## Language Association Journal

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## Language Association Journal

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## Letter from the Outgoing Editor



Dear Readers,

I am excited to re-introduce the NYSAFLT Language Association Journal with this current issue. It is particularly meaningful to have the journal return in 2017 as NYSAFLT celebrates its $100^{\text {th }}$ anniversary. Just as NYSAFLT has evolved over the course of its history, so has the journal.

The recent hiatus of this publication served as a time for reflection, feedback, and renewal. The results of this process were a renewed commitment by NYSAFLT leadership to continue to publish a journal as well as a refreshed format that will be timelier and more reader-friendly. What makes the new format timelier is the call for submissions on all topics of importance to our field rather than only those related to a particular theme. These topics are indicated by the use of key words. What makes the new format more reader-friendly are the updated look of the pages and the inclusion of navigation tools for easier electronic reading.

What has not changed is the enthusiasm of NYSAFLT members and others for sharing their scholarship, their experiences, and their ideas. To continue to be inclusive of the range of writers and readers, there are still two main journal sections: scholarly articles and teacher-to-teacher articles. In this issue, you will read articles that serve to enhance and expand the work language educators do both within and outside of the classroom, from designing elective and technologyengaged courses, to differentiating instruction for heritage learners and those with special educational needs, to planning for students' literacy learning and their travel abroad. Enjoy, reflect, and share the ideas you learn from our authors.

After you have read and considered the many ideas shared here, I invite you to be inspired and to submit an article that represents your scholarly work, your innovative practices, or your impactful experiences that that can inform and inspire others.

Finally, I want you to know that the work of this journal will be carried on for the next few years by Dr. Mary Caitlin Wight. I am excited for her expertise and vision to contribute to the necessary and important evolution of the NYSAFLT Language Association Journal.

Kind Regards, Joanne O'Toole

## Letter from the Incoming Editor



Dear Colleagues,
While celebrating and learning in Niagara Falls this past October, the magnitude of 100 years of our world language association's existence struck me. Our collaboration has been ongoing for a century! What a perfect time for our Language Association Journal to return, revitalized and ready, so that we can share experiences and novel ideas throughout the year. The Language Association Journal is your place to dialogue and collaborate asynchronously with your colleagues through research articles, reports, and teacher to teacher works. As the saying goes, if you've got it, flaunt it. I am certain if there is any group that has it, it is world language teachers! Throughout this issue you will be able to partake in literature circles, plan engaging elective work and student travel, collaborate with other content areas such as STEM and special education, and build tiered classrooms for all learners. As you explore this issue, think of the engaging teaching you are doing and how you could share that work through a journal article with your colleagues!

I want to extend my sincerest gratitude to Joanne O'Toole, our outgoing journal editor. While you might have noticed the journal on hiatus, Joanne never stopped working to develop this space for our community. From researching what our association wanted in a journal, to exploring different avenues of creation, to creating updated submission guidelines, rubrics, and templates, Joanne tirelessly worked to prepare our journal for the next 100 years. I hope you will join me in thanking her for all she has done!

Best,
Mary Caitlin Wight

## Call for Papers

The Language Association Journal is the official peer-reviewed journal of the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers (NYSAFLT). The audience for this journal includes world language educators at all levels, teacher educators, administrators, and others who are interested in world language education. To address the diverse interests, focuses, and needs of this audience, each issue of the Language Association Journal allows for three submission types-scholarly articles, reports, and teacher-to-teacher articles - across multiple categories that are organized by key words, including, but not limited to: advocacy, assessment, culture, curriculum, FLES, instruction, issues in the profession, language development, literacy development, methods, policy, professional development, teacher preparation, technology. While previously the journal was thematic, we now welcome submissions from a range of topics for each edition. The Language Association Journal is published two times per year.

## Submission Guidelines

- Publication Status
- Your manuscript must not be previously published or under consideration for publication elsewhere.
- Language
- Write your manuscript in English.
- You may include examples written in languages other than English. Italicize these and include the English translation.
- Content
- Your manuscript may be a scholarly article, a report, or a teacher-to-teacher article.
- Graphic content such as tables, charts, and photographs, should enhance your written content.
- Key word categories: advocacy, assessment, culture, curriculum, FLES, instruction, issues in the profession, language development, literacy development, methods, policy, professional development, teacher preparation, technology.
- Present content that is appropriate for the audience of the Language Association Journal; that is accurate, timely and relevant; that extends or deepens what is currently known on the topic; that represents innovation or new ways of thinking; and that bridges theory and practice.
- Length
- Limit scholarly articles to no more than 8,000 words.
- Limit reports to no more than 5,000 words.
- Limit teacher-to-teacher articles to no more than 3,000 words.
- Writing and Style
- Write in active voice and with language that can be understood by all audiences of this journal. Define terms that may be unfamiliar to readers.
- Include only and all works cited in the reference section.
- Use style guidelines outlined in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, $6^{\text {th }}$ edition (2009). See http://www.apastyle.org for style support.
- Replace all references that would reveal your identity in the manuscript with generic terms such as Author X or School X.
- Proof-read your manuscript to ensure that it is error free.
- Technical Considerations
- Prepare the manuscript in a word document (.doc or .docx) using Times New Roman font size 12, double-spaced.
- Assure that any external links included or hyperlinked in the manuscript are active at the time of submission.
- Indicate the placement of any graphics (e.g., charts, tables, illustrations, student work) or photographs, within the word document. (You will submit these in separate files.)
- Remove any evidence of tracked changes that were used in the writing of the manuscript.
- Permissions
- Photographs
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- Obtain written consent for any graphics (e.g., charts, tables, illustrations, student work) that are not your own or that are not copyright free. (You will submit this in a separate file.)


## Manuscript Submission Guidelines

- Submit your manuscript and any additional files (e.g., graphics, photographs, consent forms) that have been prepared according to the above guidelines through the submission form on the NYSAFLT webpage.
- In your manuscript submission, provide a brief biography to include at the end of your article or report if it is published.
- Upon receipt of your manuscript submission, the Editor will send you an acknowledgement email and an approximate timeline for review of your submission.


## Manuscript Review

- After the Editor has received your manuscript and completed on-line information form, he or she will do an initial review to assure that your submission abides by the stated guidelines.
- If the submission abides by the guidelines, the Editor will forward the manuscripts to one or two members of the Editorial Board for anonymous evaluation and publishing recommendation. If the submission does not abide by the guidelines, the Editor will communicate this information to you.
- When all reviews are returned to the Editor from the Editorial Board, the Editor will make the final decision regarding the manuscript's publication and will notify you about the submission's status.
- All manuscripts accepted for publication are subject to editing.


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# Building an Inclusive Foreign Language Learning Environment: Self-Assessment and Collaboration 

Mary Caitlin Wight


#### Abstract

The purpose of this work is to provide language educators and special educators a self-assessment tool, Self-Assessment for Building an Inclusive Foreign Language Learning Environment (Wight, 2015a), to explore their practices in the language learning environment. It additionally aims to build collaboration among special educators and foreign language educators at the secondary level in an effort to better meet the needs of all language learners and ultimately decrease the need for the foreign language exemption of students with special needs. Educators are encouraged to participate in the self-assessment to better understand and reflect on their own inclusive practices. They can then use self-assessment results to develop professional learning communities and action research projects within specific departments or as a collaborative venture between multiple departments.


Keywords: Special Education, Foreign Language, Reflection, Inclusion
The purpose of this work is to provide language educators, special educators and other stakeholders in language education a self-assessment tool to explore their practices in the language learning environment while encouraging their collaboration to develop inclusive foreign language learning environments for their students. The reviewed literature, the selfassessment, and available resources that follow all aim to support educators in recognizing that there are potential exclusionary practices in language teaching and learning that they can address in ways that better include all learners. If the goal is for all students is to develop communicative and cultural competencies, then educators must create foreign language learning environments that are inclusive of the needs of all learners. This work is an attempt to provide one approach through which educators at the secondary level ${ }^{1}$ can explore their current practices while developing collaborative relationships within and across departments.

## Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

The educational theory of inclusion entails that all students feel, "welcome and that their unique needs and learning styles are attended to and valued" (Nevada Partnership for Inclusive Education [NVPIE], 2012, para. 3). Inclusive educators and learning environments aim "to provide all students with the instruction they need to succeed as a learner and achieve high standards, alongside their friends and neighbors" (NVPIE, 2012, para. 5). Inclusive education is a key component in successful schools that are able to reduce the achievement gap and improve achievement for all students (Hawkins, 2007). Although research has revealed that there are

[^0]those who believe inclusive education can be detrimental to high achievers (Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, \& Kaplan, 2007), inclusive education is, in fact, beneficial to all members of the learning environment, including learners and educators (Kalambouka et al., 2007; McDonnell et al., 2003; Salend \& Duhaney, 1999). Inclusive education is not simply the addition of modifications and accommodations to the current curriculum; rather it is a change at the fundamental level in order to meet the needs of all students enrolled. An inclusive foreign language learning environment welcomes all students, while challenging them with high expectations through differentiated learning techniques and assessments.

