Teachers Facing New Challenges
by Ronie Webster

As the school year began, teachers found themselves facing challenges with the new paradigm or, better yet, the new model of teaching. Very few schools returned in September with complete classes face-to-face. Some systems implemented a hybrid system with some students in class and others attending virtually. A common schedule for this system divided students into two groups, each of which would be in class for two days per week and remote for the other two days. With this schedule Wednesday (or another fifth day) was designated as a 100% virtual day. Some districts decided to begin the school year on a 100% remote schedule and monitor data to determine when/whether they would go hybrid. Teachers either found themselves in the semi-familiar virtual classroom from the spring or they were faced with the new challenge of a mixed in-person/virtual classroom. Although many were nervous, concerned and even felt unprepared for this new reality, they embraced it, understanding that this was what was necessary.

I will confess that I am no longer in the classroom, having retired a year ago, but I have read a great deal about the issues teachers have encountered and I have followed the dialog and comments that my fellow teachers and colleagues have posted on social networks. So, let’s look at some of the new challenges teachers have faced.

Physical Spaces

Upon returning to school, many teachers found that they had been moved to new locations. The reason given for this was the necessity of limiting the movement of the students. I’m sure to many this was upsetting but they accepted their new locations because to them their location was not as important as being present to do what they loved – teaching.

Classrooms have taken on a new look. My classroom always was arranged with desks in groups of four. This was perfect for my cooperative teams. It allowed me to cruise among the groups as they were working on communicative tasks, get feedback by listening to them, and provide supports as needed. Classrooms are now arranged with all desks facing forward, six feet apart. Although this is different, teachers are finding ways to make this physical layout work for communicative tasks.

I have read that in some districts, teachers were instructed to go into their classrooms prior to opening and remove ALL of their personal belongings. Well, my classroom was always filled with materials from posters and art reproductions to books for enrichment, and realia I have purchased over the years. I always wanted to offer to my students an interesting, eye-catching and stimulating environment. If the school prohibits all of my personal things, and some even do not allow teachers to post materials on walls, I would have found my classroom to be a bit sterile and cold. So how are teachers meeting this challenge? They are creating Google Bitmoji classrooms that are interesting and get the attention and interest of their students. Here I am going to admit that I am such a passionate life-long learner that when I started to see these, I had to go and make my own Bitmoji classroom. Even though I have no class in which to use it, I am pleased with what I created. It reflects those elements of my classroom that are important – interesting posters, wall messages, links to reference materials and supports. I even included something to let my students know about me. On the arm of the couch in my Bitmoji classroom is a kitty which is similar to the photo of my kitty which I always had posted in my classroom.

To provide support for student learning, many teachers posted sentence fragments or key vocabulary for interpersonal tasks on their classroom walls. Another challenge was how to make these same supports available to those students sitting in front of them as well as those students who are attending remotely. It didn’t take long for someone to discover that this can be done on Padlet. A padlet could become a virtual word wall or it could become a reference for all students during an interpersonal task. The creative and innovative ideas that come from the professionals in the field never cease to amaze me. Once again, challenge accepted and resolved.

Movement around the classroom has become another issue for teachers. Most
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teachers move around their classrooms, monitoring student work, providing feedback and listening to students as they negotiate and solve tasks. With hybrid teaching this is not easy to accomplish. Many teachers have told me that they now find themselves sitting behind the multiple screens that they are monitoring and are no longer able to get up and interact on a personal level with the students who are physically present. Those teachers who have been teaching completely remote confess that they look forward to short breaks to get up, move and do a bit of walking. To help offset this new, sedentary teaching style, several of my colleagues have told me that they now make sure that they get outdoors for at least a brief time each day after school to get fresh air and exercise.

Technology

As the beginning of the school year approached, teachers received training in the technology that would be used by their school system. PD revolved around learning the various platforms and gaining an understanding of how they could be used. Even the most reluctant anti-technology educators embraced the change and dove into the professional development to prepare themselves to use the technology to deliver their curriculum. Many faced a steep learning curve, but teachers worked together, supporting each other so that everyone could feel somewhat prepared. Those who were more conversant with the technology stepped up to assist the teachers who were experiencing it for the first time. Some teachers have actually stated that this instructional model and delivery system is so different that they feel like new, novice teachers again.

And what about the students and technology? Some teachers have reported that they have students who are using all different types of devices. Some are on Chromebooks and some are on regular PCs. Others are on Macs and Ipads and still others are trying to stay up with things using their smart phones.

Even in districts where students were provided with common devices, some students have opted to use the devices that they already had at home and with which they were familiar. Many teachers have commented that they have found it difficult to support all of the students with all of the different devices and are trying to learn how to help students logon, troubleshoot, and find materials using the various platforms that their students have. As one teacher said “At times it seems overwhelming but I want to help them.” This differential access to devices and supportive technology along with varied levels of supports for learning at home are other challenges that teachers have faced.

Another struggle/challenge is that in some districts not all students have up-to-date, fully functioning devices and some of the students who do have good technology have unreliable internet connections. These districts are very concerned about the sustainability and, especially, the equity of this model. Additionally, many districts which ordered computers and other technology in preparation for the school year have found that the pandemic has caused shortages - the devices are backordered or just slow in arriving. Yes, education in the midst of a pandemic is difficult in so many respects.

Students

Students, for the most part, have embraced the new paradigms of education. Some have had to learn how to use the new technologies and to navigate the various menu structures but they seem happy to be back learning. Some, however, complain that every day they are required to learn a new technology or a new program and they feel overwhelmed. Teachers and admin-
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by Ronie Webster

Teachers

Teachers are spending more time than ever planning for their classes. Most have had to totally revamp lessons and they have had to determine which elements of the curriculum are essential. Many teachers, especially those who are mid-career and have children of their own, have had to balance their own teaching duties with their home responsibilities such as supporting their own children in their education. Although they end their days exhausted, teachers continue to do their best and provide the best education possible for their students. The expression “one day at a time” has taken on new meaning this year as many teachers manage to get through one school day and then plan for the next.

