

NNELL
at

25

and its
founding
mothers

by Janet Glass

On the occasion of NNELL's 25th anniversary, I looked into a bit of its past and sent interview questions to those early leaders that could be reached.

The Founding

It was November 1986. An ACTFL Conference in Dallas brought them together at a networking session for early language programs. These professionals were lamenting: elementary schools interested in foreign language programs had no network for support. So our Founding Mothers decided to do something about it.

Nancy Rhodes said, "The Center for Applied Linguistics orga-

nized and hosted the planning meeting in January, 1987 at CAL's offices in Washington, D.C. Twenty-five educators from 16 states met, most of whom came from out of town at their own expense.

"It was like a pajama party at my house,"

Mimi Met said, "and the excitement was palpable."

At the end of the two-day meeting, the National Network for Early Language Learning was born. The Executive Committee that came out of that meeting included Carolyn Andrade, Diane Ging, Mari Haas, Nancy Hess, Melanie Klutts, Gladys Lipton, Kathleen Riordan, Nancy Rhodes and Marcia Rosenbusch. Marcia

said, "I had just finished my Ph.D in 1986 and had focused my dis-

sertation on the topic of second language learning in young children. I presented my findings at the ACTFL Conference in Dallas, Texas, in November 1986 at which we decided that an organization such as NNELL was needed."

The Early Days

Kathy Riordan looked back on those early days: "I think that the concept of a network encouraged teachers, usually with little administrative support, to be changemakers."

Carol Ann (Pesola) Dahlberg, co-author of *Languages and Children: Making the Match*, said, "Visibility for early language programs was relatively low. NNELL gave us a focal point for the passion we shared for early languages in the early years."

At that time, Nancy Rhodes, Mimi Met, Carol Ann (Pesola)

Dahlberg, Helena Curtain and others were instrumental in providing professional development opportunities for districts across North Carolina. "That helped us establish strong programs," Mary Lynn Redmond recalled. As more and more states were included in the network, NNELL also began to sponsor networking sessions at conferences across the country.

Mary Lynn said, "NNELL began as a grassroots organization and I think this is the beauty of the organization."

Mimi Met recalled that "when ACTFL first scheduled sessions for us to share materials or information, about seven or eight of us showed up. One way we knew NNELL was a success was when the annual Swap Shop breakfast at ACTFL sold out at 250 tickets."

Publications Emerge



Celebrating NNELL's 20 year anniversary at ACTFL 2007 in San Antonio. NNELL past presidents from left to right: Lori Langer de Ramirez, Nancy Rhodes (past Executive Secretary), Susan Walker, Janis Jensen, Myriam Met, Martie Semmer, Marcia Rosenbusch, Carol Ann Dahlberg, Eileen Lorenz, Kathleen Riordan, Mary Lynn Redmond, Christine Brown, Mari Haas, Terry Caccavale



In the spring of 1989, NNELL produced the first volume of a publication, *FLES News*. This newsletter helped to create cohesion among participants. It also served to disseminate information to a growing body of NNELL members. In the fall of 1995, NNELL transitioned from a newsletter to a referred journal entitled, *Learning Languages*. One of our Founding Mothers, Marcia Rosenbusch, was the first editor of *FLES News*. She then became the founding editor of the journal.

Marcia remarked, "I think having a journal was a strong visible reminder of the organization and its work."

Carol Ann said, "Planning for a journal, and eventually for a referred portion of the journal, helped to include pre-kindergarten through university participation."

A More Formal NNELL

Then, in the fall of 1991, NNELL elected their first officers and approved the constitution. Many of the founders continued to help shape the organization. The elected officers included Carol Ann (Pesola) Dahlberg, Carolyn Andrade and Audrey Heining-Boynton. Nancy Rhodes was appointed executive secretary and Marcia Rosenbusch, editor. Among the accomplishments in the subsequent years were becoming a voting member of JNCL, dividing NNELL into five geographical regions with regional representatives, and establishing the NNELL Swapshop breakfast at ACTFL in 1992.