New York State currently allows for a practice that can seem exclusionary: the foreign language exemption. Students who are identified as having a disability, "which adversely affects the ability to learn a language may be excused from the Language Other than English requirement" (New York State Education Department [NYSED] 2010, section b.2.ii.b). In lieu of foreign language study, exempted students take courses in other subjects to make up the credits. No similar exemption is allowed in other content areas. Instead, alterations to requirements in testing or test scores are used. Furthermore, New York State does not regulate exemption practices. Instead districts are allowed to make the determination of who is exempted from the requirement and who is allowed to enroll in foreign language studies (Wight, 2014). This policy is contradictory to the Rehabilitation Act (1973), which states, "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability...shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excused from the participation in...any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance" (Section 794, para. A). This exclusionary policy is problematic because it perpetuates the myth that some can learn another language and others cannot, while simultaneously opposing the tenants of inclusion. McColl (2000) argued that:

Only in the English-speaking world, apparently, is it the norm for people to be able to express themselves in one language only. In most countries around the world two or more languages are spoken, not just by the academic or social elite but by everybody, regardless of education or background...There is no distinction between those who can and those who cannot; all just do. (p.3)
Inclusive foreign language education better allows for all students to become bilingual and bicultural while achieving levels of proficiency commonly acquired around the world. Language and special educators throughout districts must work together to provide an inclusive environment for all learners, with their collaboration serving as a powerful agent in decreasing language exemptions.

While the benefits of inclusion and the potential detriments of exclusive practices such as exemptions are known, many foreign language educators feel unprepared to meet the needs of all of their students (MacKay, 2006). They cite a lack of understanding as to how to make their courses inclusive (Lapkin, MacFarlane, \& Vandergrift, 2006) as well as a lack of support from special educators (MacKay, 2006; McColl, 2005). If inclusive foreign language learning environments are desired, foreign language educators and special educators need to support and empower each other through collaborative and meaningful professional development. Both foreign language educators and special educators have a plethora of tools available to support student learning and, through increased collaboration, these tools can empower educators to increase foreign language learning opportunities for all students. The self-assessment that follows provides an opportunity for reflection on current classroom practices and promotes collaboration between educators in two knowledgeable fields to support inclusive language learning.

## Use of the Inclusive Self-Assessment

It is important to remember that inclusive education is not meant to address solely the needs of students with disabilities. It is meant to create a learning environment that is welcoming to the strengths and needs of all students. By creating an inclusive foreign language learning environment, educators are better able to support all students in developing communicative and cultural competencies. The Self-Assessment for Building an Inclusive Foreign Language Learning Environment (Wight, 2015a) presented here is designed to assess inclusive practices within the foreign language classroom and is found in Appendix A.

The recommendations for the use of this self-assessment are threefold: at the individual level, at the departmental level, and at the interdepartmental level. At the individual level, foreign language educators and special educators are encouraged to complete the self-assessment individually based on their own classroom or a classroom they support and to reflect on the results. This assessment is not an indicator of teacher effectiveness or performance, but rather a chance to question one's own practices in order to spur thoughts about potential areas of growth. As answers may vary, based on the individual student or section being thought of while taking the assessment, educators are encouraged to pick an audience and think of only it for the duration. It is recommended that, as different audiences and needs arise, the self-assessment be retaken with these in mind. Educators are encouraged to use this self-assessment regularly in order to continuously reevaluate the areas of strengths and needs within the foreign language learning environment.

At the departmental level, this self-assessment is a tool that allows both foreign language educators and special educators to work within their respective departments. Thoughtful engagement over an extended period of time supports the professional learning community and fosters collaboration and growth. It cannot be overstated that this process cannot be rushed. Within a department, group consensus

> By creating an inclusive foreign language learning environment, educators are better able to support all students in developing communicative and cultural competencies. regarding common areas of need can spur action research projects that lead to the implementation of data-informed practices. For example, a yearlong project for the department might encompass researching best practices for vocabulary instruction, working together as a department to collect data on new practices, and making necessary changes in order to make vocabulary practices more inclusive to student needs.

At the interdepartmental level, this self-assessment allows for a conversation among special education and foreign language departments to occur with specific areas of need and desired support in mind. Members of both departments should reflect on their responses and determine areas where they would like to grow as well as areas where they need more support. Using the model of an interdepartmental professional learning community (DuFour, 2004), members can work together to further support each other and their students. For example, members of the two departments might concur that assessment is an area of need in order to make the foreign language learning environment more inclusive. They could then share insights
from best practices from their respective fields to make assessments more meaningful opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning and receive feedback.

To complete the Self-Assessment for Building an Inclusive Foreign Language Learning Environment (Wight, 2015a), the teacher should examine the statements in the middle column and then determine whether that statement is true or false for his or her foreign language learning environment. Although this assessment is unable to cover all ways to make the foreign language learning environment inclusive, it does discuss many aspects that are well-documented as being potential areas of exclusion for some students (Wight, 2015b). The results of this selfassessment point educators to areas of strength, areas for growth, and areas for exploration and collaboration within and across their professional learning communities. The section that follows the self-assessment provides several resources available to support that growth.

## Available Resources

The use of the self-assessment provides teachers an opportunity to identify areas of their practice that might be exclusionary. They can work from their "false" responses to explore potential areas of need and use these as the driving force behind action research. They might also use these to identify resources that promote the growth of their professional learning community. For example, a teacher who finds that assessment might be an area that excludes some learners in their classroom or department can take the time to research current assessment practices, explore alternative assessments with documented success in inclusion, make a choice about an assessment to implement, collect data, and repeat the cycle as necessary. There are many resources available to support areas of growth, including various professional organizations and materials on inclusive education, foreign language education, and students with special needs. (See Table 1.) Be it an individual, a department, or a collaboration of departments, anyone can use these and other resources to help make the language learning environment inclusive to the needs of all learners.

Table 1
Available Resources on Inclusive Foreign Language Learning Environments

| Resource | Group | Website |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Professional Organizations | New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers (NYSAFLT) | www.nysaflt.org |
|  | New York State Council for Exceptional Children (NYS CEC) | www.nyscec.org |
|  | American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) | www.actfl.org |
|  | Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) | www.cec.sped.org |
| Inclusive Education and Universal Design | Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) | www.CAST.org |
| Students with Special Needs | Center for Parent Information and Resources <br> - Has many of the resources previously available from National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY) | www.parentcenterhub.org |


| Students with Special | Ñandutí (2009) | http://www.cal.org/earlylan |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Needs in the Foreign |  | $\mathrm{g} / \mathrm{b}$ enefits/special_needs.ht |
| Language Classroom |  | $\underline{\mathrm{ml}}$ |
| Students with Special Needs in the Foreign Language Classroom - United Kingdom | Hilary McColl and Associates | www.languageswithoutlimi |
|  | - Languages without Limits | ts.co.uk |
|  | David Wilson (2014) | http://www.specialeducatio |
|  | - Special Education Needs and Language Learning | nalneeds.com/home/langua ges |

## Conclusion

If the goal is for all students to have the opportunity to acquire communicative and cultural competences in a language other than their own, then teachers must develop inclusive foreign language learning environments. The Self-Assessment for Building an Inclusive Foreign Language Learning Environment (Wight, 2015a) provides a chance to question oneself and one's practices in an effort to grow and alter language classrooms and support of language classrooms so that all students have the best opportunity. Through collaboration with colleagues, both at the departmental and interdepartmental levels, there is the possibility of decreasing the use of foreign language exemptions and increasing the acquisition of communicative and cultural competences for all students. Changes at the local level should be used as a catalyst for changes in statewide policies and practices, so that language educators are able to provide the many benefits and advantages of second language proficiency to all learners.

Dr. Mary Caitlin Wight has a Ph.D. in Curriculum, Instruction, and the Science of Learning focused in foreign and second language education from the University at Buffalo. Prior to pursuing her doctorate, she was a middle school Spanish teacher for beginning language students in both urban and rural settings. She has additionally taught English as a New Language at the Post-Secondary level. She is currently an instructor of teacher education at SUNY Geneseo and is an active member in NYSAFLT, ACTFL, and TESOL. She is an award-winning author for her 2015 publication in Foreign Language Annals entitled "Students with Disabilities in the Foreign Language Learning Environment and the Practice of Exemption." Dr. Wight lives in Greece, New York with her husband, daughter, and two dogs, and is a proud member of the Greece Central School District's Board of Education.