Another teacher challenge is accessibility. Teachers in this new educational environment have found themselves available 24 hours a day through technology. Many teachers have lamented that they receive emails at all hours of the day and night. Because so many are conscientious and want to be there for students and parents, they feel obligated to respond. Several have commented that they are often up in the middle of the night answering the multiple emails and, sometimes, grading the missing assignments that they are receiving. The challenge has been for teachers to get themselves off the clock. They have had to learn to limit the hours that they answer questions and emails. They have had to learn to take care of themselves and incorporate well-being tasks into their daily lives.

In some schools teachers have either retired early or resigned due to the stress of the new teaching environment. Unfortunately, many districts could not find teachers to replace those who opted to leave the classroom. After numerous searches, many had to resort to putting students into online programs. In one district, the teacher who had been teaching the Spanish 3 and Spanish 4 classes was reassigned to teach the Spanish 1 and Spanish 2 classes who had no teacher due to a resignation. The Spanish 3 students started the year with a teacher, one that was familiar to them, and suddenly found that they were in a self-paced online program instead. Those who are not that independent and responsible for their own learning are finding it difficult and those who had developed a positive relationship with their teacher have discovered that they miss the human interaction. The teachers have expressed concerns that putting students into online programs might have a negative impact on those students who now may opt to end their world language studies as they are not able to deal with the paradigm shift of a self-paced, independent online course. This certainly highlights the fact that we need more people to become teachers of world languages. That, however, is a whole other challenge (see article on page 14). As I close this article, I wish to share what I heard recently. Everyone has been challenged by the ups and downs of this crazy year. But we have survived. We have learned to be tougher. We have had to be flexible and look to new ways not only to teach but to live each and every day. We have charged forward and carried on, and I believe we will come out stronger and better for it. The September issue of Vogue focused on the word HOPE. This theme was common on all the fall issues of Vogue, from Britain to Russia, from Mexico to Australia. The U.S. version had numerous articles on the topic authored by individuals from government to sports and music. The messages shared were of optimism, positivity and joy. Although I am not Anna Wintour, current editor of Vogue, I wish to send a message of hope. I hope that one day teachers can get back to their classrooms and see their students. I hope that all educators continue learning and growing as they look at new ways to instruct their students. I hope that one day we can begin to live normally; that we will be able to see friends and family, that we will once again be able to get together and laugh and share stories. I hope that we will be able to resume traveling and exploring the world. I hope that we will become a kinder, more empathetic, more understanding and gentler world. I invite you to join me in HOPE.
MaFLA’s Educator In The Spotlight
An Interview With Adriana Thomas, World Language Coordinator

Our Educator in the Spotlight, Adriana Thomas, is a World Language Coordinator and former Italian teacher in Medford Public Schools. Adrianna was recommended by MaFLA Board Member Kim Talbot who is the Director of Teacher and Leader Development for Salem Public Schools.

MaFLA: Tell us a little about yourself.
Adriana: I was born in Providence, RI, then lived and went to school in both Italy and the United States for most of my life through college, where I studied Italian and English at Smith and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. My mother is an Italian immigrant and my father is Lebanese-American. I was blessed to grow up bicultural and bilingual, though this came with challenges of identity, social emotional and linguistic struggles. This inspired me to enter the field of education, teaching Italian and Spanish at both the middle and high school levels. I am currently a K-12 World Language Coordinator in Salem Public Schools where I am fortunate enough to continue work that encompasses curriculum, teacher leadership and development and advocacy for world language learning. During my Masters research, I was particularly drawn to the special learning needs of heritage language speakers. I know those needs because I grew up learning a language that had been passed down to me by my family. My commitment to heritage language learning is something I hope to continue developing and advocating for as a member of the MaFLA Board of Directors. On a personal level, I am a hopeless dog-lover, a cooking show fan, mystery novel reader, and travel enthusiast!

MaFLA: You’ve taught a wide range of students and levels. What teaching skills do you find work with all the grades that you teach?
Adriana: I think that the core of all teaching is building relationships with students, communicating with them about subject matter and the process of learning, which cuts across all grade levels. Other areas that I believe are important are differentiation to reach learners of all abilities in the classroom; accessibility of education to all learners; both eliciting and providing feedback; and, finally, approaching the work with a lens of equity and making that an overarching part of all you do in education. To go further on differentiation, any theme that you choose in world language can be built upon and scaffolded from the novice to the most advanced level, wherein questions get more complex.

MaFLA: What do you like best about being a teacher and helping students every day?
Adriana: Without a doubt, the most fulfilling part of being a teacher is seeing students grow and gaining confidence every day, no matter if it is in small amounts. Seeing that growth gives me so much joy. And when you see the connections that you’ve built with them and you see the work they’re doing extending even beyond the world language classroom, it is simply inspiring and just rejuvenates me and the work I do.

Right now, I work most closely with students via the Seal of Biliteracy initiative. What inspires me the most about this work, in my district, is the ELs, along with heritage and world language learners, being seen and recognized for their talent, work and achievements. I’m particularly proud when I see families, especially those from immigrant backgrounds, as well as the community at large, imbued with a sense of pride about their children’s and students’ proven biliterate skills. I believe this opens the wider community’s eyes to the value and assets that understanding and speaking an additional language provides.

MaFLA: Since the proficiency movement is so new, how do you think language teaching will evolve over the next few decades? Or where do you see yourself in making the transition to teaching for proficiency?
Adriana: I think teaching for proficiency is going to revolutionize the way we teach world languages, as it shifts the focus to asset-based learning, to what the students can do as opposed to what they can’t — to a deficit-based approach. Students will often believe that they haven’t achieved enough with a world language. With a proficiency-based approach, students understand that they may be exactly where they need to be or, if not, where they need to improve. This approach pushes teachers to think beyond “fill-in-the-blanks” to what authentic language should look like. In my district of Salem, we are just beginning to implement a proficiency-based approach in classrooms. This will be of great importance to the variety of language learners we have. It’s not going to be easy, but we believe that with some hard work we will get there.

