotomy has no value for L2 teachers, researchers disagree on whether the acquisition of L1 and that of L2 are in fact the same process. The audio-lingual approach prevalent in the 1960s advocated that the process is the same but more recent Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies state that the process is different. The fact remains that L1 learners begin with a blank slate and acquire the language naturally but that L2 learners already possess language knowledge upon which the teacher can build. According to Seville-Troike, “there is general agreement that cross-linguistic influence, or transfer of prior knowledge from L1 to L2, is one of the processes that is involved in interlanguage development.” She states that “the transfer can be either positive, i.e., when an L1 structure is used in an L2 utterance and that use is appropriate or correct in the L2 or it can be negative, i.e., when an L1 structure or rule is used in an L2 utterance and that use is inappropriate and considered an error.” (15) The L2 teacher should be aware of the following areas of backlash from L1 which result from the tendency that L2 learners have to translate from L1:
   a. False friends: Words in two languages that look or sound similar, but have a different meaning, e.g. library vs. librairie.
   b. Fossilization: The phenomenon by which learners tend to keep forever in their L2 output elements of vocabulary, pronunciation, and structure in spite of the amount of instruction or practice that they receive. For example, in spite of repeated pronunciation drills, English speakers learning French will pronounce the French u as ou because the u sound does not exist in English. They will apply the closest English sound to it and consequently pronounce vu like vous and tu like tou.
   c. Word order: French learners who are unfamiliar with the French noun-adjective word order rule will usually apply the English adjective-noun word order rule and say le rouge crayon rather than le crayon rouge to render “the red pencil.” The same applies to the French verb-adverb rule: “I often go” becomes Je souvent vais instead of Je vais souvent.
d. Failure to add L2 lexical item. Learners unfamiliar with the rules governing the use of the definite article will say *Nous aimons jazz* instead of *Nous aimons le jazz* to say “We like jazz.”

e. Deletion of L1 lexical item. “What a surprise!” becomes *Quelle une surprise!* rather than Quelle surprise!

**Conclusion**

The competence/performance dichotomy can serve as a guide to the L2 teacher in the planning of L2 learning activities. The L2 learners come into the classroom already “knowing” language, i.e., they already possess the linguistic competence in L1 that they acquired naturally and subconsciously. It has been shown that knowing a language is more than learning words and grammatical rules. Language competence means not only knowing how to produce grammatical utterances but also how to manipulate language to a desired effect. The role of the L2 teacher is to direct that competence towards those aspects of the L2 language system that are different from the L1 system and that can cause problems. The more important role of the L2 teacher is to plan and facilitate activities that will increase the performance level of the learner.

**References**

10. Source unknown
12. Author unknown

**About the author**

Marcel LaVergne, Ed.D., retired, was a high school teacher of French, a Director of Foreign Languages, an adjunct professor of Foreign Language Methods, a textbook author, and a consultant on Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. He was associated with the National Capital Language Resource Center as the author of the Sound Bites for Better Teaching column.
**Motivators For Mastery**

Every MS teacher has heard the complaint, “Oh, Madame, we did this yesterday…”

As a middle school teacher, the action can never stop. Engaging the learner and repetition to attain mastery of the material remains a driving factor in the class. Repetition is defined as the “recurrence of an action or an event”. However, for the middle school teacher, the activity must change constantly. One sure fire way to attract their attention is to incorporate technology. Here are a few activities that I’ve found helpful:

**Plickers:**
https://plickers.com/library

Easy, and fast: Create a set of questions on the website, set them in a queue for the class. Print out a set of the “cards” (shapes that all look different, but are recognized as multiple choice answers ABCD). Download the app on your phone or iPad. The teacher posts the question from the queue, students select the correct response, and hold up their response card. The teacher collects the information by holding the phone or iPad and circling around the room of held up cards. The site reports how many selected A,B,C,D (graph or number) or can indicate individual responses (if you opt to assign card and names). It serves as an easy formative assessment, and the students love playing it! Note: you use your phone or iPad, but students have no access to it. You collect the answers on it, but your personal information is not viewed by them).

**Quizlet Live**
https://quizlet.com/live

Exciting! My introduction was through a student! I had a quizlet account, and used the activities for a warmup in the language lab. For those unfamiliar with Quizlet, it is a free online account. The teacher creates vocabulary lists, or verb lists, and students can race against “gravity” to correctly answer the questions before it implodes. Recently, a new feature was added, which has completely changed the class. Using the lists you have already created (or you’ve gotten from a shared listing), you sign up for Quizlet Live. The teacher receives a 6 digit number, and puts it on the board. The students sign in with the number. Immediately their names register on the list. When everyone is signed in, the teacher hits continue, where the students are broken into teams (the names of the teams are awesome: les animaux en français!!). Once you hit begin, the students are completely focused on getting the correct answer. Each team member has to answer one question at a time, the second question hops to another team member, and if any are incorrectly answered the team goes back to the start. I leave the students all over the room, not seated near their team mates. After two rounds on one team, you can continue the same game, but “change teams”. The intensity and enthusiasm is astonishing. Most importantly, they have mastered the verbs/vocab very quickly!