Kathy Riordan reflected that her favorite NNELL memory is the Swapshop breakfasts. She called it "a lively member-directed event where sharing is the most important thing."

During the more formal years, NNELL also became partners with ERIC-CLL, working with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics at CAL. Under the presidencies of Mari Haas, Eileen Lorenz and Mary Lynn Redmond, political action and advocacy grew widely along with strong networking. In 1997, Mary Lynn organized an Invitational Institute that brought 58 NNELL members to Wake Forest University. Participants created lessons to reflect the reforms in K-8 language education that were brought on by the new National Standards.

Later, NNELL Institutes were held at Iowa State University for

several consecutive summers. This is a favorite memory of Marcia's: "The NNELL workshops we were able to hold at Iowa State University through the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center were great. They helped teachers from across the country have time to get to know each other and talk about mutual concerns."

As noted by Carol Ann, "We set up a formal structure that ensured that many voices could contribute to the development of the organization." NNELL's structure in more recent years has also benefitted from the fine leadership of some who may not have been previously mentioned. They include presidents Susan Walker, Christine Brown, Myriam Met, Carine Feyton, Martie Semmer, Lori Langer de Ramirez, Janis Jensen, Terry Caccavale, Paula Patrick, Jacque Van Houten and Rita A. Oleksak.

The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century

In addition to networking, supporting programs, and advocacy, NNELL has also been a force in national foreign language goals. Marcia Rosenbusch relates an anecdote that changed the face of the ACTFL National Standards.

In 1993, I ran into members of the Standards Task Force Committee as we overlapped at a meeting on the East Coast. I learned that they were not thinking of including the elementary level in the standards document since there were few elementary programs at that time. When I got back home, I wrote a position paper that expressed the idea that "establishing standards for eighth and twelfth grade, but not fourth grade, limits the future of the profession" and sent it to the NNELL Executive Board for approval. They backed it, and with this statement from the NNELL Executive Board, Christine Brown, Chair of the Standards Task Force, later said she was able to get the task force to visit K-12 schools in Florida. After that they decided to make the Standards K-12.

The National Standards Task Force attributed NNELL's strong push for a K-12 framework as the impetus that broadened the scope and long-term impact of the standards.

Other Impacts on the Profession

Just for Fun

Other names proposed before NNELL was chosen for this organization:

- NNELE: National Network for Early Language Educators
- NESFLE: Network of Elementary School Foreign Language Educators
- FLIC: Foreign Language Instruction for Children
- NELL: Network for Early Language Learning
- EFLL: Early Foreign Language Learning
- EAL: Early Additional Languages

According to some of our early leaders, the impact NNELL has had on the profession extends not only to teachers, but also to the public and other organizations. Kathy Riordan stated, "I think NNELL has given members a power base from which to learn and with whom one can advocate for change."

Carol Ann Dahlberg said, "It brought visibility to the needs of language education at this level."

Marcia offered, "I think, through the years, it has made other organizations, such as ACTFL, more aware of the elementary school level of world language teaching."

Nancy went even further: "One of the most exciting things has been seeing how a small grass-roots, low budget effort—of teachers, administrators, teacher trainers, and researchers—has been able, by working collaboratively, to make a huge impact on the teaching of languages to young children. Over the last 25 years NNELL has moved the field of K-8 language education into the forefront of K-16 language education."

Advice for Current and Future Early Language Teachers

Our NNELL Founding Mothers have seen the organization grow and the profession change. They are eager to impart their wisdom to those who will follow. One strongly stated, "Stay in the target language in your classroom." Research confirms that this very simple premise leads to higher student proficiency levels.

Another encourages us to join organizations to keep developing professionally. She advises new and veteran teacher alike to become active in those organizations and share with colleagues. World language teachers, especially in the elementary school, can be in a lonely, isolated position.