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## Appendix A

## Self-Assessment of Inclusive Practices

Directions: In response to the statements in the middle column, mark whether each is true or false for the language learning environment. If false, the learning environment can be altered to be more inclusive to learners.

|  |  |  | $\begin{gathered} \text { True } \\ \text { or } \\ \text { False } \end{gathered}$ |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Classroom Environment ${ }^{2}$ | Sounds \& Lights | Background noise and glare are reduced to minimize distractions for students. |  |
|  |  | The room is well lit. |  |
|  |  | I make sure all students can see my face when giving directions. |  |
|  | Seating | Students are able to see and hear the teacher, each other, and the board and/or screens easily. |  |
|  |  | Seating allows for easy access to the teacher and to peer support. |  |
|  | Appearance of Texts, Including Notes \& Visual | Texts are well organized including, but not limited to, use of headings, graphic organizers, pictures, and deletion of extraneous material. |  |
|  | Aids | Fonts and background colors are not prohibitive to learning. |  |
| Inclusion | Inclusive Stance | I believe that the curriculum, textbook, and instructional practices should change based on individual student need. |  |
|  |  | I believe that inclusive foreign language education requires a fundamental curricular and practical change, not solely modification and accommodations to existing materials. |  |
|  | Individual Student Needs | I aim to find out how each student learns best and attempt to alter the curriculum and course content to meet their individual needs. |  |
| Course Content | Communicative \& Cultural | Language learning is viewed through the lens of developing communicative and cultural competencies. |  |
|  | Competencies | Communicative and cultural competences are developed with equal importance. |  |
|  | Objectives | Students know the learning objectives and goals for developing communicative and cultural competencies at the daily, unit, and yearly levels. |  |
|  | Vocabulary | Vocabulary is presented and facilitated at the rate of 5-9 meaningful lexical items (Khoii \& Sharififar, 2013). |  |
|  | Grammar | Grammar topics are presented in contextualized and meaningful ways that focus on communication skills. |  |

${ }^{2}$ Aspects of the classroom environment section were supported through the self-audit available by the Training and Development Agency for Schools (2009).

| Classroom Procedures | Directions | Directions for assignments are available both orally and in print. |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | Learning <br> Strategies | I explicitly teach students how to use their language learning resources, how to organize their language learning materials, and how to effectively study and acquire language and cultural concepts. |  |
|  | Participation | I am clear with students regarding expectations for participation and how they can achieve their best results. |  |
|  |  | I am consistent and equitable in opportunities for students to participate. |  |
|  | Student Groupings | Students are grouped heterogeneously throughout our school. |  |
|  |  | Within specific classes, during group work, I group students heterogeneously. |  |
|  | Availability of Materials | Course materials are available so students can refer to them if necessary (e.g., the course website, extra copies in the back of the room). |  |
|  | Homework | Homework is used as a meaningful tool to develop communicative and cultural competences, rather than decontextualized language practice, such as grammar worksheets. |  |
| Assessments | Purpose | I believe the role of assessments is for students to demonstrate their learning and receive feedback for growth. |  |
|  |  | Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning. |  |
|  | Assessments | What is covered in class is consistent with what is assessed. |  |
|  |  | Students know what is expected of them on assessments. |  |
|  |  | Students are provided a quiet environment when necessary. |  |
|  |  | Alternative assessments that focus on developing communicative and cultural competences as well as on individual learning responsibility, such as portfolios and projects, are used. |  |
|  |  | Assessments inform my instruction, and I make alterations based on student need. |  |

Self-Assessment for Building an Inclusive Foreign Language Learning Environment, (2015a), original, unpublished self-assessment regarding inclusive practices for foreign language educators and special educators by author, M. C. S. Wight.

# Adapting Literature Circles to the Intermediate-Level World Language Classroom 

MaryNoel Goetz


#### Abstract

Today's global world calls for our youth to become proficient in language, communication, collaboration, leadership, as well as creativity and critical thinking. As $21^{\text {st }}$ century educators, teachers are tasked with fostering in our learners a cultural sensitivity and awareness of and appreciation for diverse customs. These educational goals are readily attained when an educator employs literature circles as a technique in the world language classroom. Participating in literature circles develops students as both independent and interdependent learners. They will become proficient in various jobs or roles in the circle promoting their ability to adeptly serve in many capacities. Literature circles prepare students with college and career readiness, equipping them with self-reflection, self-assessment, and self-reliance skills.


Keyword(s): Literacy Development
Literature circles are small groups of students gathered to discuss one piece of literature in depth. The idea for this practice is credited to Karen Smith, an elementary school teacher in Arizona, as a way to promote reading through small group work and discussion (Daniels, 2002). A classroom literature circle is the student equivalent of a structured adult book club with the aims of promoting open discussion among its members and fostering a love of reading. Literature circles provide a structured, student-centered approach to learning, allowing students to engage in reflection, critical thinking, and collaboration as they read and discuss literary pieces.

Harvey Daniels (1994) has researched and written much about the use of literary circles in the classroom. His definition of this teaching strategy is commonly used:

Literature circles are small, temporary discussion groups which have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book...each member prepares to take specific responsibilities in the upcoming discussion, and everyone comes to the group with the notes needed to perform that job. (p 13)
This technique involves students working together as well as independently, to delve into the meat of a piece of writing and pull it apart, analyze and discuss it together. When students practice group learning rather than solitary learning, they increase their exposure to new ideas (Kanamura, Laurier, Plaza, \& Shiramizu, 2013). This creates a student-led activity, which deepens student interactions, and builds classroom community and collaboration (Daniels \& Steineke, 2004). In this article, I will outline the various student roles and inform the reader how I have employed the literature circle as a teaching technique to fit my intermediate-level World Language classroom. I offer examples in Spanish.

## The Literature Circle

## General Outline

In the literature circle, students elect or are assigned jobs or roles to complete regarding the reading. The teacher describes the duties pertaining to each role and models each task in order to familiarize students with each aspect of the various roles. When the students perform a literature circle, the teacher evaluates the students based on their individual role as well as their contribution to the discussion pertaining to the literary piece. Upon completion of a literature circle discussion, students perform a self-assessment. The roles may be switched for the ensuing group discussions on different or future literary pieces.

## The Roles

Typical roles for the students have titles that would appeal to the elementary level student: Discussion Director, Diction Detective, Bridge Builder, Concrete Connector, and Literary Luminary. In adapting literature circles to intermediate-level Spanish classes, I renamed the roles and increased the rigor of the tasks involved in each role. The names have been modified to for the student population. Typical roles for an intermediate-level language class follow:

- Director - The Director (a) begins and directs group discussion, keeping the group on task in a timely manner, and (b) writes five thought-provoking questions for group discussion.
- Summarizer - The Summarizer prepares a brief summary of the reading, including main ideas and events, central characters, and symbols.
- Vocabulary Finder - The Vocabulary Finder records important and pivotal vocabulary words from the reading selection. For words that are unusual, unknown, have double meanings, or are essential to the plot, the Vocabulary Finder records, defines, and locates them in the text.
- Investigator - The Investigator searches for historical, geographical, or cultural information that can help the group of readers connect to the text. Such information may be about the author, theme, setting, era, and more.
- Connector - The Connector locates one or more key passages in the literary piece and connects them to real life. The connection may relate to any facet of their personal lives or prior knowledge, including incidents and characters from other readings.
- Artist - The Artist depicts, draws, or creates a visual rendition of a scene in the reading, then shares and explains the artwork to the group. The explanation includes which scene is represented and why they chose to represent that particular scene or event.
- Passage Picker - The Passage Picker chooses a key or pivotal passage to read aloud to the group and explains why this is an essential passage.
- Story Mapper - The Story Mapper highlights the locale and setting of the story and keeps a timeline of the major events of the story, both of which are reported to the group. In promoting discussion of a text in Spanish, I also refer to the roles, or papeles, in Spanish: Director, Resumidor, Vocabularista, Investigador, Conectador, Seleccionista de Pasaje, Artista, and Planeador. The above roles may be included or excluded as needed, depending on group size or on the teacher's discernment as to which roles will be most effective for the particular students. In my own classroom, I have designed groups with as few as four to as many as six students. Thus, as necessary, roles have been added, subtracted or combined together in order to successfully cover the text in discussion. To make roles more challenging,
they may be combined. For example, it may seem natural to combine the roles of Vocabularista and Seleccionista de Pasaje. Another logical combination of roles would be the Conectador and Ilustrador. This practice of combining roles works best when you have advanced students and smaller groups. Doing so enhances the students' ability to cover more material in-depth.

How are roles assigned to students? In order to create a comfortable environment and buy-in from the students, allow them to choose their preferred role for the first round of the literature circle, if possible. Also, share with the learners that, as the literature circle is a recurring event in the classroom, each student will have the opportunity to perform each role at least once. Thus, if they are not assigned their preferred role the first time around, they will surely have that role assigned to them in the near future. The instructor, taking the pulse of her class, may also opt to assign roles. A simple roll of the dice is another solution to assigning roles.

