

Reframing professional development: Creating a faculty learning community for world language educators

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Abstract

This article examines the development, delivery, and outcomes of a year-long, collaborative, professional development (PD) program for 33 K-16 world language educators who taught in the State of Delaware. This work was prompted (in part) by Delaware's publication of its World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (Delaware Department of Education, 2016), as well as the author's growing recognition of the various teacher-training pathways, both traditional and nontraditional, that teachers/educators took to secure their role in the classroom. The author worked to discover whether these teachers/educators from dissimilar backgrounds fully understood how to integrate the World-Readiness Standards, a proficiency-oriented approach, into their own curricula, and whether they recognized the importance of collaboration between K-12 teachers and university-level educators to ensure that they were working toward the same instructional outcomes. Prior to the development of this program, the author and colleagues debated the efficacy of current practices in professional development. Recognizing the importance of continuing education for teachers/educators, they took steps to ensure that their program would meet participants' learning needs by reframing the conventional PD program into a faculty learning community, which is a highly collaborative forum that enables K-16 teachers/educators to learn together. At the end of the program, post-program data revealed the degree to which the participants had increased their knowledge of teaching for proficiency. The data also provided evidence of how important it was for participants to experience proficiency-oriented language instruction as learners.

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Introduction

According to a 2017 report published by the Office of Post-Secondary Education in the U.S. Department of Education, Delaware has been struggling since 2003 with extensive teacher shortages in K-12 content areas such as science, reading, math, music, art, foreign language, and English as a second language. Some of those areas, in fact, are considered critical need, including foreign language, and state education administrators have felt the push to fill those empty teacher slots (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Historically, a good number of world language educators in this state had arrived at their profession via traditional teaching programs (i.e., a four-year undergraduate degree in education with a specialty concentration). However, to meet the critical need for teachers of foreign language, Delaware supported a dramatic increase in educators coming to the profession through an alternative process that allows individuals with at least bachelor's degrees to teach without going through a college campus-based teacher education program (Cartwright et al., 2015).

In the Evaluation of Delaware's Alternative Routes to Teacher Certification (ARTC) report (Cartwright et al., 2015), it was noted that novice ARTC candidates teach a higher proportion of foreign language classes than traditionally trained novice teachers in this state. Similar parallels occur at the state's university level: the number of non-tenure-track faculty members has increased in recent years, and some reports claim that they now account for 79% of all faculty at four-year institutions (Barnshaw & Dunietz, 2015).

While this author does not intend to debate the wisdom of hiring one type of teacher over another, this distinction in teacher training pathways—traditional vs. nontraditional—gives sound justification for the need for substantial and sustainable professional development in the state to ensure that teachers at all levels and from all training backgrounds are keeping pace with best practices in their field.

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Background

In 2012, Delaware adopted the Common Core State Standards for K-12 teachers (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Because these standards do not explicitly include world languages, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) created a type of crosswalk called Aligning the National Standards for Learning Languages with the Common Core Standards that outlines how and where each standard supports the other (ACTFL, 2012).

In 2013, ACTFL revised its Standards for World Language Learning, renaming them World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (ACTFL, 2013). Delaware likewise published its own World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages in 2016, reflecting a shift in instruction from learning about the language to engaging with the language (Delaware Department of Education, 2016).

This shift (might we call it a sea change?) to a proficiency-oriented approach has opened the gates to a new set of expectations for K-16 teachers to prepare students to use language in meaningful, real-world contexts. This change, which reframes the view of the student as a learner of language to one in which the student is a creator of language, is no small task for our teachers, who are now called upon to find and master new methodologies to meet these expectations.

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Proficiency-Oriented Language Instruction

The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) describes proficiency-oriented language instruction as more of a general framework for organizing instruction, curriculum, and assessment rather than a method or a theory. Within this framework, language learners practice the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and the three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational) to communicate in the target language. Learning activities consist of meaningful and real-world purposes for use of the language. Proficiency-based instruction is student-centered and focuses on what students can already do and what they need to do (ACTFL, 2013; CARLA, n.d.).