One of the Founding Mothers asks teachers to volunteer to be that support that colleagues in other schools may need. Another said, "Follow in the footsteps of those trailblazers who never gave

A tribute to Mari Haas (in absentia), one of the Founding Mothers and a NNELL past president, at the 2010 ACTFL Conference Swapshop Breakfast in Boston. From left: Helena Curtain, Terry Caccavale, Janet Glass, Pamela Valdez, Josie O'Neill, Nancy Rhodes, Marcia Rosenbusch, Alicia Vinson.



up. Love your work, and work for the best possible programs in every school. "

NNELL's Role Today and in the Future

"NNELL is poised to play a very important role in the future of language education in the United States," Nancy Rhodes suggested. "Because of the economic recession, many schools and districts have cut their language programs. Compounding this, No Child Left Behind has hurt languages as math and reading have dominated the resources. This has also cut into NNELL membership. But NNELL can play a critical role in collaborating with other organizations to ensure that a strong language component is part of a world-class education."

Mary Lynn Redmond agreed, "It is important that we show that the development of students' global competence cannot become a reality without serious attention to language study that begins early."

Marcia Rosenbusch agreed but warned, "For NNELL to be effective, the NNELL leaders need to have regular, quality communication with their members and to work to have a presence at the national level."

Looking ahead, there is no end to the challenges we still face. Yet, as NNELL looks back at the past 25 years, we find a great deal to be proud of. We insisted that early language learning and long sequences were important. Over the past two and a half decades, more and more research has supported this position, and we were right there to spread the word. Although the future is never certain, we do know one thing for sure: The vision and courage of our Founding Mothers has served us well.

Carol Ann Dahlberg ends on a high note: "It was a privilege to be one of the Founding Mothers of NNELL. We had high hopes and they were fulfilled beyond all expectations."

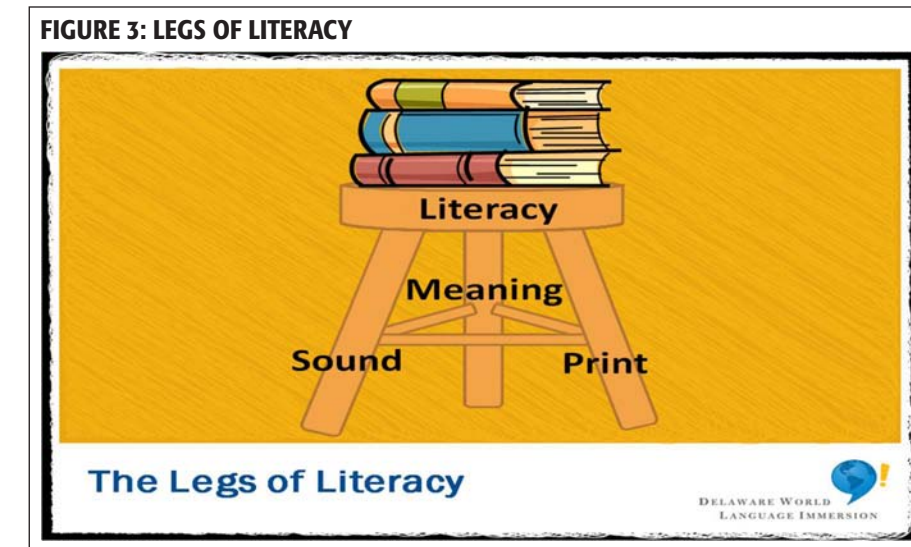
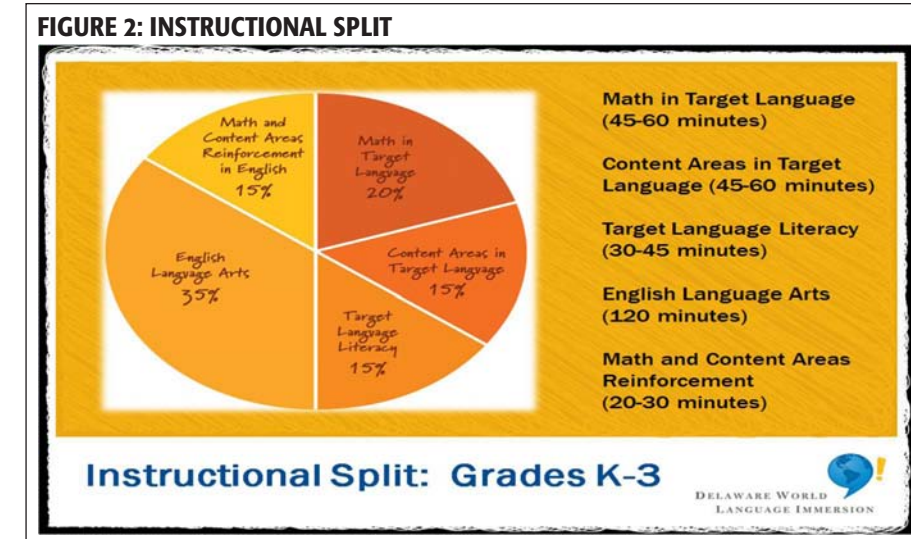
tent publishers, videos from target language web sites and YouTube, CDs and DVDs of target language music, computer applications and target language web sites, and in the case of our two-way programs, target-language speaking peers in the class. (See figure 4: list of web sites)

