Implementing STARTALK-endorsed Principles in an Intensive Summer LCTL Program: Challenges and Implications

Julian ChengChiang Chen and Sarah Jourdain
Stony Brook University

Abstract

This paper discusses how STARTALK-endorsed principles were adopted in a first-year STARTALK summer program in three LCTLs: Arabic, Persian and Turkish. Our 34 high school and college participants were enrolled in seven week, six-credit intensive introductory college courses. All students began at the Novice-low proficiency level in each LCTL. The program effectiveness was assessed by students' learning outcomes (ACTFL-based proficiency test results and LinguaFolio evidence) and evaluated by a site visit team's observation report, program exit surveys and student project work. Students' oral proficiency scores showed a significant improvement ranging from the Novice level to Intermediate low/high. Triangulation of the qualitative data also revealed overall positive attitudes toward this immersive and learner-centered program that integrated language, culture, and content in LCTLs. Positive results did not come without some challenges in curriculum design and technological integration. Lessons learned and pedagogical implications are provided for others interested in implementing similar programs.

Introduction

In summer 2014, Stony Brook University hosted its first non-residential STARTALK program in three Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs), Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. Our central theme was "Travel," embodied in the slogan: "*Go East! Discover the Colorful Middle East!*" Students imagined that they were traveling to a country where the target language is spoken (Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, respectively). A wide variety of thematic units were then developed around this organizing concept for our target audience of high school

juniors, seniors, and college undergraduates leading to a culturally rich, immersive experience. During the seven-week, six-credit intensive introductory college-level courses, we aimed to help students:

1. Reach the Novice High/Intermediate Low oral proficiency level;
2. Demonstrate their interpretive, interpersonal and presentational skills in a final summative assessment including a target language presentation and e-portfolio showcase of a host country tourist itinerary;
3. Address the "Communities" goal in the ACTFL World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages by having students interact with native speakers of the target languages both within and outside of the classroom.

Our goals were both ambitious and focused, guided by principles of best practice. In the following sections, we will discuss the steps taken to reach these goals by 1) providing an overview of the National STARTALK Program and its standards-based, performance-driven principles; 2) delineating our program model regarding its setting, curriculum design, implementation, assessment, and evaluation; 3) reporting on program outcomes; 4) discussing the unforeseen challenges encountered; and 5) offering pedagogical implications for future LCTL research and teaching.

Context

STARTALK programs were launched in 2007 as part of the U.S. National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) in order to "increase the number of Americans learning, speaking, and teaching critical need foreign languages" (Ingold & Hart, 2010; STARTALK, 2014a). Over the past seven years, almost 50,000 students and teachers have participated in STARTALK-funded programs (Hart, Ellis & Malone, 2014) which now include Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Hindi, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Swahili, Turkish and Urdu, with Korean being added for 2015. Originally focused on K-12 contexts, the programs were expanded in 2009 to include college undergraduates. The core of the program has remained intact, organized around *six principles* of best practices in language learning and teaching (Ingold & Hart, 2010; STARTALK, 2014b):

1. *The curriculum must be standards-based and thematically organized*. This

principle entails that grammar will not be the organizing thread of STARTALK curricula; lessons will instead be created to foster real-world communication skills.

2. *The classroom must be learner-centered.* Adherence to this principle necessitates the maximization of opportunities for negotiation of meaning in the classroom, including frequent opportunities for pair- and group-work.
3. *The target language (TL) is to be used at least 90% of the time.* To reach this goal, teachers must focus on providing comprehensible input and avoid recourse to translation.
4. *Language, culture, and content must be integrated* such that cultural perspectives are associated with specific products and practices.
5. *Age-appropriate authentic materials are to be used.* These include print and non-print, technology-based resources.
6. *Assessments are performance-based.* Both formative and summative assessments which engage students in real-world communicative tasks are key elements of all STARTALK programs.

While these principles are supported by decades of research into best practices, their effective implementation often remains challenging. Regarding 90% TL use, for example, LeLoup, Ponterio and Warford note, "In spite of its edification in the research and standards that inform language pedagogy, extensive teacher use of the TL eludes most Western PreK-12 and postsecondary classrooms" (2013, p. 45). In an early study conducted in the late 1980s, Duff and Polio (1990) found that in a selection of second quarter college undergraduate language courses representing seven different languages, including LCTLs, the amount of TL used ranged from 10% to 100%. Two decades later, Warford (2007) in a survey of foreign language teachers finds that teachers still express a great deal of ambivalence in the use of first language (L1) vs. second language (L2) for many classroom functions such as "giving homework" or engaging in "class routines," and there is no clear preference for using the TL in many contexts where negotiation of meaning is involved. Therefore, it was not a foregone conclusion that our instructors and students would be able to effectively implement this principle.

Our goal of having our students reach the Novice High/Intermediate Low proficiency level after seven weeks of intensive instruction (90 contact hours) was also ambitious. Studies of adults

enrolled in the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) have indicated that 16 weeks of intensive training (480 contact hours) lead to an average spoken proficiency in Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish in the Intermediate range—Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) level 1 for Arabic and Turkish, level 1/1+ for Farsi, which roughly corresponds to ACTFL Proficiency levels Intermediate Low/Mid and Intermediate Mid/High, respectively (Liskin-Gasparro, 1982, cited in Omaggio Hadley, 2001, p. 26). Studies by the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon found that for students who learn languages in grades K-8 approximately 200 contact hours are needed for 25% of these students to reach the Novice-High proficiency level whereas 700 hours are needed for 50% of students to reach this level (CASLS, 2010b). They also found that regardless of language studied, including LCTLs, most high school students studying in traditional language programs achieve only Novice-High /Intermediate Low proficiency by the end of 4 years of study (CASLS, 2010a).

