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brian@factor110.com

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sam@factor110.com

Shelly Boyd
shelly@factor110.com

National Network for Early Language Learning
P.O. Box 75003
Oklahoma City, OK 73147
P 405.604.0041
F 405.605.0491
www.nnell.org

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Welcome to the new edition of Learning Languages. As your new president, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly introduce myself.

I have been a lifelong educator; teaching French in middle school, high school and university; supervising student teachers and teaching methods courses; and more recently serving as World Language and International Education Consultant for the Kentucky Department of Education.

From taking fifth graders to France on three-week back-to-back exchanges to developing the first LinguaFolio Junior, to advocating for federal early language learning legislation, I have seen first hand the advantages of acquiring language and intercultural skills at an early age and the challenges associated with building the necessary sustained support. As your president, I promise to bring NNELL’s mission—the importance of early language learning—to the forefront of the national discussion on education and provide support for your efforts as teachers, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders.

In addition to the national promotion of early language learning, NNELL will become more actively involved in the development and piloting of LinguaFolio Junior. The National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) has asked NNELL to partner with them in the revision of this reflective learning tool, so look for details about this cooperative project in the near future.

This year will certainly prove to be an exciting year for NNELL. In order to better meet the needs of NNELL’s membership, the Executive Board voted to hire an association management company, factor 110, this past summer. NNELL moved its headquarters to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and welcomed Brian Ferrell, Sam Wilder, and Shelly Boyd to manage our national organization.

Immediately, the factor 110 team redesigned the NNELL Web site, making it user friendly and giving members the ability to join online, a request we’ve heard over the past several years. Sam has been busy improving the Members-Only area and has other changes in mind to give NNELL members additional opportunities to network. Brian serves as our membership secretary and communicates with members regarding registration, payment, and renewals. Brian and Shelly provide editing and design services for Learning Languages.

In order to continue offering the variety of high quality articles along with the latest research, NNELL established a Learning Languages Editorial Board comprised of Terry Caccavale, Robert Raymond, Sandra Schoder, Jie Tian, Leah Schoenberg Muccio, and Bonnie (Olga) Correjar. As you will see by this edition of Learning Languages, the committee’s work along with factor 110, has produced another superb edition of Learning Languages for its members.

The monthly E-NNELT Notes is a tool NNELL has decided to use to update members on the latest news taking place in the organization. Members are notified of workshops and webinars, which we will be offering more frequently, presentations, a call for articles, and committee updates through this form of communication. Members also will be notified if there is new information available on the Web site and instruction on how to register for workshops. The Executive Board is excited about offering additional means in keeping the membership informed on time sensitive activities.

In September, NNELL sent out ballots for the offices of Vice President and Secretary/Treasurer and asked members to vote on the new bylaws revised by a committee over the summer. The membership voted to approve the new bylaws and elected Rita Oleksak as Vice President and Al Martino as Secretary/Treasurer. It is a joy to work with these very talented individuals.

As you know, I took over the office of President in November and Paula Patrick is now in the position of Past President. Your Executive Board is already hard at work to provide professional development opportunities and networking forums both face-to-face as well as virtual.

NNELL was quite busy at the ACTFL Convention in Boston, Massachusetts, this past November. The NNELL Executive Board met in November and developed its strategic goals. NNELL’s Annual Business Meeting took place at the conference, and Nathan Lutz gave members an overview of what has transpired with the NNELL organization. Board members listened to feedback from the Regional Representative, State Representatives, and members of NNELL that were able to attend.

NNELL was also proud to offer three sessions at ACTFL. They were: Early Language Assessment for Professional Development and Accountability; FLES Immersion Day Camps: Extending Language Learning Beyond the School Day; and Culture in the 21st Century: Where is Early Language Learning Going?

The Swap Shop Breakfast was a huge success. Participants received a CD of lesson plans from NNELL members that uploaded lesson plans on to the NNELL Web site. Participants of the Swap Shop also were very impressed with this year’s Keynote Speaker, Catherine Porter, the Past President of Modern Language Association.

The NNELL Award was presented to this year’s recipient, Stu Silberman, superintendent of Fayette County Schools in Lexington, Kentucky.

I am confident that you will find a wealth of information that will help in your quest to increase language performance and build the rigor that in turn keeps students challenged and engaged in every activity. Capture the student engagement, the excitement, and the language learning that take place in each and every classroom.
Installation of Officers

On November 20, newly-elected officers joined the NNELL board. The new officers elected were Rita Oleksak as Vice President and Al Martino as Secretary/Treasurer. A change of position took place with Dr. Jacqueline Bott Van Houten moving up as President and Paula Patrick as Past President. NNELL is very excited to have them as a part of our leadership team.

Annual ACTFL Convention

NNELL would like to thank the membership for turning out in such great numbers at the ACTFL Convention and World Language Exposition in Boston on November 18-21. The three NNELL sponsored sessions were a huge success. NNELL’s annual business meeting also took place and several key initiatives that NNELL is undertaking were discussed during the conference.

Get Connected

Become a friend of NNELL on Facebook. Stay up-to-date on the issues that are affecting early language learning across the nation. Learn how to be an advocate for early language learning by connecting to peers in your state and country. You’ll also find updates on NNELL events. It’s a great way to stay connected with your old NNELL friends—and maybe even make a few new ones.

Web Site

NNELL launches redesigned Web site

NNELL launched a redesigned Web site offering visitors additional ease and flexibility in accessing information as well as new features and content not previously available.

“We are excited to launch the redesign of our site,” said Brian Ferrell, CMP, NNELL Membership Secretary. “The Web site now offers expanded information on member services and benefits. As we revamped the site, we took every opportunity to add features that make it easier to use and incorporate more information for our members.”

Other features of the Web site include a glimpse of upcoming world language events with the online calendar. Current publications, language resources, and online membership registration provide information for current and prospective members.
2010 NNELL AWARD

NNELL Recognizes Stu Silberman for Outstanding Support of Early Language Learning

Each year, NNELL honors someone for their Outstanding Support of Early Language Learning. This year that award is being bestowed on Stu Silberman, superintendent of Fayette County Public Schools in Lexington, Kentucky, a district that serves more than 37,000 students in 61 schools.

Silberman, who was nominated by his world language immersion program coordinator and NNELL member, Alicia Vinson; an elementary school principal, William Gatliff; a parent, Kay Saffari; and a 12th grade immersion student, Rachel Swanson, was chosen to receive the award because of his strong support and expansion of language programs and outspoken advocacy for early language learning.

Because of Silberman’s vision and actions, the Fayette County district quadrupled the number of world language programs since he took the helm in 2004. The district now boasts 12 schools that offer Chinese instruction, five schools that offer Japanese, and 11 schools that offer Spanish beginning in kindergarten and continuing through high school.

These elementary programs guarantee at least 90 minutes of language instruction per week. In addition, when Silberman learned that hundreds of families were routinely turned away from the district’s one Spanish immersion school, he made it a priority to expand the immersion program to five schools that now serve more than 800 students in grades K-12. He also instituted a dual immersion pre-school program, “Early Start,” and plans to increase the number of immersion programs next year.

In an interview conducted earlier this year, Silberman explained his belief in language learning. “It’s extremely important for our students to acquire a second, third, even fourth language, … it not only broadens their view of the world, it helps them with their overall academic achievement as their brain develops … and the acquisition of languages needs to start extremely early … the earlier we can get to them the better.”

He describes his support for the programs in three ways: financially, even in tough times—by securing grants, lobbying for funding, and making district monies available for administrator incentives; by hiring “great folks as leaders and teachers”; and by providing teachers many opportunities for professional development.

His advocacy for early language learning is evident when he speaks to colleagues at the state superintendents network meetings and in his twice monthly electronic newsletter called “Stu’s News,” in which he highlights successes of the world language programs.

In September at their annual conference, the Kentucky World Language Association (KWLA) honored Silberman with their Outstanding Administrator Award.

To see an interview conducted by KWLA past president Susann Davis with Stu Silberman on the importance of world language learning, visit www.education.ky.gov.
El Sistema de Formas en Colores for Teaching Grammar in Spanish

BY JAMES NAILON

Language Learning Goals and Standards

Sistema de formas en colores (SFC) is a symbols-based system for teaching Spanish grammatical structures and concepts within a communicative context in the elementary school. The (ACTFL) Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century states that, “While grammar and vocabulary are essential tools for communication, it is the acquisition of the ability to communicate in meaningful and appropriate ways with users of other languages that is the ultimate goal of today’s foreign language classroom. (p. 3)” Cameron (2001) notes that, “Grammar may emerge naturally in first language ... but the grammar of a foreign language is ‘foreign,’ and grammar development requires skilled planning of tasks and lessons, and explicit teaching (p. 108).” So, even with the current emphasis on communication-based pedagogy, the relevance of teaching grammar still exists and grammar must be taught. However, teaching in a communicative context requires that grammar instruction support the learners’ developing communicative needs. “Structures are modeled and introduced as they are needed to express meanings important to the children and the content being addressed (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 286).”

When I began teaching Spanish part-time in my parish school in August 2007, I tried to introduce my students in grades 4-6 to some of the easier grammar issues they will face in 7th grade, when they begin using a traditional introductory Spanish text. Using theme-based codeswitching writing assignments with prescribed vocabulary sets, I had students construct noun phrases, each consisting of an article, noun and adjective, in Spanish and write the remainder of the sentence in English. For example, in a Halloween writing assignment students might write, “La bruja fea (the witch ugly) lived in una casa oscura (a house dark).” Upon noticing the difficulties my students were having with the abstract concepts of gender and agreement, I began thinking of ways to make the concepts more concrete. I suppose it is not surprising that a math teacher would revert to the use of symbols to solve a complex problem, and that is what I did. Unlike some other systems available from commercial vendors, SFC is a word-based system that tackles grammar issues head on and can even be used as a writing aid in the foreign language.

Problems and Solutions

I identified the three major problems my students faced: 1) Spanish nouns have gender in addition to number, 2) articles and adjectives must agree with nouns in both aspects, and 3) descriptive adjectives usually follow the noun. The most concrete reference for the abstract and arbitrary concept of gender is simply the dictionary, so we first learned about the italicized references to gender and parts of speech in the Spanish-English dictionary. The second problem is two-dimensional (gender and number) and was solved by varying the color and shape of the background symbol upon which each noun, article or adjective is written (Figure 1). The last problem was solved with a positioning guide, called the Arc of Agreement, included on the symbols for articles and adjectives (Figure 2).
Spanish dictionaries alphabetically list only the masculine singular case for adjectives. I explicitly taught that adjectives that end in “o” in the dictionary will have all four formas en colores (FCs) (Figure 2), whereas adjectives that do not end in “o” will only have two FCs (Figure 3). Adjectives ending in letters other than “o” agree with nouns of both genders, so they only change in shape for singular/plural agreement. Their FCs are half blue and half pink. Additionally, I chose slightly darker shades of pink and blue for adjectives so they can be easily differentiated from nouns.

The 4-inch diameter shapes are cut from colored paper using a die-cut machine. A Spanish noun, article or adjective is written on the front and the English translation and part of speech is written on the back. The FCs are then laminated and a small piece of Velcro is attached to the back so they will stick to felt boards. Guided by a simple slogan, “Sustantivos reglan (Nouns rule),” which implies that the noun goes on top, the student only has to match the colors and shapes to construct grammatically correct noun phrases (Figure 4). The FCs take any guesswork out of deciding which form of an adjective or article agrees with a noun.

It should be noted that I only used descriptive adjectives, which are normally placed after the noun, in this lesson. Spanish has other types of adjectives, such as possessive and comparative, which are placed before the noun. When teaching these adjectives, the arc of agreement should be placed on the right side of the FC to assure correct placement.

Building Sentences

Since symbols had successfully eliminated the mystery of writing noun phrases, I decided to use the same approach to writing complete sentences. This involved tackling what is probably the most difficult challenge for students learning Spanish: verb conjugation. I chose a yellow arrow pointing away from the subject as a symbol to reinforce the basic verb functions of movement and direction. I designed different shapes for subject pronouns and keyed the left side of conjugated verbs to match (Figure 5). By assigning my two original shapes to 3rd person singular and plural, any noun can be the subject of a sentence. For infinitives, the left side of the arrow is simply a straight line.

Other additions I have made are FCs for adverbs, conjunctions and pronouns, which allow the construction of more complex sentences (Figure 6). With the addition of a punctuation FC for the question mark, the moveable shapes make it easy to demonstrate how to rearrange the words of a statement to form a question. Now, SFC has become a basic language system flexible enough for teaching simple writing and grammar at the elementary level (Figure 6).
Using SFC to Support Content-Based Communication

Sistema de formas en colores is by no means intended to return the language classroom to the dark ages of grammar and drill. Rather, it is a useful tool for the necessary teaching of grammar within a communicative context. Traditional explicit grammar instruction has been criticized for the authoritative role of the teacher and the passive role of the student (Adair-Hauck, Donato & Cumo-Johanssen, 2005). With SFC, once the teacher has explicitly taught and demonstrated the grammar point, students can begin writing. No longer is the teacher the sole authority of grammar or the student a mere passive recipient. The SFC gives the learner active control in manipulating words to construct sentences. The system itself, not the teacher, provides simple visual reinforcement for grammatically correct constructions.

I use the system in theme-based units with related vocabulary sets written on FCs that culminate in a writing assignment. Topics include animals, family, numbers, body parts, food, and more. To assess students’ grammar, I monitor and give feedback on their project during the writing phase and include grammar as a criterion in the grading rubric for the final project.

Conclusion

Possibilities for future use of the SFC could include its adaptation to other gender-based languages or development of Web-based applications. Creating and organizing a large number of FCs is a challenge, so a computer application would be the most efficient way to increase the available vocabulary without creating untenable logistical demands on the teacher or students. The SFC would also work well as a learning center activity to practice new grammar or to review grammatical concepts previously taught.

