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## The Business of Languages in the Classroom Today: A Model for K-12 Professional Development

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# The Business of Languages in the Classroom Today: A Model for K-12 Professional Development

## **Cover Page Footnote**

The authors would like to thank Dr. Deb Reisinger for her comments and review of this article. We also appreciate her participation in the 2012 FFLA conference.

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THE BUSINESS OF LANGUAGES  
IN THE CLASSROOM TODAY:  
A MODEL FOR K–12 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ABSTRACT

As world economies become more connected, it is increasingly important to prepare students with language and cultural skills necessary to work on internationally diverse teams within the US or abroad. Since the use of language and culture for the workplace has not been a traditional focus in coursework, professional development for foreign language teachers must expand to include best practices, resources, and program models that develop globally competent citizens for twenty-first-century careers. This article describes the model created by the Florida Foreign Language Association (FFLA) and the Network of Business Language Educators (NOBLE) to infuse business language concepts, curriculum examples, and connections to local business leaders within an annual state conference. By sharing the design and implementation of this conference format, we hope to provide a professional development model that promotes the teaching and learning of language and culture skills with real-world business applications.

KEYWORDS: business language, professional development, K–12 education, foreign languages

INTRODUCTION

The following study describes how one language organization, the Florida Foreign Language Association (FFLA), added focus on business language and the career advantages of learning a second language to its annual state conference, in addition to the academic advantages that have so long been an integral part of its conference programs. We will present the planning and implementation process that took place during the 2011 conference, and explain how the FFLA continues to maintain “language and career” content in subsequent conferences. We share this conference model with the hope that others will be able to implement similar conferences in their state or region.

Recent literature, from both the humanities and business perspectives, stresses the importance of connecting language, culture, and business education. The Association for the Advancement of Collegiate Business Schools' 2011 *Globalization of Management Education* report claims that "people who have the ability to span a contextually complex society are a critical resource for both businesses and governments; they are future leaders who are more capable of advancing international peace as well as economic prosperity." Hans Fenstermacher (2013), chief executive officer of the Globalization and Localization Association (GALA), affirms that "As globalization continues to grow, the need for multilingual skills will increase exponentially. The problem, however, is that the United States doesn't have the language infrastructure in place—or even in the planning stage—to meet multilingual demands."

While the need for twenty-first-century global skills is often cited in a variety of media outlets, training and resources are scarce for teachers to develop innovative Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) courses or to create LSP supplemental material for existing language courses. Unfortunately, many school districts do not have language supervisors nor do they offer professional development for language teachers that is specific to their content area. For many language teachers, the best place to seek the most current, pertinent, and highest quality professional development is through their annual state, regional, and national language conferences.

With LSP training, language teachers can learn how to demonstrate the value and importance of learning a second language in preparation for implementation of the Common Core. To improve the understanding of the importance of LSP content, programs are needed to help teachers learn how to become proactive and use data to support their arguments for the value of foreign language skills and culture in the global workplace. Resources, curriculum models, and training to support implementation of LSP programs should be readily available to faculty at all K–16 levels. In addition, LSP concepts and strategies should be prominent themes in teacher professional development.

#### CONFERENCE FORMAT

The first step in the planning process of the 2011 FFLA conference was to create a clear vision of the school-to-global-workplace focus. This was expressed in the chosen theme: "The Real World of Languages in the 21st Century." The vision of the conference was aligned with the mission of the CIBER-supported NOBLE educator community, which aims to bring together K–16 educators interested in curriculum development and program building that integrate the study of foreign languages and cultures across disciplines,

particularly professional schools such as Colleges of Business, Engineering, and Health. Other goals were to raise awareness of the need for practical application of language and culture skills in the workplace as well as to encourage faculty at all levels to promote and lead foreign language advocacy efforts. As connections and communities are also part of the ACTFL national standards, the conference planners wanted to connect with local and state businesses throughout Florida.

Since the conference took place on Florida's Space Coast, NASA was a perfect partner for themes related to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), the international space station, and community collaboration. As the result of a community connection made with a retired astronaut at one of the Brevard Chamber of Commerce meetings, the FFLA was able to offer a pre-conference workshop or "field trip" for teachers to the Kennedy Space Center (KSC). Teachers were given digital voice recorders and a hand-out of guided interview questions to ask bilingual employees there who were native speakers of Spanish, French, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and German that the KSC and the Hispanic Outreach and Leadership Alliance (HOLA) had provided. These questions were divided by proficiency level and based on the Florida and ACTFL standards. Most questions were asked in the target language of the interviewer, but some used English to ask about the importance of knowing and using a second language in the jobs of those employees being interviewed. Questions sought to explore how bilingual abilities had impacted their careers, salaries, personal and professional opportunities, and perspectives on the value of languages. All of the interviews were conducted with voice recorders, converted into podcasts, and posted on the FFLA website. The podcasts serve as resources for teachers to use in their classrooms for interpretive listening and other communicative activities that would help develop student proficiency, especially for real-world applications.

