



IMPACT OF THE TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING PROJECT

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

A CASE STUDY: VIRGINIA BEACH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

About Virginia Beach City Public Schools

Virginia Beach City Public Schools is the fourth largest in Virginia, and among the 50 largest school systems in the United States. The district is home to over 160 world language teachers in nine languages and is guided by the K-12 World Languages Coordinator, Jennifer Carson.



WHY THE TELL PROJECT?

Since the inception of TELL, I have been using the framework and related documents to coach world language teachers in a large K-12 public school division. With teachers ranging from new graduates to seasoned veterans, I needed tools which would allow me to guide teachers from their starting point to where they wish to be in terms of their own professional practice. My goal was to use the resources from the TELL Project as coaching tools to engage in collaborative, respectful conversations about what works best for students and leads to gains in language proficiency.

THE PROCESS

The first year, I introduced teachers to TELL on an individual basis. Generally, this was because they were beginning teachers, or they were struggling, or they had expressed an interest in experimenting with a new individualized method of developing professionally. In addition, I began sharing TELL with principals to give them look-fors when evaluating world language teachers. Whenever I joined them for learning walks, I brought along copies of the applicable **Focused Feedback Forms**, to ensure we were all on the same page, so to speak. Recognizing TELL's merits as a powerful stimulus for self-reflection and growth, I crafted a professional development course available to all of the world language teachers in the school division: *Using the TELL Framework to Guide Professional Growth*. In this two-hour course, participants gained a familiarity with the domains, criteria, and self-assessment tools and then selected one or two goal areas. The teachers themselves determined follow up. They could choose for me to observe them in the classroom, or they could videotape themselves and reflect, or they could engage in peer observations. We found that the **Focused Feedback Forms** were useful starting points as we debriefed. This year, I will offer both Part I and Part II of the course. I have also begun using TELL with the pre-service teachers at the local university to showcase best practices in world language teaching. I stress how it aligns with the Virginia Standards for the Professional Practice of Teachers, giving concrete examples of what effective teaching looks like in a world language classroom.

REFLECTION

TELL has had a powerful and positive effect on the teachers, students, parents, and administrators in Virginia Beach. For me, it has provided evidence of many of the tenets I had long espoused. It is one thing if I say that the language should be spoken at least 90% of the time from Level I onward, and another thing to see it spelled out in the TELL criteria. This gave me credibility with teachers, parents, and administrators. For teachers, it symbolized that they were truly in control of their own professional growth. And for students, it ensured that their teachers would be aware of the most effective methods for promoting second language acquisition. As teacher evaluation has become more dependent on teachers providing evidence of professionalism and student growth, teachers have used the documents to show that they are seeking to learn and improve. Those who have put the TELL criteria into practice; have seen gains in student engagement and performance.

I am very fortunate that my state organization, the Foreign Language Association of Virginia (FLAVA), and the foreign language specialist at the Virginia Department of Education, Dr. Lisa Harris, were early adopters of TELL too. Last year, Dr. Harris sent a survey to all of the teachers in the Commonwealth who had used TELL, forwarding the results to assist the FLAVA board in selecting sessions for the annual conference. I worked with her to ensure that all of the sessions in the conference program were correlated with TELL so teachers could select sessions that aligned with their growth areas. She and the FLAVA Executive Board created a Virginia Foreign Languages Professional Development Framework which recommends topics for Beginning, Emerging, and Advancing practitioners in each of the TELL domains. I am giddy with the possibilities TELL offers to teachers to be treated as professionals and to be in control of how they increase their own knowledge and expertise.

— JENNIFER CARSON
K-12 World Languages Coordinator
Virginia Beach City Public Schools

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