MaFLA: So then what would be your advice to another teacher making the transition to proficiency-based teaching?
Adriana: I would say, in a step-by-step manner, starting small. It will not happen overnight, but by first enacting a series of minor but intentional changes to units and lessons. Just as we, teachers, would approach our work with students in the classroom, we ourselves have to scaffold our own learning. I would also encourage teachers to reach out to colleagues that have already gone through the process of teaching for proficiency. It goes without saying that learning what has worked and hasn’t worked and the action plans you can take is helpful.
MaFLA: You have been an active member of MaFLA. How has your membership inspired your teaching?

ACFTL’s Leadership Initiative for Language Learning (LILL) has inspired me to expand my work with heritage language learners. This opportunity to be a delegate to this group was provided by MaFLA and really springboarded multiple projects and ongoing work that I and my colleagues are engaged in. DESE is currently studying heritage language standards as a part of our updated World Language Standards. I’ve teamed up with Andy McDonie, our World Language Content Specialist, to discuss gaps in implementing teaching and programming for this group throughout Massachusetts. I’m also currently working on a survey to collect data on heritage programs and teaching in Massachusetts. My hope is that this will give us an idea of what teachers need and how we can work together as a group to move our capacity forward and support each other.

My passion for providing resources and education to heritage language learners is inextricably tied to my passion for fostering educational equity for underserved and underprivileged communities. These communities are often the ones in which heritage and less-commonly taught languages are spoken and lived. This issue is vitally important to me; my connection with heritage students stems from my own experience as a first-generation American.

MaFLA: Last March, teachers found themselves all of a sudden teaching virtually. What techniques or strategies worked well for you in the virtual classroom?

Focusing on interpersonal communication in the virtual classroom has been important and leveraging the breakout room feature has been helpful. Though by no means perfect, the breakout room has been a tool for group discussion with either heterogeneous or homogeneous groupings; brainstorming and project development; or making meaning of complex text using protocols like “The Jigsaw Method.” Understanding where our students are struggling this year is also important and I encourage my team to engage in community circles and other social emotional tools to create a safe environment in such difficult times.

MaFLA: Is there anything else you would like to share?

As educators, this year has challenged us in ways we never envisioned. In a profession where we espouse equity as essential to a quality education and have recently woven ideas of social justice in our new world language standards, we have a renewed mandate to look at our own biases and make sure we are living up to our highest values. We should continue to connect our talents, lift up our students, and affirm the value of world language education in our classrooms, to our families and districts.

Above all, this year has taught us that we must learn to live with uncertainty, that nothing is a given and the most precious thing we can do is treat each other with love, respect, and forgiveness.
**Virtual Escape The Room Game For Language Teaching; Tips and Suggestions on Creating Your Own**

by Sarab Al Ani, Yale University

What is Escape the Room game?

Escape the Room game started as a recreational activity in Japan in 2004 and made its way to the rest of the world as it gained popularity (Nicholson, 2015). In this type of activity, participants are confined together in a locked room and can only escape after solving several brain teasers (Borrego et al, 2017). These “brain teasers” can include anything from discovering clues, solving puzzles, opening locks, and completing different tasks and challenges. Activities that require thinking and mental processing are not the only type of activities involved in these games. Oftentimes participants have to complete physical tasks as well, such as moving, removing, assembling and others in order to be able to find the clues, solve the riddles, etc. to complete each challenge. This game is almost always played under a time restriction and participants must use the time effectively to reach their goal (i.e. escape the room) (Gómez-Urquiza et al, 2019). Additionally, the game format often has teams competing against each other (López-Pernas et al, 2019). Escape the Room game may have first been inspired by video games with the same general format according to Wikipedia. Once the Escape the Room game concept gained popularity it went back to the virtual domain where it now acquired more elaborate designs (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escape_room). The game itself is referred to by a number of names including: Room Escape, Escape Room, Real Life Room Escape, Live Escape, Live Escape Game, Exit Game, and Escape Game (History of Room Escapes) all having the same concept.

**Escape the Room for Teaching.**

It did not take long for educators to notice the value of Escape the Room game for educational purposes as they saw an opportunity that would enable them to gain a two-fold benefit. The first was that the game design could include the knowledge and skills that learners need to master. The second benefit was to capitalize on aspects needed to complete the tasks in the game, such as: creative thinking, collaboration, communication, problem solving, time management, in addition to organization of people and resources (López, 2018, López-Pernas et al, 2019). Breakout EDU started in 2015 as a company dedicated to creation of Escape the Room type games for educational purposes (Madda, 2016). Perhaps the one big difference between Escape the Room game and The Breakout EDU games is the physical room escape. As you might imagine, locking students (regardless of their age) in a room is not the safest option. Therefore, Breakout EDU games are based around a box closed and secured with several different locks, or sometimes multiple locked boxes. Thus, the goal becomes to unlock the box rather than to “Escape the Room”; The big idea is still the same (Breakout EDU). Breakout EDU has games designed for science, math, social studies, arts, world languages and more. They also range from games designed for Pre-Kindergarteners all the way to adult players. In addition to games that can be played physically, Breakout EDU also provides virtual versions of these games.

**Escape the Room for Language Teaching.**

In addition to the reasons mentioned above (teamwork, leadership, etc.), using Escape the Room type of activities for language teaching seem to have one extra value; which is that when designed correctly, this type of game can have learners use all three modes of communication (Interpretive, Presentational and Interpersonal) in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed manner. This type of game has also been shown to increase learner’s motivation when it comes to oral communication (Dale & Geisel, 2019, López, 2018, Stollhans, 2020).

What do I need to create my own digital Escape the Room game?

The current situation of having much - if not most - educational instruction conducted remotely makes it ideal for virtual instruction and for incorporating the virtual Escape the Room game. It has been argued that one of the elements that is affected the most during remote instruction is the social aspect of face-to-face learning (Huang-Saad 2019).
et. Al. 2020). In this regard, digital Escape the Room type of educational games seem to be ideal as they create a communal like feeling in the team that is working towards their common goal (Dale & Geisel, 2019, López, 2018, Stollhans, 2020).