Magnan (1986) found that the proficiency of college French students after one year of study ranged from Novice Mid to Intermediate Mid/High, and Tschirner & Heilenman (1998) found the proficiency of college German students after four semesters of study ranged from Novice High to Intermediate Mid. Their review of previous studies shows similarly wide proficiency ranges in first through fourth year high school courses and first through fourth semester college courses. Finally, a study of high school summer Mandarin courses, Levels II and III, taught under the STARTALK program, found that a majority of the students remained in the Novice range as assessed by a Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview (SOPI) after four week intensive courses (Xu, et al., 2013).

Taken together these studies suggest that our goal for students to achieve Novice High/Intermediate Low oral proficiency after seven weeks was a high, though not impossible, bar to reach within our immersive, performance-driven program.

The STARTALK Program at Stony Brook University

Program Site

Our first non-residential STARTALK program was hosted at Stony Brook University in the Northeastern region of the US in summer 2014. Different from most of the other residential K-12 STARTALK programs or short-term non-residential counterparts in the US, our program was unique both in its longer duration (four days per week with 90 instructional hours in seven weeks) and its credit-bearing provision (both high school and college students were able to earn six college credits). Three intensive beginning-level courses were offered under our program in Arabic, Persian and Turkish. STARTALK scholarships were awarded to 13 highly motivated, eligible student applicants to cover the cost of tuition and mandatory fees for these courses.

Participants

Students. A total of 34 student participants joined our summer program. Students were recruited mostly from our diverse body of undergraduate (age 18-22) and graduate (age 24-37) students on campus, with a few from other campuses in the Northeastern region. High school students (ages 15-18) were from the local districts, with a few from the metropolitan area. Except for one undergraduate student of Chinese, participants were mostly native English speakers who had learned more than one foreign language before the program (typically Spanish plus one additional foreign language).

In our Arabic course, 14 of the 18 participants were enrolled students and the other four were graduate student auditors. Of the enrolled students, five were high school students and eight were college undergraduates. One enrolled student was a graduate student. STARTALK scholarships were awarded to four of the five high school students and two of the eight undergraduates. In Persian, five of the eight participants were enrolled students and the other three were graduate student auditors. Of the enrolled students, four were college undergraduates and one was a graduate student; three of the five undergraduates received STARTALK scholarships. In Turkish, six of the eight participants were enrolled students and the other two were

graduate student auditors. Of the enrolled students, one was a high school student and five were college undergraduates. The high school student and three of the five undergraduates received STARTALK scholarships.

Instructors. Three dedicated instructors, one each in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, participated in our intensive summer program. They are each native, or near-native, speakers of their languages. Although all instructors had relevant teaching experience in an LCTL and/or ESL (English as a Second Language), with strong backgrounds in linguistics and foreign language education, only the Arabic instructor had received prior STARTALK professional development training. They each also participated in two pre-program professional development workshops, including the design of STARTALK-endorsed curricula, lesson activities and performance-based assessments (detailed in the following sections).

Program Model

Major Goals. As noted, our program goals were to assist our students to 1) reach the target language proficiency level (Novice High/Intermediate Low), 2) successfully demonstrate interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational skills through the summative assessment, and 3) receive an immersive learning experience in the target culture communities so that they could develop appreciation for Middle Eastern cultures and languages that further foster their intrinsic motivation for continued learning. In order to meet these goals, we adopted the *STARTALK Student Curriculum Program Template[1]* to guide our backward designed curricula in the three target LCTLs (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). We specified each indicator under each thematic unit so that students' learning goals and outcomes could be identified and

---

[1] The STARTALK Online Curriculum Development Guides & Templates web page (https://startalk.umd.edu/curriculum-guide) provides all STARTALK programs with rich resources in curriculum development guidelines, sample templates, and materials.

measured. Below is an example of the Arabic curriculum designed under the ACTFL benchmarks targeting Novice-High and Intermediate-Low proficiency levels, accompanied by specific Can-Do statements for students to successfully demonstrate the "interpersonal speaking" skill:

NCSSFL-ACTFL GLOBAL CAN-DO BENCHMARKS *Be sure to label the mode and proficiency level of each statement*	PROGRAM CAN-DO STATEMENTS OR NCSSFL-ACTFL CAN-DO STATEMENTS *Number the can-do statements here and then transfer to stage 3*
Interpersonal Speaking	
Novice high: I can communicate and exchange information about familiar topics using phrases and simple sentences, sometimes supported by memorized language. I can usually handle short social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering simple questions.	1. I can socialize with people in culturally appropriate ways, such as greeting and leave taking. 2. I can exchange personal information with my travel companions and host family, such as nationality, language(s) I speak, family members and their characteristics.
Intermediate low: I can participate in conversations on a number of familiar topics using simple sentences. I can handle short social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering simple questions.	3. I can talk with someone about my interests and school.
	4. I can respond to simple questions based on my likes/dislikes, such as Egyptian dishes and traditional musical instruments.
	5. I can talk about weather in the US and the Arab world.
	6. I can interact with others in everyday situations, such as ordering a meal or making a purchase.
	7. I can talk about a few customs and traditions that I learned when interacting with native speakers of the language.
	8. I can talk about the tourism aspects of the trip—places I will visit and things I will do.
	9. I can talk about things to do in a city and give and ask for directions for getting around a city in Egypt.