Younger children lack the mature thinking necessary to grapple with abstract grammatical concepts (Cameron, 2001). The SFC gives young learners a hands-on, concrete way to learn and explore a variety of grammar topics: agreement of articles and adjectives with nouns; plurals; agreement of subject and conjugated verb form; negation; question formation. Placing the part of speech on the back of the FC’s reinforces the meta-language students are learning in their English grammar classes. Placing the definition on the back of the FC can even aid students in learning new vocabulary.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Nailon teaches Spanish in grades K-8 at St. Thomas More Catholic School in Omaha, Nebraska. The Spanish program is a FLEX model, and he sees students once each week for 40 minutes. He earned a B.A. in Guitar (‘76) and a B.S. in Statistics (’99) from The Evergreen State College. In 2003, after retiring from the aluminum industry, he completed a M.A.T. from the University of Portland, with endorsements in middle school math and upper elementary. He completed his endorsement in middle school Spanish in December, 2010. Two CDs of songs he has written for teaching Spanish, Canciones de mi clase (I & II), and other Spanish song downloads are available through SongsfTeaching.com. Jim was a co-presenter at the 2008 Nebraska International Languages Association (NILA) Conference, discussing the use of music to teach Spanish. He presented his Sistema de formas en colores at the 2009 NILA Conference. At the recent 2010 NILA Conference, Jim received the award for Outstanding New World Language Educator for the State of Nebraska.

Figure 7. “Now my system can communicate complex and interesting ideas.”
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- Extensive vocabulary and phonics practice
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- Comprehensive assessments
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Dwight-Englewood FLES Program

BY JANET GLASS

Señora Glass, I'll never forget your Spanish class. I remember learning a lot of phrases, a lot of random vocab, and doing what I love the most, many artistic things, to have some Spanish and Spanish in high school, learning an award for Spanish in high school, learning an award for

Spanish in high school, earning an award for Spanish in high school, learning an award for Spanish in high school, earning an award for Spanish in high school, learning an award for Spanish in high school, learning an award for Spanish in high school, learning an award for Spanish in high school, learning an award for Spanish in high school, learning an award for Spanish in high school, learning an award for


by Janet Glass
your folder will be sent to a class in Mexico City, with a written paragraph, in order to make your first contact with a new friend.

Some of the presentations will be filmed to serve as models for the following year. Several video clips will be posted on the school Web site. Later, we may have a chance to use video Skype to meet the pen-pals.

Since this integrated performance assessment contains a part for understanding some written material, describing pictures and answering questions about them, students are assessed using three different rubrics: one for the interpretive task, another for the interpersonal task, and a third for the presentational task.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exceeds Expectations</th>
<th>Satisfactory</th>
<th>Does not meet Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>My message is crystal clear and easily understood with clear vivid details.</td>
<td>My message is understood but with pauses and hesitations.</td>
<td>My message is difficult to fully understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Control and Vocabulary Use</td>
<td>I can use a variety of words and phrases. My grammar is correct when I create complete sentences.</td>
<td>I am mostly correct when using memorized sentences. My vocabulary shows basic information.</td>
<td>I am correct at the world or phrase level. My vocabulary is repetitive or limited.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentational Impact</td>
<td>My delivery is lively and very expressive. I have appealing visuals that help to support my language use.</td>
<td>The presentation is delivered with interest and eye contact. Visuals reflect the content of the presentation.</td>
<td>I make little effort to hold the audience’s attention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment rubric for the oral presentation.

The vocabulary centers around personality, character, physical description, and favorite activities. Students use the first and third person of the verbs. Videoclips, a wide variety of games, skits, interviews, TPR, TPR-S, information gap activities, stories, surveys, and handouts are used during the lessons over five weeks. This ensures that the students can master the vocabulary and structures that are needed to meet the goal. They also see the work of previous students, in the form of written paragraphs and videos, so they have a very clear idea of the expected performance.

To further motivate my students, I include samples from Mexican students’ responses to last year’s project. This provides learners with a real-world cultural exchange. Students also visit the Web site of the Mexican school to get a sense of its setting.

The authentic written material used for the interpretive mode in this unit contains selections from a non-fiction, out-of-print book, Imagen y Voz de los Niños y Niñas de México, a publication of Conaculta, a Mexican government-owned publisher.

The next unit is called Meet Dwight-Englewood. In this unit, students prepare brochures about their school in pairs, from their own fifth grade perspective, to send to the classes in Mexico. They use Microsoft Publisher.
FEATURE

This unit takes about five weeks to complete. Once students understand the task, see the rubrics and review models from the previous year, they realize that they will be required to describe the physical plant, school activities, school features and their own schedules. They understand that we are preparing by labeling our school's floor plan in Spanish, looking at Web pages from target language schools, doing information gap activities about making a play date, learning the "we" form, and participating in a variety of vocabulary games and writing activities to equip them to create the brochure.

The next unit uses digital voice recorders to capture unrehearsed conversation. Digital voice recorders are small electronic devices that are very simple for students to use. They only need to press the record and stop buttons. Teachers can then listen to the conversations at leisure and re-play segments for the whole class. The conversations become audio files which can be downloaded onto a computer. The teacher can e-mail an audio file of a child home to parents, use the recordings as models for the following year, or simply collect them for assessment. A digital voice recorder will cost anywhere from $35 to over $100.

For this unit, Let's Talk, students are challenged to sustain an unrehearsed conversation about a wide variety of topics. They have to talk for at least three minutes without pauses. The students enjoy talking about music, favorite sports and activities, their families, going shopping, and the food they like, so we explore vocabulary appropriate for those exchanges. One of the activities that we do in class is a virtual shopping trip using the online catalogue of the store, El Corte Inglés, in Madrid. This activity helps students to understand that numbers are written differently in Spain (6,00 € means six euros) and allows them to choose what they'd like to buy with a given number of euros. In addition to shopping, we study the music from Daddy Yankee to Mariachi, Enrique Iglesias to Juanes, as well as a variety of sports and family activities. They soon have more than enough to talk about.

Lessons also focus on how to agree and disagree with someone and how to ask follow-up questions. In this unit, students interview a variety of native speaking adults as well. These interviews create an authentic need to use a different verb form, the formal register. For example, after interviewing the school psychologist who is of Cuban descent, they write an article for the school newsletter in Spanish. This unit takes about six weeks and uses rubrics for the performance assessments. There are also quizzes along the way and many practice opportunities to converse with a randomly chosen partner. Homework assignments include calling another student on the phone and having a timed conversation in Spanish.

After several units have been completed, the students take a self-assessment. This gives them a chance to look at their accomplishments and to reflect on the extent to which they feel that they've mastered the material. The following is a series of Can-Do statements to which students respond after completing the third unit.

What happens in the program before the grade five? Before students reach the fifth grade in the Dwight-Englewood program, learning is also divided into units. The third grade studies Guatemalan folktales, the fourth grade a Peruvian folktale and a New Mexican story. Earlier grades have their thematic centers, too. The classes are standards-based and content-related. But the most significant factor in keeping the learning on track is that students know what they’re expected to accomplish through the performance assessments. Long recordings of conversations, articles in the newsletters in Spanish about interviews in Spanish, and the many proficient students like Priya, bring heart-warming evidence of how far a solid FLES program can reach, while still being a work in progress. As time has passed, I’ve become more protective of time on task. Spanish projects that require crafts, such as Day of the Dead items, have become integrated into the art program so we don’t use Spanish class time to make them. Songs that don’t relate to the units have been eliminated or moved into music class. Cutting and pasting for a project is to be done entirely at home. Class time is devoted to moving students from novice-mid to novice high to intermediate-low proficiency levels by having clear expectations of increasingly varied and connected discourse.

How does Dwight-Englewood’s support play an essential role? One way is by not tampering with what’s good for language. Keeping classes meeting at least three times a week for 45 minutes rather than cutting the hours or the frequency during lean times is important. Other ways are by sustaining the sequence from Pre-kindergarten to fifth grade, by being receptive to all-school assembly programs around Latino language and culture, by supporting the technology needs of the program and by making professional development available.

Seventeen years ago I made a decision that bemused my upper school colleagues by going to the lower school. Here’s what I’ve learned from my willing students: programs with early starts, long sequences, clear proficiency targets, and strong evidence of proficiency can make good things happen for languages.

To see videoclips from various projects, visit www.youtube.com/levinejanet.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Janet Glass is currently a Lower School Spanish teacher at Dwight-Englewood School and an adjunct Methodology teacher at Rutgers University in New Jersey. She has taught Spanish and ESL at the middle and high school levels and has attended various conferences around the country. Janet has made numerous contributions to professional journals and has been a frequent presenter at state and national conferences. She received a fellowship and two grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 2008 she became the ACTFL national teacher of the year. She has recently worked with teachers of Hindi and Chinese.

Can-Do. Spanish Fifth Grade

Please consider whether the answer is:

- Yes!
- Almost There!
- Not Yet!

Things I CAN DO in Spanish:
1. I can use numbers up to a million.
2. I can describe my physical traits such as tall, blue eyes, long hair, etc.
3. I can describe my personality traits such as lazy, organized, athletic, etc.
4. I can describe my feelings such as angry, surprised, bored, etc.
5. I can describe traits and feelings of another person.
6. I can tell my age and the age of another person.
7. I can say things I like and don’t like to do and that another person likes or doesn’t like to do.
8. I can tell time.
9. I can name the rooms in the school and items in the rooms.
10. I can talk about my schedule, my classes, grades, and things I use in class.
11. I can name my extended family members in Spanish, including step-family.
12. I can talk about sports, players and teams.
13. I can name some singers who sing in Spanish and talk about their songs.
14. I can connect two thoughts by saying, “but,” “and” and “because.”
15. I can agree with someone by saying, “me too” and “me neither.”
16. I can use “we” in a sentence saying things like, “we run, we speak, we live…”
17. I can ask how much something costs and comment on the price.
18. I can name clothing for different seasons or weather.
19. I can understand a shopping catalogue.
20. I can recognize the difference between an accent from Spain and from Latin America.
21. I can ask questions that begin with, “what, how, where, when, who, which, and how much?”
22. I can ask someone to repeat and tell that I don’t understand.
23. I can apologize and ask permission to pass someone.
24. I can comment on food and say whether it’s tasty, healthy or spicy.
25. I can respond appropriately when someone sneezes.
26. I can welcome, introduce someone and greet them.
27. I can say goodbye in more than one way.
28. I know when to use “tu” and “usted” for you for people of different ages.
29. I can keep a conversation going for at least 3 minutes on topics I’m familiar with.
30. I can read short, simple books in Spanish.
Instructional Model for FLES
a conversational approach

BY DENISE CLIVAZ AND ELIZABETH ROBERTS

In our tenure as French teachers at the Avery Coonley School in Downers Grove, Illinois, we, Denise Clivaz and Elizabeth Roberts, have continually sought an effective instructional model for our K–8 students. Our school is blessed to have a stable and historic French program for young learners, and each of our students is required to take French from kindergarten through eighth grade. The program has been in place since the mid 1940s, prior to which German was taught. Because the Avery Coonley School is independent, we have much freedom in designing curriculum and in experimenting with different types of instructional models. Denise has been teaching in the Avery Coonley French program since 1994, and Elizabeth since 2004. In the past six years we have experimented with and honed our approach, and we would like to share our journey with you.

Over the years, we had difficulty finding a good elementary French curriculum that met our needs. As a result, we were developing most of our curriculum ourselves, piecing together songs, activities, readers, visuals, and poems into thematic units. Like many FLES teachers, we used whatever we could find or create within our time constraints. Through these units, our students gained exposure to the language, learned vocabulary, and demonstrated basic comprehension. However, we were not satisfied; we wanted our students to use the language to communicate!

As our access to technology increased and we gained the ability to project visual media in our classrooms, we began to experiment with our curriculum. After much discussion of our goals and philosophy, we arrived at the partner conversation as an instructional model.

Using the dialogue, students practice the language, which they learn by encountering vocabulary embedded within a meaningful context. As we adopted the conversational model, our working curriculum changed greatly.

**Isolated details > context.** Prior to the change, our curriculum would begin with isolated elements of language. For example, we would introduce the conjugation of être (to be) before the students had used a block of language like Je suis fatigué (I am tired).

**Vocabulary > structure.** Similarly, in a unit on animals we would present our students with many different animal words. Through vocabulary games and other exposure, students were able to recall much of this vocabulary. However, the students could not say anything meaningful about animals! Now, we present animals in the context of questions such as Est-ce que tu as des animaux à la maison? (Do you have pets?) or Est-ce que tu aimes les chats? (Do you like cats?). Instead of focusing on the retention of animal vocabulary, our new goal is that students become comfortable using the structure j'ai (I have) or j'aime (I like).

**Recall > practice.** Student practice time in a given class session has greatly increased, and we rarely ask the students to recall vocabulary without the aid of the conversational model. The class time is better utilized because students can now all practice at the same time.

**Memorization > ownership.** Before, we assessed students by measuring the amount of vocabulary they retained; now we want to see them demonstrate ownership of the language. Before, we might have asked a student to recall animal vocabulary in response to images of animals; now we ask them Est-ce que tu as des animaux à la maison? and they respond Oui, j'ai deux chats! (Yes, I have two cats!).

What do we mean by ownership? We mean that students are able to communicate spontaneously, transferring the language they encounter in the partner conversation to a variety of situations. The students are able to achieve ownership of the language because they have interacted with it personally, often using the language to talk about themselves! Other communicative activities facilitate the transition from first exposure to ownership.
Here are some examples:
- Memorization
- Teacher-led Discussions
- Classroom Mixers
- Surveys
- Charades
- Role-play
- Skits
- Rhythmic Chanting/Singing
- Simon Says
- Oral Presentation

Although we do many other activities in our classes, the partner conversations remain the foundation of our program. New vocabulary and expressions are presented in a context. Something as simple as fruit, for example, can be presented in the context of the structure J’aime (I like).

The implementation of this instructional model has greatly improved our program. Next are some of the changes we have seen in our students’ performance.

**Increased motivation and engagement in learning.** Our students are more engaged; they feel empowered as they use the language effectively and spontaneously. The goals of the program are clear to both the instructor and the student, allowing for a sense of direction as one begins the study of a conversation and a sense of accomplishment as one finishes. Additionally, the little rejoinders such as C’est vrai? (Really?), Je suis d’accord (I agree), à plus tard (See you later), and C’est intéressant (That’s interesting) included in the conversations are useful and easy to transfer to other situations. We see such transfer of language on a daily basis.

**Better retention.** During the development of this model, we often conducted “experiments” in our classrooms by presenting material using the model and then testing the students. Even though the vocabulary is secondary to the structures, the students retain it better than they did when it was primary! They now learn the material much faster because of their personal connection to it and because of increased practice time.

**Improved comprehension.** We ensure comprehension with each conversation by providing visual cues and at times, English translations, and we use the same language in a variety of ways, so it becomes very familiar to them. As a result, students are very comfortable in an immersion setting, and they have a larger base of language to help them infer meaning.