In today’s classroom, where much of the teaching takes place remotely, the virtual version of the game is especially relevant. We also need not worry about the learners being trapped in a room since they indeed are not! Perhaps it is time to bring the game back to its origins. So, what do we need to create our own digital Escape the Room game?

1. **Theme**

   The first thing you need to create your own virtual Escape the Room game is a theme. A theme is needed in order to create a clear unified pathway for designing the rest of the game. For language instruction, having a unifying theme is not a problem as much language instruction is carried out thematically to begin with. All you need to do is choose one of your curricular themes and develop the game around it. With a little creativity, any theme can be a good theme for escaping.

2. **Story line**

   A storyline is essential in Escape the Room games. It provides a plot for the common goal. You can think of it in the simple terms of answering the following questions:
   - Where are we (the theme will help you answer that)?
   - What are we doing (the theme will help you answer that)?
   - Why are we trapped? (Capitalize on using the target language here to model language for learners, get them involved in the game and add richness to your game).
   - How did we get trapped? (This is an optional question that you can eliminate unless it is related to the way out).
   - How do we escape? (Learners need to know what it is that they must do to escape. For instance, answer five questions to arrive at the number combination that will unlock the door).
   - How much time do we have? (The vast majority of “Escape the Room” games have a time limit)
   - Is there a competition with another team, and why? (Answering this can be part of the third question in this series, above)
   - What is the consequence of not escaping? Some instructors, however, do give incentive for winning teams such as, the team that finishes first gets to answer four questions instead of five on the next quiz.

3. **The room**

   The virtual room your learners are trapped in will be decided as you create the story line (it could be the classroom, a haunted house, a chemistry lab, a train station. Use your imagination). To create this room you need an image inserted in a software such as Google Slides, PowerPoint, Word Doc etc.

4. **Clues**

   The clues are anything and everything your learners will need to help them answer the questions, solve the riddle, work out the puzzle, or complete a task. It can be anything from pictures, to text, to audio, to video, to a combination of any of these. You might want to capitalize on authentic mate-
Virtual *Escape The Room* Game For Language Teaching; Tips and Suggestions on Creating Your Own

Tutorials for building virtual *Escape the Room* games:
The Skeptical Educator  Kesler Science  EZ EdTech!  Lisa Marie Mazariego

Referenced Resources:
Free “Escape the Room” games  Breakout EDU  Escape the Room. Wikipedia

*Escape the Room* games that I have created:
Escape the Room ; Arabic Restaurant Edition  (Intermediate Arabic (Levantine Dialect))
Escape the Haunted House ; Who is the Mysterious Person?  (Novice Arabic (Modern Standard))

Referenced Articles:


Madda M.J (2016). *Adam Bellow Becomes CEO of Breakout EDU to Spread Gamified Learning*.


Effective mentors help new teachers find opportunities to grow as professionals in the challenges and learning risks inherent in the first few years of teaching.

Are you looking for a way to “give back or pay it forward”? Are you a veteran teacher who is passionate about teaching and learning? Do you feel ready to share your experience, expertise, and wisdom? Do colleagues see you as supportive and empathetic? These attributes are hallmarks of influential mentors.

If your answer is yes to most of these questions, you probably already are a mentor; if not, you need to be one. Novice and less experienced teachers are looking to “hire” professionals with your skillsets!

Although mentoring benefits all educators, my focus here is on classroom teachers. Every year, new teachers enter the profession with different backgrounds and levels of preparation: recent graduates with limited or no classroom experience, profession changers, educators returning to work after a hiatus, and experienced teachers moving from one district to another or from independent schools to public schools. While the professional stage of being a new teacher is unique to each individual, the challenges are the same. When veteran teachers are asked about their first years, they clearly remember what it felt like and quickly list the kinds of support they wish they had.

In which areas do new teachers want ongoing support?

New teachers often become overwhelmed by their work’s labor-intensive nature, combined with their lack of overall experience. Addressing the countless nuanced issues that arise on any teaching day while keeping students at the center can be challenging. Districts must realize that the first few years of teaching are critical. New teachers are paired with experienced mentors who can help them make the transition from student to teacher. Successful mentors help new colleagues become skilled teachers soon.

Carol P. Radford of Mentoring in Action writes, teaches, and speaks eloquently about the need for and benefits of structured, effective mentoring programs. “Research shows that the most important relationship for novice teachers is the mentor. If you [the novice teacher] are fortunate enough to have an experienced teacher assigned to you, take advantage of all she has to offer. Experience brings wisdom, and you can benefit from this. The sink and swim method of inducting a new teacher is not helpful.” (Carol Pelletier Radford, The First Years Matter, 2016, p. 8.)

New teachers mention the following among the areas in which they need support:

- Effective lesson planning and adjusting practice
- Classroom organization
- Classroom management
- Optimal learning environment
- Feedback to and from students
- Communicating with parents
- School culture
- Teacher responsibilities outside the classroom
- Collaborating with colleagues
- Managing stress

Carol P. Radford also advocates for aligning induction and mentoring programs with the Massachusetts DESE Teacher Rubric. The four standards are relevant to these topics and can be used to address these areas of growth. (DESE CLASSROOM TEACHER RUBRIC, August 2018)

How do mentors help new teachers grow as professionals?

