

Best of Language Learning: People, Programs & Practices that Inspire

2011 has certainly been a year of change. The New York State Regents are working toward a goal to attain “internationally benchmarked standards” and the State Education Department has been shifting the paradigm, all while the economic situation has suffered. With the elimination of state assessments for LOTE, teachers and supervisors from across the state united to create high quality local assessments. Schools have been asked to meet the requirements of Race To The Top and teachers are expected to match their curricula to the newly established Common Core Standards. At the same time, we strive to follow the Framework for 21st Century Learning and to meet the needs of our “digital native” students by making effective use of the latest technologies.

That’s what makes our 2011 Annual Conference theme even more important and timely for teachers, administrators, and supporters of LOTE. We cannot afford to resist the changes; they are here. The intention of “Best of Language Learning: People, Programs & Practices that Inspire” is to provide our membership with the information, diverse ideas, and professional development that will allow us to take the necessary steps to not only keep up with the changes in education, but to guide us to proactively lead the charge.

What is inspiration? As I look back to the 2010 Colloquium, I recall the thoughts that came from our three panels of experts. As Joanne O’Toole, Ph.D. reminded us, “to inspire” means “to breathe life into.” It is through our teaching that we, the teachers and supervisors, are all capable of breathing life into our classes through passionate and imaginative means. She, along with panelists Jo-Ann Esrick and Rosa Riccio Pietanza, suggested that we must model what we wish to instill in our students, that we must show our students that we truly care, to take a true interest in each of them, and to listen to them as we provide them with the opportunities to share responsibility for their own learning. According to Reina McGoldrick, Al Martino and Mary Holmes, inspirational programs require excellent communication, focus on student performance, administrative and community support, and clear, common, well-articulated goals.

“Practices that Inspire” panelist Bill Heller recommended starting with a goal, then adding thoughtful integration of technology, formative, performance-based assessments that support curricular alignment, and thematic curriculum that provides learning in context. John Webb, Ed. D. emphasized the communicative functions anchored in the cultural realities of the students and their lives, as well as the importance of getting on the literacy bandwagon to make connections between LOTE and the literacy movement. Vickie Mike, Ed. D, recommended the incorporation of ACTFL’s 5C’s as we build a community of learning achieved by making personal connections with our students.

The “best of language learning” is no longer about the teacher; it’s about the students, student learning, and student performance. We need to create a culture of teachers who seek out and integrate best practices into their lives by networking with colleagues via involvement in the professional organizations, constantly adding to our professional growth, and “tapping” young teachers, encouraging them to take an active role in our community of learning.

Over the past 94 years, our NYSAFLT conferences have offered attendees cutting-edge workshops that teach, challenge, and encourage us to grow professionally and improve our craft. I hope that you will come away with new attitudes, new concepts, and new ideas. Have a rewarding, productive and inspirational conference.