**Increased production and better pronunciation.** Students become much more comfortable using the language simply because they are speaking about 80 percent of their time in class. It becomes commonplace, and they are less afraid to take risks. They see the connection of the written word to the spoken word, and pronunciation becomes more intuitive, as does the acquisition of new language.

Vocabulary instructional model.

We have published our materials as an elementary school foreign language curriculum, available in both French and Spanish editions. The Partner Conversations book is the foundation of the program, and level one includes a progression of 58 conversations divided into ten units. These are also available in electronic form (the eBook) so that teachers can present them using a projector. The Student Activity Book provides written activities to reinforce the language, and the Teacher’s Guide offers supplemental activities and written and oral evaluations. On the Audio CD native speakers read the dialogues, providing a pronunciation guide. These materials are available at www.reallanguagerightaway.com.

We are thrilled with the success our students have had with this program, and we look forward to using this curriculum in years to come even as we develop it further.

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

Creator of the REAL LANGUAGE right away programs; Denise Ciovaz and Elizabeth Roberts teach K-8 French at the Avery Coohey School in Downers Grove, IL. Together they share 26 years of foreign language teaching experience. Through their collaboration, they developed a unique communicative approach for teaching young learners, and in August of 2009, the REAL LANGUAGE right away programs were published.

Denise Ciovaz has taught French for 16 years, prior to which she lived and worked in Switzerland as an English language teacher. Denise enjoys spending her summers in Switzerland, riding in trains, and a good espresso.

Elizabeth Roberts started teaching French at the Avery Coohey School six years ago, after spending a year in Normandy teaching English to elementary school students. In 2008, she finished her Master’s Degree in French Language and Civilization from NYU in Paris. Elizabeth has a passion for phonetics, photography, and all things French.
Preschool Italian in Melbourne

BY SIOBHAN HANNAN

Kindergarten in Victoria, Australia is the preschool year attended by children who are four going on five, and who will go onto primary school the following year. These are part-time programs, run over a small number of sessions per week, typically for 3–5 hours per session for 10–12 hours per week.

North West Brunswick Kindergarten, in the inner-northern suburb of Brunswick in Melbourne, is a typical sessional kindergarten. It boasts two spacious, light-filled classrooms and a large garden. Like other kindergartens, it offers a mixture of state-subsidised preschool programs and parent-funded shorter programs for three-year-old children.

Unlike most other kindergartens, however, two of these programs are bilingual. Alongside the traditional offerings, the kindergarten offers a three hour Italian language class and an Italian immersion preschool program.

Preschool structure proves fertile for language program

The Italian kindergarten program is structured in the same way as the mainstream kindergarten programs. It is offered over the same number of hours—currently 2 x 5 hour sessions per week. It has the same staffing structure—a degree qualified teacher working in tandem with an assistant. It attracts the same state government per capita preschool grant. It follows the same play-based approach to learning.

The Italian kindergarten program was established 13 years ago in 1997. The parent-elected Committee of Management responded to a request from local parents to offer the program. No other permission was required. There was no overarching administrative structure to give or withhold permission. Kindergartens at that time were operating in an environment of benign neglect, which gave communities a lot of freedom to meet local needs. Support for language learning in this particular community is high. Most children will go on to study Italian at primary school. Even families who do not use the program themselves are proud to be part of a kindergarten that offers it.

Melbourne has a large Italian community, and Brunswick is one of the areas where it is concentrated. However, the wave of Italian migration was largely a single generation post-war tsunami. There are no longer significant numbers of children growing up with Italian as their first language.

There are large numbers of children with at least one set of Italian grandparents. These form the bulk of the children who attend the Italian kindergarten program. Of the 22 children in the class, typically 17 will be children with some Italian heritage, but little or no active knowledge of the Italian language. In most years, there is at least one child who is an Italian-speaker. There is also a minority of non-Italian families who choose the program—usually 3–4 children in a class.

The traditional format of kindergarten teaching as practiced in Victoria has proved remarkably well suited to immersion teaching. We are able to offer a full 10 hour immersion program, whereas primary school language programs struggle to get more than 45 minutes per week. The kindergarten program is converted into an Italian immersion program by providing Italian-speaking staff. Both the degree qualified teacher and the assistant are fluent Italian speakers.

The basic approach to preschool learning—free-play in a prepared environment—is the same as the mainstream program. However, educators use Italian with each other and with the children. Songs and stories are in Italian. Some activities are chosen specifically for their links with Italian culture, or to support language-learning goals.

No extra cost

Establishing and running the program has been quite simple at the structural level. There have been no battles with bureaucracy, and no regulations to challenge. No lobbying for funding. It costs no more to run than the mainstream programs. In some years, slightly higher fees have been charged and the surplus used to buy Italian-language teaching materials—mainly books, which cost three times their English counterparts. The structure of Victorian kindergarten programs and lack of pressure to cover specific curriculum goals has meant it has been uncontroversial to turn the whole program over to Italian.

On the other hand, the lack of intrusion by external bureaucracy or policy has also left staff and parents in the program on their own when it comes to working out how to teach language in this setting. There has been no extra funding, no curriculum support, no expert advice, no external links, no professional development to support the language-learning component of the program.

The curriculum and approach have evolved over time in a local and isolated attempt to recreate kindergarten education in a bilingual form.

Play-based curriculum

Victorian kindergartens operate within the tradition of child-centered, wholistic play-based education. This approach to learning provides rich opportunities for language teaching. School classrooms are often sterile spaces that leave language teachers struggling to create a word-picture for mostly baffled students. In contrast, the kindergarten environment is filled with hands-on activities that provide plentiful opportunities for real interaction and involve physical materials and actions that support comprehension.

Teachers have multiple short intense interactions with children who are motivated to pay attention in that moment. Language-intense interactions occur at intervals throughout the day and are interspersed among the other valuable learning experiences that make up a kinder day—the familiar elements of preschool education such as block-building, puzzles, drawing, painting, sorting, fantasy play, self-care, and social interaction.
Two teachers means more target language talk

While Italian is a living language in this community, there are few children arriving at kindergarten as first-language or fluent Italian speakers. Unlike communities with multi-generational bilingualism, we cannot hope that the children will create a natural communicative need for Italian amongst themselves.

The exposure to Italian, and the impetus to tune into Italian, must come from the program itself. One of the strengths of the kindergarten format is that it automatically provides two staff working with the same class. Having two educators helps increase the level of Italian use in the classroom; staff can speak to each other even when few children can understand.

Routines and structuring talk carry most of the load

The Italian program is a bilingual environment. Interactions between the children are primarily in English. Differently to many immersion programs, staff are allowed to use English when they feel it is appropriate. The target is to use as much Italian as possible.

Within this framework, we have found that certain points of the day foster higher levels of Italian use. The activities that structure the kindergarten day—arrival, clean-up time, hand-washing, moving from indoors to out—are repeated at each session. They become highly ritualized.

Structuring elements are not always recognized by teachers as part of their program. When teachers focus on the content of a lesson, they may take the structuring components for granted. We find our best opportunity to use Italian and to elicit Italian from students is during the structuring routines.

The daily repetition of these actions supports learning of the routines and the language that goes with them.

The kindergarten learning experience also includes many enriching conversations that are unique—discussion about where hail comes from, or what flies eat, or which part of a plant is edible. However, these individual exploratory conversations are harder to transfer into a language that the child barely understands. Most such interactions in our program are conducted in English or with partial translation.

Repertoire

Kindergarten teaching adopts an approach that is flexible and responsive. However, it always relies on ready access to materials and ideas that are age appropriate and effectively target curriculum goals. Over the years that the Italian program has been operating, we have developed a repertoire of songs, stories, routines, and activities that are both appropriate for kindergarten programming and promote Italian language use.

Making passata di pomodoro, for example, is a strong cultural tradition in the Italian-Australian community. Around Labor Day each year, we get in a case of tomatoes and make passata with the children. Over time, we have refined our technique. We found a safe, plastic machine in which to puree the tomatoes. After years of high band-aid consumption, we discovered plastic lettuce knives for cutting tomatoes, that will not cut fingers.

We developed a routine for instructing children how to cut tomatoes safely. The activity is rich in learning in its own right. We add to it as a language learning experience through the talk that accompanies working with individual children and through group time discussion. We have a song about making passata that reprises the key phases and language of the process.

We also make sure to produce a piece of artwork to go into each child’s folio that connects to this activity. We hope this artifact will provide a link back into memories of the activity and trigger memories of the song and the language that we learned with it.

While our program always continues to demand creativity and ingenuity from the staff and families involved, we find it readily combines a bilingual environment with play-based preschool education. The flexible, responsive, varied, concrete learning environment of kindergarten is a good place for bilingual education.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Siobhan Hannan teaches in the Italian Kindergarten program and is a doctoral candidate at the University of Melbourne School of Language and Language Education.
Personalized Thematic Kits

BY SHARON BONTRAGER

As a FLES teacher with more than 10 years of experience, I know the challenges of teaching a second language through the lens of the core curriculum. Each day, as I walk in the classroom, I am welcomed by walls of student-created work that includes math, science, and social studies. I first learned the importance of developing integrated thematic units at an outstanding workshop with Helena Curtain, co-author of Languages and Children, Making the Match (2010) who informed us of the importance of culturally-based thematic units as a standard element of elementary second language instruction. I now build kits around these thematic units as a way of meeting and embracing the cognitive learning styles of my students. Some styles that emerge within a unit include field independent, field dependent, left brain vs. right brain dominant, reflectivity, impulsivity, and visual and auditory. In order to meet the needs of students with these diverse styles, I try to provide many different strategies for learning, in an organized way. Brown (2000) defines strategies as contextualized ‘battle plans’ that might vary from moment to moment, or day to day, or year to year. Strategies vary intra-individually; each of us has a number of possible ways to solve a particular problem, and we choose one or several in sequence-for a given problem.” I often set up the “problem” in the form of a cliff-hanger that captures the attention of the young learner. They apply their learning style to the problem, and together we acquire new language.

Teaching Spanish at the K–5 level is a passion of mine, and I would like to share some of the practical applications that I find most rewarding and effective. I have found enthusiastic response to the creation of detailed language learning kits that are rooted in storytelling, but expanded to include home-made board games, contextualized mini-stories and music! In my experience, the best-intentioned workbooks and curriculum packages just do not meet the personalized needs of an individual classroom. I understand that there are many restrictions on curriculum and teachers are often told to “teach to the test” and to use scripted lesson plans. Instead of feeling squeezed by the standards, I choose to ignite the students’ imagination through play and real-life scenarios. As I do this, I constantly bring it back to a child their age in the target culture going through a similar experience in the target culture. The expression on their faces when I say something to the effect of, “This would happen to a little girl in Costa Rica, except she would …” is typically wonder and amazement. At that point, the proverbial light bulb goes off in their head. It is one of the many joys of teaching.

Home-made Language Learning Kits

The kit items that I have chosen for this article combine materials from primary classrooms (K–2). I feel strongly that the kits contain these steps with the flexibility to expand according to time, parent assistance, and the accommodation to minor changes in the classroom teacher’s agenda. It is crucial to assist learners in making connections with material introduced by the classroom teacher so as to activate that prior knowledge and increase exposure to the target language forms. Going back to what I said about learning styles, you will see visual (illustrations), auditory (music), and field independent (connecting single words learned in homeroom lessons with new target language).

Create cartoon versions of the subjects being discussed in the classroom. In my case, I created insects and sea creatures to go along with the homeroom teacher’s unit of insects. They are the base for the teacher’s lessons on math sequencing and pattern activities. The sea creatures move her first graders into counting by fives (number of arms on a sea star) and tens (number of legs on a crab). I use them as a vehicle to teach Spanish.

Anchor the mini-stories in a Spanish-speaking culture. Characters will embark on adventures that take them through Costa Rica, learning basic Spanish (colors and numbers), as well as aspects of the Costa Rican geography and animal life (rain forests and volcanoes).
Mini-story: Mosca Manuel lleva puesto los zapatos mágicos... está perdido en el bosque tropical de Costa Rica!

**Personalize the mini-stories.** An important aspect of TPRS (Total Physical Response Storytelling) is activating students' prior knowledge. After the key vocabulary terms have become a part of their active, working memory, students are able to add their own details to the retelling of the story. Through a variety of activities, students create their own resolution to the cliff-hangers created by the teacher's mini-stories. In doing such, the language becomes their own, personalized story. We begin by placing our character in Costa Rica.

Teacher says, "Pon Mosca Manuel encima del volcán." They instruct students to place mini cut-outs of the characters on this "concept map" of geographic locations in Costa Rica.

Students work in pairs and follow teacher's target-language directions.

Create games to play in small groups or with the entire class in order to assess language acquisition. The students are sitting around the memory match game taking turns as the teacher reveals what is behind the photo (in this case household pets). When a match is revealed, we chime, "Felicitationes." Traditional games such as "Pirinola" are also used as a vehicle to teach target culture while playing a language learning game at the same time.

**Teacher** Pass out these characters with greetings to each child and use as a way to open the class.
A little note on music.

When it is applicable, I use target culture folk songs to reinforce the language. I have also found that using traditional American children’s songs as a starting point for the melody, makes the learning more readily available and easier to learn for the students. I tell the mini-story verse by verse in the song. The chorus brings back the repetition, and each student experiences instant success. Original songs are perhaps the best vehicle through which new language is assimilated into the child’s memory.

These “kits” are a form of what we as K–5 teachers already do, allowing for more structure and ongoing collaboration with the classroom teacher. We already gather our favorite worksheets and activities to bring language to our students, but by taking it one step further and looking through the cultural lens, you begin to teach your students to become cultural anthropologists. I now have students that come to me with questions that dig deeper, and take us in directions different from those we had originally planned.

Teaching a second language through the vehicle of thematic, culturally-appropriate kits is a sure way to develop both a love of the language and a love of learning in young children. Thematic instruction differentiated to individual learning styles and cognitive profiles is automatically accessible to all students.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sharon Bontrager currently teaches at Blue Oak School, a progressive, independent K-8 school in Napa, California. She also works one day a week at Brown’s Valley Preschool teaching pre-K language learners. She holds a TESOL certificate, and a BA from Purdue University, an MA from Indiana University, and an MSW from Indiana University. Prior to moving to California, she taught at Park Tudor School in Indianapolis, IN.