Several characteristics of proficiency-oriented instruction have been identified by Tedick (1997, pp. 9-23), Hadley (2000, pp. 2-27), and CARLA (n.d.):

- Emphasize meaningful language use for real communicative purposes
- Help students learn to use the language rather than learn about the language
- Integrate the use of all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing
- Include the use of authentic foreign language texts and materials
- Integrate language and content
- Organize language learning around themes, topics, and other content areas
- Incorporate authentic assessment of student performance
- Encourage students to be actively involved in the learning process

If we expect teachers to implement these changes in their classrooms, they will need varying levels of support in which they can observe teaching strategies being modeled, receive ongoing coaching, and receive ready-made materials to use.

We are, in fact, asking students and teachers alike to move away from methods that were once considered fundamental in language teaching and learning and to move toward proficiency-oriented instruction. If we expect teachers to implement these changes in their classrooms, they will need varying levels of support in which they can observe teaching strategies being modeled, receive ongoing coaching, and receive ready-made materials to use.

The Evolution of Professional Development

Historically, the support teachers might receive would be some type of professional development, which could be any type of formal or informal continuing education effort (conference, course, seminar, retreat, and/or workshop) to help educators improve their skills with the ultimate goal of boosting student outcomes. And yet, there are many indications from research and literature that those traditional modes of professional development have failed to deliver meaningful experiences of the kind that might enhance teachers' competencies. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2009), more than 90 percent of teachers participate in workshop-style training sessions during a school year, yet the workshop model has a poor record for influencing teachers' practice. When professional development merely describes a skill to teachers, very few teachers transfer it to their practice; however, when teachers are coached through the awkward phase of implementation, many can successfully use the new skill (Ermeling, 2012; Joyce & Showers, 2002). Based on their review of research, Schlager and Fusco (2003) conclude that conventional professional development, organized at the school and district levels, is "disconnected from practice, fragmented and

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misaligned. Many of the programs lack key pedagogical, content, and structural characteristics of effective professional development that are needed by the teachers they serve” (p. 205).

Educators at all levels recognize that professional development should not simply mean the learning of new information, facts, or teaching methods. Professional development should engage teachers in learning cycles that are dynamic. These experiences should help teachers gain a new understanding of current situations and contexts and enhance their awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses. Garet et al. (2001) noted, “The success of ambitious education reform initiatives hinges, in large part, on the qualifications and effectiveness of teachers. As a result, teacher professional development is a major focus of systemic reform initiatives” (p. 916). Teachers who participate in meaningful professional development experiences are “better prepared to make the most effective curriculum and instructional decisions” (Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004, p. 326).

Options for Alternative Professional Development

One example of that type of reform is a Faculty Learning Community (FLC), a community of educators who engage in “a continuous process of learning and reflection, supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done” (McGill & Beaty, 2001, p. 11). McGill and Beaty (2001) describe FLCs as groups that have voluntary membership and meet for a period of at least six months at a designated time and in an environment conducive to learning. These groups should develop empathy among members, operate by consensus, develop their own culture, engage with complex problems, energize and empower participants, and have the potential of transforming institutions into learning organizations (Cox, 2004). Cox (2004) further states that the qualities necessary for community in FLCs include safety and trust, respect, collaboration, challenge, enjoyment, and empowerment. A successful FLC should include a mission and a purpose, curriculum topics, scholarly process assessment, and rewards. Researchers have observed how FLCs promote professional development through collaboration and reflective practice, how they strengthen collegial relationships, and how they develop faculty into better educators through a deeper understanding of pedagogy (Gabelnick et al., 1990; Layne et al., 2002).

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In the fall of 2017, the author began working with the members of the Advocacy Committee of the Delaware Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (DECTFL), which hoped to establish a relationship with the University of Delaware (UD) to benefit world language (WL) education in the state. Because of recent changes to WL standards, the Advocacy Committee saw an opportunity to work with UD to address issues such as helping students reach higher levels of proficiency, promoting continued language study at the university level, and inspiring students to become language teachers in the state. The author met with the DECTFL Advocacy Committee several times during the fall of 2017 and with the curriculum specialist from the Delaware Department of Education. All agreed to work on the proposal of a professional development program that would enable K-12 educators to work side-by-side with the UD faculty who teach languages at the introductory level.