**Team Shake**
http://www.rhine-o.com/iphone-apps/team-shake/
(Apple store .99 also available free for Android in Google Play Store)

This app has hidden qualities! Whenever a teacher is selecting partners/teams, students are always suspicious how the selection process happens. Using popsicle sticks can take time as they are drawn out and names read. On this app, student names are uploaded for each class.

The teacher can then identify via student skill level, or gender. Teams can be chosen by the number of teams or the size of team. For example, the teacher can select 3 students per team, mixed levels…or 4 students per team, similar levels…or partners m/f and the teams appear on colored lists. If there are absent students, the teacher can temporarily disable their names so they are not included in the listing. All students feel that it was done impartially, when, in fact, the teacher has a bit of pre-programmed control!

These sites are not limited to middle school teachers only! Applications and variations for different age levels make them multipurposed.

Hope these suggestions add a few more tricks to your Mary Poppins magic bag.

Submitted by Callie Egan.

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**Noteworthy**

**Core Practices**

**Using Authentic Cultural Texts**
Amanda Robustelli-Price

Interview with Katie Stanton, Falmouth HS/MaFLA Newsletter 3/6/17

MaFLA’s Core Practice sessions are enjoying tremendous success. The fourth in the series, and Spring’s first, was on authentic texts. I decided to interview a staff member for some further details on the workshop on March, 4, 2017 at Melrose High School, hosted by the Director of World Languages K-12/ELL, Kim Talbot. Katie teaches in Falmouth, levels 1-3, but focused, she told me, mostly on level 3 for this workshop.

**Are you a member of MaFLA?**

“Yes, I am, as of 2016. Before that I was concentrating on Master’s level courses and other courses for certification so have not had a chance to participate fully.”

**Have you attended MaFLA’s Fall conference?**

“I have not yet because of its timing, but I intend to in the future.”

**What are your ‘take-aways’ from this Core Practice Session?**

“I thought it was good overall, but specifically because the focus was not on students knowing every word of the target language, or the details, but instead on their getting the main idea. I think students need to be confident with getting things from context and also that there is a certain ambiguity to language learning. I like that this session gave a purpose to the readings such as, a performance assessment. I also liked that it was ok to use English in the lower levels as long as the teacher uses the target language. That the use of the target language increases as the levels increase also makes sense. Amanda also said that this process can continue throughout the unit, so that pre-reading can be done one day but that in general, its not just restricted to one class period. She also used charts of samples of authentic texts. There were lots of examples of authentic texts and different ways to use them, i.e. visual, audio, etc.with useful links as resources. I want to use newspapers.
MaFLA, working as a part of the Language Opportunity Coalition, has again worked with lead sponsors Representative Kay Khan and Senator Karen Spilka to re-submit legislation for a state Seal of Biliteracy which would reward high school graduates for their functional level of proficiency in English and another language. The Seal encourages a foreign language department focus on proficiency development and pushes for testing of student proficiency using one of several tests available at the national level that assess language proficiency according to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The Seal also rewards heritage speakers of languages other than English for the skills that they already have.

Our sincere thanks go to those who answered MaFLA’s request in late January to contact their legislators to ask them to co-sponsor this important but, now, brand new legislation. Even though we are beginning our third two-year legislative session attempt to pass the Seal legislation, we remain hopeful that it will pass. Why the delay, you ask? Why has it taken so long to get this no-brainer, no-cost and so beneficial legislation through? Well, there is no easy answer in legislation and politics. As we told you in the last newsletter, in the last legislative session, we came very close to a full legislative vote on the bills and the legislation did pass favorably through the Joint Education and Joint Ways and Means Committees. We are confident that there is wide and bipartisan support for the Seal and that it will pass in this session with our continued advocacy and your continued support when we ask you to reach out to legislators.

As frustrated as I am that the Seal of Biliteracy legislation has taken so long to pass, personally, I have continued to press on in leading this effort because I believe that this is the most important transformative action that can happen to language teaching, learning and programming in our state right now. When we value proficiency development as a critical college- and career-readiness skill, programming transforms to better meet the needs of students, and students engage in the transformation as they see the utility of the work they are doing and are rewarded for the progress that they are making. To me, it is thrilling to have a way to document proficiency in a scale that is nationally understood.