NNELL Book Review

Struggling Learners & Language Immersion Education
Tara Williams Fortune with Mandy R. Menke ©2010
ISBN: 978-0-9843996-0-4

This text, advertised as a compilation of “research-based, practitioner informed responses to educators’ top question concerning immersion education,” is a must-have for the bookshelves of total and dual immersion practitioners around the country. The detailed reference section alone, consisting of 16 full pages, is worth its length in gold!

Providing answers to questions such as, “For whom is immersion appropriate/not appropriate?” or “How do you differentiate between typical delays experienced by children who are learning through a second language and a language and/or learning disability?” this text provides chapter after chapter of real-life educational case studies drawn from own one-way immersion programs and two-way bilingual immersion programs around the country. Each chapter begins with questions surrounding topics such as program/learner suitability, accessing support within the immersion program setting, transferring out of the program and the educational, social, and emotional repercussions of such decisions, etc.

References include a treasure trove of articles pertaining to immersion educations, from the earliest studies conducted in the 1970’s by Cummins, Bruck, Genesee, Barik & Swain, and others through Gardner to the latest research offered by Bialystok, Tomlinson and many, many more.

During my junior year in college, I traveled to a small coastal town in Ecuador to intern for two months with the city government. On the paper I received with my official assignment, it said I would be working with the Department of Child Development, but what that really meant was that I would be spending hours of time in an under-staffed daycare center with no funding for any educational resources. The two benefits of working in a cement building with no toys and so many needy children are that it’s easy to keep things clean and there is a desperate demand for creative ideas!

At the child development center, I was the sole entertainment. We played countless games of Follow the Leader, Simon Says, Leap Frog, Down by the Banks of the Hanky Panky, and Duck, Duck, Goose. In the evenings, I would translate every nursery rhyme I could remember, or childhood ditty I had sung, into Spanish. I began to create my own simple lesson plans and also tried to come up with economical crafts. The biggest hit was making play dough with salt, water, flour, and different colors of Kool-Aid. For the children, the colorful dough was a brand new creation that made learning colors, shapes, letters, numbers, and developing fine motor skills fun!

My experience with the children of Ecuador was far from the internship I had expected, but, paired with my love for Spanish, it got me hooked on teaching! After an experience with so little support, I have come to greatly appreciate what is available for teachers here in the states. Sometimes the best encouragement for a new teacher of FLES is a success story straight from the classroom.

In writing this article, I would like to share a few of the tools I have picked up along the way for teaching a second language. I have structured my Spanish classes on the second language research conducted by Stephen Krashen (1982) and Tracy Terrell (1983).

I have learned that children learn a new language best when messages are repeatedly given to them in a manner that they can understand. These messages are called comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982). The challenge in foreign language instruction is to develop comprehensible input in the target language so that concepts and vocabulary are “cemented” in children’s memories. Fortunately for us, there is an easier method of getting this accomplished than bringing a trowel and wheelbarrow to class!

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1883) reminds us that, “the telltale body is all tongue.” Communication is far more than simply words, so students can understand a great deal of what I am saying in the target language even if they cannot decipher the specific meaning of the individual words. The Natural Approach (Terrell, 1983) to language acquisition supports as much input in the target language as possible. From the first day of class, my personal goal is to speak 100 percent in the target language. It is amazing how much students can understand if the information is presented with the aid of visual components and amplified expressions. According to Albert Mehrabian’s (1967) research, less than 10 percent of communication of feelings and attitudes is dependant on the verbal language.

I am far from ever undertaking a career in acting, but pantomime and exaggerated expressions on my part actually speak louder than words. If I slow down and take the time to highlight the vocabulary I want my students to know while acting out what I want them to do, they can always successfully follow my directions.

Not having my own classroom is a problem I share with other FLES teachers. How does one transform someone else’s space into an atmosphere conducive to foreign language teaching and learning? Students learn best when they are in a comfortable, familiar setting. When they are not at ease, an affective filter stands like a wall between comprehensible input and their ability to learn. Altering the environment from an English-speaking classroom to a Spanish-speaking classroom is crucial. During Spanish instructional time, I want my students to be encouraged and feel comfortable using the Spanish words they know. One quick routine that clearly signifies to students the start of Spanish class is the act of having the whole class put on an imaginary Spanish Hat. Physically acting this out and making a big deal about ‘switching’ our brains to thinking in Spanish fascinates students and helps focus them on the language. Once we have our hats on, we always sing the same song, ‘Hola a todos’ (Hello, Everyone), together. Starting class together with a song they know and love boosts their confidence in learning the language.

As a class, we always move through the same routine. Establishing a dependable classroom schedule is a vital component of creating that ideal learning atmosphere. Students know that after our opening routine, we move to calendar time and then to an activity, a craft, and finally,
a familiar closing song, ‘Adiós’ (Good-bye). A solid structure actually enables space for flexibility and creativity.

Every student learns differently, so the FLES teacher’s challenge is to tailor lessons to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners. Thankfully, I work with an experienced team, have very involved parents, and use an incredible, comprehensive curriculum that establishes a solid framework for teaching each class. This proverbial “three-legged stool” supports and scaffolds a wonderful learning atmosphere.

**Incorporate Visual Stimulation**

It has long been held to be true that visual learners grasp information best when it is presented in an orderly, visible fashion and that colorful graphics help to engage students while aiding them in comprehension and language retention. When presenting new vocabulary, it is nice to have a corresponding graphic so that students decipher what is being said without needing to rely on English. The enrichment Spanish curriculum I am currently using comes with a plethora of fabulous visual aids for which I am grateful!

**Get a Workout with TPR**

Movement and touch strongly appeal to kinesthetic learners. When students actively participate in Spanish instruction, the language gains meaning and significance. The Total Physical Response methods developed by James J. Asher (1969) transform children’s excess energy into a very useful learning tool. Every opportunity we have as a class to “translate” the language into movement greatly increases comprehension and helps students better retain concepts and vocabulary. Active and robust vocabulary learning has been supported by research conducted by Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2002).

**Engage the Vocal Cords**

Auditory learners need vocal input and output in order to remember linguistic concepts. In my classes, my main focus is on developing oral language comprehension. I daily work on providing opportunities where my students hear the language within a context they can understand. Listening to music and singing along with native speakers is key in allowing children to pick up native-like accents and intonations. Remembering lyrics is simple compared to rote memorization! When first learning a language, people go through a natural silent period where producing meaningful enunciations in the second language is extremely difficult. Singing songs helps shorten this period by providing an easy, comfortable outlet for speaking in Spanish.

**Harness Adrenalin for Achieving Goals!**

Once a familiar schedule is set, I like to encourage good behavior with the anticipation of a culturally relevant celebration. Yes, it often requires a little more preparation, but the memories made are definitely worthwhile. When I think back to my high-school Spanish class, my fondest recollection is when we all brought tapas, a variety of snacks from Spanish cuisine, to class to share with one another. Those cultural moments, however small, tend to create a deeper connection between students and the language. Setting a classroom goal in the form of a culturally oriented party can be a highly effective method for rewarding good behavior.

Cultural celebrations need not be complicated. As the winter season approaches, our next classroom goal to look forward to will be Chocolate Day! Making a cup of hot chocolate opens up an opportunity to discuss the history of chocolate, and its significance in Hispanic culture. We’ll sing traditional Spanish songs and recite poems all related to chocolate, as well.

**Own Your Destiny!**

As my students grow in the language there will come a time and a place for rigorous grammar studies. Fortunately for me, my students are younger, so we are playing with...
the language to break down barriers of fear, embarrassment, making mistakes, and shyness. Planting a love of learning Spanish in students while they are young will help carry them through the years of more serious grammatical and syntactical study.

I love taking time to daydream and ‘make-believe’ with my students. The imagination powerfully motivates young learners. We pull out maps and travel magazines, old photos from my overseas trips and storybooks of grand adventures abroad. There are incredible opportunities available to bilingual speakers in today’s global society, and it is my job to open up that global perspective to my students.

Whether by teaching in Ecuador or here in the states, it is a joy to prepare students for taking their place in this world through teaching them a foreign language. Creating an immersion atmosphere, setting a routine, balancing visual aids, audio supplements, TPR activities, and dreams for the future is the game, and teaching a second language to young learners is its name!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Sophia Maletz, BA in Spanish, Foreign Language and Literature, studied and taught English for a semester in southern Chile and then interned with the city government of Puerto López, Ecuador. She currently works for Kids Immersion, LLC and teaches Spanish to first and second graders at a public school in Oregon.

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A: Muchas gracias. (Thank you very much!)
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Connecting & Collaborating
How Content–Related Instruction Increases Students’ Speaking Abilities

BY SHERRI HARKINS

Young students come to world language classrooms with genuine excitement about the possibility of being able to speak a language other than their own. “What matters most is that we take advantage of children’s natural curiosity about the world” (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). When world language teachers connect second language instruction to students’ general education curriculum content, the opportunity presents itself to potentially increase students’ ability to speak in the second language. At Pittsville Elementary Middle School, this is evidenced by a significant increase in the confidence level of second language production of the third graders in our program.

Program Overview

Located in rural Wicomico County, Maryland, Pittsville Elementary Middle School (PEMS) is a small school of approximately 450 students and 63 staff members. The school includes grades three through eight. World language course offerings have traditionally included middle school exploratory foreign language (FLEX) and Spanish I for eligible eighth graders. In 2008, the Wicomico County School System piloted a content-related foreign language elementary school (FLES) program in French for third, fourth and fifth graders at this location.

There are three individual classes in each elementary grade at PEMS. FLES was originally designed as a thirty-minute per week class conducted in students’ classrooms. Now housed in its own classroom space, the program is officially included in the school’s special area courses and FLES instructional time has increased. Currently, third grade students have two 45 minute classes every six days, giving them a jump start into second language learning, and fourth and fifth grade students have one 45 minute class every six days.

Collaboration & Content Topic Selections

In her Practical Handbook to Elementary Foreign Language Programs, Lipton (2004) asserts that “an interdisciplinary approach ... yields an integrated, holistic curriculum” for students. Aligned with this assertion, the FLES program at PEMS is designed in a cross-curricular manner made to maximize teacher collaboration. During the program’s first year, the grade level content teachers and the French teacher shared common planning time. These teachers worked together to select the original topics covered in the French curriculum.

Since the program’s inception, the three third-grade classroom teachers have chosen to view FLES instruction as a means of presenting material in a format which is both cross-curricular and utilizes the spiraling of topics and concepts throughout the school year. When the teachers initially met, they mapped out each of the content themes taught in third grade. The French teacher supplemented this information with possible French vocabulary and grammar structures that would support each content theme.

Since French class time is limited, the teachers had to narrow the list of grade-level content themes to be reinforced in the program. In order to do this, the group reviewed relevant student achievement data. Third grade is the first level of instruction at which Maryland students take the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) test as part of the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act. The third grade teachers wanted topics taught in the FLES class which would support their desire for improved test scores, and the French teacher wanted to teach topics which would empower students as language learners. By carefully refining the content theme selections, the group was able to plan a FLES French curriculum which is aligned with the Maryland World Languages State Curriculum, as well as state curricula in Reading, English, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and Math for this grade level, and which ultimately satisfied both the third grade classroom teachers and the French FLES teacher.

Throughout the school year, the group meets to review student progress and data in both the French language and the content: being taught. Activities in units of study are modified to meet changing student needs, although the overall objectives remain intact. Instructional ideas and activities are shared among the group to ensure that students have multiple interactions with material for reinforcement and for addressing different learning modalities. The third grade teachers consider the French teacher a part of their grade-level instructional team. This group of teachers considers itself to be an integral instructional team.
What We Know

When students are interested in what they are learning, their performance reflects that interest. According to language acquisition research cited by Curtain and Dahlgren (2004), language acquisition is most effective when the "input is meaningful and interesting to the learner" and when there is an "opportunity for comprehensible output" from the learner. The use of thematic units in French which are directly linked to the general education curriculum allows for the focus of learning moving from simply the French language to using the language in a meaningful way (Curtain & Dahlgren, 2004). At PEMS, students are introduced and work with new content in their general education class briefly before the corresponding French unit begins. When the French unit begins, student confidence in the content is increased. For some students, the increase is a result of a perceived familiarity with the content. For other students, the increase is the result of having an opportunity to experience the content for a second time in a different context. An example of creating what Harvard professor David Perkins calls a "culture of thinking and learning," this process gives students the foundations for greater achievement in both the content theme and French language usage.

Learning is a consequence of thinking ... This sentence turns topsy-turvy the conventional pattern of schooling. The conventional pattern says that first students acquire knowledge. Only then do they think with and about the knowledge they have absorbed. But it's really just the opposite. Far from thinking coming after knowledge, knowledge comes on the coattails of thinking. As we think about and with the content we are learning, we truly learn it (as cited in Harvey & Goudvis, 2007, p. 207).

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollack maintain that the ability to identify similarities and differences is essential to all learning (2001). By dissecting content and putting it back together, students achieve a greater understanding of a more difficult task. World language teachers know this skill as the fourth C, Comparisons, from the ACTFL Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (1999). Since the French teacher is knowledgeable about what is being studied in the third grade classrooms, French lessons allow for students to identify similarities and differences between the languages English and French, and between the students' cultures and the cultures of the francophone world. As Curtain and Dahlgren point out, content related, thematic units connect the "content, language and culture goals to a big idea" that carries the student forward as a language learner (2004).

Third-grade students are initially given explicit guidance in this process through vocabulary cognate recognition in each unit. As the year progresses, students are asked to identify similarities and differences independently and to construct visual representations of these. By the end of the year when students are constructing their first-person narratives, they will have practiced utilizing a variety of graphic organizers to compare and classify information they will need to achieve their writing goals. The learning process is more valuable to the student as a result of using such a proven high-leverage instructional strategy.

Listening to the Results

The speaking in French at PEMS starts at 7:30 a.m. when the students arrive and exit their buses. Third-grade students yell out "Bonjour!" across the bus ramp to one another, to the older students they know as friends, and to the French and Spanish teachers. A typical day in the French classroom at PEMS, has third-grade students speaking French with a smattering of English words. The English words usually have to do with social events in the students' lives. By no means

CONTINUED ON PAGE 35
The Positive Impact of World Language Study on Special Needs K–5 Children
A Mixed Methodology Research Study

BY DR. PATRICIA DAVIS-WILEY & DR. ROY V. MILLER

Abstract
The present research study was conducted to explore how structured Spanish instruction (30 minutes, twice a week, for a semester) impacts the level of class participation and on-task behavior and the reading fluency rate of a group of self-contained, special needs, elementary school children (grades K–5). Data for this mixed methodology study were elicited over the course of one semester from three sources: semi-structured interviews with the CDC (Comprehensive Development Classroom) teachers; a series of class observations (using an interactive analysis protocol) of the children, both in and outside of the Spanish class; and CBM (Curriculum-Based Measurement) scores. Results of the research reported demonstrate that the children involved in this project benefited from second language instruction in several ways. It had a positive influence on their degree of engaged participation and on-task behavior; it enhanced their reading fluency; and, it made them feel happy and special.