As part of this effort, a survey was distributed to all WL educators in the State of Delaware who were members of the DECTFL, as well as UD faculty who regularly taught languages at the two introductory levels (see Appendix A). The survey was created by the author in concert with the executive board members of the DECTFL and the director of

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the teacher preparation program at UD. The author's intent was to gather input from the members of this target audience regarding their interest in learning about several topics related to language education; therefore, the survey items were designed to be mindful of the most common challenges in language teaching, as determined by the DECTFL executive board and the ACTFL Core Practices for World Language Learning (ACTFL, n.d.). The survey presented topics related to proficiency-oriented language teaching. In the survey, participants were asked to rate the topics using a Likert scale. The results (78 K-12 language educators and 14 UD faculty completed the survey) would inform a collaborative professional development opportunity for this community. The author analyzed the survey results by calculating the frequencies of responses for each item to determine the topic(s) that generated the most interest.

Table 1 presents the responses from K-12 educators. The responses showed that an overwhelming 76% of respondents indicated a desire ("very interested") to learn about designing lessons that facilitate 90%+ use of the target language. The need to learn about planning a proficiency unit came in second place, with nearly 67% of respondents indicating a rating of "very interested" for this topic.

Table 1.
K-12 Responses to Survey Regarding Educator Needs

Topics of need	Very Interested		Interested		Not Interested		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Goal-setting and assessment; planning with backward design and aligning the curriculum with standards	30	38.4	37	47.4	11	14.1	78
Planning a proficiency unit; designing task-based activities and promoting cultural competence	52	66.6	25	32.0	1	1.3	78
Project-based learning in the foreign language classroom	24	31.6	39	51.3	13	17.1	76
Teaching grammar in context (PACE model)	27	36.5	35	47.3	12	16.2	74
How to write an integrated performance assessment to promote growth	27	35.5	38	50.0	11	14.5	76
Designing lessons that facilitate 90%+ use of target language	57	76.0	15	20.0	3	4.0	75
Using technology in the foreign language classroom	33	43.4	32	42.1	11	14.5	76
Teaching the four language skills in a proficiency-driven classroom	43	56.6	26	34.2	7	9.2	76

N = 78

Table 2 presents the responses from the UD language faculty, whose responses mirrored those of the K-12 educators. The largest percentage of respondents, 64.3%, indicated a rating

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of “very interested” in designing lessons that facilitate 90%+ use of the target language. The desire to learn about planning a proficiency unit again came in second place with 57% of respondents indicating a rating of “very interested.” Surprisingly, the results indicated a lack of understanding or knowledge surrounding the proficiency goals the state had adopted in its World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages.

Table 2.
University of Delaware Faculty Responses to Survey Regarding Educator Needs

Topics of need	Very Interested		Interested		Not Interested		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n
Goal-setting and assessment; planning with backward design and aligning the curriculum with ACTFL standards	6	46.1	6	46.1	1	7.7	13
Planning a proficiency unit; designing task-based activities and promoting cultural competence	8	57.1	5	35.7	1	7.1	14
Project-based learning in the foreign language classroom	5	38.5	7	53.9	1	7.7	13
Teaching grammar in context (PACE model)	5	35.7	7	50.5	2	14.2	14
How to write an integrated performance assessment to promote growth	2	14.3	10	71.4	2	14.3	14
Designing lessons that facilitate 90%+ use of target language	9	64.3	4	28.6	1	7.1	14
Using technology in the foreign language classroom	5	35.7	7	50.0	2	14.3	14
Teaching the 4 language skills in a proficiency-driven classroom	6	42.9	7	50.0	1	7.1	14

N = 14

Researching a Solution to Educators’ Professional Development Needs

Armed with this insight, the author and the Advocacy Committee embarked on a research project to design an instructional guide for K-16 instructors to enable them to help their students engage with the target language.

Research Questions

To ensure they were not making assumptions about their participants’ knowledge, the author and Advocacy Committee started with two questions:

1. What do participants know about proficiency-oriented language instruction and how to implement its strategies?
2. What will participants learn by engaging in this type of teacher education program?

By starting with a question to assess participants’ existing knowledge, the author and Advocacy Committee could effectively scaffold the instruction by systematically building on the participants’ experiences and knowledge as they learned new skills. By asking a question about

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anticipated outcomes of the program, the author and Advocacy Committee would be able to focus on their desired outcomes and learning objectives.

Methodology

The purposes of this study were twofold: to assess participants' knowledge about current professional standards and core practices for language teaching and to evaluate their level of understanding of teaching for proficiency at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels as appropriate to each teacher/educator.