“If new teachers are paired with high-quality, trained mentors and receive frequent feedback, their students may receive the equivalent of up to five months of additional learning, a new study found.” (Madeline Will on June 22, 2017, 8, Education Week.) Influential mentors share their mistakes and how they learned from them, thus giving mentees the confidence to accept mistakes as part of their learning process. Additionally, they help them understand the direct correlation between effective teaching and their students’ learning. Successful mentors have mentees who see them as allies, consultants, and coaches. In his Edutopia article, David Cutler states: “New teachers must feel confident in expressing doubt or admitting mistakes to experienced teachers, without fearing embarrassment or repercussions. In this respect, mentors serve as confidants, not evaluators, concerned only with helping mentees – and, in turn, students – succeed in the classroom.” (https://www.edutopia.org/blog/why-new-teachers-need-mentors-david-cutler)

Research-based evidence shows that having a quality mentor helps new colleagues become skilled teachers sooner. “Mentoring is a fundamental form of human development where one person invests time, energy, and personal knowledge in assisting the growth and ability of another person . . . each of us has a birthright to actualize our potential. Through their deeds and work, mentors help us to move toward that actualization.” (Shea, Gordon F. (1997) Mentoring [Rev. Ed.] Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publication.) Professor John Hattie, author of research-based Visible Learning, encourages teachers to “know thy impact.” He states that teacher-effectiveness is the number one influencer of student achievement, shown on his “barometer of influence.” (Hattie, J. [2012] Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning. New York, NY:Routledge.)

What do mentors need to be effective?

Excellent teachers need the training necessary to become proficient in their new role. Successful induction and mentoring programs match mentors with novice teachers based on the subject matter or
grade level. They also stress that trust and confidentiality are crucial, non-negotiable requirements for being a mentor. Therefore, when school districts offer training and ongoing support, mentors thrive. Mentors are observers; they need to give actionable feedback that helps improve the new teachers’ work. Mentees do not want to hear “great job” or “everything is fine.” They crave comments on why something worked or not.

In my experience, one of the most powerful impacts of mentoring is the mentor/mentee observation. School leaders need to provide release time so mentors can observe the mentees’ classes. It benefits both: the veteran teachers reflect on their practices, and the new teachers can see successful exemplars of student rapport, lesson pacing, clarity, and classroom management strategies. These visits are never evaluative.

Some areas in which school districts can train and support mentors include:

- Providing a structured, articulated Induction and Mentoring Program
- Identifying the new colleagues' strengths and what needs strengthening
- Ongoing support from other mentors
- Working through challenges
- Giving honest, actionable feedback that helps new teachers grow
- Using classroom observations as a tool for building on effective teaching strategies
- Provide release time to observe the new colleagues' lessons
- Reflecting on their knowledge of pedagogy and best practices
- Staying positive and modeling resilience and self-care

The informal everyday conversations, advising how to craft an email to parents, and checking its tone before the new teacher sends it, providing emotional support are all part of the mentor's work. These organic interactions are as valuable as the planned conversations and targeted feedback mentors glean from training.

In conclusion, the mentor/mentee relationship is enriching and often a lasting one. Examples of mentoring relationships throughout history include Socrates and Plato, Hayden and Beethoven, and Freud and Jung. Mentor is the name of Odysseus' friend in Homer's Odyssey. When he goes to fight the Trojan War, he entrusts his son Telemachus to Mentor until he returns. Mentor now means friend, trusted advisor, teacher, and wise person. You, too, can be defined by these noble attributes. Moreover, you can reap the rewards of “paying it forward” by seeing a new teacher blossom because of your gift of mentoring.

Editor’s note: I am sharing this Facebook post, with permission, from a former student of mine. I love the positive message and her persistent optimism.

And for all of this, you’re given bar graphs on tests to show if what you’re doing is actually making a difference. But there are other data points you should consider as well.

1. **Your students are asking questions, not just giving answers.**
   Critical thinking does not mean thinking harder before giving an answer. It means being critical of all possible answers. If your students are asking more questions, and feel comfortable doing so, you can rest assured they will continue the habit outside your class.

2. **You have used your authoritative role for inspiration, not intimidation.**
   Monkey see, monkey do. I once had a writing professor who, as a best-selling novelist, was not too proud to bring his own raw material to class for the students to workshop. This was a great lesson in humility that I’ll never forget.

3. **You have listened as often as you have lectured.** Another lesson in authority.
   Your students have respected your thoughts and ideas by attending your class; the least you can do is respect theirs. Lending an ear is the ultimate form of empowerment.

4. **Your shy students start participating more often without being prompted.**
   Cold-calling may keep students on their toes, but it never creates an atmosphere of collaboration and respect. When the quiet ones feel comfortable enough to participate on their own, you know you’ve made an impact.

5. **A student you’ve encouraged creates something new with her talents.**
   The simple act of creating is so personal, memorable, and gratifying that you can rest assured your student will want to make it a habit.

6. **You’ve been told by a student that, because of something you showed them, they enjoy learning outside of class.**
   Even if it becomes a short-lived interest, your student will realize that learning outside of class doesn’t have to mean doing homework.

7. **You’ve made your students laugh.**
   People like, and therefore listen to, other people who make them laugh. Showing you have a sense of humor about a topic will lubricate the learning path for your students.

8. **You’ve tried new things.**
   Students, especially if they are older, can be critical of change. A new grading system or an unexpected group discussion session can easily lead to resentment instead of renewed interest. But your students will remember it. Whether the change succeeds or not, they will remember it years down the road when all their other classes, so similar to one another, blur together.

9. **You’ve improvised.**
   Respect and inspiration result from going out on a limb, whether the limb breaks or not.

10. **Your student asks you for a letter of reference.**
    Whether you get bombarded by requests for recommendation letters each year or have been asked for one in your entire career, you can’t deny the confidence you’ve boosted and the difference you’ve made.

11. **You have taken a personal interest in your students.**
    Your favorite student still may not get into college or achieve his career goals—it’s
frustrating, but it happens—however, the chances that he will are infinitely higher simply because you showed an interest.

12. You’ve let your passions show through in your lessons.
It’s hard to stay animated when you’ve been teaching the same material for twenty-five years, but it’s also hard for your students to stay animated when they don’t know why your subject should excite them. Even if they never become excited by your subject, they have learned that different people have different interests and that it’s okay to share your passion regardless of what other people think.

13. You’ve made students understand the personal relevance of what they’re learning.
Psychologists have proven time and time again that people remember things much better if they are personally relevant. Perhaps the lone advantage in a self-centered culture.