## The Adaptations

By definition, literature circle groups select their own reading. However, the instructor may also select the short stories, poems, articles, or book chapters the groups will read and discuss. In my intermediate-level Spanish course, the short stories used in class discussion are mostly those found in the text Album: Cuentos del mundo hispánico (Renjilian-Burgy \& Valette, 2005) which is replete with cuentos by authors from a variety of Spanish-speaking countries. These stories range from one to ten pages in length. Their size allows us to use authentic Latin American literature and complement the cultural aspect of learning in a manageable amount of time. The teacher, however, may choose any literary piece that fits the curriculum and level of the students.

## Phases and the Role of the Instructor

In this section, I have divided literature circles into three phases: the initial phase, the rehearsal phase, and the continuation phase. Introducing and discussing literature circles in phases will aid the learner in acclimating to the concept as a whole.

Initial phase. During the initial phase, the educator introduces the concept of the literature circle to students and the duties of each of the roles in the group. The role descriptions need to be detailed and with examples and checks for understanding. It is important that the learners feel confident in their knowledge of the scope of expectations for their role in the research and discussion.

Also essential in the initial phase is a demonstration of the literature circle. The instructor is very active during the modeling of the technique, allotting about 40 minutes of class time to read the chosen short story aloud with students, check for understanding, clarify events and ideas, and answer questions. The instructor should be present and accessible to students throughout this phase to answer their questions thoroughly and provide role clarifications. She should also share the assessment rubric to assure that students know what is expected of them. On their own time, students then reread the story for better understanding of details and nuances as well as to become more familiar with the story and its vocabulary. These steps combined are critical to building students' comfort level. As they come to better understand the nuances of their roles and prepare themselves thoroughly, they are more willing and open to take the "risk" of openly discussing the literature with their peers. The time and effort put in by the instructor during the initial phase will result in buy-in from the students. It will also ensure a seamless, in-
depth literary discussion that will leave everyone filled with a sense of accomplishment in their ability to meet the challenge of an extended, student-driven discussion.

Typical questions from students. During the initial phase, as students prepare for rehearsal of the literature circle, they are likely to have questions specific to their assigned roles. These questions should be answered thoughtfully and thoroughly by the instructor with responses directed to the whole class, given that, at a future date, each student will be charged with that same role. The following are some questions to anticipate from your learners:

The Directora may ask: In which order should I ask people to report to the group?
The Resumidor may ask: How long should my summary be?
The Vocabularista may ask: Have I chosen enough words? Are my words the right words?
The Investigador may ask: If I have trouble finding information about this story, what do I do?
The Conectador may ask: If I don't connect to this story personally, what do I do?
The Seleccionista de Pasaje may ask: What if I find two parts that stand out as important to me?
The Artista may ask: May I elect to do a song/painting/sculpting instead of a drawing?
The Planeador may ask: How does my role differ from that of the Resumidor?
Rehearsal phase (guided literature circle). After the initial phase is complete, the students are ready to "perform" their first guided literature circle. They arrive to class, and one group at a time is seated in a circle. Such face-to-face seating promotes meaningful discussion, idea exchange, and sharing. Students come ready with their notes and information from their research and preparation as well as the literary passage they have read in anticipation of the discussion. The instructor may opt to have the rest of the class serve as an audience to the discussion or have others work independently while she guides and assesses the group that is currently performing the literature circle.

The instructor sits outside the group. She is there for support and, during this phase, informal assessment. That is, she will listen and attend to the group discussion, offering feedback when crucial to the students’ understanding of and clarification of the roles they have been assigned. For example, she may remind the Director that it is his job to begin the conversation by reminding the group which literature selection they have read and will discuss, then elect one of his peers to report their findings to the group. The instructor may also chime in when she sees the Vocabularista share her chosen vocabulary to her peers without citing its location in the reading. The instructor will point out that it is important to cite directly from the passage, in order that other students may locate and read that word in the context of the story while the Vocabularista describes its importance to the group. Such feedback during rehearsal is essential for clarifying for all students the tasks associated with each role.

Continuation phase. After the rehearsal literature circle, subsequent literary pieces are read, prepared, and discussed in an increasingly more independent manner by the students. The
class might begin to read the story in class and continue and finish their reading of the story independently. Role preparation also takes place outside of class time, as homework. During the rehearsal and next literature circle, the students perform with their own writings, notes, and paragraphs of what they wish to report; but, over time and with each new circle, students gradually shift from relying on having research notes in front of them to relying more on their mental preparation for reporting. After only a few literature circles, students will have weaned themselves from their notes and will be able to work solely from the story when discussing a literary piece. The exception to this is the Artist, who will have a visual depiction to share. It is at this point that students will have reached "book club" status! That is to say, they are so familiar with the material in the text and the information for their role, that they do not need notes to discuss it.

Over time, the instructor's role transitions from that of assessor and facilitator to that of observer and assessor. The instructor, though present during the discussion, is not involved during the literature circle other than to observe the interactions and assess learning outcomes. It is important that the students are physically sitting in a circle while the instructor is physically outside of it. She listens and observes, filling in the assessment rubric and noting comments for each participant.

Timing. When the complete literature circle occurs in my intermediate-level Spanish classes, it is performed entirely in the target language and generally uses up all of the 40 minutes of class time with student discussion of the literary piece. It has happened that, during the question period at the end, the students are so engaged with their discussion, the bell rings, and class has to wrap up before we are truly finished....a sign of success and accomplishment by the group.

The instructor can modify the quantity of circles that are performed in a semester, based on the students, the proficiency level, and the length of the class. The literature circle is an invaluable technique that weaves together learner independence, student interdependence, communication, self-assessment, and so many valuable practice. It is worth utilizing often. Once begun, the literature circle becomes a well-oiled mechanism that can propel itself forward, enhancing student self-confidence, independence, engagement, and collaboration.

## Conclusion

In today's world language classroom, the use of literature circles helps us to prepare students with collaborative skills and the flexibility to play various roles on a team, which are essential in their readiness for their future path in college or career. As students discuss, assess, evaluate, and question issues that arise in the text, they gain critical awareness (Iida, 2012). Higher-order thinking skills are honed in each of the roles in the discussion. Students themselves, as they cycle through the role of Director, are the creators of the higher-order questions. In literature circles, students analyze text, question cultural values and assumptions, view emotional conflicts and social dilemmas, and create value judgments. As students read, examine, share, and discuss collectively, their critical thinking skills are enhanced (Brown, 2009). In essence, through the use of literature circles in the world language classroom, $21^{\mathrm{st}}$ Century best practices are enacted and students become self-sufficient learners, outfitted with the tools and techniques to thrive and succeed in university and career settings.

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# Building a Classroom for all Learners: Using Tiered Instruction to Challenge Native Speakers in Non-Native Speaker Classes 

Lauren Snead


#### Abstract

When teaching native and non-native speakers of the target language in the same World Language class, teachers must differentiate their instruction to promote all students' language learning and satisfaction. Tiered assignments are one strategy that can be developed from existing resources and implemented for both learning tasks and performanceassessments. Appropriately designed, tiered assignments support and challenge learners based on their current levels of proficiency.


Keyword(s): Instruction

## My Differentiated Experience

A few years ago, I visited Lake Louise in Canada with my family. If you have never been, it is definitely worth putting on your bucket list. While there, we did a six-mile hike to a remote teahouse with no electricity. The only ways to get there are by foot or by horse. I love hiking. I love beautiful scenery, and I love the idea of a remote teahouse that is unreachable by car. But I do not like heights. Not at all. This particular hike is a steep uphill climb which, at points, it is quite high. One stretch of the hiking trail follows the edge of a cliff, which is about two feet wide and alongside a very steep drop. There is even a wire to hold onto so that no one falls. I sure was scared!

Due to the frequent use of horses to travel to the teahouse, there is an alternate route on more walkable ground. No one expects a horse to walk along that cliff. The alternate route may be a longer distance, a little of out of the way, and with different views, but it gets to the destination all the same.

This is ultimately the definition of differentiation. It is about different ways to get to the same goal or end result. On the hike, everyone arrives at the teahouse. Some take longer routes, and some take more challenging routes. Some take steep routes, while others take flat routes. Regardless of the journey, the teahouse is the final destination for each hiker. Similarly, each student in your class bring differences: different abilities, different levels of achievement, different learning preferences. Some students quickly master concepts, while others need more time on the same concepts. As a result of learner variation, some methods of teaching can be more effective for some students, while other methods may work best for others. Regardless of each student's route and the method of instruction you choose, the end result is what matters most.