In most of my classes at Salem State University, from beginning Spanish language to graduate level courses, at some point in the semester, the discussion will turn to why language teaching and learning just does not seem to be a priority in the US or why we are not graduating great numbers of highly proficiency students. At Salem State, for our language requirement students, this judgment stems from the fact that so many students have to start their course work at the 101 level since they do not remember enough of the language they learned in high school or it just didn’t ‘stick.’ For my Methods students, the discussion grows from the fact that while the MA Framework for Foreign Languages elaborates the ideal K-12 programming where all students have access to language learning, the reality is that only about 20% of MA districts have any kind of elementary language program and there is no state foreign language requirement, nor, for that matter, a dedicated Foreign Language Coordinator position at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Most recently, in my Peer Tutoring course, the heritage Spanish speaker students in the class were discussing their K-12 school experience of being told not to speak Spanish in the playground and the cafeteria. Peer Tutoring course is one of two community service courses in our department, and in this one, students are trained to tutor and

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**Core Practices (conc.)**

with Spanish III, for example. And I like the templates provided.”

**How will you apply what you learned to your daily instruction?**

“I use the concepts I learned anyway, but now I will include the purpose to produce something more than just for practice or because it relates to the vocabulary and grammar being addressed in the text or unit. I like the possibility of using a variety of authentic texts. And that they can be used anywhere.”

**How comfortable are you with proficiency?**

I feel pretty confident with it since we work on it in the department with lots of resources, but it wasn’t specifically part of my student teaching or coursework. I understand it but need to put it into practice. I see that I need to move away from simple multiple choice and more toward production of target language that is unrehearsed and authentic. It takes time for students to get used to the format.”

**Do you intend to attend future MaFLA events?**

“I am attending all of the Spring Core Practice sessions this year and after having my baby this summer, I will continue to attend MaFLA events in the future.”

Submitted by Pat DiPillo
support the language requirement students in the department or students in other settings such as Melrose High School and the Salem State Preschool. The first third of the semester orients the new interns to the special needs of teaching and tutoring, and discussions are on going about how to motivate language students and make language learning engaging and communicative.

The proficiency movement is transforming language learning and teaching since it pushes teachers to engage students in their developing language proficiency. The Seal of Biliteracy offers a way to concretize the classroom experience and demonstrate what students can actually do with the information learned in class. Unlike the standardized tests offered to try to validate most subjects, a proficiency test is not actually connected to specific content. This means that the proficiency oriented classroom practices a variety of performances to get our students ready for open-ended, creative communication outside of the classroom with the expectation that it will develop to a functional level of ability.

Bottom line, the need for proficient citizens is only going to increase. In fact, a recent report from Renew Our Economy showed that between 2010 and 2015 the number of online job postings in Massachusetts requiring bilingual candidates had almost tripled! And, the tides seem to be changing in terms of the national focus and appreciation of language learning. As you read in Ted Zarrow’s article, as a result of a bipartisan commission by Congress, the first since the Carter administration, a “Commission on Language Learning” was created at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2015 to study the importance of languages in our economy, diplomacy, productivity and overall fulfillment and determine the actions that need to take place to ensure excellence in languages. Their report entitled America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century was just released in February. The report outlines the recommendations to create the pipeline and build capacity to provide strong foreign language learning opportunities for all students. To coincide with the release of the report, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the national foreign language (K-20) teacher organization, launched a campaign called Lead with Languages with a great video to raise public awareness about the report and the importance of language learning in general.

The report underscores that there is a critical need for language teachers across the US. It is a great time to be a language teacher! I envision a near future where college credit is given for proficiency gained in the K-12 programming and employers will expect a proficiency level on résumés when knowledge of a language is mentioned, as a result of the Seal of Biliteracy. Even more exciting, I envision a near future where, when I say I am a language teacher and Spanish teacher trainer, people respond enthusiastically about the importance of language learning in the United States.

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**Monson High Celebrates Students with Shout Outs**

This year we started a new initiative at Monson High called Shout Out. Any teacher can write a Shout Out to a student for something special he or she has done. Sometimes I give a shout out to students who have accomplished a challenging task. Sometimes I shout out to someone who has helped in class – like the Shout Out I recently gave to a student who mentioned to me at the end of class that she had collected all of the materials and notes for an absent peer and would take the responsibility to get them to her the next day. The Shout Outs are displayed in the hallway and we see students reading them frequently. When a Shout Out is no longer displayed, it is given to the student. It has been a very positive initiative. We also have started a program called Shout Out to a colleague. I recently sent a Shout Out to a colleague who invited me into her classroom to co-teach with her a short story by Jorge Luis Borges. We enjoyed planning the lessons together and working with the students. We both felt that the classes went well and we received very positive feedback from the students. In my Shout Out I thanked her for inviting me in and for working so collegially with me in the process. We both learned a lot from each other.

If you want to know more about Shout Outs, contact me at ronie@mafla.org.
Send YOUR contribution to the next issue to:
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Deadline for the Back to School Issue is Aug.  5