14. You have cared—and shown that you cared.
Researchers at the University of Leicester have proven that students assign the most authority to teachers who care about them. If this is true, then you are demonstrating a wonderful principle: that respect comes from kind behavior.

15. You have helped a student choose a career.
Whether your student was already interested in your subject when she entered your class or only became interested once you started teaching, you know you’ve done a great thing when she asks you privately about careers in your field.

16. One of your students becomes an educator.
Maybe one of the greatest honors of all. You must know you had some part in the process, whether it was something you did or (yikes) didn’t do.

17. A parent approaches you with kind words.
Certainly too seldom the case, but reassuring when it happens. Sometimes you have no idea your student listened to a word you said until a relative comes forward to thank you.

18. Your students visit you when they don’t have to.
This is not a popularity contest. This is an accessibility contest. If your students feel comfortable approaching you outside of class, whether for help on an assignment or advice on a career, you’ve made a difference already.

19. You can be a mentor when you need to be.
Many students suffer from major obstacles to learning in the form of inner conflict or turmoil at home. While school counselors exist for a reason, you can’t afford to be completely closed off to personal issues. Learning is not independent from feeling, and this is something you can demonstrate to your students.

20. You practice strength and patience.
We’ve all reacted to current situations with emotions left over from the past, whether it’s trouble at home or personal strife. The ultimate lesson, at the end of a rough day, is not blaming anyone but yourself for your reactions. Students are always watching; someday someone will be watching them too. Despite what administrators might drill into our skulls, educators exist to produce good people, not good test results. The true measure of our success is hard to record on paper but easy to recognize in a student's behavior. Look for the signs and be open to improvement.

This article is based on a post first published on opencolleges.edu.au; Other Data: 20 Signs You’re Actually Making A Difference As A Teacher; image attribution flickr user horizontalintegration.

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https://www.teachthought.com/pedagogy/other-data-20-signs-youre-actually-making-a-difference-as-a-teacher/?fbclid=IwAR0I3W7QHzqvUsyfUCHlty-vpZCuyW9Rjr3JIDkeM8MppuQnODl-BOHGXhG2k
Recruiting Teachers In The Target Language: Developing And Implementing Open Educational Resources For Language Teacher Recruitment

By Michele Back and Joseph Dean, Neag School of Education, University of Connecticut, Storrs

There remains a serious world language teacher shortage across the nation, and language teachers are the ideal people to try and shore up the ranks: we are passionate about language and culture, know the profession, and have direct access to motivated students who are learning the language and are beginning to figure out what they want to do in the workforce. However, world language teachers also already have plenty on their plates with teaching alone. This year one of the authors of this article (Michele) was chosen as one of NECTFL’s Mead Leadership Fellows. Our project for 2020-2021 will entail designing online, open educational resources for world language teacher recruitment. These resources will be in several target languages (still to be determined, but most likely Spanish, French, and one other language) so that language teachers can integrate them into their courses. By providing recruitment materials in target languages, we can allow teachers to seamlessly incorporate them into units on careers, schools, or other related themes, simultaneously providing new open access target language resources and advocating for the profession without adding an undue additional burden on teachers.

Our interest in this project stemmed from a pilot study that we conducted with two of Neag’s partnership schools, in which we implemented a Spanish-language adaptation of ACTFL’s Educators Rising recruitment program. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this program, Educators Rising is a series of online modules that introduce students to the importance of world language education and how to take steps towards becoming future world language teachers. The current iteration of the program can be found here. Our goals in doing so were to see what current high schoolers think about world language teaching and to assess the effectiveness of the recruitment materials.

Although ACTFL suggests implementing these modules as part of an after-school or lunchtime club, doing so can be challenging, considering the responsibilities world language teachers may have after school and how busy students, particularly high school students, are with activities such as sports, other clubs, jobs, or just catching up on homework. In order to make these modules more accessible to students and teachers, we adapted a previous version of the modules into the target language so that our Spanish teachers could use them as part of their courses. We then held focus group meetings with the students in order to get their take on the modules’ effectiveness, as well as reasons they may (or may not) be considering teaching. Our findings from this pilot study will be published in the Summer, 2020 issue of Foreign Language Annals. Through the process of conducting the study, we saw areas where the students had concerns, but also reaffirmed our belief that target-language versions of the recruitment materials could be useful.

With the support of NECTFL and the Mead Leadership Fellows Program, we are well-positioned to take this project to the next level. We have distributed a survey (found here) to world language teachers around the country to discover what they are currently doing in their own classrooms to recruit future world language teachers, as well as to gauge their familiarity with ACTFL’s Educators Rising program. To date, 120 people have responded to this survey. Results so far indicate that although 65% of respondents do talk with their students about becoming world language teachers, only 5.5% incorporate these discussions into their formal curriculum. Of particular interest is the fact that 77% of respondents have never heard of Educators Rising; moreover, of the 23% who have heard of it, only 1% has used it in their classes. This suggests that world language teachers, if they know about the program at all, are not finding it to be something they can incorporate into their teaching; it is therefore not reaching potential teacher candidates. We believe that adapting these modules into the target language so that they might be more readily used in language classes could be an effective solution. And so, we turn to you for help.

Our next step for this project is to put together a task force of world language teachers who are interested in assisting us with adapting the modules. Fifty percent of our survey respondents have indicated interest in participating in this initiative; our hope is to begin this work over the summer. The more people we have on board, the easier it will be to divide the work of translating the modules and adding target-language resources, with the goal of having online, open educational resources for recruitment ready to pilot in the fall.

Whether or not you are able to participate in this initiative, the project will benefit all world language teachers and the profession by offering accessible, online teacher recruitment materials in the target language that can be easily incorporated into relevant units. Given the critical shortage of language teachers in Connecticut, the Northeast region, and the country, we hope that you will consider participating.