Introduction
“Ever since ‘integration’ became ‘inclusion’ educators have been trying to ensure no child is denied access to the full curriculum. This includes, of course, access to foreign language learning” (McCull, 2005, p. 103). The ACTFL Foreign Language Guidelines, in fact, recommend that world language (WL) study be available to all U.S. students, which by extension, includes both mainstream and special populations. In the U.S.1, however, children with special needs are typically not given the chance to engage in early second language instruction. Many feel that children with learning (and especially language-based) disabilities will be greatly challenged by studying a WL (Barr, 1993; Duval, 2006; Ganschow & Schneider, 2006), yet, what would the benefits be for these children, if given the opportunity?

This paper investigates this very question and describes a pilot foreign language elementary school (FLES) program, offered to students in a self-contained, CDC2 (Comprehensive Development Classroom), in a small, urban elementary school in the southeastern U.S. Results, analyzed from data drawn from three different (i.e., triangulated) sources, collected during a semester-long research project conducted with these children and their teachers, are also presented and discussed.

Setting for the Study
For over 25 years, an integral component of the Track 1 master’s program in FL/ESL Education, at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has included a three semester hour WL teaching practicum in local elementary schools, during which curriculum is designed for the intended target population, by the graduate students, in concert with the practicum’s professor and the local schools’ principals and classroom teachers. WL instruction is then offered to the children at those schools approximately 30 minutes, twice a week, for 12 weeks.

During the spring of 2010, a small local East State, urban school, with a richly-diverse population of 280 students (75 percent having free or reduced-meals and 90 percent considered in the poverty level), was selected as the venue for a very unique FLES Spanish program. At this school, two different populations of students were taught by one of the University of Tennessee’s practicum students: two classes each of traditional first and second graders and one class of CDC (Comprehensive Development Classroom) students (grades 1–5). The latter population of students became the focus of the present research study.

Description of the FLES Spanish Program Curriculum
If the goal of a FLES curriculum is to establish basic levels of WL proficiency that can be scaffolded into and articulated to WL classes offered in the upper grades, then, the WL class needs to be content-based. The literature reports a variety of content-based models that may be appropriate for the second language classroom, ranging from totally content-driven (where subject content is the vehicle for promoting language acquisition) to language-driven (where the second language is the medium for delivering content). In the middle of this content-based instructional continuum are “theme-based modules” (Stryker & Leaver, 1997, p. 3), that “may be drawn from the academic content of the school” (Stoller & Grabe, 1997, p. 83). Thus, themes based on content from single subject areas (e.g., math or science) become the curricular focus for the WL language class. Likewise, cross-curricular
While samplings from two or more of the other subjects (e.g., music and fine arts; math and science) may become themes and actually tie content material across the entire elementary school curriculum. After careful consideration, a modified themes-based model was used for Spanish instruction in the current research study. Given the special culture of the CDC classroom, where the FLES program was going to be implemented, it was necessary to first establish realistic goals that could be articulated into a meaningful experience for the CDC children (classified as being DD, ED, FD, ID and/or OHI) during the 12-week long FLES program. These goals would need to both reinforce and enrich the subject area content that was being concurrently delivered to these students.

In order to identify the content, scope and sequence of the FLES Spanish curriculum for the CDC group of grades 1-5 students, and the developmentally and cognitively-appropriate instructional strategies that would need to be used for this special population, the specific goals of the program and the on-site school resources available (i.e., materials, technology, CDC teacher support) to implement it, needed to be determined. Following a series of visits to the FLES school site, by the researcher with the principal, CDC classroom teachers and children who would receive Spanish instruction, it was decided by the principal of the school and the researcher that the curricular content of the FLES Spanish program would align itself with the existing curriculum and offer reinforcement of basic academic concepts already in place, yet, also offer additional enrichment experiences for the children.

Thus, the following topics were selected to be taught in the research classroom over the course of 24 lessons: basic greetings and expressions of courtesy (including using direct address with Señorita, Señora and Señor); the Spanish alphabet song (using a TeacherTube video); essential classroom vocabulary and expressions; simple math; colors; calendar vocabulary (i.e., day, week, month, and year); seasons; weather expressions; body parts; world geography (map skills showing where Spanish is spoken in the world); and daily cultural tidbits from the Spanish-speaking world (including music, dance, and seasonal customs). All activities were highly interactive, fast-paced, student-centered and scaffolded from the very first class meeting. A typical class session, therefore, would begin with, Buenos Días, ¿cómo estás? ¿Qué tiempo hace hoy? ¿Cuál es la fecha? ¿Qué día es hoy? and give all students the opportunity to interact with the teacher as a group and with each other.

Then, following this class opening ritual, the teacher would warm-up the children with a little Simon Dice (Simon Says) to practice body parts and then lead them in the Alfabeto song (a march-based, slow to fast-cadence song), prior to introducing the new content for the class period. Each class would follow the same routine in order to quickly engage the students and keep them engaged throughout the entire lesson. At all times, the FLES teacher would be ready to move to another activity if a significant number of students became off-task; at no time, however, would an activity last longer than a few minutes.

**Instructional Strategies**

Research reports that at-risk and special students can benefit from language instruction that is both structured and multi-sensory (Ganschow & Sparks, 2005a, 2005b; Schneider, 1999; Schneider & Crombie, 2003; Sparks, Artzer, et al., 1998). Thus, teaching language through commands, Total Physical Response (Asher, 1982), was a primary instructional medium, augmented by chanting, singing, dancing, Simon Dice, and role-playing activities. In addition, the teacher used a laptop and SMARTBoard (interactive electronic white board) on a daily basis in order to connect to authentic cultural videos (e.g., Flamenco dancers), and websites and show mini Power Point presentations and visuals.

Throughout each lesson, the teacher was effectively in touch with her students, and consequently able to differentiate her instruction by slowing down or speeding up the pace of her instruction and moving seamlessly from one activity to another—a necessity for keeping her 12 special needs students highly engaged in the learning process.

In the history of the FLES practicum at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, this is the first time that a CDC class had ever been offered WL instruction, and both the practicum's professor and the target school's principal were very much interested in identifying how successful the WL instruction would be with these very special children. Thus, the idea for this research study was conceived.

**Research Questions**

Specifically, the research questions that guided this study were “How can special needs elementary school students benefit from world language instruction?” and “How can the impact of FLES instruction on these children be measured?”

**Methodology**

**Participants**

Data for this study were drawn from the following three different sources: 1) group and individual interviews with three teachers (1 Special Education teacher and two Educational Instructional Assistants), who worked with the
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CDC children, in a self-contained classroom; 2) observations of 12 CDC students (grades 1-5; three females and nine male); and 3) CBM (Curriculum-Based Measurement) scores from the target student population, identifying their level of reading fluency.

Data Collection

Interviews

The researcher elected to conduct three sets of semi-structured interviews following open-ended guide questions (see Appendix A for the protocol—page 35) with the teachers who worked on a daily basis with the 12 CDC children, in order to capture their perceptions and first-hand experiences. First, a group interview was conducted with all three teachers prior to the first Spanish class with the children, in order to hear their personal voices relating their experiences with the children (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Individual teacher interviews were subsequently conducted, mid-semester, using the same interview protocol, followed by a third and final group interview with all of the teachers at the end of the semester. These interviews were conducted at times that were convenient for the teachers and the researcher and digitally recorded for later qualitative analysis. "In much qualitative work, interviews are used alongside other data collection methods" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Thus, two other data sources were used: observations and test scores.

Observations

Three sets of classroom observations, conducted by the researcher, at the beginning of the semester, mid-semester and end of the semester, provided both quantitative and qualitative data, recording the verbal and non-verbal behavior of the CDC students during three scheduled Spanish classes and during three class periods of other regular content instruction. After a review of the literature, a suitable data collection instrument for the present study was not found. Thus, a protocol (see Appendix B—page 35) was developed by the researcher to record student behavior during instruction, during all six full class period observational sessions.

CBM Scores

The school district in which this research study took place uses the AIMSweb* Reading Curriculum-Based Measurement (R-CBM)* to provide a measure of students' levels of reading achievement (in grades 1-5). CBM® checks were made at biweekly intervals with the 12 student research participants throughout the semester to measure their levels of oral fluency.

Data Analysis—Qualitative

Each of the three sets of interviews with the CDC teachers, guided by a set of open-ended guide questions (see Appendix A), had been digitally recorded and were subsequently burned to a CD and transcribed, by the principal investigator. A typological analysis of the data (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) was subsequently used to organize all data into categories, informed by the research questions. Although there are a number of computer software programs available for qualitative data analysis, the researcher preferred to personally hand-code and then word-process the data in order to identify reoccurring themes and commonalities.

Data Analysis—Quantitative

Observation Protocols

Over the course of 12 weeks, and during each of the six visits to the CDC classroom (three visits during Spanish instruction and three visits during regular class instruction), the researcher recorded on the observation instrument (see Appendix B) the number of times that particular types of previously-identified behavior occurred during each observed lesson with the student research participants. Student behaviors that were observed, yet not listed on the protocol, in addition to anecdotal field notes, were recorded as well.

Following each classroom observation, the researcher hand-tallied the categorized behaviors recorded on the data collection instrument and summarized the anecdotal notes on the bottom of each observational instrument. At the end of the data collection period, the observed behaviors of the CDC children were rank-ordered in descending order of occurrence.

CBM Scores

CBM checks were made of the students' oral fluency levels, on a biweekly basis, throughout the 12-week data collection period. Scores from the students, reported from data collected the semester prior to the FLES instruction, were compared with CBM data collected throughout and at the end of the semester, and were placed into a table for ease of comparison, interpretation and identification of any gains.

Results and Discussion

Interviews

Whereby the researcher collected a wealth of information during the series of three interviews with the three CDC teachers, this study will report four typologies, identified from the qualitative analysis of the data, the latter of which focused primarily on the teachers' perceptions of their CDC students in the classroom. These include:

- the behavior of typical CDC students;
- a comparison of the children's behavior in Spanish class with their behavior outside of Spanish class;
- the type of activities that kept the students on-task; and,
- the children's overall response to Spanish class.

Profile of CDC Student

In their own words, the teachers described this special population of students as being "easily distracted" with the "shortest attention span...of some being every couple of seconds," and others having on-taskness that is sporadic and "changes all day long." They go on to report that these...
children are "easily distracted" they "get frustrated very easily," and "need a lot of redirection" to stay focused. Some of the children have medication challenges and are lethargic and "want to go to sleep, which is a little difficult to handle."

When asked how the CDC students behave during the FLES experience, the teachers had much to share with the researcher.

**Comparison of the Students' Behavior In and Outside of the FLES Spanish Classroom**

The CDC students "are very attentive and pay attention. They are very happy to be in the [Spanish] class," said one of the CDC teachers. When asked why she thought that the students were happy studying a second language, another teacher retorted, "...by their reaction. They are doing very well in Spanish class and have accepted it well." The children enjoy their special lessons so much and look forward to the FLES teacher's visits that they regularly ask their teachers when the Spanish teacher is coming. The students "have a good attitude ... a much more willing attitude" [in Spanish class than during regular lessons], perhaps in no small part, due to the dynamic teaching style of the FLES teacher and the use of hands-on activities that "they can relate to."

**What Keeps the Children Engaged in Class?**

As was stated early in this paper, and corroborated by the literature, it is essential to utilize a variety of instructional strategies with special needs children, and to teach, as one teacher said, "in an animated ... way. You need to grab their attention. It can't be boring. If you're into it with them, they are into it with you ... An element of surprise is also good."

One comment that especially seemed to make the effort involved with setting up this FLES program for the CDC kids worthwhile, was the following.

They [the CDC kids] know they are different from everyone else and they know that if they are doing the same things that the regular [non-CDC] kids are doing, it really makes them happy ... especially the older kids.

Beginning in the pre-teaching phase of the study, and reiterated several times over the course of the three interviews, the CDC teachers mentioned the fact that their kids "enjoy pretty much anything that you want them to do" yet, they do "not enjoy writing or reading tasks because it is very difficult for them." Thus, it was decided early on in the planning of the FLES curriculum to focus primarily on aural-oral-visual input with oral-motor output. As with any child, and in concert with published literature on the issue, the researcher and her FLES practicum student discovered that if the children are happy and motivated to participate in class, using their strongest modalities, they will stay on-task and learn.

**The Students' Overall Response to Spanish Class**

Overwhelmingly, the students' response to participating in a FLES program was indeed very positive. Teachers and staff in the school reported to the researcher that they would hear the CDC children calling the principal of the school señor and other teachers señora, and sometimes even with an hola or buenos días to accompany this direct address. Indeed, what the children learned in their special FLES classroom accompanied some of them out in the halls and even during bathroom breaks when a teacher heard "... one student singing the Alphabet Song out in the hallway."

Aside from the former, when asked what subject area carryover the CDC teachers noticed from the Spanish class to other classes, one teacher said, "... I mentioned Christopher Columbus and the kids got really excited because they remembered that from Spanish class."

This suggests that not only can traditional students follow the bridge across the curriculum, from WL class to other subject areas, but so too can special kids.

A final comment from one of the CDC teachers, during the final interview conducted at the end of the semester, added that one of the benefits of having her students be exposed to Spanish was that, "it's letting them know that there are other things, besides this little part of the world, to know about ... [and] ... they seem to enjoy it." The results of the qualitative interviews with the CDC teachers appear to mirror what the researcher found during her classroom observations.

**Class Observations**

Results of the quantitative analysis of the Classroom Interaction Protocols and field notes taken each of the six observations over the 12-week data collection period, indicate that the children participating in the present study exhibited a higher degree of engaged participation and on-task behavior during the Spanish classes, than during the non-Spanish classes, as observed by the principal investigator of this study (see Table 1). Specifically, the top three frequently-occurring behaviors exhibited by the children in the FLES classroom demonstrated positive attentiveness. The students smiled, nodded, listened, repeated after the teacher (when prompted), and raised their hands to ask or answer a question.

