NOTE CATCHER

REFLECTION AND INQUIRY ON ARTICLES
ARTICLE 1: The Impact of Early Language Learning
I'm interested in the idea of naturalistic vs. formal learning settings, especially how much time it takes to learn a language in each and how that depends on the quality of instruction. I also wonder about unintended consequences; what if we started an early childhood language program and students didn't become highly proficient in the language, but their scores in other areas went up because their brains were working in new ways? Lastly, I want to think more about the BAF project and contact time in our current program; that will be something for the CASLS article.
I am curious to learn more about how language learning for young students impacts learning in other areas (Armonstrong and Rogers, 1997; Taylor and Lafayette, 2010.) I wonder what the Spanish lessons replaced in the schedule; in other words, what did students miss as a result? Additionally, I am curious about the "quantity and quality of exposure" to the target language being more important than age (Munoz, 2006). How might this information guide our thinking to enhance language learning for students?
"Comparing elementary students over one semester who had three Spanish lessons per week versus those who had not learned Spanish, found that the Spanish students had significantly better scores on math and language."- Introducing a FLES program would have benefits beyond their 2nd language development. Exposure (even a small bit) would potentially benefit students in other ways as well! DLI program?
Some main takeaways from the research: Adults and older children have an advantage in L2 language acquisition in terms of initial speed of acquisition due to their more developed academic skills and metalinguistic knowledge. However, native-like competence and native-sounding accent are only possible when L2 acquisition begins at an early age. That being said, quantity and quality of exposure to the target language is more important overall than age, with lots of naturalistic exposure being more beneficial in the younger years. The research shows us that different second language learning models (starting age, contact minutes, type of instruction, etc.) have different benefits and disadvantages. The question then, is not, "Is it a good idea to start foreign language instruction at the elementary level?" but instead: If we decide to implement FLES, what is the **goal** of the program? What are the top priorities for educators and the community? Is it important that students eventually have the opportunity to obtain native-like proficiency? Is it improvement in cognitive abilities, other academic areas, or cultural competence? Is it increased opportunities for our students at the high school level and beyond? First identifying our priorities will help in then guiding decisions on whether or not to start world language at the elementary level, what age to start, what model of instruction, and even what language to choose.

In the U.S., students usually get only a few hours of language class each week, which is known as "drip-feed instruction". This limited time leads to slow progress, and starting earlier doesn't seem to make much difference. The Barcelona Age Factor study showed that older starters made faster progress initially, but that younger learners eventually caught up with them in listening and speaking over time. The BAF concluded that the overall number of hours of exposure was more important than the age at which the children started. The article shared studies that found students who received daily language instruction significantly outperformed those who did not. The article praised language immersion and dual language programs, stating that this type of learning and exposure was a more meaningful and natural way to learn a language.

My question would be how a district like Byram would logistically be able to adopt an immersion-based program and not drip-feed instruction? More importantly, what is the goal or outcome for foreign language learning in Byram? Fluency? Exposure? Cultural awareness?

ARTICLE 2: Language Education in Elementary Schools: Meeting the Needs of the Nation

As I read about FLES vs. FLEX, I wonder how we would articulate our goals for language learning for students in the elementary schools. Is our goal to acquire listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills with an appreciation of culture (FLES), or is it to develop an awareness and interest in learning languages in the future (FLEX)?

There is a lack of research on the impact of non-intensive language programs on student learning.

The European model, which starts with young children, suggests that 10% of instructional time is spent on language teaching.

Additionally, the challenges identified in this article remain the same as those we identified in the 2008 study: 1) costs, 2) qualified teachers, and 3) time. Additionally, a well-sequenced and structured program is necessary across elementary and secondary. (Would this mean we need administrative oversight of a FLES program to ensure a strong curriculum? If so, that adds to the costs!) See Brown, 1995.

The statement, *"Very few schools are currently using standardized, nationally available forms of assessment to measure the effectiveness of their programs or to provide baselines on which to build adequate articulation plans"* (p. 8), resonates with a longstanding challenge in world languages. Since the discontinuation of the Regents exams, assessment has been inconsistent; third-party assessments often lack inter-rater reliability, while locally developed assessments can vary significantly between teachers and schools. As we move forward with the refined NYS World Language Standards embedded in our curriculum, along with planned local Checkpoint A and B assessments, we will be better positioned to measure the effectiveness of our program in a more consistent and meaningful way.