The opening night session of the FFLA conference fostered connections between the business and educational communities. Members of both communities were invited to a reception in the exhibit hall of the conference venue, where guests mingled and signed a large art mural with a personal message of advocacy for language education. A local superintendent of schools gave the welcome address. To reinforce the conference theme, on the first night, we invited a local business woman to talk about how she had expanded her local business overseas and how important bilingual language and culture skills had been for the success of her business. We then screened *Speaking in Tongues*, a documentary that challenges viewers to re-think the skills that Americans need in order to succeed in the twenty-first century. Before viewing the film,

ten questions were provided to help direct a discussion after the screening. Questions addressed the important role language played in the lives of the four different students portrayed in the film, both personally and professionally. This discussion provided motivation among attendees to promote further advocacy action and collaboration after the conference.

The keynote session was conducted by a panel consisting of a retired astronaut, a representative from the office of the National Intelligence Foreign Language Programs, and a marketing executive from a major Florida port. Each panelist spoke about the importance and value of language for careers and interdisciplinary connections for all job sectors. The speaker for the closing general assembly, Dr. Emily Spinelli, Executive Director from the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP), shared examples of how to use Florida and ACTFL standards to connect real-world examples of business needs to the classroom.

In addition, eight other sessions addressed business language and connections to the community. Teachers of Chinese, German, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish from the high school, college, and university levels made presentations; the session titles are listed in Table 1.

In order to assure sustainability and continued expansion of resources related to the conference vision and theme, events throughout the conference were recorded and archived. Photos were taken and posted on the organization's website. All keynote session talks and panels were recorded and later edited into smaller clips for a future documentary. Presentations of keynotes were also professionally video recorded and made available on the website. In addition, we created a document containing business resources and community contacts that will bring together education, business, and community stakeholders for conference collaboration to further expand teacher professional development in the future.

To promote the importance of learning a language from a student's point of view, a contest was held six months prior to the conference. Students created an image and a slogan that represented the conference theme of "The Real World of Languages in the 21st Century." A winning image was chosen from K-6, 7-8, and 9-12 grade levels and turned into postcards. These postcards were used as invitations to the conference and sent to hundreds of stakeholders in the education, business, and legislative communities. The postcards are available on the FFLA website for teachers to use.

TABLE 1. 2011 FFLA BUSINESS LANGUAGE COMPONENTS

<b>Title</b>	<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Presenter Profile</b>
Getting Down to Business: The REAL World of Languages in the 21st Century	General Assembly	All	Business
Kennedy Space Center Tour	Pre-Conference Workshop	All	Business
The Business of Languages	Opening Keynote	All	Business
Preparing Global Leaders through the Spanish Classroom	Session	Spanish	High School
Fun and Effective Ways to Apply Business Language in the K–12 Classroom	Session	Japanese	High School
High School Chinese for Future Professionals	Session	Chinese	University
Working Group Discussion: LSP in the K–12 Curriculum	Session	All	University
Brazil and Portuguese: A Competitive Advantage for Future Careers	Session	Portuguese	High School-University
Enhancing Cultural IQs for Success in International Careers	Session	All	College
Introduction to Business German	Session	German	University
Language Program Promotion Project for Your Students	Session	Japanese	University
Preparing Our Students for the Global Workplace	Closing Keynote	All	Professional Association
NOBLE—Language Learning for Business and the Professions	Exhibit Booth	All	Community of Practice

### CONFERENCE OUTCOMES

Conference attendees received an online survey to evaluate the event, and of the approximately 400 conference attendees, 143 responded. The overall results were positive with a 90% approval rate of the conference. From the qualitative comments it was evident that attendees enjoyed the refreshing, innovative, and real-world connections discussed at the conference. Some suggestions for improvement were to offer continuity and further opportunities to develop some of the presentations (such as those in the business component) at future conferences.

The keynote panel and presentations from business people, the visit to the Kennedy Space Center, the business language sessions, and community connections were radical and new for teachers. These innovative enhancements to the conference inspired teachers and made many of them consider supplementing their curriculum with more communicative activities and field trip experiences that highlight business-themed contexts and tasks. The conference also raised awareness about the importance of language education among members of the business and political communities. Networking and advocacy groups were formed between the business, educational, and political communities in order to foster partnerships that continued after the conclusion of the conference.