Figure 1. A snapshot of Can-Do statements for interpersonal speaking skills in Arabic

Curriculum Design. Our curriculum, under the umbrella theme *"Go East! Discover the Colorful Middle East,"* was geared toward novice students by providing them with ample opportunities to 1) practice the target language through the incorporation of authentic materials and interactive tasks, and to 2) develop cross-cultural awareness and understanding through interaction with people and places of cultural relevance. Each thematic unit was centered around real-life scenarios that were meaningful to our students, such as shopping in a local market or asking for directions to a museum. The goal was to prepare them to use the target LCTL to accomplish each communicative task as if in the target culture. Below are the key components that guided and strengthened our curriculum development:

ACTFL Standards. Following the ACTFL Standards manifested in the 5Cs (*Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities*)[2], our curriculum incorporated task-based instruction in each unit so that students were able to use the target LCTL for communicative and meaningful purposes in various real-world situations. Specifically-designed curricular activities illustrate how these standards were operationalized in the three LCTL courses: 1) Communication: Role-playing bargaining with sellers in a local market for clothing and souvenirs; giving and following directions on a city map in Egypt; 2) Cultures: Making Persian food in a cooking workshop; practicing belly dancing; wearing culturally appropriate clothing in a mosque; 3) Connections: Understanding the Turkish traditions and family values during a guest speaker's talk; 4) Comparisons: Comparing/contrasting American and Arabic celebrations of festivals; 5) Communities: Interacting with native speakers in a local Turkish community and visiting a Turkish family. Under the 5Cs benchmark, these novice students not only applied what they had learned in and outside the program to real-world situations, but above all, developed their cross-cultural competence and appreciation for the beauty of Middle Eastern cultures, arts and languages.

STARTALK-endorsed Principles for Effective Teaching & Learning. To ensure program effectiveness, our curriculum design was closely aligned with the six STARTALK principles as exemplified in 1) our *ACTFL standards-based curriculum* built into the central thematic unit in "Travel," 2) pair- and group work to promote a *learner-centered setting*, 3) instructors' endeavors to use the *LCTLs most of the time* and provide *comprehensible input*, 4) a variety of field trips and cultural workshops to *integrate language, culture, and content* via experiential and situational learning, 5) incorporation of real-life materials and content into instruction to enhance the sense of *authenticity*, and 6) *performance-based*

---

[2] For further details regarding ACTFL 5Cs and World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages,
please refer to http://www.actfl.org/node/192 and http://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/World-ReadinessStandardsforLearningLanguages.pdf

assessments, such as presenting a one-day itinerary to demonstrate interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational skills.

Specifically, each unit was backward designed so that our students could use the LCTL communicatively while learning the culture and content seamlessly. In other words, our curriculum was designed in such a way that students could check off *Can-Do statements* (e.g., *I can talk about local food I want to try in Egypt* (presentational speaking)) across the three modes of communication in the LinguaFolio[3] system—an evidence-based, portfolio assessment platform to keep a track of learners' progress in accomplishing Can-Do Statements. Further information about how students provided learning evidence to upload to the LinguaFolio site will be detailed in the Assessment section.

Additionally, our curriculum was purposefully designed to instill an immersive learning component into our thematic unit planning so that our students could reach out to the community. A series of well-planned field trips and cultural workshops were conducted throughout the program. Students had the chance to use the TL communicatively, authentically, and meaningfully through visiting local museums and mosques, attending cooking workshops, interacting with invited guest speakers of the target language, learning Persian calligraphy and turning it into an artwork, and so forth.

Differentiated Instruction. Given the diverse makeup of participants, our thematic unit plan was designed to draw upon students' background knowledge and prior experiences as a springboard for them to acquire new cultural, linguistic, and content knowledge in the LCTLs. Our curriculum also incorporated a wide variety of authentic materials, real-life tasks, digital technologies, and a learner-centered approach to accommodate students' various learning styles and interests. Since professional development in differentiated instruction has been identified as an area of need in LCTLs (Mana, 2011), our instructors received instruction in specific techniques via our pre-program

---

[3] LinguaFolio (https://startalklfo.uoregon.edu/) is a self- and formative assessment online tool that documents learners' language progress. It lays out all the Can-Do statements selected and modified by each program in order for students to demonstrate their performance via uploaded learning evidence. All STARTALK student programs are required to implement LinguaFolio in their curricula.

workshops. In particular, students were provided with instructional differentiations to accommodate their learning styles as well as to demonstrate their language production through: *individual work* (e.g., practicing script writing), *pair work* (e.g., creating a poster presentation for a gallery walk), the *interpersonal mode* (e.g., exchanging information with peers about family members, hobbies), *digital technology* (e.g., video-narration on introducing the campus to native speakers), *formative assessments* (e.g., understanding how to follow instructions on a Tehran city map) and *summative assessments* (e.g., presenting to the class and invited guest speakers a one-day travel itinerary to Istanbul).

Technology. Digital tools played a crucial role in our curriculum in order to tailor to high school and college students' digital learning styles and interests as well as to facilitate teaching (Blankenship & Hinnebusch, 2013; Haley, Steeley & Salahshoor, 2013). *Blendspace* (https://www.blendspace.com/)—an interactive, user-friendly site that supports multimodal features—proved particularly useful for students to document their project work, such as images of poster presentations, audio files of oral communication with peers, video clips of role plays, etc. It also served as their personal e-portfolio, which showcased their learning progress and provided evidence for both the instructor and director to evaluate whether the target goal set for each performance-based task had been met. In addition, the instructor was able to upload his/her lesson materials and to announce new assignments on Blendspace.

Capitalizing on mobile learning, students were also introduced to different mobile applications (Apps) that optimized LCTL learning. Students used *Quizlet* (www.quizlet.com) to practice new vocabulary via interactive digital flashcards, *Movenote* (www.movenote.com) to narrate their video presentations via slideshow, and *Educreations* (www.educreations.com) to create their digital storytelling recordings in the target LCTL. Not only did students practice the LCTL at their own pace in and outside the class, but they received feedback from peers and the instructor on their project work, creating a virtual community in which to participate.

Professional Development Workshops. Prior to our STARTALK program, two half-day workshops were conducted for our three language instructors with a focus on (1) curriculum design and STARTALK-endorsed principles, (2) appropriate assessment techniques, and (3) technological tools to enhance learning and teaching. Our program director had participated in the STARTALK Spring 2014 Conference and led the first session by sharing the materials gathered and organized from the workshops. Then all participants engaged in a follow-up collaborative work session to discuss appropriate assessment techniques and create assessment rubrics for interpersonal and presentational communication activities as indicated in our curriculum template. Finally, our curriculum designer, who was the Technical Director of our Language Learning Research Center on campus, led the third session on how to implement digital tools (e.g., Blendspace) into LCTL teaching and learning.