Sample

The participants (n=33) were comprised of eight UD faculty and 25 K-12 WL teachers. The UD faculty participants by language consisted of three Spanish, three French, one Italian, and one Japanese. The K-12 teachers by language consisted of 14 Spanish, seven French, two Chinese, one Italian, and one Japanese. Participants were (29) 88% female and (4) 12% male. A total of 33 participants completed the pre- and post-surveys for the two summer sessions. Because of schedule conflicts, attendance at the year-long sessions varied greatly; therefore, only 15 participants completed the year-end survey.

Instruments

The instruments for this survey included a pre- and post-program survey for the initial two-day session in August 2018 and a final year-end program survey in May 2019. This survey was designed in concert with the Advocacy Committee and the State's director of Language Acquisition. The pre- and post-surveys given during the two August sessions were identical, with the post-survey containing an additional five items pertaining to the participant's level of satisfaction with the organization and content of the program. The final year-end program survey expanded upon the pre- and post-surveys with an invitation to visit a colleague's classroom to observe, as well as open-ended responses to aid in the planning of the next year's collaborative professional development program (see Appendices B, C, and D for the pre-, post-, and final surveys).

Program Detail

Prior to the program's start, participants were assigned readings to complete, including the ACTFL Performance Descriptors (ACTFL, n.d.) for each of the three modes of communication and the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements (Bott VanHouten et al., 2017).

On August 14, 2018, participants met on the UD campus for the first session of the program, called Path to Proficiency, which was facilitated by the author and two members of the Advocacy Committee. The day began with a brief networking opportunity and breakfast, followed by an introduction of the facilitators and planned speakers and a presentation of the goals of the program. Participants then engaged in small-group discussions of the ACTFL Performance Descriptors (ACTFL, n.d.) with an interactive activity aimed at providing examples of language production in the various ranges. During breakout sessions, participants discussed what types of proficiency-oriented teaching activities were currently being practiced in their own teaching environment. Following a short break for lunch, participants attended two presentations. A Spanish teacher at Cape Henlopen High School spoke about the State's curriculum alignment, and an assistant professor of German from UD gave a demonstration of how she teaches for communication in introductory levels of German. For the remainder of the first session, participants joined various cohorts (based on language and levels taught) to create proficiency-oriented lessons.

The second day of the program again took place on the UD campus. After a brief networking breakfast, the session began with a whole-group discussion of the prologue and chapter 1 of VanPatten's *While We're on the Topic: BVP on Language, Acquisition, and*

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Classroom Practice (2017). Participants then posted products and thoughts from the first day’s work and were given time to explore the various groups’ postings. The facilitators led a brief discussion of the importance of comprehensible input. The remainder of the day was dedicated to working in language groups to develop materials for the classroom.

During the two days, framed with a book study of VanPatten’s *While We’re on the Topic* (2017), participants engaged in discuss 2 2019 session, participants shared outcomes of the comprehensible input strategies they adopted, and a participant shared ways to collect authentic resources. At the end of each session, materials and resources were posted on the program’s Schoology site.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The author’s first step was to determine the validity of the pre-program survey (Appendix B). There were seven questions designed to measure the degree of understanding and use of key concepts in language instruction with the following four response options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. The distribution of each variable was measured in the pre- and post-survey to ensure that there were no distribution problems. The author found the distributions to be reasonably behaved and represented a full range of responses: there were no extreme distributions or single responses where everyone agreed.

Participants were asked to complete three surveys during the duration of the year-long program. The first pre-program survey was completed on August 14, 2018, at the beginning of the first day’s session to gauge participants’ level of understanding of key concepts in language instruction. The post-survey, completed on August 15, 2018, at the end of the second day’s session, measured changes in participants’ understanding of the key concepts. The final year-end survey was completed on May 4, 2019. The author analyzed the survey results by calculating the frequency of response for each item to measure the percentage of participants’ agreement with each item. The author collected and coded qualitative data for themes. Tables 3 and 4 present the responses.

Table 3.

