

Teacher Leadership Through Advocacy:

The World Languages Advocacy Project

BY MICHELE BACK

The ability to collaborate and advocate beyond the classroom and across stakeholders, from department chairs to administrators to parents, is a crucial teacher leadership skill. Moreover, the critical shortage of world language teachers, combined with the diminishing number of U.S. students taking world language courses, means that teacher candidates in this content area must be strong advocates for their own profession from the moment they step into the classroom.

During my time as the world language advisor and methods instructor at the University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education, I have become increasingly preoccupied with the scarcity of world language teacher candidates, especially as compared to other content areas. I have wondered how our current candidates could apply their emerging leadership roles in ways that would encourage K–12 students to both continue learning languages and to also consider careers in world language education.

At the same time, I felt that our prior assessment for ACTFL/CAEP's Standard 6 (a statement on advocacy for world languages), was failing to capitalize sufficiently

on the leadership opportunities available to candidates in their final year of study. These considerations led to the creation of the World Language Advocacy Project.

The Neag School of Education certifies world language teacher candidates through two programs: Integrated Bachelor's/Master's (IB/M) and Teacher Certification for Post Collegiate Graduates (TCPCG). The goal of the Master's year, particularly for IB/M students, is to encourage teacher candidates to take on leadership roles in year-long, school-based internships, preparing them to serve as innovators and agents of change.

Having already completed a semester of student teaching, the Master's year is an opportunity for candidates to go beyond the classroom and utilize their skills to enact change at a departmental, school, or even at the community level. Internship projects in world languages have included the incorporation of technology into a school's world language courses, preparing students for annual proficiency testing, and creating and revising course curricula. These projects empower teacher leadership by allowing candidates to take the initiative to identify particular issues and challenges in the school setting, and then implement innovative proj-

ects that address them. In this way, candidates go beyond the classroom to collaborate creatively with a variety of stakeholders, from teachers and administrators, to parents and other members of the school community. A required course on teacher leadership further scaffolds this experience.

The issue of advocacy for world language teacher candidates is folded into the Master's year experience in the World Language Advocacy Project. This project involves the creation and implementation of two or more audiovisual artifacts that either promote language education or recruit future language teachers. I refer teacher candidates to ACTFL's *Educators Rising* program for ideas and statistics about world language learning and teaching. I also encourage them to use whatever technology they feel most comfortable with to create these artifacts. Candidates have created Powtoons, videos, and Tumblr pages. Less tech-oriented projects are also acceptable, but I find that candidates become excited about the possibility of utilizing technology that both they and their students are familiar with in new and creative ways. Figures 1-3 are just a few of the artifacts that have been created as part of this project.

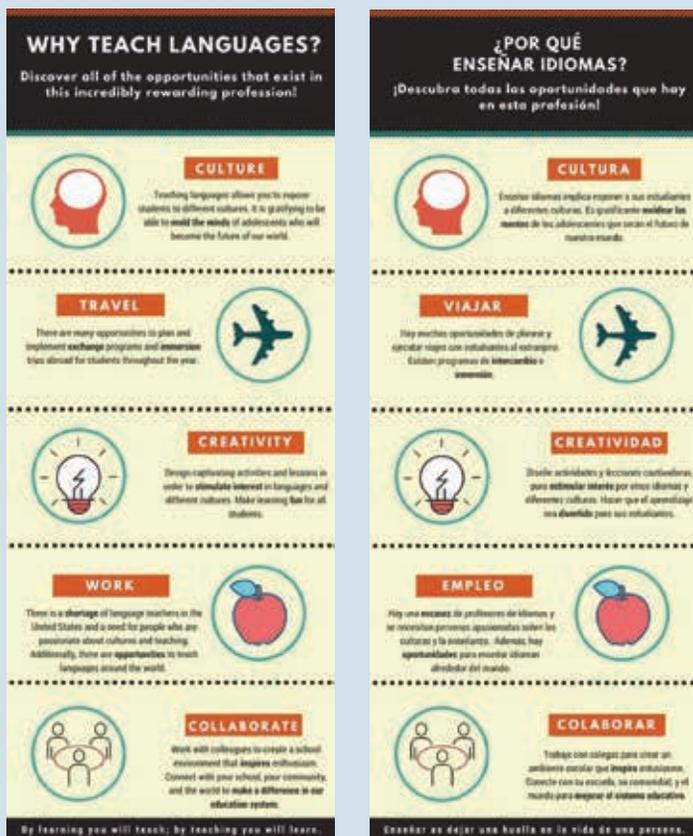


FIGURE 1: This infographic in English and Spanish on the benefits of teaching languages empowers teacher leadership through an innovative, engaging visual that encourages young learners to consider a career in language teaching. The English version was published in the Connecticut Council on Language Teachers’ monthly newsletter. Created by Carly Bernheimer and Sarah Muñoz, MA 2018.