With funding from the University of Florida Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER), the recordings of the business speakers were professionally edited and made into short video clips that were posted on YouTube™ for viewing by educators and students. In addition, two other video clips were created using engaging graphics, statistics, and facts on the value of language, culture, and careers. As of the fall of 2012, the clips produced as a direct result of the conference have had 7,162 views. The clip entitled “Are We Prepared for Jobs of the Future” has also been screened at a variety of state, regional, and national conferences, so that the theme of language learning for business and the professions has reached several thousand teachers around the country.

The most notable presentation was given by teacher Cristin Bleess of Castle View High School in Colorado, whose presentation centered on her “Spanish for Leadership” course. According to survey feedback, her presentation on course design ideas and guidelines for acquiring course approval was very useful for teachers. Bleess’s work has been featured in ACTFL’s *The Language Magazine* (Crouse, 2013) and her session inspired Florida Spanish teacher Danika Cornelius of Seacrest Country Day School to develop

her own version of Bleess's "Spanish for Leadership" class. Since the 2011 conference they have both offered their courses at least once, have received approval to continue offering them, and present their models regularly at conferences in order to share with other teachers. Their models and course ideas are also available on the program development page of the NOBLE (Network of Business Language Educators) website (see "Language Learning for Business and the Professions," 2013).

Even though state conference themes cannot always be focused on careers and business language, associations can at least offer a business language or career "strand." For example, the 2012 FFLA conference theme was "Connecting Students to the Global Environment," and although its main focus was not on careers and business language, several pre-conference half-day workshops that focused on business languages were offered to participants. One such field trip took teachers to the Jacksonville Port Authority (JAXPORT), and another workshop focused on Business French. Professional development field trips to local businesses serve as models for teachers on how to make community connections and they give teachers insight on how to create activities in their classrooms that demonstrate the need for languages in real-world applications.

At the opening general assembly we screened the advocacy clip "Are We Prepared for Jobs of the Future," created in conjunction with the 2011 conference. The clip set the tone for the keynote speaker, who emphasized the importance of connecting languages and careers, and explained how teachers should consider themselves as "facilitators of global engagement" on their campuses. Seven additional sessions focused on business and connecting to the community (Table 2). They were presented by high school and postsecondary faculty and covered languages such as Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish. Co-presenters of the "Spanish for Leadership" session modeled the use of technology by featuring Cristin Bleess presenting via Skype™ software. Using video conferencing technology or Skype™ software has become more common in the business world, but is still considered innovative in education. Sessions using technology to present on LSP initiatives model innovation and show how to disseminate information while reducing budget expenses for conferences.

Two sister cities groups from different parts of the state presented on their initiatives and how teachers and students can connect with global partners. The groups represented a variety of sister countries and thus had a broad appeal across languages. For the second year in a row, NOBLE sponsored

TABLE 2. 2012 FFLA BUSINESS LANGUAGE COMPONENTS

<b>Title</b>	<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Presenter Profile</b>
Connecting Your Students to the Real World of Business — Tour of the Port of Jacksonville	Pre-Conference Workshop	All	University / Business
Teaching Language at the Crossroads of Culture and Commerce	Pre-Conference Workshop	French	University
Languages and Global Initiatives	Opening Keynote	All	High School
Individual Case Studies on the Development of Intercultural Competence in Business Environment	Session	Japanese	University
The Right Language to Get Connected: Portuguese	Session	Portuguese	Business
Incorporating Business into High School Spanish 3	Session	Spanish	High School
Spanish for Leadership and Business	Session	Spanish	High School
Student-centered Business Language Activities for the Foreign Language Classroom	Session	Japanese	University
Global Connections through Sister Cities	Session	All	Community
Culture Shock in the Eternal City	Session	Italian	University
NOBLE—Language Learning for Business and the Professions	Exhibit Booth	All	Community of Practice

an exhibit booth with resources for developing LSP curriculum. The exhibit sought to raise awareness of program models teachers can access at the K–12 level as well as reach out to those teachers who may not have attended the sessions on business.

### CONCLUSIONS

While a variety of LSP conferences are held annually, the majority of teachers are unable to attend, primarily due to limited funding. By infusing professional development for LSP into state conferences, more faculty at all K–16 levels have the opportunity to benefit. In general, state conferences offer numerous advantages to teachers, such as affordability, responding to the local context of professional needs of the state and region, offering the possibility to tap into local resources for community connections, attracting a large number of participants, and reaching a mix of K–12 and postsecondary faculty to enhance articulation between levels. Working with a large number of high school teachers at the local level and encouraging them to share and disseminate their ideas gives them a voice and empowers them to innovate and prepare students with the new skills needed to be successful in future careers.

The FFLA conference format we describe provides a model for language organizations to plan an LSP/business-themed conference or section in their state that will meet the professional development needs of the twenty-first-century language teacher. We must continue to seek innovative ways to provide the resources and support teachers' need to design and implement effective curricular strategies that develop global citizens who are able to communicate and compete in the twenty-first-century global workplace.

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