Professional development participant responses to pre-assessment 9:00am August 14, 2018

	Strongly Agree 4		Agree 3		Disagree 2		Strongly Disagree 1	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. I am familiar with the principles of backward design and can apply them to unit and lesson design.	8	24.2	20	60.6	3	9.0	2	6.0
2. I understand what it means to teach for proficiency.	13	39.3	18	54.5	2	6.0	0	0.0
3. I understand how to set learning targets based on the ACTFL/NCSSFL can-do statements.	9	27.2	20	60.6	4	12.1	0	0.0

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4. I provide opportunities for students to demonstrate competence in the three communicative modes.	10	30.3	18	54.5	5	15.1	0	0.0
5. I plan opportunities for students to reflect on their attainment of unit performance objectives and their own learning goals.	5	15.1	18	54.5	10	30.3	0	0.0
6. I use the target language at least 90% of the time and have a rationale for when first language use is appropriate.	5	15.1	16	48.8	12	36.3	0	0.0
7. I understand the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development.	13	39.3	15	45.4	5	15.1	0	0.0

$N = 33$

The responses showed that prior to the two-day launch of the program, approximately 40% of respondents indicated a rating of “strongly agree” for understanding what teaching for proficiency means. The same percentage of respondents understood the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development. Roughly 25% of respondents reported familiarity with using backward design to plan units and lessons and understood the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development.

Table 4.

Professional development participant responses to post-assessment 3:30pm August 15, 2018

	Strongly Agree 4		Agree 3		Disagree 2		Strongly Disagree 1	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. I am familiar with the principles of backward design and can apply them to unit and lesson design.	25	75.7	8	24.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
2. I understand what it means to teach for proficiency.	27	81.8	6	18.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
3. I understand how to set learning targets based on the ACTFL/NCSSFL can-do statements.	25	75.7	8	24.2	0	0.0	0	0.0

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4. I provide opportunities for students to demonstrate competence in the three communicative modes.	12	36.3	15	45.4	5	15.1	0	0.0
5. I plan opportunities for students to reflect on their attainment of unit performance objectives and their own learning goals.	7	21.2	16	48.4	10	30.3	0	0.0
6. I use the target language at least 90% of the time and have a rationale for when first language use is appropriate.	10	30.3	12	36.3	11	33.3	0	0.0
7. I understand the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development.	26	78.7	7	21.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
8. This professional learning opportunity increased my ability to design and/or refresh units and lessons to align with proficiency targets.	17	51.5	16	48.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
9. The activities (presentations, group exercises, etc.) were relevant for my job-related needs.	20	60.6	13	39.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
10. The peer collaboration was helpful in making my units and lessons more proficiency-focused.	21	63.6	12	36.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
11. The organization of the learning environment (facilities, materials, participant groupings, etc.) met my learning needs.	20	60.6	13	39.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
12. Overall, I am satisfied with this collaborative professional development experience.	21	63.6	12	36.3	0	0.0	0	0.0

N = 33

The responses showed an overwhelming increase in understanding what it means to teach for proficiency, from 39% to 81% (see Table 5, next page). Understanding the role of comprehensible input in a proficiency-oriented classroom also increased, from 39% to 78%. Increases from 25% to over 75% were also seen in the number of respondents who reported familiarity with using backward design to plan units and lessons and understanding the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development.

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Table 5.

Professional development participant responses to FLC year-end assessment May 4, 2019

	Strongly Agree 4		Agree 3		Disagree 2		Strongly Disagree 1	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. I am familiar with the principles of backward design and can apply them to unit and lesson design.	9	60.0	6	40.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
2. I understand what it means to teach for proficiency.	8	53.3	7	46.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
3. I understand how to set learning targets based on the ACTFL/NCSSFL can-do statements.	5	33.3	10	66.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
4. I provide opportunities for students to demonstrate competence in the three communicative modes.	5	33.3	9	60.0	1	6.6	0	0.0
5. I plan opportunities for students to reflect on their attainment of unit performance objectives and their own learning goals.	1	6.6	11	73.3	3	20.0	0	0.0
6. I use the target language at least 90% of the time and have a rationale for when first language use is appropriate.	1	6.6	7	46.6	8	53.3	0	0.0
7. I understand the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development.	8	53.3	6	40.0	1	6.6	0	0.0
8. This professional learning opportunity increased my ability to design and/or refresh units and lessons to align with proficiency targets.	6	40.0	9	60.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
9. The activities (presentations, group exercises, etc.) were relevant for my job-related needs.	5	33.3	10	66.6	0	0.0	0	0.0
10. The peer collaboration was helpful in making my units and lessons more proficiency-focused.	9	60.0	6	40.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
11. The organization of the learning environment (facilities, materials, participant groupings, etc.) met my learning needs.	7	46.6	8	53.3	0	0.0	0	0.0