## Reaching Native Speakers

A few years ago, I accepted a new position as a high school Spanish I teacher. I was thrilled for the opportunity to work with the beginning students in my six assigned sections of Spanish I. Over the years, these beginning learners of Spanish have become my passion.

Having taught Spanish I for five years, I felt confident in my ability as a Spanish teacher and was ready for my students. I had even helped re-write the district's new and improved Spanish I curriculum in anticipation of the school year. Nothing could surprise me. Or so I thought.

At my previous school, my Spanish I students were non-Spanish-speaking students with very little experience with the language, other than what they learned from media, such as television shows or music. Over the course of that first day at my new campus, I realized that many of my students already had a strong foundation in speaking Spanish. Some students spoke primarily Spanish at home with their family. Others spoke it with extended family and had a strong grasp of the verbal language.

I learned that, due to having Spanish as their dominant language, a number of these students did not perform well in other content area classes. This made me question whether other teachers differentiated for their language skills and background knowledge. Even though our campus had Spanish for Native Speakers class, these students chose to enroll in Spanish I, a class in which they could envision their success. They were confident in their ability to speak Spanish and felt that Spanish I would be a strong fit for them.

From this very first day, I began to think about how to reach every student, regardless of background or Spanish-speaking ability. I knew this year would be different than other years. Although isn't that true for all classes? Every year we get different students with different strengths, needs, and backgrounds.

Maybe you have experienced a similar situation. Some schools do not offer languages other than Spanish or advanced Spanish classes. With today's lack of resources and shrinking budgets, it is possible that native speaker classes are non-existent in some schools. Regardless of resources, I believe it is our job as educators to try to engage and challenge every student the best we can.

## Looking at the Native Speaker

In this article, the native speaker, sometimes called heritage speaker, is defined as a student raised in a non-English speaking home who speaks and/or understands their native language to some degree (Cornell, 2015; Edstrom, 2007). Although Spanish-speaking native speakers might live in the same neighborhood and shop at the same stores as non-Spanish speaking students, they come to class with unique characteristics. Therefore, the way in which they approach Spanish class is likely going to be much different, too. Figure 1 looks at how native speakers generally differ from non-native speaker students in your class.

This unique group of students comes to our classes with different knowledge and experiences than others in the class. As seen in Figure 1, native speakers typically have a strong vocabulary base. For example, the unit on daily greetings and calendar items will seem very basic to them. When studying about ordering food at a restaurant, they will already know how to navigate that situation and likely would have ordered food in their native language countless times. Edstrom (2007) explains that native speakers perceive that they have an advantage with oral skills, but yet feel that non-native speakers have the advantage with grammar. With this in
mind, how can we teach to the strengths and address the needs of all our students in our class? Each student comes to our classes with unique experiences.


Figure 1. Concepts based on work by Edstrom (2007); graphic created by author.

## Using Tiered Assignments to Reach All Learners

"The focus of a tiered lesson is for all students to achieve the same essential skills and understanding—but at different levels of complexity, abstractness, and open-endedness. " Deborah Blaz (2006, p. 69)

Tomlinson (2003) describes tiered assignments as "parallel tasks at varied levels of difficulty" (p. 80). They provide an opportunity to scaffold learning in a way that differentiates instruction for each student, while meeting them where they are in their learning process. As explained by Blaz (2006), tiered lessons and assignments provide students different ways to reach the same set of learning objectives. Students will not experience the same level of readiness simultaneously, and tiered assignments enable teachers to meet students at their learning level. In addition, tiered assignments provide opportunities to appropriately challenge students with advanced proficiency, such as native speakers in a beginning language class.

Upon learning of tiered assignments, I wondered if my students would protest the differentiated tasks. Sometimes students expect everyone should receive the exact same instruction. Surely, the more proficient group will feel overworked, while the less proficient group will feel inferior. However, as I implemented a tiered assignment, I realized that this was not the case. Students were able to perform at their highest level, and students of all levels were satisfied and confident in their work.

The following are three steps to use when implementing a tiered assignment. Keep in mind the wide range of Spanish proficiency levels in your class as you prepare your activity.

## Step 1: Divide Your Students into Three Differentiated Groups

The day before a tiered assignment, I use a formative assessment to determine students' knowledge and achievement of the current learning objectives. This may be a quiz, a class activity, an informal assignment, or an exit ticket. Based on performance, I divide the students into three groups: low/developing, middle/at level, and high/above level. Typically, the native speaker students fall into the high/above level category.

## Step 2: Create a Tiered Assignment Based on Differentiated Groups

Tiered assignments do not always have to be complicated. It is possible to start with something you already have and modify it to fit the needs of all students. Think about something as simple as a worksheet that has already been created. The questions on any given worksheet pertaining to your learning goals are a great starting point for creating a tiered assignment. Even consider using some activities from the textbook as a starting point. Using a tiered assignment does not mean starting from scratch. Existing activities with relevant problems can serve as a sufficient beginning. Figure 2 uses an already created question using the verb gustar (to like). The problem was altered to differentiate for ability.

| Original Question | Tier 1 <br> Low/Developing | Tier 2 <br> Middle/At Level | Tier 3 <br> High/Above Level |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Directions: Conjugate <br> the verb gustar. | Directions: Conjugate <br> the verb gustar. Then <br> indicate if the sentence <br> is true for you or not. | Directions: <br> Write a sentence to tell <br> a friend something you <br> like or like to do using <br> the verb gustar. | Directions: <br> Write a note to a friend <br> in which you write <br> about what you like to <br> eat using the verb <br> gustar. |
| A mí me(gustar) leer los libros <br> de Twilight.A mí me(gustar) leer los libros <br> de Twilight. <br> Verdad? Falso? | - | - |  |

Figure 2. Tiered Prompt for Expressing Opinions with Gustar.
My objective for this activity is that all students can express an opinion through the appropriate use of gustar. I altered the original question from the worksheet to fit the different levels, and I added meaningfulness. Native speakers flourish with tiered assignments. They want to be challenged intellectually. If given the low/developing level question, the native speakers and advanced students would finish quickly. They would then likely become bored and be easily tempted to get off-task. With the high/above level questions, native speakers are able to create and design. The native speakers find freedom in the questions that ask them to communicate about what interests them. They feel empowered and that their language is valued. All students deserve to be engaged, appropriately challenged, and given an opportunity to learn. By creating activities at the right level for native speakers, you convey the message to these students that they can do more than they imagined, and that simply "doing enough to get by" is not acceptable or in their best interests. After all, we should have high expectations for all students. The key idea behind a tiered assignment is to meet students where they are and to ensure that all students are appropriately challenged.

## Step 3: Implement the Tiered Assignment

In order to be successful, students have to know what is expected of them. I like to create classroom expectations using the Wong \& Wong (2005) method: be clear, make expectations known to the class, and reinforce expectations throughout the activity. Typically, I do not explain that the activities for each group are different. I also do not state the levels or how the students were grouped. I simply describe that students will be working in groups on similar activities. Each group is given their individual assignments. This is a good time to remind students of healthy cooperative group practices such as respecting others' ideas, helping each other, and working together. I post my expectations on the board for all to see and refer to them as necessary. However, as you implement tiered assignments in your classroom, you will learn what is best for your students. The following are the expectations I have for my students: (1) remain in your assigned group; (2) work together as a group to help one another; and (3) ask questions of group members before asking the teacher. Using these three steps can set you up for successful implementation of a tiered assignment.

## Performance-based Assignments for Tiered Learning

Performance-based assignments ask students to be an active part of their learning, requiring students to write, speak, read, or listen and respond. These assignments provide an open-ended prompt while allowing students the opportunity to create their individualized response. There is not one specific answer, but yet many responses can appropriately answer a prompt. The beauty of performance-based assessments is the built-in tendency towards differentiation. Assignments written as open-ended prompts allow students to respond in the way that fits their learning level.

Tiered assignments easily complement performance-based assessments. For example, consider the following prompt:

You are enjoying your Spring Break on the beaches of Mexico. It is lunch time and you are starting to get hungry. The waiter is walking around taking orders. You may order food, drinks, and snacks right at the beach. You may also ask about finding a restaurant you can sit and eat at.
This is a simple prompt that students can work on in their tiered groups, without even changing the prompt. By simply having students work in their groups, each group will work on this prompt at a level that is appropriate for them. Tier one will likely use short, high frequency phrases, while tier three can have deeper conversations with more content and further discussion. This prompt could also be altered by becoming an interpersonal conversation in the advanced tier. Two students can role play the waiter and vacationer and take the conversation to greater lengths. As you can see, there is a lot of flexibility in how to roll out tiered assignments with performance-based assessments. Take risks and try new things. Start with prompts and assignments already created so as not to reinvent the wheel.