However, without connecting the sound to its meaning, language can end up sounding more like the “wah wah, wah wah wah” of the teacher in the “Charlie Brown” cartoon series rather than meaning-laden input that conveys a comprehensible message. It’s not enough for the immersion teacher to simply use the language, but rather, he or she must also make it understandable and meaningful for the students. Extensive use of visuals, gestures, props, graphics, realia, and multimedia is key to making language understandable, and how to find and use them has become an important component of the ongoing professional development sessions and instructional support teachers receive. In a very short amount of time, we have been able to build a sense of community among our language teachers and the Immersion Team. As we find or create materials, we share them with the group via Dropbox or group emails. These collaborative efforts are helping teachers feel more confident in making meaning understandable to students and providing them with the resources to be successful in doing so.

DEVELOPING AN AWARENESS OF PRINT

Providing a language-rich environment for students is not limited to just having them hear the language as much as possible. The third leg of the stool, print, is consistently present in our immersion classrooms. The physical classroom environment is an ever-evolving place filled with both functional and environmental print. Functional print builds over the course of the year. Teachers first label classroom objects in the target language; post classroom rules, procedures, and expectations for students to see and refer to throughout the year; hang posters with vocabulary related to the first days of school and the people in the building; and dedicate space for word walls which will grow to include vocabulary for all content areas taught over the course of the year. Teachers also surround students with environmental print much like what you see in English only classrooms. These materials foreshadow content that will be taught in later months, such as posters of animals and habitats, but also include magazines, advertisements, target language posters, and other forms of realia that students don’t yet understand but which may peak their curiosity to want to learn more about what they see on the walls. (See figure 5: word walls)

FIGURE 4: SUGGESTED WEB SITES
SOUND
 Spanish online illustrated stories: <http://www.childtopia.com/>
MEANING
 Clip art (subscription-based): <http://www.clipart.com>
 Free stock photos: <http://www.sxc.hu/>
PRINT
 Animated Chinese Characters: <http://www.csulb.edu/~txie/azi/page1.htm>
 Chinese mini-books: <http://www.chinese4kids.net/chinese-reading/>
 Spanish mini-books (subscription-based): <http://www.readinga-z.com/>
GENERAL
 List of multiple sites in Spanish: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/5juz1ravx4g47ba/ENLACES%20EDUCATIVOS.doc>