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12. The opportunity to visit a colleague’s classroom to observe their teaching practice was valuable.	5	33.3	5	33.3	0	0.0	0	0.0
13. Overall, I am satisfied with this collaborative professional development experience.	8	53.3	7	46.6	0	0.0	0	0.0

N = 15

The responses showed a decrease in the percentage of respondents who chose “strongly agree” in their identification of understanding what it means to teach for proficiency and understanding the role of comprehensible input in a proficiency-oriented classroom. This can be explained by the very low number of responses; only 45% of the total respondents who completed the pre- and post-program surveys in August 2018 completed the final year-end survey. The final year-end survey housed two open-ended questions seeking to understand specific value participants found in the program (see Table 6). All respondents expressed overall satisfaction with the professional development program.

Table 6.
Professional development participant open-ended responses

Theme	Sub-topics
Example lessons	seeing strategies in action
	sample lessons / lesson plans
Networking	cross-language connections
	peer-to-peer interaction
	K12-UD counterpart interaction

Note: N = 11

The following findings summarize the qualitative data collected from participants in two major areas: example lessons and networking.

Example lessons

Many participants noted the value of seeing lessons in action. Being able to experience instruction firsthand through languages like German and Polish facilitated participants’ understanding of strategies in action. One participant noted, “I really enjoy seeing lessons in a language I don’t know as a means of modeling certain strategies.” Others also noted that participating as learners seemed to really “hit home” in terms of putting themselves in their students’ shoes. Seeing lessons in action also sparked new ideas for participants. One stated, “I have gotten so many new ideas for ways to increase comprehensible input in my classroom.” Another commented, “I not only learned strategies for [curriculum and instruction] but I learned about new platforms and resources.”

Networking

Eight of the 11 participants (73%) commented on the benefits of making cross-language connections and connecting with UD faculty. The ability to work together and understand the scope, sequence, and constraints of a variety of language instruction programs shed light on the two greater issues at hand: that of increasing language proficiency in students and encouraging continued language study. According to one participant, “For me, the

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opportunity to network with other language teachers in the state has been invaluable. I love talking about different activities and approaches that people have found success with and thinking about ways to incorporate these into my classroom.” A UD faculty member stated, “This has been a fantastic PD experience, and I am greatly appreciative to have gained some new understanding of the K-12 language classroom.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the data analysis reveal that participants’ understanding and learning evolved through the collaborative approach of this professional development FLC program. Participation increased the shared understanding of what proficiency-oriented language instruction entails and provided opportunities for colleagues to collaborate on the creation of teaching materials. UD faculty increased their understanding of the language curriculum in the K-12 programs, and K-12 participants indicated a further desire to connect with and work with UD faculty to continue on a path of shared collaboration.

The FLC approach contributed to and aided in the creation of an active learning environment that supports the goals of professional development and WL education in the State of Delaware. By contextualizing the learning and having topics that are important to everyday teaching concerns and struggles, the author and Advocacy Committee leveraged participants’ enthusiasm, interest, and desire to increase the dissemination of new research in the field.

Limitations

The author recognizes two important limitations of this study. First, the sample population is too small to be representative of the larger group of WL educators in the state.

Second, the study does not take into account other factors that may prevent teachers from utilizing the recommended teaching approach (for example, district or school policies on course materials, such as whether teachers are required to use a specific textbook or whether common exams are mandated).

Recommendations

Based on the author’s and Advocacy Committee’s analysis of this program, several areas present themselves for recommendations moving forward:

- Collect qualitative data during the program
 - To enhance this professional development program, it is important to understand how learning takes place throughout the program at regular intervals.
- Involve pre-service teachers
 - The involvement of pre-service teachers should strengthen the language education program at the UD and entice more WL teachers to become clinical educators.
- Provide support for language clubs and honor societies
- Increase the motivation of K-12 educators to facilitate activities specific to language learning and teaching, such as the Educators Rising initiative in their schools

Due to the success of this first year, a second year-long program launched in August 2019.