Outside of the Spanish classroom, however, two of the three top-occurring behaviors of these same children were not positive; the children did not pay attention and answered the teacher without raising their hands. Thus, during the final of the six in-class observations, the CDC students were more actively engaged and on-task and showed more appropriate
behavior when they were in the FLES classroom then when they were not.

**CBM Test Scores**

In addition to having a desired impact on student behavior, Spanish instruction also appeared to have had a positive influence on 50 percent of the students' gains in reading fluency, when comparing the rate of increase of words correctly read at a per minute rate, between the fall to spring semesters of the 2008–2009 academic year, with the increase or gain of words correctly read at the end of the spring semester during the 2009–2010 school year (see Table 2). It must be noted that any proficiency or academic gains for these CDC students need to be viewed in perspective. The gains reported here for the participants are norm gains (i.e., percentage of increase for individual students), and are not reported here as criterion-referenced gains (i.e., percentages compared with all of the school district children who had CBM scores. Yet, any gain or increase is to be celebrated as in the case of six out of the twelve CDC children in this study.

**Conclusions**

The results of the present study cannot offer a comprehensive snapshot of the impact of WL instruction on children with special needs due to a variety of reasons: 1) only one group of students (N=12) in one small, urban school was the focus of this study. 2) Observations of the subjects were made by only one researcher, during only six class periods and using one observational protocol. 3) Interviews with the CDC teachers were only conducted at three different time intervals. Therefore, the results of this study cannot necessarily be generalized to a greater population similar to the one examined in this study.

The results, however, did report some very encouraging data that appear to indicate that early world language instruction, offered to children with special needs, does have a guardedly positive overall impact on their behavior, cognitive processing and retention of content offered through a second language via an highly-structured, multi-sensory input. Additionally, the authors of this study concur with the literature that, "... the benefits of [special needs] pupils' self-esteem are considerable and ... motivation is significantly increased by achieving short-term goals" (Holmes, 1994a, p. 9) when participating in a FLES program of instruction.

**Implications and Recommendations**

The Center for Applied Linguistics reports that only 25 percent of all elementary schools in the U.S. offer world language instruction (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010, p. 3), and from these schools, 25 percent of them have been affected by a shortage of qualified WL teachers, and most especially, those schools with a "large percentage of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds" (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010, p. 6). It should be noted that these data report the number of U.S. elementary school WL programs for traditional students, not for special needs students, such as the participants in the present research study. It is only by conducting and reporting the results of additional empirical research studies, like the present study, that the rationale for offering WL instruction for the intellectually less-gifted of U.S. elementary school students can arguably be made.

Whereby, this paper reports a guardedly positive impact of second language instruction on the CDC children examined in this study, further research studies, involving a greater and more diverse population of subjects need to be conducted. Additionally, even though this research triangulated data from three different sources and used a mixed qualitative and quantitative methodology, subsequent research studies could include video-taping of and interviews with the student research participants in this study to add another voice to the next study.

**Table 1: Rank Order of Occurrence of Student Behavior.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Grade</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>2008-2009 Gains</th>
<th>2009-2010 Gains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fall to Spring CBM-WRC</td>
<td>Fall to Spring CBM-WRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>700%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>450%</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>500%</td>
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<td>9%</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>200%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"WRC = Words Read Correctly"

**Table 2: CBM Scores of CDC Students.**

2. This differs from the sentiment about the availability of world language instruction in Europe. Following a pan-European research investigation, resulting in a report from the European Commission in 2005, it was concluded that... all young people in the European Union, whatever their disability.
whether educated in mainstream or segregated schools/streams, have equal rights to foreign languages education” (as cited in McColl, 2005, p. 103).

3. Knox County School District defines those students who are enrolled in a CDC as having “…been identified as needing a small, structured environment where core academic areas are addressed at the student’s instructional level while still tying the instruction to curriculum standards” (CDC, 2010, para. 2).

4. There are two master’s programs in Teacher Education. Track 1 consists of 18 graduate hours in a world language and 18 hours in Education. Track 2 includes a year-long teaching internship, leading to initial licensure in a world language. The practicum student in the present study already held an initial licensure in Spanish from another university.

5. DD = Developmentally Delayed; ED = Emotionally Disturbed; FC = Functionally Delayed; ID (formally known as MR or Mentally Retarded) = Instructionally Delayed


7. The research corroborates the efficacy of such right hemisphere actions and reports that, “Rhythmic vocal games are part of the inbuilt language development of most children and take advantage of familiar and inherent processes can be of value” (Holmes, 1994b, p. 14).

8. Due to conflicts in the teachers’ schedules, it was not possible to hold a group interview with all teachers present; consequently, individual interviews were conducted by the researcher.

9. According to the AIMSWeb® website (available at: http://www.aimsweb.com/measures-reading-cbm/), “more than 25 years of research has shown that listening to a child read graded passages aloud for 1 minute and calculating the number of words read correct per minute provides a highly reliable and valid measure of general reading achievement, including comprehension, for most students” (para. 1).

10. Deno (2003) defines Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) as, “an approach for assessing the growth of students in basic skills that originated uniquely in special education” (p. 184).

11. According to LeComte & Preissle (1993), typological analysis is defined as “dividing everything observed into groups or categories on the basis of some canon [i.e., tenet] for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study” (p. 257).

12. It was tempting to use a software program to analyze the interviews. Glesne and Peshkin (1992), however, feel that, “The products of computer-assisted analysis are only as good as the data, the thinking, and the level of care that went into them” (p. 145).

13. However, due to the nature of this special population, a gain one year is not necessarily followed by a gain after a subsequent year. Thus, 1 student who went from 3 words read correctly (WRC) to 13 WRC during one academic year, showing a 333 percent increase, dipped to a 200 percent increase (going from 12 to 24 WRC) the following year.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Patricia Davis-Wiley is Professor of WL and ESL Education at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she teaches graduate WL and ESL methods classes, directs doctoral students in ESL Education, and coordinates the WL Education programs. She is Tennessee’s state representative to NVELL.

Dr. Roy V. Miller has been Principal of Mooreland Heights Elementary School, Knox County Schools, Knoxville, TN, for seven years and is an active supporter of FLES programs, conducted by WL Ed graduate students from The University of Tennessee, at his school.
**Don’t Forget the Teachers! Building Excellence in Early Language Programs**

**BY ALYSSA VILLARREAL**

It is no secret; students quickly make critical decisions regarding their language learning abilities and even more quickly whether they like a language or not. These decisions are critical in regard to early language learners. Poor experiences in the early years can turn a student off to language learning or program students to see themselves as lacking in the language ability department. Whether a teacher realizes it or not, every day in every class teachers send messages to students about who they are as language learners, how successful they can be, and if it is worth their time to engage with the teacher on a language journey. As a district supervisor with dueling FLAP grants and rigorous performance benchmarks, this is a scary reality and an exciting revelation at the same time!

Pressures have never been more intense for schools, and teachers are no doubt under more scrutiny and more pressure to produce results than ever before. Today’s teachers face demands racing in from multiple directions and deal with students who learn differently from students in previous generations. Also a dramatic teacher shortage has created a highly volatile climate for opening, expanding, and solidifying programs. Nonetheless, in 2007 Memphis city schools began a journey to create sustained, long sequences of language learning never before afforded to the urban students in Tennessee’s largest public school district. We are proud to be providing instruction in less commonly taught languages to students in urban schools who are often denied access to such instruction.

**Meet Memphis City Schools and Its Community**

Memphis is home to many international world headquarters including FedEx, International Paper, Thomas and Betts, and Autozone. Thanks to FedEx, Memphis has been known as America’s Aerotropolis or America’s distribution center for three decades. It is important that Memphis students have access to languages that will connect them to the business community. Not only do we aim to groom students for a successful future, but hopefully a future that will include giving back to their local community by matching the language skills students have learned in MCS (Memphis City Schools) with companies who need employees who speak these languages.

Memphis City Schools (MCS) is the nation’s 23rd largest school district, incorporating 200 schools and approximately 105,000 students distributed in four regions of the district. Our student population is predominantly African American (85.1 percent), with a growing percentage of Hispanic/Latino students (5.2 percent). Four out of five students (82.7 percent) meet income criteria to qualify for free or reduced lunch, an indicator of economic disadvantage. The percentage of students who enroll in college in the city is low. According to the 2000 Census, 26.8 percent of Memphians aged 18 to 24 are enrolled in college or graduate school, in comparison to 34 percent nationally.

**Our MCS FLAP Adventure**

MCS has applied for several FLAP (Foreign Language Achievement Programs) grants to fund new programs to increase access to language for MCS students, and especially to provide access to longer sequences of less commonly taught languages in the district’s four regions. The first FLAP grant established a K–8 Russian program to complement an established and very successful 9–12 program. The second FLAP grant is providing funding to create K–12 language feeder patterns across the district. We began implementing an ambitious five-year plan to expand our budding Russian program. We also planned to build a K–8 Japanese program to connect with a successful 9–12 program, and to implement new K–12 programs in Arabic and Mandarin. The K–12 Mandarin program is planned to articulate with the district’s first International Baccalaureate High School. Each program is strategically placed in one of the four regions. The Russian and Japanese programs built downward from successful high school programs to the feeder middle and elementary programs while the Arabic and Chinese programs were started due to the desire to increase the number of critical, less commonly taught languages in the Memphis City Schools.

Our efforts began with a Russian program in 2008 at Brownsville Road Elementary School. In 2009, two new programs were added: a Russian program at Peabody Elementary School and a Japanese program at Richland Elementary School. This fall we added Mandarin at Oak Forest Elementary School. We quickly involved more than 2000 students in new languages. Eventually, as students exit our K–5 programs, the curriculum will be articulated to the middle school, and as they exit grade 8, the curriculum will be articulated through to the 9–12 program.

Our elementary programs in less commonly taught languages are nothing less than a dream come true for me. With classes meeting daily for 30 minutes, these programs offer an exciting opportunity to push the envelope in student achievement, exploring what is possible based on our current knowledge of best practices in language classrooms.

**Setting the Stage for Teacher Excellence**

As we established these programs, we put in place a variety of teachers, ranging from those who are completely new to teaching to those with several years experience. With only two district staff to serve 200 world language teachers, 45 of whom were first year teachers, a major concern was how we would be able to deal with teacher quality. In addition, many of these teachers were placed in schools where this articulated approach to language learning was completely new. We asked ourselves, “How can we even begin to adequately support these new teachers, much less help them to develop professionally?” We were also concerned that if new teachers were struggling it might be difficult to get buy-in from parents and classroom...
teachers. These and many more logistical questions weighed on our minds as we established these ambitious projects.

It was not long after beginning this process, and with the help of seasoned consultants with deep experience in establishing programs, that we experienced an epiphany of sorts. We knew that using rubrics as the basis for student performance assessments removed the guesswork for students so that they could understand exactly what would be assessed and what they were responsible for. The use of rubrics empowered students to take control of their own academic growth. As we worried about how we could help our teachers to grow professionally, we wondered if we could apply the same strategy for teachers that we do for students. Why not create a rubric for teachers to guide their development as professionals? How could we begin to clearly identify excellence in world language teaching and put all of our teachers on the path to excellence in a highly individualized process? What professional behaviors would be regarded as non-negotiable?

Our work began with the “Starting with the End in Mind” document (Couet, Duncan, Eddy, Met, Smith, Still, and Tollefson 2008), developed by a team of national language leaders. Although this document identified essential characteristics and practices of highly effective world language teachers, it did not address general education topics such as classroom management and our goal was to provide a complete picture for our teachers. With the assistance of Greg Duncan, a member of our consulting team, we crafted a document that characterizes the whole teacher. It outlines 63 characteristics of highly effective teaching practices divided into seven areas:

- Classroom Management
- Instructional Planning
- The Learning Environment
- Teaching the Lesson
- Assessment
- Materials
- Professionalism

Vetted by several groups of MCS teachers, by teachers in other districts across the country and by national experts, we have a working document with both an elementary and a secondary version. Even though there are only a few differences in the two documents, we felt that it was important to have both elementary and secondary specific versions.

The self-assessment document contains four columns after each effective characteristic. The first column allows for teachers to identify where they think they are currently. The second column asks them to indicate where they would like to progress to over the academic year and what resources or support they anticipate needing to meet their objectives. The third column offers an opportunity for the teacher to give us any necessary information or notes regarding their current and desired performance levels. The fourth and final column asks the teacher what support they need to reach their goal on each indicator.

The first section in the document is Classroom Management. We accept that classroom management is a fundamental skill and without good management no learning will take place. It is not marked as a non-negotiable, because it is considered the baseline. Only when a classroom environment is managed in a functional manner can we begin to talk about instruction. To these ends the non-negotiable elements are addressed with teachers in conjunction with classroom management. Again, each indicator is considered essential in a classroom.

While we wanted to create a complete picture of best practices that characterize effective teachers, we realized that 63 indicators could be overwhelming even to the most seasoned teacher. Therefore, while every indicator in the document is considered best practice, there are some indicators that are high-yield strategies identified as a non-negotiable starting point for our teachers. These indicators are basal in nature, specific to instruction, and therefore are highlighted in a different color to draw attention to them. So for all teachers, new to the district or merely new to the early language learning program, there is a clear-cut beginning point upon which to focus their work.

These non-negotiable characteristics for MCS are focused only in a couple of the sections including instructional planning (2–3), teaching the lesson (4), and assessment (1). The stem question to each indicator is “To what extent do I ...

Instructional Planning
1. I determine what I teach based on standards and my local curriculum?
2. I plan instructional activities that keep all students cognitively engaged and on-task?
3. I plan to avoid meaningless rote drills when introducing and practicing grammar concepts, ensuring that all practice requires attention to meaning? (secondary only)

Teaching the Lesson
1. I clearly state the lesson’s performance objectives and post them somewhere in the classroom for the duration of the lesson?
2. I use the target language almost exclusively (at least 90 percent of the time) and encourage my students to do so as well?
3. I present and my students practice language within a meaningful context?
4. I use a variety of strategies to make language comprehensible?

Assessment
1. I measure my students’ language proficiency in a variety of ways that focus on what my students can do with the language, not just what they know?

The clearly stated characteristics open the door for meaningful conversations regarding practice. Teachers are
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able to identify where they are in their journey to having a solid core of good teaching practices in their repertoire. Additionally, these non-negotiables allow me to plan coordinated professional development for the teachers as well as to provide differentiated professional development in a job-embedded fashion (i.e. in the teacher's classroom).