Professional development continued before the summer courses started through informal meetings between personnel to further develop curricula, materials and assessments. During the seven-week instructional period, the program director shared an evaluation report with the three instructors based on her class observations of their content delivery, class activities and teacher-student interaction. The curriculum designer also conducted a series of debriefing sessions with the instructors mid-program to discuss what worked and did not work and any modifications to be made based on student performance and reaction to each task.

Assessment

Formative and Summative Assessments. In line with recommendations by Malone, Montee & Disilvio (2010), both formative and summative assessments were incorporated into our curriculum design and carried out throughout the program. Our instructors used different communication strategies (e.g., recasts, clarification requests) during small group and whole-class work to informally assess students' comprehension (interpretive mode) and performance (interpersonal/presentational modes) and made lesson modifications if necessary (formative assessment). Students also self-assessed their language performance by providing evidence to check off Can-Do

Statements on the LinguaFolio site (formative assessment). Before exiting the program, they did an oral presentation on a one-day itinerary of the target LCTL city and demonstrated their composite skills in interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes. After their presentation, they addressed questions from the audience to further process the knowledge built from the integration of language, culture and content (summative assessment).

LinguaFolio. Students in our STARTALK program were required to upload their learning evidence in order to check off "Can-Do Statements" in the LinguaFolio system that were coded with the three communication modes in the curriculum template. Students were able to upload different kinds of learning episodes to demonstrate their comprehension and performance via text, images, audio and video files. For the Turkish interpersonal Can-Do statement, *"I can order a meal*," for example, students were able to upload a video clip of a real-life situation where they used the TL to order their meals from a native server in an authentic Turkish restaurant (see http://goo.gl/uZAfhR). For the Persian interpretive Can-Do statement, "*I can usually understand short simple messages on familiar topics*," students demonstrated their understanding of a Persian text by uploading an image of their responses to the comprehension questions (see http://goo.gl/EaVslM).

LCTL Oral Proficiency Tests. Students' overall oral proficiency in the LCTL was assessed using ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPI) to determine if improvement had been made from zero or Novice-low (before the program) to the target proficiency level at Novice-high or beyond (after the program). Three types of ACTFL-based OPIs were administered: A telephone OPI for Turkish, a computerized OPI (OPIc) for Persian, and anACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages (AAPPL) for Arabic (see http://aappl.actfl.org/). The rationale behind adopting three different types of tests for each language is threefold: 1) an OPIc is currently not available for Turkish. Therefore, a telephone OPI was chosen; 2) an OPIc was chosen for Persian for the sake of practicality (the test can be administered to all students at the same time in a lab setting); and 3) AAPPL was chosen for Arabic because it is STARTALK-oriented and follows the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* and principles

of *performance-based assessment*. Its video chat format allows students to demonstrate their interpersonal listening/speaking skills in various simulated real-life conversation scenarios. The request was made for us to pilot test the Arabic AAPPL with our STARTALK students during the summer, a request which we were able to accommodate. Although we cannot directly compare the three types of assessments, since a different one was used with different groups of students, we do report on our experiences with each one in section (4) below.

Program Effectiveness Evaluation

Program Director's Class Observation Report. To further evaluate the actual implementation of the STARTALK-endorsed curriculum, the program director observed the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish classes in the second week of the program. She paid particular attention to the class dynamics of learner-teacher interaction, lesson activities, the percentage of use of the LCTL, authentic materials and formative assessments. She then organized her observation notes and sent each instructor a report on the strengths of their teaching of the day, provided with constructive feedback on areas that needed improvement. The class observation also helped the director and curriculum designer to gauge whether the curriculum plan was well executed and any modifications should be made.

Site Visit Team Evaluation Report. In the third week of the program, a three-member site visit team came to our campus to conduct class observations, meeting with the program personnel and with the instructors and students of the three classes separately. The purpose of their visit, as required by STARTALK Central for all funded programs, was to evaluate whether the implementation of the approved curriculum had progressed as planned and whether there were any challenges to be addressed. The team debriefed and shared with both the program director and curriculum designer the feedback gathered from all stakeholders of our program. After their visit, the program director received an evaluation report that outlined the strengths of the program and specified recommendations for changes that needed to be made to improve program effectiveness. The program director shared the results

with all the personnel and later filed a report to address the site visit team's comments.

Program Evaluation Surveys. At the end of the program, we administered a program evaluation survey to our students to elicit their overall attitudes toward the program's effectiveness and opinions about how we could improve the curriculum to better serve our future STARTALK students. Close-ended items were designed to gather information on the constructs of students' foreign language experience and levels of satisfaction (a five-level Likert scale from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree"), instruction (e.g., *The teacher spoke the target language 90% of the time or more*), lesson activities (e.g., *The lesson topics were varied and related to real life*), technology use (e.g., *This class incorporated a wide variety of technology into instruction*), and field trip/workshop experience (e.g., *Field trips made learning more related to culture*). Open-ended items were included to probe students' perceptions in further detail (e.g., *How can we improve our program to satisfy your learning needs in the future?*).

Similarly, we sent our instructors an evaluation survey about their reflections on teaching with us and suggestions on curriculum design for the second-year program. To make constructs comparable to those in the student survey, we asked instructors' opinions about instruction (e.g., *I spoke the target language at least 90% of the time*), lesson activities (e.g., *The Startalk lessons were different from my previous experiences teaching in a foreign language class*), technology use (e.g., *I think using technology facilitated my teaching*), and field trip/workshop experience (e.g., *Field trips maximized teaching different cultural aspects)*. Instructors also responded to open-ended items in depth under each construct with a focus on program curriculum (e.g., *Please reflect on your teaching journey that followed the Startalk-endorsed principles in this program*).