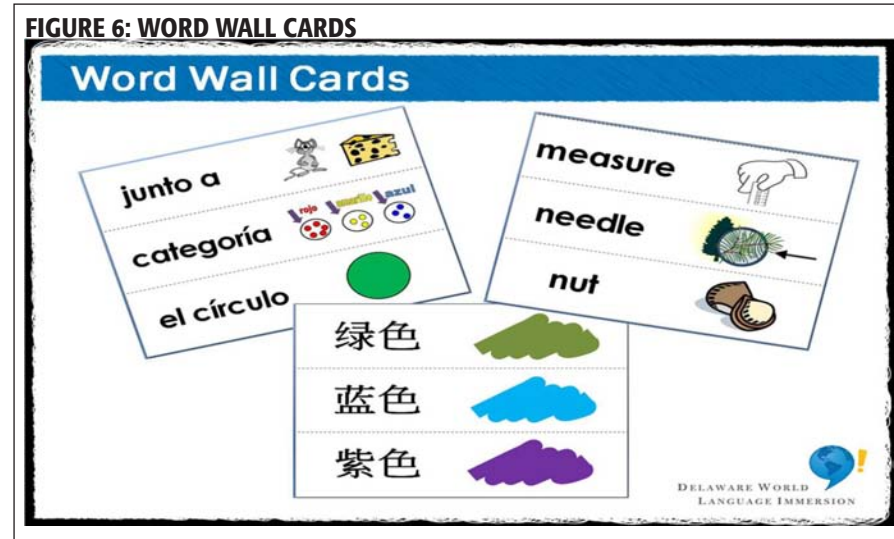
stand but which may peak their curiosity to want to learn more about what they see on the walls. (See figure 5: word walls)

In the same way that teachers work to connect sound to meaning, they use a variety of resources to connect print to meaning as well. Since the print leg of the literacy stool is connected to the legs of sound and meaning, print is almost always accom-

panied by a visual to help students make meaning from what they are seeing. One of the primary resources teachers use are word wall cards for all content areas based on math vocabulary cards being used to support the Utah Dual Language Immersion programs. Immersion teachers use the target-language versions of the cards to introduce the written word or charac-

ter to students once a concept has been presented and worked with orally. Teachers may have already used the word in context, associated it with a gesture, or read a story or taught a song that included it. After showing students the word wall card, it is added to the word wall in the classroom where both students and teachers can reference it. The word wall cards can be du-

plicated and cut apart as well for students to use during teacher-led comprehension checks or student-led games. The English partner teachers use the English versions of the cards to support content reinforcement lessons, provide additional access to content during their English Language Arts block, and begin to develop academic vocabulary in English that students will eventually see



- FIGURE 8: SHARED READING SEQUENCE**
- Shared Reading Sequence**
1. Set the Scene, conduct a Picture Walk
 2. Read the text, identify main characters throughout
 3. Reread the text, invite students to participate in the reading
 4. Read the story again, engage students with specific elements, ask them to react to the text
 5. Share student responses
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on state-level tests. (See figure 6: Word wall cards)

INTEGRATING THE COMMON CORE

With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, the Delaware Department of Education has been working to provide ongoing professional development to K-12 teachers throughout the state about the content of the standards and the primary shifts they entail. Since these standards are forming the foundation of literacy instruction in English throughout the state, it only makes sense for them to be adopted as a component of the Delaware World Language Immersion programs. In this first year, as we roll out our initial Kindergarten program, we have chosen to focus on the three shifts required by the Common Core to help guide us in literacy instruction in Chinese and Spanish. These shifts can be framed by three questions: What do students read? What do they do with what they read? At what level do they read?

TEXT TYPES AND INTERACTIONS

The first shift focuses on the types of materials students read and interact with. The Common Core encourages a 50/50 balance between literary texts, e.g. stories, poems, folktales, and songs, and informational texts, e.g. non-fiction readers, short articles, and factual texts, throughout the elementary grades, with that balance shifting toward more informational texts as students enter middle and high school. (See figure 7: Literacy genres)

Stories are a perfect vehicle for providing input for students because they provide an instant context for language learning, can be represented through images and gestures, and contain a beginning, middle, and end which can be used to engage students in higher order thinking skills, including predicting what will happen next. Our immersion teachers include “stories” every day in their lessons. Some of them are in the form of songs, some are authentic stories from the target culture, some are publisher-created to focus on a specific concept, and a few others are translations of known children’s stories in English. Our English partner teachers are a great resource in helping embed stories into the curriculum. During collaborative planning, the teams of teachers identify English-language literacy strategies, discuss how to implement them in the classroom, access video clips of classroom demonstrations, and schedule observation times for the immersion teachers to see those strategies in action. We have found the video series “The Art of Reading a Storybook”

housed on the “Books for Life” YouTube channel to be valuable in starting conversations about using stories as a basis for literacy instruction. Targeted strategies include starting reading with picture walks, continuing with multiple shared readings, using the questioning series of the natural approach to help monitor comprehension, and giving students multiple opportunities to interact with the text. (See figure 8: *Shared reading sequence*)