## Tiered Assignments: An Assignment for all Levels

Although tiered assignments require more preparation and logistical planning than a "one-size-fits-all activity," the end result is worth every minute of work. Native speakers thrive on challenges and will rise to the occasion. There is no time like the present to fully engage every student in the classroom.

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# Planning Student Travel in an Imperfect World 

Denise Caroline Mahns


#### Abstract

This article explores four factors in planning travel with language students: school sponsorship, lodging and food, the itinerary and travelers. It ranks potential travel situations from ideal to great to good-enough, drawing on research about homestay situations and shortterm study abroad experiences. The best travel situation involves lengthy school- and community-sponsored exchanges, while a good-enough experience involves a tour company and a short trip. The article also includes elements for teachers to consider when planning travel for language students in New York State and elsewhere.


Keyword(s): student travel, travel grant
It has become axiomatic that language learning and travel go hand in hand. Frequently, parents attending an open house ask one pointed question: When is the trip? However, school districts vary in their policies regarding student travel, and each teacher's circumstances are different. This variation becomes evident in answering these four questions: Will the trip be school-sponsored? Where will students sleep and eat? What will they do? And who, exactly, gets to go? This article ranks student travel experiences from "The Ideal" to "The Great" to "The Good Enough," offers responses to the four questions, and provides additional considerations for planning a trip with language students.

## The Ideal

School-sponsored? The ideal school district recognizes the important cultural and linguistic experiences students have when traveling to countries where the target language is spoken, and administrators at all levels would be supportive of student travel. Goldoni (2013) reminded that "building relationships with locals, establishing friendships, and participating in service or leisure activities within a local community of practice remain the most direct and successful strategies for creating a rich, authentic, meaningful, and effective cultural and linguistic experience" (p. 370). Teachers are allowed to publicize the trip in their classrooms and communicate with parents using school facilities. Fund-raising enables all students to participate, regardless of family income level. Aides are provided to students with disabilities, courtesy of the school. Student travelers are free to present to the School Board about what they learned during the trip.

Lodging/Food? The ideal trip involves a home stay and meals with families in the community. Students are able to practice their language skills and are immersed in the target language during the stay. Di Silvio, Donovan, and Malone (2014) found that "by placing ... learners in a situation of close contact with native speakers, a homestay placement can facilitate language development" (p. 182). Students in host families practice meal-taking and other customs. Depending on the time of year, travelers have the opportunity to attend school in the target community. Students in a home-stay context have "opportunities to perform day-to-day
activities; engage in more abstract discussions; and witness and participate in family chores, daily routines, leisure activities, social functions, and traditions" (Shiri, 2015, p. 22). A sistercity program enables multiple local schools to forge meaningful relationships, including welcoming students from the target language community on a reciprocal basis. The "most common type" of sister-city exchanges "are academic exchanges of students" (Bell-Souder \& Bredel, 2005, p. 6).

Itinerary? A lengthy stay allows for true immersion in the culture of the country, from a bustling metropolis capital city to rural farmland and everything in between. Travelers gain a sense of geographic and cultural diversity from in-depth study of the character of different parts of the country. Using the rail system or another form of transportation favored by locals gives students a sense of space and accessibility as they travel through the country. All activities are co-curricular and involve real-world use of the target language in contexts students have studied in their courses.

Travelers? Ideally, the trip is open to all, regardless of a student's family's ability to pay. Students with disabilities are provided the support necessary to take advantage of the travel opportunity. Chaperones are both proficient in the target language and experienced in leading group trips, and include teachers, administrators, and community members.

## Student travel can be a great boon to language programs and to the community.

## The Great

School-sponsored? A great trip has the school's blessing and support. Fund-raisers may be held outside of school hours. Parents fill in for aides in order to ensure that the trip is accessible to all students. Students and teachers present to the Board of Education before and after the trip. A tour company may be used to provide insurance and help with logistics.

Lodging/Food? A great trip includes hotels and restaurants that are independentlyowned and centrally-located. Restaurants specialize in local cuisine and students learn about the dishes before they are served. Some time is provided for students to eat in small groups in restaurants of their own choosing in order to practice ordering and meal-taking in the target language.

Itinerary? Frequently confined to a school vacation, a great trip packs in sight-seeing and museums along with walking tours to complement curricular topics. The itinerary is frequently customized to the group's interests. To save time and money, the trip may focus on only a few regions or cities. However, "in even a short-term program...students do notice and produce target language forms that are specific to the areas" visited (Reynolds-Case, 2013, p. 319). A great trip might also include students of multiple languages and have an itinerary that spans borders: French and German students visiting Bavaria, Alsace, and Paris, for instance, or French and Latin students touring Paris, the South of France, and Rome.

The choice of destination may be different from the group's ideal trip; rather than France, where airfare from New York State adds an extra expense, Quebec may be the best option. The relative cost of travel to Costa Rica compared to Argentina may point the plane's nose a little less southward. While closer destinations tend to be less popular, given that some students may have already visited the area with their families, they can also be more accessible, both financially and culturally. Oxford and Shearin (1994) noted that "foreign language learners rarely have sufficient experience with the target language community to have clearly articulated
attitudes toward that community, and they are therefore uncommitted to integrating with that group" (p. 15). Travel is a way to elicit motivation and to stimulate a desire to continue learning the target language. Teachers "can offer richness of stimulation by recreating realistic situations where use of the language is essential (e.g., traveling, ordering meals, finding a doctor, going shopping, solving a problem)" (Oxford \& Shearin, 1994, p. 24).

Travelers? The list of travelers on a great trip might be limited by students' parents' ability to pay, despite some fund-raising. Students with disabilities requiring special services may need to travel with a parent. A vetting process may be used, especially in case of overwhelming demand, excluding, for example, students with a disciplinary record. The age, maturity and behavior of travelers are considered, typically through formal character references completed by their teachers.

## The Good Enough

School-sponsored? In a post-9/11 world, many school districts have restrictions on school-sponsored travel. However, even a non-school-sponsored trip can have many important advantages. The lack of fund-raising can be liberating, especially since students and chaperones will be giving up school break time and will not have administrative support. Insurance is extremely important for non-school-sponsored trips, and using a travel company is a must.

Lodging/Food? A good-enough trip might have chain hotels located in the outskirts of major cities. Restaurants may also cater to American student travelers, but there will still be time for travelers to have dining experiences, especially at lunch, typically at their own expense. Street food and al fresco dining can be wonderful and inexpensive, especially if the weather is good!

Itinerary? In order to keep costs down, a good-enough trip might include only highlights and "must-see" sites. "Students are most frequently sent abroad in groups, often to attractive, vacation locations" (Goldoni, 2013, p. 359). Since both students and teachers must use school breaks, the trip duration may be shortened to ensure that everyone will return for school, even in the case of airline delays. A good-enough trip should carefully consider timing: February break will be less expensive, but New York weather may ground flights. April break risks interfering with Easter or Passover celebrations. Summer trips are more costly, and more crowded, but eliminate the pressure to return to school.

In some cases, smaller groups on the same tour package may be combined with groups from other states through the tour company. A limited itinerary can be supplemented by grantfunded additional cultural activities. For instance, the NYSAFLT Zimmerman grant specifically funds a special addition to a trip that was not included in the itinerary.

Travelers? A good-enough trip allows a group leader much discretion over the group composition. As a non-school-sponsored trip, only those students who pay promptly and demonstrate a cooperative, willing attitude will be accepted on the roster. Chaperones are typically only teachers, but may include their spouses. A parent chaperone, if very trusted, may be added if necessary. Even though the trip is not sponsored by the school district, it is a good idea to hold travelers to the school's code of conduct to make sure that each student is a worthy ambassador for the United States.

Consider your circumstances: Can you offer your students an ideal trip? A great trip? Even a good-enough trip can be a life-changing experience for travelers. With enough advance planning-over a year in some cases-student travel can be a great boon to language programs and to the community. Bon voyage!

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# Language Elective Courses: The Sky is the Limit! 

Susana Epstein


#### Abstract

After fulfilling their high school graduation requirement, many students opt to discontinue their study of a foreign language. To counter this trend and continue to build students' capacity to use language for real-world purposes, I propose that language educators should develop appealing, yet challenging, elective courses. Here I report on one such course, its evolution over time, and its outcomes for the students who took it.


Keyword(s): Curriculum

## Elective Course Enrollment: Obstacles and Possibilities

Many high schools struggle to keep their juniors and seniors enrolled in foreign language classes. It seems that, after fulfilling their individual requirements, usually two or three consecutive years of study, many students have little or no desire to continue. Why? Did they get conjugation fatigue? Perhaps they disliked the readings in their program? Do they anticipate having to learn more lengthy vocabulary lists? For whatever reason, some programs struggle to breed life-long language learners. Once these students have met their minimum foreign language requirements, they are done!