Results and Discussion

Did We Achieve our Goals?

The short answer is "Yes." Below we report the evidence-based outcomes and discuss those positive results along with unforeseen challenges encountered.

Learning Outcome 1: Novice High/Intermediate Low oral proficiency

For Learning Outcome 1, we have varying results of the end of-program language assessments: In Turkish, five out of the six enrolled students participated in an official ACTFL telephone OPI administered by Language Testing International (LTI). All five of the tested students (one high school student and four undergraduates) received the proficiency ranking of *Intermediate Low.*

In Persian, all eight of the students participated in an official computerized OPI (OPIc) likewise administered by LTI. We experienced a number of unforeseeable technical difficulties (including a flood-induced power outage) as well as miscommunication regarding which level of test the students were to take. This resulted in understandable frustration, lost time, and perhaps inaccurate results. Two students, one of whom was an undergraduate scholarship student and the other an enrolled graduate student, failed to complete the exam and thus had no reported proficiency scores. Our three auditing graduate students received different proficiency scores—*Novice High, Intermediate Low, and Intermediate High.* The remaining scores of our undergraduates were *Novice Mid, Novice High, and Intermediate Low.* Our classroom observations and reports from the language instructor indicate that this wide range of scores is not a true reflection of the proficiency levels of the students but instead reflects testing difficulties. Despite these difficulties, five of the six students met or exceeded our target proficiency level (Novice High/Intermediate Low), but we believe that all of our students might have ranked in the Intermediate level had they all been tested in the same manner as the Turkish students.

In our Arabic course, 12 of our 14 enrolled students participated in the computerized AAPPL. We experienced the same technical difficulties in administering this exam as with the Persian OPIc (the same day of 13 inch record rainfall and flooding in our area resulting in numerous complications). There was considerable student frustration that we believe negatively affected the test results. Nine of 12 students scored at the *Novice Mid* level. Only one student scored at the *Novice High* level while two students scored at the *Novice Low* level. We cannot claim that these scores are an accurate reflection of the Arabic students' language proficiency in as far as our class observations and measures of

students' class performance suggest a higher proficiency level. In class, the proficiency of these students resembled the proficiency of the Turkish students, all of whom were ranked at the Intermediate Low level based on their telephone OPI. Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell if the lower proficiency ratings of the Arabic students are due to the testing conditions, the test itself, the instruction and/or the students' actual proficiency.

Additional evidence for Learning Outcome 1 can also be found in the documents which students uploaded to LinguaFolio as evidence of individual Can-Do statements. Having analyzed all of this evidence, we find that our students met Learning Outcome 1. The following is an example of a student's learning evidence in Turkish writing uploaded to the LinguaFolio site. This gives evidence of fulfilling one of the Can-Do Statements in "*I can write short notes using phrases and simple sentences.*"

Figure 2. A picture evidence in a Turkish student's presentational writing at the Novice-high level

Learning Outcome 2: Final summative assessment to demonstrate interpretive, interpersonal and presentational skills

For Learning Outcome 2, we have the presentations which the learners created and uploaded to Blendspace to document their work before uploading to the LinguaFolio site as evidence of fulfilling Can-Do statements. In some cases, we have additional videotaped highlights of these presentations documenting student achievement of Learning

Outcome 2. Figure 3 illustrates evidence of Learning Outcome 2 in which two students presented their one-day itinerary to Cairo using Google Maps to highlight the route from Tahrir Square to the Egyptian Antiquities Museum. It was screen-captured from their presentation slides they uploaded to the LinguaFolio site in order to demonstrate the Can-Do statement: "*I can present information on plans, instructions, and directions*" (Presentational Speaking, Intermediate-low level):
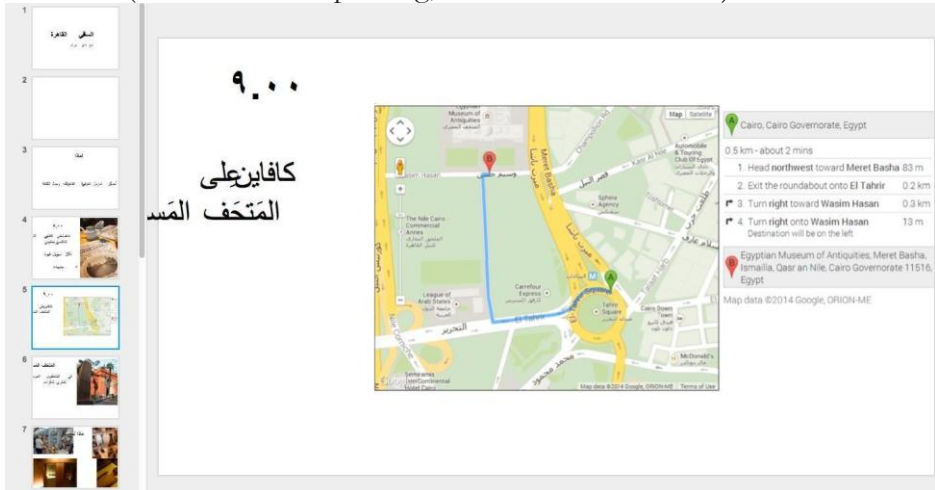

Figure 3. Evidence of Google Mapping direction in a one-day itinerary presentation

Learning Outcome 3: Achieve the "Communities" goal in the ACTFL World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages

Finally, as documentation of Learning Outcome 3, our students participated in multiple OK culturally-rich field trips and on-campus workshops involving native speakers of the LCTLs from the community[4]. All of these experiences contributed to the outreach of our programs, helping to extend the learning experiences beyond the walls of the classrooms. Our Arabic instructor organized a field trip to a local mosque and a Coptic church, where students were exposed to the interrelationship of language, culture, and religious traditions. She also

---

[4] Photos and videos of those events have been posted on our program site at https://llrc.stonybrook.edu/startalk-program-highlights.

organized a drumming workshop and a dance workshop held on campus which brought these aspects of Egyptian culture into the classroom. Our Turkish instructor invited the musician Ahmet Erdogdular to perform on campus and demonstrate musical instruments which provided a fascinating blend of language and culture. Students also visited an authentic Turkish restaurant in New York City, and they were invited to spend the day in the home of a Turkish family where they shared a meal and were able to try out some of their newly-learned language skills.