References

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Appendix A Survey of Educator Needs

- | | | | |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Goal setting and assessment; planning with backward design and aligning the curriculum with ACTFL standards. | | | |
| | <i>Very Interested</i> | <i>Interested</i> | <i>Not Interested</i> |
| 2. Planning a proficiency unit; designing task-based activities and promoting cultural competence. | | | |
| | <i>Very Interested</i> | <i>Interested</i> | <i>Not Interested</i> |
| 3. Project-based learning in the foreign language classroom. | | | |
| | <i>Very Interested</i> | <i>Interested</i> | <i>Not Interested</i> |
| 4. Teaching grammar in context (PACE model). | | | |
| | <i>Very Interested</i> | <i>Interested</i> | <i>Not Interested</i> |
| 5. How to write an integrated performance assessment to promote growth. | | | |
| | <i>Very Interested</i> | <i>Interested</i> | <i>Not Interested</i> |
| 6. Designing lessons that facilitate 90%+ use of target language. | | | |
| | <i>Very Interested</i> | <i>Interested</i> | <i>Not Interested</i> |
| 7. Using technology in the foreign language classroom. | | | |
| | <i>Very Interested</i> | <i>Interested</i> | <i>Not Interested</i> |
| 8. Teaching the 4 language skills in a proficiency-driven classroom. | | | |
| | <i>Very Interested</i> | <i>Interested</i> | <i>Not Interested</i> |

Appendix B
Pre-program survey

Path to Proficiency 2018-2019
FLC pre-assessment 8/14/2018

1. I am familiar with the principles of backward design and can apply them to unit and lesson design.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
2. I understand what it means to teach for proficiency.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
3. I understand how to set learning targets based on the ACTFL/NCSSFL can-do statements.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
4. I provide opportunities for students to demonstrate competence in the three communicative modes.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
5. I plan opportunities for students to reflect on their attainment of unit performance objectives and their own learning goals.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
6. I use the target language at least 90% of the time and have a rationale for when first language use is appropriate.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
7. I understand the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

Appendix C
Post-program survey

Path to Proficiency 2018-2019
FLC post-assessment 8/15/2018

1. I am familiar with the principles of backward design and can apply them to unit and lesson design.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
2. I understand what it means to teach for proficiency.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
3. I understand how to set learning targets based on the ACTFL/NCSSFL can-do statements.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
4. I provide opportunities for students to demonstrate competence in the three communicative modes.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

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5. I plan opportunities for students to reflect on their attainment of unit performance objectives and their own learning goals.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
6. I use the target language at least 90% of the time and have a rationale for when first language use is appropriate.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
7. I understand the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
8. This professional learning opportunity increased my ability to design and/or refresh units and lessons to align with proficiency targets.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
9. The activities (presentations, group exercises, etc.) were relevant for my job-related needs.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
10. The peer collaboration was helpful in making my units and lessons more proficiency-focused.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
11. The organization of the learning environment (facilities, materials, participant groupings, etc.) met my learning needs.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
12. Overall, I am satisfied with this collaborative PD experience.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

Additional comments:

Appendix D Final post-program survey

Path to Proficiency 2018-2019

FLC Final year-end assessment 5/04/2019

1. I am familiar with the principles of backward design and can apply them to unit and lesson design.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
2. I understand what it means to teach for proficiency.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*
3. I understand how to set learning targets based on the ACTFL/NCSSFL can-do statements.
Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

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4. I provide opportunities for students to demonstrate competence in the three communicative modes.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

5. I plan opportunities for students to reflect on their attainment of unit performance objectives and their own learning goals.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

6. I use the target language at least 90% of the time and have a rationale for when first language use is appropriate.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

7. I understand the role of comprehensible input in language acquisition and proficiency development.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

8. This professional learning opportunity increased my ability to design and/or refresh units and lessons to align with proficiency targets.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

9. The activities (presentations, group exercises, etc.) were relevant for my job-related needs.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

10. The peer collaboration was helpful in making my units and lessons more proficiency-focused.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

11. The organization of the learning environment (facilities, materials, participant groupings, etc.) met my learning needs.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

12. The opportunity to visit a colleague’s classroom to observe their teaching practice was valuable.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

13. Overall, I am satisfied with this collaborative PD experience.

Strongly agree *Agree* *Disagree* *Strongly Disagree*

14. What new ideas or instructional strategies did you learn from the professional learning series that you have used to develop your teaching practice?

15. If you are considering participating in the collaboration next year, what would make it most interesting and valuable to you?