¿Dónde hay una falta de profesores?

FIGURE 2: A screenshot from a Powtoon created to inspire heritage language learners to consider a career in world language education. It empowers teacher leadership by helping teacher candidates advocate for their heritage learners by emphasizing the need for their existing language skills. Created by Caitlin Murphy, MA 2018.



FIGURE 3: A slide from a PowerPoint presentation in Mandarin Chinese encouraging Taiwanese students to pursue certification through the Neag School of Education. It empowers teacher leadership by having teacher candidates go beyond the school setting to advocate for language teaching among communities abroad and engage in authentic cultural communication with those communities. Created by Shih-Chieh Weng, MA 2019.

The ACTFL/CAEP Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers state that world language teacher candidates must be able to “articulate the role and value of languages and cultures [...] through collaboration and advocacy with all stakeholders,” as well as “use inquiry and reflection to understand and explain the opportunities and responsibilities inherent in being a professional language educator.”

The World Language Advocacy Project addresses these standards.

Just as important as creating the artifacts is sharing them with relevant stakeholders. Candidates are required to present their artifacts to K–12 students, teachers, postsecondary students, or other relevant audiences and have a discussion about what was learned. Candidates then write a reflection on the discussion that took place using feedback they collected from their audiences. Both the creation and sharing of these artifacts empower teacher candidates to become leaders by taking them outside of their normal classroom routines and settings, allowing them to engage with a variety of audiences on a topic about which they are passionate. In addition, teacher candidates who have created and implemented world language advocacy projects are empowered by the need to articulate why they themselves became language teachers, as well as the advantages of learning additional languages. This ability will prove invaluable as these candidates engage with students, teachers, and administrators in their future careers.

The response to these artifacts has been overwhelmingly positive. For example, one teacher candidate did a presentation on the benefits



FIGURES 4 AND 5: These figures show participant response to a mini-lesson and discussion on the benefits of language learning and teaching. *Created by Caitlin Swan, MA 2019.*

of learning languages and becoming a language teacher to a group of nearly 100 post-secondary students at her sorority. Not only did participants gain new knowledge about world language learning and teaching, they were also able to see their sorority sister “in her element” as she led a mini-lesson in Spanish and discussed her passion for teaching.

By reflecting on their presentations and audience response, teacher candidates are further empowered by having access to real evidence of the effect their artifacts had on shaping participant attitudes, as well as gaining an understanding of what future steps need to be taken to capitalize on the positive responses.

After presenting her artifacts to high school heritage Spanish speakers (partially shown in Figure 2), Caitlin Murphy stated, “Many [students] had not realized that they already have some of the skills they need to become a language teacher. I think a lot of

them hadn’t considered teaching prior to the presentation, and most of the discussion was based on what kind of schooling was necessary to become a language teacher.”

Sarah Muñoz and Carly Bernheimer worked together to present their artifacts (partially represented in Figure 1) to elementary school students. “We were very impressed with students’ responses prior to the presentation and afterwards. One [student] comment that stood out was: ‘you can make lifelong friends and have amazing experiences.’ [...] Another student shared that ‘learning a new language can help through all of your life.’”

These responses show that our advocacy project was successful and made students reflect on the reasons why studying languages is important. Both Sarah and Carly were recognized at the state level when the English version of their infographic was published



“The world language advocacy project definitely helped with my leadership skills because I am now able to draw on resources from that project when discussing why language learning is important to students and colleagues. I think it will continue to help me in the future as we discuss why students struggle in low level Spanish classes and how to better motivate them to learn a language.”

CAITLIN MURPHY, MA 2018



“I think projects such as this allow us to really apply all that we have learned and to present it in a meaningful context. Since world language is such a critical shortage area yet also such an extremely important area of study for students in today’s growing world, it is crucial that we encourage others to pursue careers in both language and teaching and to even just inspire individuals to study language. Now that I have an idea of how I can advocate for language education in my community, I really hope to be able to use what I have learned from this project to continue to inspire in the future.”

CAITLIN SWAN, MA 2019

RESOURCES

ACTFL/CAEP Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers
www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/CAEP/ACTFLCAEPStandards2013_v2015.pdf

ACTFL’s Educator’s Rising
www.actfl.org/assessment-professional-development/educators-rising

The Connecticut Council on Language Teachers (CT-COLT)
ctcolt.org/pages/welcome.asp

The Neag School of Education
education.uconn.edu

in the Connecticut Council on Language Teachers’ monthly newsletter.

Reflections

The World Language Advocacy Project is only in its second year, so its long-term impact on developing teacher leadership is yet to be known. Nonetheless, initial responses from teacher candidates illustrate both the immediate and the potential impact of the project on their teacher leadership and advocacy skills. I look forward to seeing what future teacher candidates create and discover about the profession through this project, as well as how they use this project to become leaders in their own schools.

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