Our Persian instructor took students to view the world-renowned collection of Art from the Arab Lands at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, followed by a luncheon at a nearby Persian restaurant and a cooking demonstration. Here, too, students were able to employ some of their newly-learned language skills as they were immersed in both the language and culture. Our Persian instructor also brought into the classroom a calligraphy expert who demonstrated this ancient art, in the target language, and assisted the students as they created an embellished poster as showcased in Figure 4:

Figure 4. Artwork of Persian painting and calligraphy created by students and instructor

Additionally, we have student testimonials from our own program evaluation survey, which students completed during the last week of classes, to attest to the value the students placed on the field trips and guest speakers. Participants were asked to respond to the following prompt: "*Describe how an unforgettable field trip or workshop benefited your language learning.*" One of our Turkish students wrote, "On the field trips, we were exposed to many other speakers of the language, and gave us insight to different speaking styles; which was a difficult adjustment initially, but is something that will be crucial when using the language in the real world! This was definitely the most useful aspect of the trips".
One Arabic student added, "The visit to the mosque and the church were both very educational. Learning about the culture (dance, food,

religion, history) has helped me expand my knowledge in many aspects. Being able to use and interact with Native speakers helped with practicing/ utilizing the language and helped gain some confidence. I still have a long way to go, but I am definitely more motivated".

In addition to open-ended responses, we learned from our student program evaluations that 92% of STARTALK students agreed or strongly agreed that "Field trips made learning more related to culture," and that "Field trips made learning more fun." In response to the prompt, "*I learned a lot about content and culture during the workshops*," 95% of students agreed or strongly agreed. These activities clearly had a positive impact on our students.

It is more difficult to gauge the long-term impacts of the program in the wider community. We hope, nevertheless, that the Arabic, Persian, and Turkish-speaking communities in our area will find that this program valorizes their languages and cultures. We further hope that the positive reputation of this program will spread in these communities and that high-school aged children who may have some exposure to the cultures, but little proficiency in the languages, may seek to learn their heritage languages.

What Impact did STARTALK-endorsed Principles Have?

All three instructors had experience as language teachers prior to this STARTALK program, but none had taught using the STARTALK principles in the past, and each faced individual challenges in implementing STARTALK principles. We observed that all three instructors made great efforts to speak almost exclusively in the LCTL, though the goal of 90% LCTL usage was not always met, that they used an abundance of authentic materials, that they strived to integrate language, culture, and content, and that they focused on the learners.

As part of our post-program survey to instructors, we asked them to indicate whether they tried to incorporate the STARTALK-endorsed principles in their teaching. All three instructors responded "Strongly Agree." Our own observations of the courses confirm the instructors' reflections. Student feedback on the end-of-program evaluation which we administered supports this report. In addition, we asked instructors to evaluate and reflect on their experiences at the end

of the program. In response to the prompt "*Please specify what types of instruction you found beneficial or challenging*," our Turkish instructor responded, "First of all, I was surprised to see how "production-based" language teaching turned [out] to be so successful. I found that having a variety of technological tools for the students to accomplish a certain task really served for the main task of teaching. Thus, I really enjoyed incorporating these tools that made my task more convenient".

The Turkish instructor's response is revealing: Prior to the program, he had not taught using "production-based" methods (meaning methods that fostered student use of the language for communicative purposes in class). Furthermore, he did not believe, prior to the program, that such methods could be effective. Implementing the STARTALK principles, and witnessing the noticeable progress his students made in such a short amount of time, changed his beliefs about language teaching.

In the following, we will revisit the implementation of each STARTALK principle in our curriculum and discuss the actual outcomes and challenges.

Curriculum = Standards-based, Thematically-oriented. In regards to curriculum, our instructors found the number of topics and amount of material which we had originally targeted to be overwhelming, and hence, challenging. Therefore, we streamlined the curriculum during the summer to accommodate their needs. The standards-based, thematically-oriented nature of the curriculum, however, was well-appreciated by both instructors and students. Many of the in-class activities developed by our instructors epitomized the incorporation of a real-life, communicative tasks into the curriculum. One example is a video clip showing our Arabic students role-playing bargaining in a market where they used paper money to purchase authentic Egyptian souvenirs and clothing:

Figure 5. A video clip of the "Bargaining in the Market" activity in the Arabic class

Classroom is Learner-Centered. All three instructors endeavored to create a learner-centered, inviting environment and provided students with ample opportunities to practice the target LCTL with peers and the instructor communicatively, which is reflected in students' positive comments in the post-program survey. One Arabic student noted, "I liked the interaction between classmates, when we had to speak to each other in Arabic. I also liked the projects we had to do together." A Persian student said, "I liked when we went to 'Istanbul' (the Humanities Atrium) to do speaking practice! Changing the environment changed my mindset, and made me feel more inclined to only speak in the target language like we were supposed to. There, we were able to interact with each other in a more natural and personal way".

These types of comments were frequent from students in each of the language courses. Interpretive and interpersonal communication were integral parts of these language learning experiences fostering positive, learner-centered environments.

Target Language = 90%+, and Comprehensible Input. Our own observations, as well as the reflections of our instructors, suggest that there was some difficulty in consistently reaching 90% TL usage in the

classroom. This is not uncommon in LCTL classrooms (Ingold & Hart, 2010), or indeed in other language classroms (LeLoup, Ponterio & Warford, 2013; Duff & Polio, 1990). All three instructors as well as 92% of student respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the instructor taught in the TL at least 90% of the time. Student in-class usage of the TL may have been lower, however. As the Arabic instructor commented on our survey, "I regret not enforcing more TL use from them... For example it would have been better to make them use more classroom expressions in [the TL] from the beginning when they were getting into the routine of class. By the time I taught them things like 'I have a question' and 'I don't understand' most were already accustomed to requesting information in English".