Before observing a teacher in the field, we meet with the teacher and use this document to come to a common understanding regarding expectations for performance. It also serves as an umbrella document for a battery of supporting documents including a full class observation, a classroom walkthrough (both differentiated for elementary and secondary teachers), and a peer observation document. In addition, we have adapted the document for building administrator use. These supporting documents allow MCS internal and external World Language specialists to provide very pointed feedback in regard to what was observed or not observed in a classroom thus offering an opportunity not just for explanation but also for coaching.

And the Process Continues...

To date, we have found the document works very well in setting the stage for new teachers and for clarifying expectations to experienced teachers transferring into the program. The characteristics allow us to identify each teacher's effective practices as well as to identify areas for growth enabling each teacher to reach their personal best. Recently we have begun working with experienced non-LCTL teachers in departmental groups from local high schools on the same indicators.

Much to our excitement, we have experienced very little push back from teachers as we negotiate the items indicator by indicator. The document encourages self-reflection, peer collaboration, and outside support. It guides teachers in how they select their professional development and helps district staff plan professional development that is meaningful to teachers. Our district offers professional development opportunities after school, in summer, and on Saturdays. Some schools with funding or special needs may send teachers to a conference or a special workshop session such as an AP workshop. Finally as we all know there are many teachers who support their own professional development by funding it themselves or seeking scholarships. As a district administrator, I use information from these forms to plan district provided, and sometimes mandated, professional development. Having teacher input is always helpful in planning meaningful professional development.

Setting expectations with teachers has become logical and easily identifiable. Coaching sessions are very positive as we collaborate as a team including the teacher, district staff, and at times, the consultant to help each teacher meet their personal best. It is a living document and continues to evolve as we receive feedback from more teachers across the spectrum of experience. To these ends, our journey to instructional excellence continues.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alyssa Villarreal is the World Language Coordinator of Memphis City Schools (MCS). She has served as the World Language Coordinator for the previous six years. During this time, MCS has secured three FLAP grants and a StarTalk grant. Through these three FLAP grants, she has been able to begin K–12 programs in Japanese, Arabic, Chinese, and Russian across the district as well as begin the first dual language immersion school in Tennessee. She has served on the Tennessee Foreign Language Teacher's Association (TFLTA) board and the National Association of District Supervisors (NADSFL) as Secretary and currently as Vice President.
are these young, first-time language learners communicatively proficient, but that doesn't matter to them. The students want to use each and every word they have heard or read in French since the first day of school—even if that means talking about directions, magnets or animal habitats. Observers in the French classroom always remark about students' enthusiasm for their content topics. The teachers are quick to point out that the enthusiasm for the content is connected to the ability to talk about it in French.

Third grade French students at PEMS often respond in French orally and in writing to their general education teachers. The third-grade teachers (having learned the French material themselves) are undaunted by the responses. Students have synthesized the French language into their daily classroom thinking patterns and are content to point out that they no longer generate separate answers (one in English and one in French). If the correct answer is north, students respond with north or nord and no longer make a conscious distinction between languages.

By using grade-level content as a tool for second language instruction, students learn real language in a real context. The result is real excitement—for the students speaking French and for the world language teacher watching the development of life-long language learners.

**REFERENCES**


**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Sherri Harkins has been teaching French in the Wicomico County Public School System for 10 years, the last three in FLES. Sherri is the Maryland state representative for NNEFL and has been extensively involved in French curriculum development. She has presented at local, regional and national foreign language conferences on topics including professional learning communities, reading strategies and integration of culture. As the 2010 Maryland Foreign Language Teacher of the Year, Sherri has been working with her colleagues across the state and northeast region to advocate for second language learning.
The Classroom Teacher and the Early Language Teacher Partnership

A Collaborative Teaching Model for Early Language Programs

BY CARMEN CARRACELAS–JUNCAL

The demands on the early language teacher and the limited lesson time seem to be some of the reasons for the lack of learners’ engagement in interpersonal communication in early language programs. Although the research on the role of the classroom teacher in early language programs is scarce, there is evidence that the classroom teacher can play a central role in these programs. The classroom teacher is an expert in teaching children, and it seems that a collaborative partnership between the classroom teacher and the early language teacher can provide the extended context for the learners to use the language creatively for real communication during the school day.

Introduction

Research about the role of the regular classroom teacher in early language programs is scarce (Donoghue, 1968; Driscoll, 1999; Eriksson, Forest & Mulhauzer, 1964; Frost, 1999; Gefen, 1969; Schrier & Fast, 1992; Sharpe, 1999; Williams, 1963), and yet my own experiences as a K–5 researcher, Spanish teacher and program coordinator, as well as my work in teacher preparation programs, point to the classroom teacher as a crucial partner in early language programs. Shrum and Gilson (2010) note that “in early language programs, it is important that the regular classroom teachers view language as an important component of the curriculum rather than as a frill” (p. 121), but they do not elaborate on their statement. The purpose of this article is to include the forgotten teacher in the discussion of early language programs, and to illustrate how a teaching partnership between the classroom teacher and the early language teacher can be a successful teaching model in early language programs. But before we move on to discuss the classroom teacher’s role in early language programs and the characteristics of successful teaching partnerships, it is important to briefly look at the historical context of early language programs, the realities of early language teachers, and the characteristics of the classroom teacher and the elementary school environment.

A Brief Look at Early Language Programs

Although the history of early language programs in the USA is as old as the country itself, the launching of the Russian satellite Sputnik and the development of the audio lingual method brought about national attention to the importance of early language learning. As a consequence, The National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 provided funding for training institutes on the audiolingual approach and included foreign languages in its funding of elementary and secondary instruction. As a result of this funding, the 60s saw a proliferation of foreign language programs in elementary schools and the coinage of the term FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary School) to refer to them (Andersson, 1969; Brown, 1994; Curtin & Pesola, 1988; Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Many of the programs were not well thought out and when the funding ran out most of the programs were discontinued due to the fact that the teaching method did not produce fluent speakers. There was also a general movement to return to the basics (Andersson, 1969; Curtin & Pesola, 1988; Rhodes & Schreibstein, 1983; Schinke-Llano, 1985; Thompson, Christian, Stansfield & Rhodes, 1990). During the 60s FLES experience, it became evident that two major obstacles for the implementation and success of FLES programs were the lack of qualified teachers and the failure to produce the expected results in the children’s learning (Curtin & Pesola, 1988; Rhodes & Schreibstein, 1983; Rosenbusch, Kemis & Kerri Moran, 2000; Thompson et al. 1990). The issue of lack of qualified teachers brought the classroom teacher to the forefront of a debate among the experts in language teaching on whether the classroom teacher or the language specialist should be the language teacher in elementary school. The conversation, however, did not seem to get anywhere because there was a lack of elementary school teachers who could speak a foreign language (Donoghue, 1968; Eriksson et al, 1964; Gefen, 1969; Schramm & Oberholzter, 1964; Stern, 1969; Williams, 1963). Despite the near disappearance of FLES programs in the early 70s, FLES programs continued to be implemented throughout the country during the next two decades.

In the late 70s and early 80s “the rise of multinational corporations, the increasing importance of international trade, and the oil crisis” brought foreign language education once again to the forefront of national attention. In 1979, the President’s Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies recommended “the urging of language study in the elementary school.” This commission was followed by national studies and reports on education that stressed a “more international vision in the schools and a higher priority for language learning” (Curtin & Pesola, 1988, p. 18). In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education also “encouraged the study of a foreign language in the elementary grades” and in 1987, other organizations, such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals, supported the teaching of foreign languages in elementary school (Rosenbusch et al, 2000, p. 306). The 90s saw a renewed interest in language learning in general and early language learning in particular, and brought new hope for advocates of early language programs. This resurgence of national interest in FLES culminated with the drafting of the

The study of foreign language was officially deemed “central to the learning of all students” and the document promoted “an early start to the study of a foreign language by defining standards for grades 4, 8, and 12” (Rosenbusch et al., 2000, p. 306). Again elementary schools were encouraged nationwide to establish language programs through grants and other funding and many new FLES programs were implemented throughout the country. The conceptual framework for foreign language study was solid: the national standards provided a clear guideline based on the latest research on language teaching and learning, second language acquisition, and best teaching practices; and established clear achievable milestones for language learning.

However, a decade later, with the term FLES in disuse in favor of early language programs, we find that history seems to have repeated itself. Due to political views, new educational directives to “return to the basics,” and general economic uncertainty, many of the early language programs established in the late 90s and after the publication of the standards document disappeared. Early language programs still functioning continue to suffer from the same problems as they had in the preceding decades: lack of funding, lack of integration in the elementary school curriculum, lack of qualified language teachers at the elementary school level, and lack of expected results.

Throughout the history of language instruction in the elementary school, programs have solely relied and depended upon the language teacher but, as we will see below, this teaching model has not been able to produce the expected language abilities on the part of the children. It is time to consider other teaching models for early language programs. Here we will explore the possibility and outcomes of a teaching partnership between the language specialist and the classroom teacher. It seems that early language programs that combine the expertise of the language teacher and the classroom teacher can foster the creative use of the language in interpersonal communication by the children. Before we take a look at the results of such a partnership, it is important to consider the teaching context and expectations of early language teachers.

The Early Language Teacher

Teaching in early language programs brings many rewards to the language teacher, but it also presents many challenges. Some of these challenges are inherent to the teaching position: providing language instructions to all levels from K–5 or K–6, teaching in more than one school, the time limit of the lessons, lack of funding, and the constant threat of program elimination. Needless to say, teaching in early language programs requires very special teachers. According to Myers (1998), public school coordinator of Savannah, Georgia, the measure of an early language teacher “is not how well the teacher speaks the language. But how well he/she can teach it to a young learner” (p. 291). She goes on to say that the language teacher in early language programs “must understand how to design instructional activities that are meaningful and developmentally appropriate, and that embrace the language skill areas. He or she must also understand how to make language learning cyclical, and to move it beyond memorized production of discrete vocabulary items to the point where students communicate their own meaningful information” (p. 291). Moreover, the early language teacher should understand the role of “context and attention to integration of meaning in all activities that take place in the elementary school setting” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 123), and use a variety of instructional approaches to “maintain the interest and motivation of students” (Chinen et al., 2003, in Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 112). And yet, it seems that the skills of the language teacher alone are not enough to bring young learners to use the language creatively, as Donato, Tucker, Wudthayagorn, and Igarashi (2000) found after observing the fourth and fifth grade classes of a Japanese FLES program for a seven month period.

During their observations there was “only one instance of creative use in interpersonal communication” by a student, showing that “self-nominated, creative language use was rare or nonexistent” (p. 388). They concluded that “(1) contextualization and culture do not necessarily lead to language creativity, and (2) interaction between students and teachers does not categorically promote the negotiation of meaning and autonomous interpersonal communication skills” (p. 388). Donato et al. (2000) could not fault the lessons themselves for the lack of language use by the students. In fact they noted that the lessons were “highly engaging” and the language teacher was well prepared and knowledgeable (p.388). In reference to their findings, Shrum and Glisan (2010) suggest that in order for early language learners to engage in interpersonal interaction, “teachers must carefully design opportunities for learners to create with the language and communicate with one another within the context of the lesson or thematic unit” (p. 123).

I agree that in order to develop interpersonal communicative skills young learners must have the opportunity to communicate with one another in a meaningful way, but I disagree that this communication must be contained within "the context of the lesson or thematic unit" and the implication that if the language teacher follows this suggestion the desired results will follow. Even the best planned lessons that integrate interpersonal communication activities may not bring about independent use of the language by the children. As Igarashi (1997) notes, young learners "may not become independent language users" regardless of the type of language program (cited in Shrum and Glisan, 2010, p. 123). Shrum and Glisan (2010) warn that “program developers must be careful to set realistic expectations of what students are able to achieve as a result of elementary school language study” (p. 122).

Setting realistic expectations for student achievement is
important to the success of early language programs, but I would like to add that researchers and early language programs must also be careful to set realistic expectations for what the early language teacher can achieve depending on the characteristics of the early language program in which she/he is working. The expectations set on the early language teacher are almost impossible to fulfill if we consider teaching in early language programs as the sole responsibility of the language teacher.

Early language teachers are doing in most cases their very best, but they just simply do not have the time to fit everything in every lesson. Donato et al. (2000) recognized that “the demands placed on a single specialist teacher who is challenged daily with presenting multiple lessons across a wide range of age groups and levels of ability” (p. 389) might be a possible and plausible cause for the lack of language creativity on the part of the students. Early language teachers are limited in the amount of language contact time they have with the children they teach. Very often they have a short time for their lessons, a busy schedule, and at times classroom management issues that cut into their lesson time. The key then seems to be extending the opportunities that the children have to “create with the language and communicate with one another” beyond the allotted time for the language lessons into the school day. It is time to turn our attention to the role of the forgotten classroom teacher in early language programs and the significance of the elementary school classroom environment for early language learning.

The Classroom Teacher and the Elementary School Environment

The classroom teacher is central to every early language program. Although research regarding the classroom teacher’s role in early language programs is scarce, the findings point to the importance of the classroom teacher to the success of these programs. In the 60s, Donoghue (1968) noted that “the classroom teacher, by virtue of his general instructional activities, is in a position to communicate to the pupils his approval or disdain of this newcomer to the elementary curriculum. Without the classroom teacher’s enthusiasm, pupil learning is hindered and the program effectively sabotaged” (p. 307). Three decades later, Schrier and Fast (1992) found that “the positive attitude and participation of the classroom teacher in the actual learning of the foreign language influenced the elementary students’ attitude towards the language learning experience” (p. 1306). They also pointed out that “the single most negative action on the part of the classroom teacher towards destroying a successful FLES learning environment was to treat the foreign language experience as an interruption of ‘real’ work” (p. 1036). They came to the conclusion that “the influences of the classroom teacher have surfaced as more important than previously assumed.” The classroom teacher not only provides the ‘space’ for instruction but creates a culture that the visiting FLES teacher must negotiate every day if he or she is to have a chance at being an effective instructor (p. 1309).

Although the classroom teacher can influence the attitude of young learners towards the language lessons, what is most important for early language programs and often seems to be forgotten is that the classroom teacher is an expert in elementary education, and can be a great resource for early language teachers. As Driscoll (1999) points out, classroom teachers may not have extensive knowledge of the language being taught, but “they do have a different kind of professional knowledge to bring to the task” (p. 29).