Proficiency in another language is a precious gift. High schools that are unable to maintain students' interest in this crucial field experience a major loss, not just for these young minds, but for the nation as a whole, which must continue to communicate with its neighbors and beyond. This article proposes that a major contributor to low elective course enrollment is a lack of pedagogical imagination, which results in course offerings that students find unattractive.

Teenagers do not typically want more of the same year after year in a language program. They are eager for variety, and what they want the most is to speak in Spanish, Mandarin, French, Italian...or whichever foreign language they have been studying. It is our responsibility to create such opportunities. After all, what is the ultimate goal of language instruction? We hope our students remain committed to perfecting the language(s) we taught them beyond their classroom years. We hope they turn this school subject into a real life tool.

Language teaching is most effective when focused on building communication skills in the three modes: interpersonal (oral or written negotiation of meaning between two or more people), presentational (delivery of a one-way message, either oral or written), and interpretive (comprehension, interpretation, and analysis of aural, written, and visual texts). Such an approach values real-life, practical language over prepackaged textbook units. The goal should be to have students creatively engage with the subject by drawing on their own experience, rather than learning the depersonalized vocabulary of seemingly random topics, like hospitals, post offices, and grocery stores, to name just a few.

Textbook-based courses and curricula are still predominant in many schools, a factor that can play a role in students' motivation to withdraw from language classes once they have completed their program's requirements. This is not to say that the fault lies with the textbooks.

There are excellent programs in the market at present with wonderfully interactive resources that, when used properly, can be a boon to any language course. That said, we need to implement these tools more wisely, organizing our topics of interest according to our students' preferences, interests, and abilities rather than just following the dictates of a publisher. In my experience, discussing current affairs or inquiring about students' likes and dislikes in a variety of areas injects real life information into lesson plans and reenergizes pedagogical objectives and curricula.

We can no longer teach topics that are not directly relevant to our students' lives and demand that they memorize long, occasionally absurd vocabulary lists before their next quiz. We can no longer impart decontextualized grammar lessons with drills in preparation for the next unit test. Language professionals have an obligation to strike a balance between what they want to teach and what the students want to learn. Mixing traditional methods with more innovative strategies is the path to a healthy, long-lasting foreign language experience. These newer approaches are predominantly learner-centered, featuring personalized instruction that utilizes multiple levels of communication. Technology has an important role to play in meeting this challenge, yet live interaction between teacher and students, as well as amongst students themselves, remains the single most indispensable element of a robust language education.

## A Model for an Elective Course

With an inkling of these ideas in mind, I began to offer an elective course called Las Noticias en Español 18 years ago. The class was designed for seniors who had already completed their language requirements. The initial objective was to keep the Spanish student population engaged in their language studies through their last year of high school. Discussing the news seemed an effective way to stimulate their self-expression, both in speech and in writing. The content of the course was largely determined by the students' interests. Five years ago, after a student survey, the course took a turn from being exclusively focused on current affairs to introducing other foreign languages as well. This is exactly what the students wanted, and I agreed to it under the condition that all languages be taught in Spanish. Nowadays, we spend most of the second semester learning the basics of German, French, Portuguese, or Italianlanguages with which I am familiar-depending upon how much time we have left in the term.

So what is it about this course syllabus that attracts our seniors? I believe interest is driven by students' curiosity for other languages and cultures, as well as their eagerness to use their Spanish in a different classroom setting where they can engage with contemporary topics they are likely to discuss with native speakers should they get the chance.

So what does the Noticias en Español class look today? To begin, we watch online news in Spanish every day for about five minutes. Then we talk about what we watched, often generating heated group discussions. Next, we take the conversation to our class blog, where students post their thoughts as an assignment. This is not an open-ended virtual space; it is a controlled arena in which I post specific, relevant questions to further our dialogue on a particular subject. As the year progresses, I pass the responsibility on to the students, who take turns picking new discussion topics. Some major subjects of interest this past year included the American presidential election, the legalization of marijuana in Uruguay, and the ongoing civil war in Syria. The exchange of opinions in an open forum helps students build a public voice. I am always struck by their improvement over the course of the year. Not only do they learn a great deal of vocabulary rarely found in ordinary textbooks, but they also adopt new idiomatic
expressions and syntactical structures they never used before, thus securing their path to proficiency.

In a parallel effort to develop their private voice, students write daily entries in their ejournals. This assignment essentially consists of drafting brief e-mails to which I respond individually, meaning that they have homework every night (and so do I!). All of their e-entries are recorded in folders I keep separately under each student's name. The fact that this exercise is limited to two-way communication keeps the exchanges mostly confidential. Students write about a wide array of topics, ranging from personal entries about their daily routines, their families, favorite films, books, TV shows, college choices, etc., to more explicitly academic work about the day's class or other current events. Posts are about 50-80 words on average, and the tone is generally casual and friendly.

In all of these activities, the emphasis remains firmly on communication. As long as we understand one another, students do not lose points for their mistakes. When errors accumulate to the point that communication is compromised, I return e-journal entries or blog comments with corrections for students to address. They do occasionally lose points for lack of depth in their opinions, and certainly for any late assignments.

I am aware that some of my students occasionally resort to Google Translate, Word Reference, or other virtual tools when they are doing their homework. This is allowed in our course, so long as students acknowledge their sources at the bottom of their piece. It works. Once they know their teacher will not punish them for it, students venture into new vocabulary and sentence structures they would never attempt on their own. I believe that this is a good learning tool for them, as long as they are honest with themselves and their teacher. Do I ever encounter students who fool me? Of course I do. This is a risk I am willing to take, for the positive results vastly outweigh the occasional misuse.

Apart from reading online news and selected articles I bring to our meetings, students have an opportunity to read actual newspapers every two weeks, when we meet for a first period class in the school cafeteria. My neighborhood newsstand provides me 20 copies of El Diario, but I am sometimes also able to bring copies of El País, El Clarín, El Mercurio, and other papers to pass around. I value these biweekly classes tremendously, as they help me create the kind of closeness with the students that can only take place once you get out of the classroom. The lesson takes place as we have breakfast together and read out loud, comment, interrupt, and misbehave-all in Spanish, of course, just as if we were a big family in a big kitchen sharing the morning news.

## Expanding and Enhancing the Elective Course Curriculum

There are many other important components to this elective course that guarantee its effectiveness. We watch and discuss movies from many different Spanish-speaking countries, conduct interviews as a group with Hispanic members of our school community, and engage in a wide variety of individual and collaborative projects. However, as inventive as the course can
be, every year I notice a sort of Spanish fatigue arise during the second semester, once college admissions decisions start coming in. Many students are understandably preoccupied as they wait to learn whether they have been accepted, deferred, or rejected.

In an effort to refresh students' attention, a few years ago, I decided to expand the curriculum during this sensitive part of the year. It was the spring semester of 2008. I announced that we would begin studying additional foreign languages-in Spanish. Although not fully convinced, most of them enjoyed this playful dare. I proposed a handful of languages, and the students voted for Italian. This complete switch of gears was a great opportunity to introduce students to a new language while simultaneously advancing their Spanish. I was thrilled.

Before getting started, however, one student, who had privately studied Arabic for many years, offered to teach us some basic Arabic in Spanish as a special, individual project. I could not say no, as student enthusiasm and participation was exactly my goal. This student prepared a week's worth of lessons (four classes) and worked very hard at using his Spanish at all times to explain fairly difficult grammatical concepts and proper pronunciation. He even got us all to come up to the board to learn how to write our names in Arabic. After finishing this student-led project, we discussed the difficulties we all encountered-both the presenter during his preparation and delivery, and we, his audience, while following the lessons. The discussions were also conducted in Spanish.

After a dose of Arabic, the students were ready for an introduction to Italian. Choosing Italian was a great idea because many of them had some experience with Latin, which allowed them to make quick connections to Spanish. We enacted some simple dialogues, learned a couple of traditional songs, and, to conclude the cycle, we watched an Italian movie with Spanish subtitles. This series of tasks, which originally caused some complaints, greatly strengthened their reading comprehension in the target language, as demonstrated by their in-class writing and conversation sessions. Their e-journal and blog assignments continued throughout the Italian experiment.

During that first year, I also introduced French, following the format I had implemented with Italian. Thereafter, circumstances changed according to the different population of students. Some years I did not do Italian or French, as students voted for either German or Portuguese instead. In 2014, for instance, we studied basic Portuguese by popular demand, due to Brazil's status as host country for the World Cup. (I work at a boys' school!) In reality, any Romance language is a plus in the Spanish classroom. I am always interested in making comparisons, drawing inferences, playing word games-in short, making my students think about languages and be excited about learning them. This year, we also benefited from a week of basic Mandarin-again, in Spanish - thanks to a student of Chinese descent who asked to do an individual project for extra credit. Fascinating! Without having planned it, I now had students offering to prepare lessons in their home languages, which opened up the possibility of integrating other cultures into our classroom.