Instructors may have relied on translation to a greater extent than indicated by STARTALK principles: Two of our three instructors reported using translation to help students grasp the meaning of new words and phrases. They may also have relied on translation as a strategy more than they perceived, as noted in other literature on TL use in the classroom (LeLoup, Ponterio & Warford, 2013); 70% of our student survey respondents agreed that instructors used the translation technique to communicate the meanings of new words. Our instructors addressed how they dealt with this principle in the instructor survey, where one instructor noted, "Instruction in the TL was challenging at first for students, but they got used to it."

In terms of the communicative approach that enhances comprehensible input, all students agreed or strongly agreed that "The instruction was communicative in ways that allowed me to interact with my peers" and that "When I didn't understand, the instructor would use gestures or visuals to help me grasp the meaning." Students' positive responses were echoed by instructors' comments on effective teaching techniques such as this one, "...hands-on activities such as TPR or the communicative ones that fostered a lot of oral interaction were effective. For example, ...bingo (find someone who..) where students had to seek information from multiple students. This also helped them stay in the TL".

Language, Culture, and Content are integrated. The integration of language, culture, and content was most frequently and effectively accomplished during the field trips and workshops. This is evident in the student testimonials already quoted in section 4.1.3 and in this additional response, "I enjoyed the cultural portion of the field trips and interacting with native speakers. It motivated me to practice my Arabic and gave me a more positive experience overall." Students found that the field trips and workshops allowed them to use their new language skills with native speakers in authentic situations while learning culturally rich content. These interactions provided an important link to cultural perspectives which reinforced the lessons learned in class.

Less evident for our instructors, and as noted in other research (Wang, 2009), was how to integrate language, culture, and content on a daily basis in each of the lessons taught. We believe that additional professional development will help address this goal and facilitate networking with other LCTL instructors to share authentic materials and resources.

Use of authentic materials. Although we may have concluded that a greater integration of language, culture and content would be beneficial, all students nevertheless agreed or strongly agreed that authentic multimedia materials were used in class. However, for our Turkish instructor, the greatest challenge he reported was finding authentic materials that he was able to use. This might have resulted from the fact that he was new to the STARTALK teaching approach and there were relatively few Turkish student STARTALK programs available at the time. Hence, he found it challenging to locate hands-on materials and lesson activities. As with the challenge of language, culture and content integration, we believe that networking with other Turkish instructors will assist him with this challenge in the future.

Assessment = Performance-based. In terms of assessment, both the instructors and the students found LinguaFolio to be overwhelmingly daunting. LingaFolio is designed to document students' work evidence. However, both instructors and students found it cumbersome and only minimally user friendly. As one of the instructors pointed out, "...asking students to audio/video tape themselves was effective. However, the can-dos were very overwhelming. I think next year, we should have

certain activities for each can-do from the beginning of the semester and the homework should be relevant to the can dos. This will help students to upload all their work on Linguafolio".

Her comment above is echoed in students' frustrations over the Can Do statements, such as, "The task of developing the evidence specified in the Linguafolio can-do statements was a source of significant anxiety and took time away from more effective ways of making progress toward language learning goals," or "Activities I disliked was [sic] all the Can Do statements we're supposed to upload. It's very difficult to have to do that in a week period and expect us to fulfill every piece of evidence."

The technical aspect of the LingaFolio system also complicates the instructional design and assessment process. An initial, general Can-Do statement must first be identified before specific Can-Do goals can be selected. The result is an increased overall number of goals for which students must supply evidence. Second, as noted by our students, when they wanted to upload files, they often encountered problems linked to file format and size. Lastly, only the instructor can see each student's work. This is problematic for program directors and curriculum designers whose access to the LinguaFolio evidence is limited. These problems notwithstanding, the performance-based nature of the assessments was beneficial, particularly the evidence that students uploaded onto Blendspace which both students and instructors preferred overwhelmingly compared with other platforms.

Additional Positive Outcomes of the Program

We learned two additional valuable lessons from the entire implementation cycle of our first-year program, the first concerning the combined high school/college model and the second concerning students' perspectives on the language learning experience:

(1) *Combined high school/college model.* We learned that an immersive summer language and culture experience that brings together high school and college students is more than just possible; it is enormously successful on our Stony Brook campus. Although it is challenging to recruit high school students since it is often difficult to reach them directly, it is well worth the effort.

(2) *Students' perspectives on the language learning experience.* Student responses to the end-of-program evaluation prompt, "*Please specify what types of instruction you liked in this program,*" provide an excellent summary of how student learning was impacted. Several students wrote comments resembling this one: "I feel that I have learned so much in such a small amount of time, and compared to other language courses I have taken, this one has by far been the most immersive and successful for me." There is much evidence to show that Stony Brook STARTALK students achieved the goals set out by the program and found their experience to be an incredibly valuable one.

Implications and Recommendations

Based on the challenges encountered, lessons learned and feedback received from the stakeholders of our first-year program, we discuss some implications and offer some recommendations for future STARTALK programs to enhance program effectiveness:

(1)   *Maximize opportunities for field trips/guest speakers.* While they represent much effort for the instructors to set up, both the instructors and the students found them to be fun, motivating and a valuable element of language and culture integration.

(2)   *Incorporate technology into instruction.* Both instructors and students expressed positive attitudes toward the use of technological tools which was beneficial for their teaching and learning. For instance, Blendspace, as an e-portfolio site, is easy to use and allows for sharing among students and instructors.