The second shift focuses on interacting with the text – paying close attention to what students do with what they read or how they react to what they read. Reacting to a text usually begins with providing text-based answers to questions posed by the teacher or by other students. This is all about demonstrating comprehension in various ways. Immersion teachers use Total Physical Response (TPR) for students to be able to show that they have understood elements of the text. They do this using a variety of strategies including asking students to hold up images from the story when asked questions, indicating with red or green cards if a statement about the story is true or false, or ordering events from the story to serve as the basis for a simple retelling. Two helpful resources with information about and strategies for monitoring student understanding are the books *Checking for Understanding* by Fisher and Frey and *Total Participation Techniques* by Himmele and Himmele.

This shift also focuses on how students react to the text in writing. For novice language learners who don't yet have all the language they need to fully respond to a text in the target language, teachers employ multiple strategies to have students react to the text. Students use writing journals to draw a response to the story, then they tell something about it in the target language. Teachers have students react to the text as a group by asking students to respond orally to questions, then the teacher compiles their responses on chart paper. Teachers also use sentence frames written on their whiteboards, on sentence strips, or on blank pages in literacy centers to give students a structure to help them show that they understand a story, personalize a response to a story, or extend a story. Teachers are using sentence frames to extend literacy into math instruction as well. Story problems are used as early as kindergarten to begin to develop number sense in students, and sentence frames, focused on talking about math, help students produce language when their proficiency level is still quite low. (See

figure 9: *Sentence Frames for Language Arts* and figure 10: *Sentence Frames for Math*)

TEXT COMPLEXITY

The third shift, focusing on the complexity of what students read, can be broken into two parts as well. The first focuses on students having regular practice with academic vocabulary. In immersion settings, the sheer nature of teaching content through another language ensures that students gain exposure to and interact with academic terms that are associated with that content. However, teachers need to be aware of the language students have learned in previous grade levels and extend student language in each successive grade level. One of the important things we will do as we continue to develop and refine curriculum over the course of the next six years will be to create a language framework for each grade level, similar to those of Portland Public Schools, that includes language functions, language forms, and examples of vocabulary for each grade level. This will help us ensure that academic language is embedded in the curriculum and grows in a logical way from year to year.

The second part of the shift asks that students read and interact with ever-increasingly difficult “levels” of texts. When analyzing a text in English, teachers consider qualitative, quantitative, and reader/task dimensions. Two of these can be used to evaluate texts in other languages: qualitative dimensions such as purpose of the text, structure of the text, and language clarity

and reader/task dimensions such as student knowledge, motivation, and purpose and complexity of the task. However, quantitative dimensions such as word length, word frequency, and cohesion can be more difficult to determine in another language. In English, the quantitative level of a text is often identified by the publisher with a lexile level, an accelerated reading level, or a Fountas and Pinnell guided reading level. However, target language materials, with the exception of some Spanish language materials, are often not coded in this way, or are identified simply as “early emergent,” emergent,” or “beginning,” terms which are

FIGURE 9: SENTENCE FRAMES FOR LANGUAGE ARTS

Sentence Frames for Language Arts

¿Qué hay en nuestra casa? (What's in our house?)

- Hay _____ en mi casa. (There are _____ in my house.)
- Me gusta _____ en _____. (I like _____ in _____.)
- Yo veo _____ en _____. (I see _____ in _____.)
- En mi casa hay _____. (In my house there are _____.)

