

The President's Message

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Languages: Connecting Students to the World

When asked, how do you answer the question, "What do you teach?" I suspect that most of us are inclined to respond with the name of the language we teach. Yet, if you think about it, we don't really teach language; we teach learners...learners of language, learners of culture, learners who are participants in a global society. As teachers of those learners, we have an awesome responsibility and tremendous power...the power to influence our learners' views of the world and to provide them with tools for interacting with other global citizens.

As we all know, our learners don't arrive at our classroom door as blank slates. They arrive with a native language, a collection of experiences, and a set of perceptions and assumptions about the world and its peoples. It is through the experiences we provide them with the target language and with speakers of the target language that our learners come to expand their capacities and their perspectives. With new skills and added lenses, they can extend themselves in new and different ways to make connections where they could not make connections before. In other words, languages give our students the resources they need to connect deeply to the world.

The world with which our students connect, however, is not a singular place or time. There are possibilities for our learners to connect with those who are "worlds away," through reading, writing, travel, and technology. Our learners can connect to those who reside in their "world at home," through interactions with target-language speaking peers and community members. Our learners can come to understand the "who," "what," "where," "when," "how," and "why" of languages, peoples, cultures, and their issues by connecting to both the "world past" and the "world present."

Connecting learners to all these worlds has incredible potential, but it is not easy nor automatic in a language classroom. That is why NYSAFLT and your NYSAFLT colleagues have come together to offer you this Annual Meeting Publication and the many accompanying presentations. It is our hope that the ideas and strategies contained herein and offered in the numerous Annual Meeting workshops can guide you, empower you, and inspire you. But most of all, we hope that they will help you help your students to connect to the world.