(3)   *Encourage professional development for instructors.* Prior to the program we held two half-day professional development workshops to introduce our instructors to STARTALK principles. During the seven-week program, we held five debriefing meetings with our three instructors, based on recommendations of our site team visit to discuss weekly successes and challenges and for joint planning, reflection, and instructional support. However, our post program survey revealed that instructors wished for more professional development: One responded, "It will be great if we can attend a teacher-training workshop, which is specific for STARTALK, and learn from other teachers." As a

consequence, we will be sending our instructors to professional conferences and workshops in the near future. Research by Schrier (2010) and others supports the view that the types of professional collaborations, exchanges of materials and resources, and networking fostered by such participation will be of great benefit to our instructors and then by extension to our students.

(4)   *Use multiple means of assessing students' language proficiency*. We found that among the standardized assessments which we employed— telephone OPI, OPIc, and AAPPL—the telephone OPI provided the best measure of student oral proficiency for our students. Performance-based oral assessment was facilitated by person-to-person interaction, though further investigation of computer-mediated assessment measures is merited (see Tschirner, 2007).

Conclusion

We consider our first experience with STARTALK to have been a success. Although there were challenges, our instructors, and our students came away with very positive impressions of their teaching and learning experiences. We attribute this overwhelmingly positive response to the efforts and dedication of our instructors to focus on their students' language learning needs and to create a positive learning environment based on the STARTALK principles. Our instructors, having witnessed the enormous gains that their students made in language proficiency and intercultural skills, intend to continue to follow STARTALK principles in their language teaching in the future. Perhaps the best summary of experiences comes from one of our students: The instruction was extremely hands on and interactive, and involved far more speaking than I have ever done in any other language learning situation, which really helped me to grasp the language better. I like that we did not strictly learn out of the textbook and used our own interests and questions instead, it made the class feel very personal and enjoyable, and again, what we learned was relevant to our interests and needs. We could hardly have hoped for a better outcome.

References

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). (2015). *World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages*. Retrieved from http://www.actfl.org/publications/all/world-readiness-standards-learning-languages

Blankenship, B. & Hinnebusch, T. (2013). Survey of digital materials for teaching less commonly taught languages. *Journal of the National Council of Less Commonly Taught Languages, 13,* 33-49.

Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS). (2010a, April). *Ten burning questions: What proficiency level do high school students achieve?* University of Oregon, Eugene, OR. Retrieved from https://casls.uoregon.edu/pdfs/tenquestions/TBQProficiencyResults.pdf

Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS). (2010b, October). *Ten burning questions: What factors are important for an effective K-8 program?* University of Oregon, Eugene, OR. Retrieved from Zttps://casls.uoregon.edu/pdfs/tenquestions/TBQK8Programs.pdf

Duff, P. & Polio, C. (1990). How much foreign language is there in the foreign language classroom? *The Modern Language Journal, 74(2),* 154-166.

Haley, M. H., Steeley, S & Salahshoor, M. (2013), Connecting twenty-first century skills and world language practices: A case study with teachers of critical need languages. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 3(6),* 865-876.

Hart, M. E., Ellis, D. & Malone, M. (2014, October). STARTALK and government updates. Presentation at the national STARTALK conference, Indianapolis, IN.

Ingold, C. W. & Hart, M. E. (2010). Taking the "L" out of LCTLs: The STARTALK experience. *Russian Language Journal, 60*, 185-200.

Ingold, C. W. & Wang, S. C. (2010). *The teachers we need: Transforming world language education in the United States*. College Park, MD: National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland. Retrieved from http://www.nflc.org/publications/the_teachers_we_need.pdf

LeLoup, J., Ponterio, R. & Warford, M. (2013). Overcoming resistance to 90% target language use: Rational, challenges, and suggestions. *NECTFL Review, 72,* 45-60.

Liskin-Gasparro, J. (1982). *ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual.* Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

Liskin-Gasparro, J. E. (1984). The ACTFL proficiency guidelines: Gateway to testing and curriculum. *Foreign Language Annals*, *17*(5), 475-489.

Liskin-Gasparro, J. E. (2003). The ACTFL proficiency guidelines and the oral proficiency interview: A brief history and analysis of their survival. *Foreign Language Annals*, *36*(4), 483-490.

Magnan, S. (1986). Assessing speaking proficiency in the undergraduate curriculum: Data from French. *Foreign Language Annals, 19*, 429-37.

Malone, M.E., Montee, M. & DiSilvio, F. (2010). Assessment Practices in STARTALK language programs: A view of current language assessment literacy. *Russian Language Journal, 60,* 281-300.

Mana, M. (2011-2012). Arabic-teacher training and professional development: A view from STARTALK. *Al-ᶜArabiyya Journal of the American Association of Teachers of Arabic, 44-45, 87-101.*

Omaggio Hadley, A. (2001). *Teaching Language in Context* (3rd Ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

Schrier, L. L. (1993). Preparing teachers of critical languages for the precollegiate environment. *Theory into Practice, 33(1),* 53-59.

STARTALK (2014a). *About STARTALK.* Retrieved from https://startalk.umd.edu/about

STARATLK (2014b). *STARTALK-endorsed principles for effective teaching and learning.* Retrieved from https://startalk.umd.edu/principles/

Tschirner, E. (2007). The development of oral proficiency in a four-week intensive immersion program in Germany. *Unterrichtspraxis, 40(2),* 111-117.

Tschirner, E. & Heilenman, K. (1998). Reasonable expectations: Oral proficiency goals for intermediate-level students of German. *The Modern Language Journal, 82(2),* 147-58.

Wang, S.C. (2009). Preparing and supporting teachers of less commonly taught languages. *The Modern Language Journal, 93(2),* 282-287.

Warford, M. (2007). L1 vs. L2 in the foreign language classroom: New findings. *NECTFL Review, 60,* 50-67.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Xu, X., Padilla, A., Silva, D., & Masuda, N. (2013). A high school intensive summer Mandarin course: Program model and learner outcomes. *Foreign Language Annals, 45(4),* 622-38.