They are skilled in teaching elementary school children; they know their young learners individually and can give special attention to those who need it; they know the school curriculum for their grade and the pedagogy of elementary education; they are experts in classroom management techniques; they have effective pedagogical strategies and are aware of what good teaching practice is (Sharpe, 1999). These are necessary skills to teach young children and early language teachers can derive a wealth of knowledge in teaching young children from the classroom teachers.

It is also important to take a look at the elementary school environment. The elementary school environment provides an ideal setting for the developing of communicative competence because the every day routines provide the vehicle for integrating the foreign language in the student’s lives (Sharpe, 1999). This is a key observation, since one of the main preoccupations about early language programs is the seeming lack of ability on the part of the learners to initiate and engage in interpersonal communication. The classroom teacher can transact everyday school/class business in the new language: attendance, lunch count, morning meetings, greetings, courtesy expressions, class directives, calendar, weather, etc., and integrate the new language in the study of the other elementary school subjects. Moreover, the elementary school classroom is an important social and cultural environment for young children aside their home.

From the perspective of sociocultural theory, all learning is social. According to Vygotsky, “the child’s entire social world shapes not just what he knows but how he thinks” (Bodrova & Leong, 1996, p. 10). This is evident in the elementary classroom; as Bodrova and Leong (1996) observe, “the things a teacher points out to her student will influence what that student constructs,” but more importantly “the teacher’s ideas mediate or influence what and how the child will learn” (p. 9). Williams (1963) also states that “in the early stages of school life, the group to which [the children] belong and the teacher as its leader are of paramount importance to them and they are motivated to conform to the linguistic needs of a satisfactory member of that group” (p. 57). This is another important consideration on the role the classroom teacher plays in early language learning programs. The classroom teacher is the main figure in the social and cultural environment of the elementary school classroom; if the teacher is involved in the language learning process and incorporates the new language into the every day culture of the classroom
it will appear that the children would regard language learning as a requirement to be a successful member in their classroom culture.

On the other hand, if the cultural norms of the classroom do not include the foreign language, young learners might not acquire it as fully. Although more research is needed on the influence of the classroom teacher in early language programs, it seems safe to assume that if the classroom teacher believes learning another language is a worthwhile pursuit and integrates the language in the everyday routines of the classroom, the young learners will be motivated to acquire the knowledge of that language.

During my work in early language programs, I have seen classroom teachers become language teaching partners and the strongest advocates of the language program in their schools. Their support was evident during the language lessons: they participated in the lessons, they helped the language teachers model new structures, and they were ready to lend a hand with any classroom management issues that were almost nonexistent. In turn, the language teachers were able to use the target language throughout the lesson. The children appeared ready and excited for the language lessons, they were able to recall the material from one lesson to another, and they seemed to enjoy the lessons. But most importantly, the involvement of the classroom teacher also brought some very positive results in the language use of the children, as we will see next.

A Successful Teaching Partnership

As part of a larger FLES research study (Carracelas-Juncal, 2005), I observed a fourth grade class in an elementary school in Western Massachusetts. This was a unique opportunity because in this school the early language program was created and designed from the start as a partnership between the language teacher and the classroom teachers. Teachers who had some knowledge of Spanish and felt comfortable integrating the language in their classrooms were encouraged to do so. The language teacher visited those classes once a week. For the teachers who did not know Spanish or did not feel comfortable to revisit the lesson during the week on their own, the language teacher went to their classrooms twice or three times a week.

In the case of this particular fourth grade, the classroom teacher felt comfortable integrating the Spanish in his lessons and the children had different activities in Spanish with their classroom teacher an average of four days a week, with the language teacher visiting their classroom once a week. At the time of the observations, the children were beginning their third year of Spanish instruction. The observations lasted for four months, from the middle of September to the first week of January, with an average of one observation per week for a total of 12 observations. During that short period of time, I had the opportunity of witnessing a number of learner originated interactions and meaningful interpersonal communication. I recorded a few instances of children initiating interactions or going beyond the required answer to express something more in the target language. Here follow some examples:

Exchange 1. First month of observation, beginning of October

The language teacher is visiting the fourth grade classroom and they are reviewing the months of the year and the days of the week. The language teacher is using the help of the classroom teacher to model each activity. The children are answering both teachers’ questions in Spanish when they are asked a question in Spanish without resorting to English. During one part of the lesson one of the students gets up and the classroom teacher calls her attention.

Classroom Teacher: Silencio (Quiet)
Student: Quiero agua (I want water)

The interesting thing about this exchange is that the student continued using Spanish outside of the language lesson to let the teacher know that she was not interrupting the class, that she was thirsty, while she filled her water bottle.

Exchange 2. End of second month of observation, November

The language teacher is visiting the classroom and teaching her lesson. After a few different activities she begins to review the alphabet using the verb “gustar” (to like). She again uses the classroom teacher to model the structure she is about to review. After a few questions and answers the following exchange happened.

Student 1: Tengo una pregunta (I have a question)
Language Teacher: Pregunta, por favor (Ask, please)
Student 1: ¿Es y griega a vowel? (is “y” a vowel?)
Student 2: ¿Por qué en veinte y tres suena como un vocal? (Why does it sound like a vowel in “twenty three”?)

This exchange shows that the children were not only trying to use the language during class to do more than answer questions, but they were also aware of grammatical issues and trying to use Spanish as the vehicle to find out more information about the language itself.

Exchange 3. Third month of observation, December

The next conversations happened during a lesson in which the classroom teacher was reviewing a unit on body parts, accessories and adjectives.

Classroom Teacher: E---¿tú estás calva? (E---are you bald?)
Student 1: No, no estoy calva. No, but my father...Mi padre... Mi padre está calvo (No, I am not bald. No, but my father... My father... My father is bald);
Student 2: ¿Tienes pendientes? (Do you have earrings?)
Classroom Teacher: Sí, tengo un pendiente (Yes, I have one earring).
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Student 1 went beyond what was expected in the exercise and communicated real information about her father and most importantly, she was successful. She was able to make all the necessary changes to produce a grammatically correct utterance. Student 2 initiated the exchange in a joking manner because the teacher was male, and the teacher surprised her with his answer.

**Student 3**: “G---, ¿tienes lentes, gafas?” (G---, do you have glasses?)

**Teacher Aide**: “Sí, tengo lentes” (Yes, I have glasses)

**Student 3**: “No tengo lentes ahora, but tiene lentes a mi casa” (I don’t have glasses now, but I have glasses at home)

Student 3 initiated the exchange and then extended it with more personal information. The communicative attempt was completely successful, it had some grammatical flaws, but the message came across clearly. The student tried to go beyond the exercise and pulled together all the knowledge he had to compose this sentence in Spanish.

(Carracelas-Juncal, 2005, pp.159-164)

Although these results are very important, they are not the only positive outcomes of a classroom teacher and language teacher partnership. The language teacher observed that when the classroom teacher was not present “the students behaved differently. They wouldn’t pay attention in the same way because there was not the responsibility of the teacher there. They were also measuring me and how far they could go with me.” On the other hand, she noticed that when the teacher was present in the classroom, she could model the lesson with him or her and the children were able to understand the lesson quickly and were able to put it into practice themselves (Carracelas-Juncal, 2005, p. 131).

The language teacher also pointed out that having the teachers participate in the program helped the children realize that Spanish was considered a serious subject in their school and not an opportunity to have a break. The attitude of the staff had an impact on the children’s behavior and attitude towards the Spanish program. This is best illustrated by an experience that the language teacher shared with me. The school invited a juggler to perform for the whole school and all the grades from kindergarten to sixth grade were assembled to watch him perform. In one of his acts the children spontaneously started to count all together to his juggling in Spanish. All the adults present were truly surprised since no one had prompted the children to do it. This all school experience showed that Spanish was becoming an integral part of the curriculum at this school (p. 163).

This is only one example of one classroom and one school. However, in my experiences working alongside classroom teachers in early language programs I have seen many other manifestations of interpersonal communication initiated by the children during lessons as well as in contexts that transcend the classroom walls. I have also received written communications from parents recounting the efforts of their children to communicate with speakers of their language of study in social contexts beyond the world of the elementary school. The participation of the classroom teacher has a great effect on the outcomes of early language programs. However, in order to be successful this participation needs whole programmatic support. Although every school is different and every successful early language program reflects those differences, there are a few characteristics that are common to all and that have made the results shown here possible: a knowledgeable principal, committed teachers, a supportive community, and time for the teaching partnerships to develop.

Some Observations for Establishing Successful Teaching Partnerships

Whether the decision to implement an early language program comes from the community, from the school district or from within the school itself, it is important that the principal understands the goals and objectives of the program and sets the tone and directives for the type of early language program that will work best in his/her school. In my work with different schools, I have seen that the degree of involvement and enthusiasm of the principal affects the attitude of the whole school towards the language program.

Professional development for principals regarding how to establish, maintain, develop and support early language programs is crucial. It is important that the principal meet with the language teacher and discuss the role of the classroom teachers in the early language program. In order to establish teaching partnerships with the classroom teachers, the language teacher needs to be willing to develop a collaborative colleagueship with the teachers and serve as a resource for the whole school.

The classroom teachers should also be invited into the discussion about having an active role in the language program and give suggestions of what that active role might be. They should understand how important they are to the successful implementation of early language programs across elementary school levels. After taking the teachers’ input into account, the principal should establish a minimum requirement that all teachers can successfully accomplish, for example, being present during the language lessons. As the language teacher observed, the presence of the teacher alone is enough to turn the language lessons around.

The classroom teacher has a great influence in the effectiveness of the language lessons and the children’s behavior; when the classroom teacher is involved, they get the message that the language program is valued by all. Once the first level of involvement has been agreed upon, the principal then should find out which teachers, and other school staff, know the language or have had some language training and/or are willing to partner more fully with the language teacher and then encourage them to get more involved in the language program by recycling and integrating the language lessons throughout the school day.

Everyone should feel that she/he is contributing to the success of the program, regardless of the level of language skills...
or lack thereof. The school principal pointed this out, “we all do [Spanish] with different levels of ability, and we all do it and the kids then know that everybody is involved, from the youngest little preschooler through the six graders and the teachers” (Carracelas-Juncal, 2005, p. 145).

The language teacher can also partner with the technology, music, and art teachers to integrate the language into every facet of the school’s life. Once teaching partnerships get established, the successes and challenges of the language program are shared by all and the language program becomes everyone’s program. The language curriculum and objectives can be reviewed and developed during in-service meetings with the guidance of the language teacher, and lesson planning sessions can be regularly scheduled with the teachers as needed.

When this level of collegueship is established, it gives the language teacher much needed support and a sense of fully belonging to the school and of being a valued member of the team. It is important for the principal to give
to the classroom teachers for their cooperation
and contributions to the language program and provide ongoing professional development in the language of study and its integration during the school day for all the teachers and staff; for those who are already fully involved as well as for those that might be interested in expanding their role in the language program. Building a successful language teaching partnership takes time, and it requires administrative involvement and “know how,” a willing language teacher, and supportive classroom teachers. In other words, the entire school needs to feel ownership of the language program. The principal’s comment reflects this shared view of program ownership, “Spanish is our thing and we’ll all do it” (Carracelas-Juncal, 2005, p. 145). This type of program vision is what makes successful language teaching partnerships possible.

However, strong teaching partnerships might not happen in every classroom despite the best efforts from all involved. Some classroom teachers will be ready from the start and fully partner with the language teacher, and for others it may take years before they go beyond helping the language teacher during the lesson and venture on their own.

Even with all the right elements in place, some classroom teachers might never feel comfortable enough to take on more responsibility for the language program. This is to be expected. The early language program highlighted here experienced all possible variations in the participation of the classroom teachers, and the program was adjusted to provide the amount of language instruction needed in every classroom.

The language use of the children shows the results of careful planning, hard work on the part of both the language teacher and the classroom teachers, and of a school environment and a community that as a whole values language learning. After eight years of establishing the language program and more than a few ups and downs, the principal summed up the feeling of everyone at the school “I think everybody is kind of proud of this piece of our curriculum; that we do study Spanish pre-K through grade 6 and it’s kind of an organic natural thing. It is not another subject that everybody studies—it is integrated into day to day life” (Carracelas-Juncal, 2005, p. 145).

Conclusions
Although more research is needed on the role of the classroom teacher in early language programs, it seems that a collaborative teaching partnership between the classroom teachers and the language teacher in early language programs can be a model for success. The classroom teacher can do what the language teacher is not fully able to do, due to time limitations and the special characteristics of early language programs. The classroom teacher is in a position to integrate the foreign language at any time during the school day and weave it into the other subjects in the elementary school curriculum.

In this, both teachers can help each other by planning together. The language teacher can integrate the other subjects in her teaching and in turn the classroom teacher can integrate the language back into the rest of the subjects. The classroom teacher can make the foreign language have a real communicative use beyond the constrictions of the allotted time for the language lessons.

The elementary school classroom provides many opportunities during the school day for meaningful interpersonal communication in the foreign language, and the classroom teacher is in the ideal position to take advantage of these opportunities to expand the range of contexts in which to make meaningful use of the language for real communication.

The involvement of the classroom teacher not only would extend the amount of time the children are involved with the language, but it would also help maintain the interest and motivation of the learners in the language of study. Early language programs should carefully consider how to engage the collaboration of the classroom teacher, since it appears that early language programs that include the classroom teacher seem to foment “self-nominated, creative language” use in interpersonal communication on the part of the students.

The classroom teacher, by the nature of his/her profession, is ideally positioned to provide “the vehicle to integrate the foreign language in the students’ lives” and the social and cultural need to motivate young learners “to conform to the linguistic needs” of the new language in the classroom, encouraging the creative use of the language. The classroom teacher can play a crucial role in early language programs that cannot and should not be underestimated.
FEATURE

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Carmen Carracelas-Juncal, Ph. D. (UMass at Amherst) discovered early language programs as a doctoral student working with elementary school teachers in Western Massachusetts. Her interest in the field of early language learning led her to write her doctoral dissertation on FLES. Between 2005 and 2008 she accepted a joint appointment as Assistant Professor at SIT Graduate Institute and as FLES Coordinator for the Town of Brattleboro, Vermont, where she also had the opportunity to serve as K-2 Spanish teacher at Oak Grove Elementary. She is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi and serves as Mississippi’s representative for NNELL.
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