

## K-12 Update

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Even though inaugurations are usually pompous and self-fulfilling, this inaugural column strives to be a humble beginning step toward forging a stronger relationship between the K-12 world and IALLT. In each Journal issue, we will address issues facing the K-12 foreign language teacher. These include the role and implementation of technology in the foreign language classroom, resources for teaching with technology, course management systems in the K-12 domain, synopses of projects incorporating technology from IALLT members, creative technology maintenance, and funding for foreign language initiatives. It is here that we want not only to offer solutions to the struggles and frustrations facing a K-12 teacher in a tightly staffed, underfunded program, but also to highlight the many incredible projects and lessons teachers are using to guide their students to competency in a foreign language. If you have ever heard the term "user-friendly," this is what this column should be to you—a Mac interface powered by a Pentium IV processor.

For the past three years, I have been a Foreign Language Technology Assistant (yes, we do exist in the K-12 arena!) for my district, which is comprised of 128,000 students. The chief duty of my position is to train teachers on how to use technology in the foreign language classroom. I offer technology workshops, mini-tech lessons in department meetings, and I even co-teach with the foreign language teacher in his or her classroom. Perhaps your district does not afford you such a person devoted to technology in the foreign language classroom, but through the IALLT network and this column, we want to help guide you in the direction where assistance is available.

I would like to lay out in this first column a sort of "State of Technology in the K-12 Foreign Language Classroom", which I hope will generate discussion both on our listserv and in future local and national IALLT conferences. Over the past several years, especially since the Internet became all the rage, teachers have seen money poured into schools and partnerships made

to get schools wired for the new millennium. This usually meant one hookup to a dial-up modem in the media center. Fortunately, we have mostly progressed beyond that single phone line: now some schools have powerful servers for streaming information to the individual classrooms and integrated digital labs where any language can be taught, often anywhere a student finds a computer. Newer computers have replaced “toaster Macs” and we see more digital cameras, scanners, and LCD projectors every year. The equipment inventory is growing, particularly when the grants run large.

Yes, these walls of gray plastic and metallic processors have made our schools “up-to-date” and “21<sup>st</sup> Century,” but in reality, this massive influx of cool gadgets has overloaded an aging system of ill-prepared (and often underpaid) teachers, crumbling buildings, and administrations boiling under pressure to raise test scores. All of this coupled with a bevy of tech-savvy students creates neglect, abuse and outright repugnance for the new world order of tech invention. I see first-hand stories of \$125,000 digital language labs used only for “surfing the net” due to lack of training and tech support, or back closets where brand-new equipment remains in boxes and is used as tables. I also see teachers whose school improvement plans require integration of technology into their lesson plans, yet the most technological advanced invention they use everyday is the overhead projector. These examples do not certainly describe all teachers; I have seen incredible uses of technology by teachers in rooms next door. Teachers who could not live without a document camera and a multimedia projector. Teachers who keep Web sites up to date daily with homework and assignments. Teachers who spend weekends and evenings brushing up on the latest tech offerings. These are teachers who have taken it upon themselves to push forward, often in spite of what convention and ease would dictate.

If I were a doctor examining the K-12 foreign language technology patient, I would see a functioning body that needs more efficient exercise. Yes, all the right parts (teachers, students, equipment) are there, but the system needs a physical trainer. Therein lies the solution – a concentrated effort not only to train teachers to use technology in the foreign language classroom, but also to provide follow-up support in the school. In systems large and small, where most emphasis is placed on English, mathematics, social studies and sometimes science, the foreign language teacher may feel isolated and neglected, thereby relying heavily on methods that are proven, rather than on something that arrived

with five cords, ten CDs and weighs half a ton. Just as most universities have Language Resource Center personnel, so too, does each school need tech personnel who are versed in the fields being taught. Workshops, co-teaching strategies, mentors, student experts, and adequate compensation may also be part of this process toward a healthier organism. I have found that even one visit to answer a seemingly simple question about a computer opens new worlds for the foreign language teacher. Instead of top-down pressure to use technology, I strive to use a bottom-up strategy where teachers begin where they are (novice, intermediate or expert) and move on to where they need to be.

So where are you today? Take this personal inventory to provide a guide to where you may be. (The categories are not mutually exclusive.)

***A novice tech user in the foreign language classroom:***

- knows basic functions of the computer.
- may use e-mail
- may use a grading program
- types in word processor to create worksheets and tests
- knows how to find Internet sites of foreign newspapers

***An intermediate tech user:***

- takes students to a lab to use foreign language software
- uses presentational software in the classroom
- has set up or used lessons involving the Internet
- relies on student experts to troubleshoot computer problems
- has taken a few courses on technology
- uses e-mail heavily with attachments, etc.

***An expert tech user:***

- leads students in creating Web pages with multimedia attributes
- looks for opportunities in every lesson to use technology
- is unafraid to try the latest tech gadget
- creates own software and Web sites for the student
- trains others (students and teachers) to incorporate technology.
- uses Web pages, email and course software to communicate with students

Once you know where you are, you know where you can go. Obviously this inventory is just a tool to encourage you to think

about what you want to do and where you want to go. The how is another column. I leave you with a list of suggested ways to use the Internet effectively in the foreign language classroom. I have divided these activities into the 5Cs of the foreign language standards presented by ACTFL.

***Communication:***

- Begin an e-mail project with a school in another county, state or country
- Use a chatroom in a project with another class
- Skim target language newspapers online and prepare short summaries
- Listen to snippets of radio broadcasts or songs over the Internet and interpret
- Present a project to class on any of the topics covered in class. Students do research via the Internet

***Culture:***

- Compare and contrast news coverage in different nations on the same news topic
- Research customs on the Internet and present a festival in association with the celebration
- Research weather in the target country and draw conclusions on how it affects the way of life
- Research geography and resources to infer how a culture developed

***Connections:***

- In conjunction with the study of body parts, research folk medicine in the target countries.
- Track stock markets around the world to understand economic impacts on the way of life
- Follow a sports team in the target country for the season, giving periodic updates
- View virtual museums through the Web

***Comparisons***

- Read actual target language newspapers, trying to understand stories from context
- Plan a virtual trip using existing language capabilities to make a foray into another country
- Foster comparison and understanding with e-pals

*Communities:*

- Plan an actual trip via the Internet and take the trip during a vacation
- Produce documents for primary learners of the language

Happy surfing! ♦