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FIGURE 10: SENTENCE FRAMES FOR MATH

Sentence Frames for Math

Comparar y sumar (Compare and add)

- Tengo _____ rojas. (I have _____ red.)
- Tengo _____ blancas. (I have _____ white.)
- Son _____ en total. (There are _____ in all.)
- Hay más _____. (There are more _____.)
- Hay menos _____. (There are less _____.)

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FIGURE 11: DELAWARE PROFICIENCY ANCHORS

Upon completion of	
3 rd Grade	Intermediate Low
5 th Grade	Intermediate Mid
8 th Grade	Intermediate High
10 th Grade	Intermediate High/Advanced Low
12 th Grade	Advanced Low/Advanced Mid

Delaware Proficiency Anchors

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vague at best. This means that program administrators and sometimes teachers have to determine how complex a text is on their own and if it is indeed appropriate for the learner. The Delaware World Language Immersion Team has found resources created by the Kansas Department of Education to be helpful in understanding text complexity and will be using them to evaluate immersion texts and materials beginning in 2nd grade, the grade in which lexile levels begin to be used in English. These materials and the conversations that arise from them will help us determine if a text is most appropriate as a “Read Aloud, Read Along, or Read Alone” (Copeland, 2012) for students.

PROFICIENCY ANCHORS AND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

Knowing that Advanced-level proficiency is the goal for students at the end of a K-12 experience, we looked at established programs across the country with similar instructional models including those of the Utah Dual Language Immersion Programs and the Portland Public Schools Immersion Programs to guide us in setting proficiency anchors for students at each grade level based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The proficiency anchors serve as goals for students and also serve as an instructional framework for teachers to give them guidance in creating integrated units, instructional activities, and formative assessments over the course of a year and from one grade level to the next. We monitor student progress throughout the year, both in content and language development, using formative assessments, Can-do statements, and rubrics and checklists based on Delaware content area standards, Common Core Standards, and descriptors for each proficiency level. Over time, we will embed language goals and functions into each content-area unit to ensure that students are learning not only academic language, but also social language. (See figure 11: *Delaware Proficiency Anchors*)

IMMERSION STUDENTS' PLACE IN THE WORLD

John Rosenberg, Dean of Humanities at Brigham Young University, has stated, “the decisions we make as language teachers determine, in part, if the outcome our students can expect is academic credit only, or if they can acquire a voice in the human conversation.” (Rosenberg, 2012). While we don't have all the answers in Delaware at this point, we do have frameworks, instructional supports, and plans for collaboration in place. We are involving stakeholders in our

decision-making process to help ensure that students develop literacy, cultural awareness, and academic ability in more than one language. We are supporting teachers in making sure the instructional focus for every lesson is three-fold: make input comprehensible; connect sound, meaning and print; and be mindful about what we ask students to read and do with what they read. By focusing on these things, and by continually learning, monitoring, and growing as a program, we will ensure that students indeed find their voice. We will provide them with the tools they need to attain high levels of proficiency in at least two languages which will allow them to make a difference, economically, socially, and culturally, in an ever-shrinking global marketplace and diverse society.

Lynn Fulton-Archer is a language educator with 20 years of experience in classrooms from kindergarten through grades 16+. She is passionate about giving students early language learning experiences and spent the last nine



years of her classroom career in the elementary Spanish classroom as World Language Lead Teacher and Program Coordinator for Rock Hill School District 3 in Rock Hill, South Carolina. She is co-creator and Curriculum Director of the Kids Interacting Through Early Language Learning (KITE-LL) Project and was one of the authors of the 21st Century Skills Map for World Languages. She has received multiple awards including being named the 2005 Southern Conference on Language Teaching Educator of Excellence, the 2011 South Carolina Foreign Language Teacher of the Year and the 2012 South Carolina Spanish Teacher of the Year, the first elementary teacher to receive that honor. Lynn is currently the Education Specialist for World Language Immersion at the Delaware Department of Education where she is working to implement a statewide network of Immersion Programs in Chinese and Spanish. She continues to work with teachers and students on a daily basis to create engaging learning opportunities that will lead students to high levels of proficiency.

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