Working on the Recruiting Teachers Pilot Project

This summer I had the opportunity to work on adapting the Educator’s Rising series into Spanish. Was part of a team of Spanish teachers who analyzed the original materials in English, translated text into Spanish and found similar resources such as videos and graphics in the target language. We worked together from June until August on the development of these materials. The Spanish materials are available for grades K-16. Another group worked on adapting the materials into French for grades K-16 and a third group worked on developing the materials for Arabic grades 9-12. This fall the modules are being piloted by participants and eventually will be shared with ACTFL in the beginning of 2021. It is anticipated that these modules in Spanish, French and Arabic whose goal is to inspire and recruit world language teachers will be available on the ACTFL website in 2021.

Ronie Webster
Understanding The Massachusetts Foreign Languages Curriculum Framework: An Analysis Of The Center For Applied Linguistics Recommendations

by Marcel LaVergne Ed.D.

Because the Massachusetts Foreign Languages Curriculum Framework had not been updated since its creation in 1999, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) contracted the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) for its help in deciding if the Massachusetts Framework should be rewritten or replaced by the ACTFL Standards.

The opening paragraph of the CAL report states that “(w)orld language education is a necessary component to prepare students for success in this culturally and linguistically diverse 21st century. The ability to communicate in multiple languages and understand other cultures equips students to be college- and career-ready in multicultural campus and business environments.” That statement sets the philosophical underpinnings for its recommendations.

This article will summarize the findings of the CAL study and offer challenging implications for the teaching of world languages.

What are the best practices in world language standards and standards revisions?

CAL conducted a literature review that examined the social changes that have created needs for standards revisions. It found that “society has undergone social, economic, and technological changes to which national and local educational standards have responded to best prepare students for success. … Because of increased international competition in academia and the workplace, students need to think like world citizens. … Using computer-based technologies, students can more easily and readily access authentic cultural materials and interact with people around the world thereby learning about contemporary culture and everyday life in the target country. … An examination of the theoretical framework of the ACTFL Standards has indicated that world language teaching and learning has responded to 21st century skills by including greater attention to skills in literacy, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.”

Implications:

1. World Language teachers need to identify those skills that students need to compete in the world and devise activities that practice those skills.
2. Language teaching must go beyond the learning of vocabulary and grammatical structures and teachers need to plan communicative building tasks that put students in collaborative and critical-thinking situations that develop both fluency and accuracy.
3. Students need to be able to link with native speakers of L2 by means of the internet to gain access to authentic L2 culture.

What is the state of world language standards across the U.S.?

CAL did a comparative analysis of world language standards in all states and the District of Columbia to examine current trends. Although most programs begin at the middle and high school levels, there seems to be an increase in K-12 programs offered. These include FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School), FLEX (Foreign Language Exploratory or Foreign Language Experience), heritage language programs, immersion programs, dual language programs and traditional language programs.

Because of the ever increasing diversity of the United States caused by the rising numbers of immigrants, there are now 350 languages spoken in the U.S. and one in five residents speaks a language other than English, the result being that most states refer to world language rather than foreign language in their standards which have been revised to include a greater variety of languages. In addition to the most commonly offered languages, such as Spanish, French, German, Latin, and Russian, students can now learn Mandarin, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Korean, etc.

The one-time focus on grammar-based pedagogies has been replaced by the Communicative Language Teaching approach. Emphasis on vocabulary and structural grammar becomes an underlying component of the Five Cs: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. The one weakness seems to be that teachers focus much more on Communication and Cultures in their curriculum planning, with Communities and Connections seldom addressed.

Standards also include performance-based Can-Do statements which allow learners to demonstrate autonomy, self-determination, and competence. In other words, students are assessed not only on what they know about the language, but, more importantly, on what they can do with the target language at different proficiency levels. However, for both the Massachusetts and the ACTFL sets of standards, respondents stated that they are more familiar with the lower proficiency levels, because very few of their students are in advanced enough programs to reach the higher proficiency levels.

Implications:

1. School systems should consider changing Foreign Language to World Language. The former too often denotes different, unfamiliar, and xenophobic. The latter is more positive and relevant sounding than foreign language, especially if the goal is the creation of a world citizen.
2. School systems need to expand the number of languages offered throughout the K-12 system to include less traditional ones such as Arabic, Mandarin, Japanese, Vietnamese, etc. if the goal is to prepare world citizens.
3. School systems need to develop K-12 sequences which will allow students
to reach higher proficiency levels in whatever language they choose and make them more competitive in the world market.

4. School systems need to create the position of K-12 Director of World Languages whose task would be to guarantee effective articulation of the world language program.

What are the needs of users in Massachusetts for world language standards?

An online survey was distributed to current and former world language educators in Massachusetts to better understand local user needs. Teachers were asked to state their language teaching experience, which languages and at what grade level they taught and in which type of program. They were then asked to rate their familiarity with the standards and the various proficiency levels, their implementation of the standards, their familiarity and implementation of the 5Cs. Lastly they stated their likes and dislikes of the standards.

The survey showed that most respondents are familiar with the ACTFL Standards which they prefer to their local ones and are attempting to use them when planning their lessons. They recognize the gaps between standards, assessments, and implementation, i.e., teachers plan communicative tasks to develop proficiency but seem to favor traditional achievement type assessments. They see the need for resources and support especially in the implementation of the 5Cs. In addition, over 50% of respondents “disagree” or “strongly disagree” that it is easy to find good textbooks that are aligned with the standards, to use the framework to guide assessments and to plan lessons.

Implications:
1. School systems need to provide professional development training in Communicative Language Teaching that will help teachers to integrate the 5Cs effectively.
2. Teachers need to recognize the difference between assessing achievement and proficiency, the former assesses what you know and the latter assesses what you can do with what you know.
3. Professional development opportunities should be planned to help teachers develop lesson plans that align with the standards.
4. School systems should provide funds for teachers to attend local, state, and national World Language conferences.
5. Teachers need to insist that publishing companies align their textbooks with the standards if they are to be considered for purchase.