The quote, *"Rather than adding additional units to an already crowded curriculum, or requiring new teachers dedicated only to language instruction, immersion courses incorporate language instruction into preexisting coursework, and rely on the same teachers who teach other subjects,"* made me wonder whether this model could address a common challenge we face: finding individuals who both have strong language proficiency and the skills to teach effectively. Could a collaborative teaching approach—pairing a certified teacher with an individual who has deep language expertise—be a viable solution? This could represent a new way to leverage strengths from both areas to enhance language learning.
It was very interesting to see the advantages and disadvantages of each language learning model laid out. It appears that the research indicates that the most successful model for starting at the elementary level is dual language. I would love to see the introduction of a dual language program in Byram Hills (and it was surprising to read that dual language programs average to about $100 increased cost per student), but that requires an immense amount of restructuring and planning over the course of many consecutive years of rolling out the program grade by grade. It would be possible to do so only if we have strong community support. I wonder if it would be possible to do some sort of interest survey to gauge what the community is most interested in.
I think this article pinpoints the overall discussion/question, "What is the desired outcome of language education and what roles can elementary education play in achieving them?" What is Byram's vision and outcome goals? How would this look in terms of human and financial resources and curricular structure? It seems that what we could provide in our elementary day's structure would be limited to 20-30 minutes of instruction weekly or in 21-day Encore increments. I'm sure we all agree with the research that this is not enough exposure to achieve functional levels of proficiency.
ARTICLE 3: Center for Applied Second Language Studies
Here are the stats on contact time in our current language program: HCC: students have 135 hours a year (7th & 8th) = 270 BHHS: students have 118 hours a year (9-12) = 472 Total contact time with the language between 7-12 grade = 742 hours. An idea that resonates with me, regardless of contact time, is the notion that "what you get out depends on what you put in." I think about this in terms of the quality of instruction, a student's level of passion and engagement with language practice tasks, the preparation they do outside the classroom, and their willingness to contribute and practice the language in front of peers.
"Student proficiency is a direct result of instructional hours" (p. 2). If proficiency in language is our goal, what do we need to do? And is it possible given the challenges (see article 2).

720 hours by the end of HS: Incorporating a FLES program could potentially increase the 15% that reach Intermediate-Mid proficiency. Could 6th grade be longer than 1 wheel cycle for their desired language (ex., Pick by the end of grade 5, start language grade 6)?
The point that the author makes about practical language capabilities is an interesting one. People often think of a high school senior's world language skills at the end of several years of instruction as quite advanced, but practically speaking, most are not able to use their language skills for much more than basic conversations. This is especially true within the context of our globalized world where English is often the lingua franca. Practically speaking, an American student may spend years studying a world language, but if their proficiency is not greater than that of the English as a foreign language skills of the people they are communicating with, those world language skills will not be used. As the author noted, "If districts want to give students those professional-level skills, however, they should consider starting programs at the elementary or middle school level and adding higher level high school classes." This is not to say that professional opportunities are the only goal for world language learning, but it is an important note. This note also has implications for our high school world language classes. If the district begins world language instruction in the earlier grades, it would have ripple effects on the world language classes at the high school level, as students would arrive with greater proficiency, and more challenging classes would need to be added. This is not to say that it would be impossible to manage, but that wider implications for the world language program as a whole would need to be considered.
Learning a language takes a lot of consistent practice and time. The research shows that how many hours students spend actually using the language matters more than the materials we use. This article made a good point when comparing the maximum of 720 hours of foreign language study compared to the thousands of hours students spend learning their first language. And the thousands of hours through their school years studying their other school subjects (i.e. math, literacy skills, etc.). This limited time leads to slow progress, and starting earlier doesn't seem to be the only solution.

Other Information

- June 4, 2025, slides & agenda
- June 4, reflections, wonderings, and questions document
- Global Scholars Program webpage