By the end of the school year, my students had learned a great deal of vocabulary related to health care, finance, terrorism, war, borders, espionage, and much more. It all made sense to them. They will not easily forget it, because they had seen and used it in context. These words became relevant to them in ways that are often impossible via textbook drills. Watching and discussing engaging films that dealt with ethical issues and social conflicts also contributed to the students' improved communication skills. However, the introduction of other foreign languages in Spanish, whether teacher- or student-led, remains the greatest innovation of this
elective course. I will always be grateful to my students for their unflagging intellectual curiosity, creativity, and contagious joy for learning.

I happen to know several languages, but every teacher has skills and passions. Do you like to cook? Do you knit? Do you like sports? Do you love literature? Are you tech-savvy? Do you play videogames? Whatever you really, really like and can do well can be transformed into a valuable teaching tool in an elective course, as long as you do it all in the target language.

## Conclusion

If our aim is to retain the interest of juniors and seniors in our language programs, we need to break the mold and offer more attractive course electives. Over the years, when graduates have come back to visit, they often tell me they are studying-perhaps even majoring in-a foreign language they had never thought to learn until they were introduced to the subject in our senior elective course. And yes, many have continued taking Spanish in college and even spent a semester or a year abroad in a Spanish-speaking country to become increasingly proficient.

Needless to say, there are students for whom the study of a foreign language is never a positive or fulfilling experience, which is a different topic, yet we owe it to ourselves and our students to promote learning beyond the minimal requirements by prioritizing their interests, promoting interactive communication, and challenging young minds to apply their knowledge to the world around them in new and stimulating ways. The impact of such a course may last long beyond our students' school years and transform them into lifelong language learners. I have explored one path toward this goal, and I encourage other language educators to think outside the box. After all, the sky is the limit!

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# Globaloria Game Coding: Integrating STEM into Second Language Instruction 

Deborah Isom


#### Abstract

In the $21^{\text {st }}$ century, coding information has taken on increasing importance in everyday communication. This article relates one educator's quest to learn how to integrate coding in the language classroom, her application of the resources and ideas gleaned, and the language learning outcomes of having her students engage in coding game design through Globaloria.


Keyword(s): $21^{\text {st }}$-Century Skills, Curriculum, STEM, Technology
Presently, an incongruence exists between what is taught in schools and what a student needs to know in order to function and be successful in an information-oriented society in the $21^{\text {st }}$ century (Isom, 1991). Oral communication is no longer limited to telephones and smartphones. Paper, textbooks, and calculators have been replaced by an array of electronic devices, and resource libraries are now virtual spaces. Texting has created a new language, and coding information has become the dominant means of communication. Coding is a text-based language that involves the knowledge and understanding of symbols (Myers \& Berkowicz, 2015). In order to understand how the language of coding could be used to teach and enhance second language acquisition in the school environment, I enrolled in a three-day workshop, Globaloria Game Coding, sponsored by the New York City Department of Education. As an assistant principal of World Languages, ESL, and Bilingual Education, I was interested in learning ways in which teachers and administrators can effectively prepare students to be successful and productive citizens in the $21^{\text {stt}}$-century global economy.

Globaloria STEM Learning and Computing through Game Design (https://globaloria.com/) is an online learning network that offers courses in game design and coding that enable students to not only create video games, but to also enhance their understanding and knowledge of Common Core subjects and socio-political issues. Students engage in interactive, "hands-on, learn-by-doing" activities by working collaboratively and at their own pace. Students are the "problem solvers," and teachers are the "facilitators" who assist in the students' understanding and mastery of content area subjects such as math, science, second language acquisition, social studies, etc. As I navigated the components of the program, I began to think about the ways in which Globaloria STEM game coding activities could not only enhance students' acquisition of the four language skills but also how it could also empower students in the $21^{\text {st }}$-century global economy.

A few weeks after I completed the STEM Institute, I was able to obtain a Globaloria STEM game coding grant for the middle school ELL class that I would be teaching. I aligned the thematic topics in my ELL lessons to the topics in the Globaloria STEM game coding program. My ELL students were able to apply the vocabulary and grammatical structures from the ESL lessons in the Globaloria coding program. They created a personal profile, reading and applying the guidelines to customize and complete their project page and to code their
game. The students worked collaboratively and at their own pace, and there was a high level of student engagement in reading, writing, listening, and speaking in the target language. The students self assessed and posted their ideas and experiences in Globaloria electronic learning logs and community blogs. Globaloria virtual and in-person professional development, virtual coding tutors, curriculum coaches, and the ESL Library (www.esllibrary.com) all served as additional resources to support the successful implementation of this program.

One thematic topic I introduced to my students was that of health and wellness. The aim of the lesson was "How Can We Game Code Modern Day Health and Wellness Issues Using Globaloria?" Figure 1 provides an overview of this lesson's components.

| Guiding Question |
| :--- |
| How Can We Game Code Modern Day Health and Wellness Issues Using Globaloria? |
| Game Coding Objectives |
| Students will be able to... |
| 1) work collaboratively in pairs or groups of three. |
| 2) play to learn Health and Wellness Globaloria Gallery Games. |
| 3) plan a story line plot for Health and Wellness coding game. |
| 4) create a paper prototype of a Health and Wellness game. |
| 5) code an original game. |
| 6) present and share games in class. |
| 7) publish games in the Globaloria Gallery. |
| Materials |
| 1) Chrome books with Internet access to Chrome or Safari browsers |
| 2) Smartboard, speakers, headphones |
| 3) Chart paper, markers |
| 4) Electronic flash cards, electronic and paper folders, Google and USB drives |
| Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts Grade 6 |
| W.6.6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to |
| interact and collaborate with others. |
| SL.6.1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and |
| teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas |
| and expressing their own clearly. |
| SL 6.2. Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, |
| quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study. |
| SL 6.5. Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual |
| displays in presentations to clarify information. |
| SL6.5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information |
| and enhance understanding of presentations. |
| SL6.6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal |
| English when indicated or appropriate. |
| L.6.3. Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or |
| listening. |
| L.6.6. Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific |
| words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase |
| important to comprehension or expression. |
| Motivational Activities |

1) Have students discuss the following questions in small groups:
a. Is health care free in your country? Is medicine free?
b. Do doctors make house calls?
c. How often do you have a regular checkup?
d. Have you ever been in the hospital?
e. Are you allergic to anything?
f. Have you ever broken a bone and worn a cast?
g. Are drugstores very different in your country than they are here?
h. List three different contagious diseases. What are the symptoms of each? (www.esllibrary.com)
2) Have students view, identify, and pronounce vocabulary related to health and wellness from Internet resources and electronic flash cards.

## Guided Practice

Have the students...

1) read Going to the Doctor and Drugs and Medicine using the collaborative jigsaw method.
2) complete oral presentations and written responses in their electronic journals and blogs.
3) generate original sentences, questions, and responses using thematic vocabulary related to parts of the body, medical personnel and conditions, and health and wellness.
Independent Practice
Have the students...
4) engage in Play To Learn games from the Globaloria game gallery.
5) discuss what they will do and make in the Intro to Game Design using HTML and Java Script.
6) Turn and talk about what they learned from playing the games.
7) Provide the following information using the Editor's Template:
a. Background: Where is your game taking place?
b. Player: Who or what is the player in your game?
c. Goal: What is the player's goal?
d. Collectibles: What object or objects will the player be collecting?
e. Enemies: What must the player avoid?

## Summary

1) Each group shares and discusses their Play to Learn and Game Plan outcomes with their classmates.
2) Students peer- and self-assess their outcomes in planning their game and in their Play to Learn activities.

## Homework

Students create a paper prototype of their Health and Wellness game to discuss with the members of their group.
Figure 1. Health and Wellness Lesson Plan
My ELL students were eager to use the vocabulary and structures that they had learned from the class activities to describe the villains and heroes in their game coding scenarios. Students who had access to the Internet in their homes completed the activities at a faster pace than the students whose only access to the Internet was at school. My students also participated in an "hour of code" in which they selected a game coding activity to complete and share with other students.

This experience of integrating Globaloria Game Coding activities with my ELL students has motivated me to further explore and identify ways to integrate STEM activities not only in ESL classes, but also in world language classes. STEM activities promote the use of the four linguistic skills, student-centered learning, and the social and cultural communicative skills that will help to ensure the success of our students as productive citizens in the $21^{\text {st }}$-century global economy.

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[^0]:    ${ }^{1}$ This work focuses on the secondary level as that is the general age level that foreign language education occurs in New York State. There are understandings throughout that may support primary or postsecondary educators as well.