Conclusion

Rather than rewriting the Massachusetts Framework, CAL recommends that we adopt the ACTFL Standards with their expressed goals and proficiency descriptors. The 2019 report recommends that we adopt the term “world language” in place of “foreign language” because the languages being learned are not foreign to many of our learners and to many of our local communities, i.e., Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Vietnamese, Chinese. In addition, CAL recommends that additional resources and more professional development opportunities be offered to teachers if we are to prepare students to have the necessary 21st century skills to be successfully competitive linguistically and culturally. The CAL study presents some difficult challenges to teachers and administrators if the Communicative Language Approach is to supersede the traditional grammar oriented approach still in vogue in too many L2 classrooms.

References:

To find CAL’s complete study and recommendations, click on the following link: http://www.doe.mass.edu/research/reports/2019/06world-language-standard.docx

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 and is a frequent contributor to the MaFLA Newsletter.
MaFLA Recognizes Dr. Roger Harris With Our Friend of Foreign Languages Award

Black students at the K–12 level are more likely to attend schools or be tracked into programs in which world languages are not available. Also, Black students complete the least number of high school credits in this subject. They earn only 4% of bachelor's degrees conferred in world languages, and Black teachers comprise merely 6% of instructors in the humanities and a mere 3% of postsecondary world language faculty (Musu-Gillete et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Without intervention, the pattern will continue. Therefore, the 2020 MaFLA Board of Directors has conferred Dr. Roger Harris Friend of World Languages Award to recognize his work countering Black students' underrepresentation in world languages.

Dr. Harris served as the Principal and Executive Director of Boston Renaissance Charter School (BRCs), with a student body predominantly African American (more than sixty percent). During his tenure from 1998 until his retirement in 2015, BRCs's Dr. Harris built a reputation as a visionary leader in public education in Massachusetts and nationally. His vision was to create an urban public school that would offer all the amenities, enrichment opportunities, and rigor found in America’s elite public and private schools. The cornerstone of Dr. Harris’ vision was world language education as part of every student's instruction during the school day. As part of the Boston Renaissance Global Education Initiative, Renaissance students learn Mandarin Chinese as a second language, beginning in Kindergarten and can continue through 6th grade.

For years, Mandarin Chinese has been designated by the federal government as a “critical language” for American students. Responding to this designation, in 2009, President Obama announced the “100,000 Strong Initiative,” a national effort designed to increase the number of American students studying in China. In the same year, Boston Renaissance Charter Public School began a collaborative and dynamic Chinese Program through a triangulated design: Envisioning, Implementing, and Evaluating a Chinese Program. Developed by Dr. Harris’ vision, the BRCs’s language program includes well-articulated goals, research-based classroom practices and assessment, and ongoing collaborative evaluation. It also embraces a professional development plan, a curriculum development process, and a high level of responsiveness to students, teachers, and families. This well-defined framework for instruction, assessment, and evaluation brings a structured approach for teaching this vital language to urban children while integrating innovative practice into the school's fabric.

As the quoted Dr. Harris, "In most [world] language programs, it's for the students who are in the talented and gifted program, students who have shown through the years a proficiency. But what we've learned in two years is, it doesn't matter what the demographic is. By exposing kids to language and culture in the early years, all the stereotypes go out the window.”

Submitted by Jorge Allen.

In Other News

Boivin Center To Celebrate Its 35th Anniversary in 2020

As I finish my 21st year as director of the Boivin Center of French Language and Culture at UMass Dartmouth, I have a great deal of pride and satisfaction in what the center has accomplished over the past 35 years.

The then Southeastern Massachusetts University established the Omer E. and Laurette M. Boivin Center for French Language and Culture with a $100,000 endowment from the 95-year-old Fall River doctor on April 11, 1985. I was there that glorious day with a gathering of my university colleagues, French dignitaries, representatives from numerous French organizations, and many school officials from the region.

Dr. Boivin had been the chief of urology at St. Anne's Hospital until he reached the age of 70, and was educated in French in Canada. He wanted to bring the French language and culture to the fore in Southeastern Massachusetts. He also wanted to show that French was the lingua franca in the world alongside English in the arts, business, technology, hospitality, medicine and diplomacy, and he focused on SMU to do just that. Apres tout (After all), he was born to French-Canadian parents, and had lived in Fall River all his life. For me, a lifelong friend of the Boivins, the moment was a dream come true.

Over the years, we have given many scholarships for needy students studying French in the States, in France or in Quebec. We have interviewed Franco-Americans in our region to document the positive impact these hard-working and industrious individuals have had on this region in the 20th and 21st centuries. In addition, we offer a certificate program in international marketing and French.

We have collaborated with other centers so we can bring our message to many other members of the university and community.

Our very popular, acclaimed cultural program has been highlighted by too many outstanding luminaries (Quebec writers, Francophile writers, French authors, Francophone scholars, French cordons bleus, chanteurs and chanteuses, etc.) to list here.

In December of last year, the preeminent writer and New York Times bureau chief in Paris, Elaine Sciolino, graced our stage with her new book, The Seine. The highly anticipated program took place in the Charlton Business College Auditorium. A reception and book signing followed the talk. Gaston Dery, the celebrated Quebecois naturalist, gave a virtual speech on biodiversity in September, and the program was a great success.

Succinctly, the Boivin Center continues to grow and meet new and even greater challenges. Finally, my hope for the next 35 years is to strengthen our Center with new and increased membership, and enhance awareness of the global impact of France, Quebec and other francophone countries in our present-day society.

Mel B. Yoken, Ph.D.
Yoken is chancellor professor emeritus of French language and literature at UMass Dartmouth.
Our theme for the Winter Issue is – Motivation

How do we motivate our students?
What are some motivation strategies you use in your classroom?
How do we motivate ourselves?
How do we deal with the reluctant learners?
How do we help students to set goals and be motivated to achieve them?
What are the factors that improve motivation or reduce motivation?

Andre Sasser
@MrsSasser

Two years ago, I was saying “do you have any questions?”. Last year I switched to “what questions do you have?” It made a difference. Today I tried “ask me two questions”. And they did! And those ?s led to more ?s. It amazes me that the littlest things have such a big impact!