

NURTURING LEADERSHIP FROM THE GRASSROOTS

BY BECKIE BRAY RANKIN

With contributions from Mike Bogdan, Emily Bugbee, Jenny Delfini, Greta Lundgaard, and Haydee Taylor-Arnold



Leadership is most often described using a story. Not just any story, but a personal memoir told with passion, frequently with humor, sometimes with a sense of astonishment, perhaps with regrets, but always highlighting a mentor or colleagues, an opportunity, and an instant of realization that this is the moment to step up.

The Leadership Initiative for Language Learning, affectionately known as LILL, is a story that was dreamed into being during a meeting of stakeholders from national and regional world language organizations during the summer of 2014. These visionary individuals saw the need to identify and cultivate potential and emerging leaders from all spheres of the world language education universe: from classroom teachers, to department chairs, to district administrators, and beyond.

At heart a grassroots initiative, LILL reaches out to world language professionals from all walks of work and provides learning experiences, leadership tools, and above all, leadership networks that already are showing results in the development and growth of the future leaders of the profession.

LILL's goal is to establish a sustainable model of K–16 collaboration that not only focuses on honing essential and research-

based teaching and learning practices, but which also deepens our understanding of research-based leadership strategies and skills through experiences, networking, and mentoring. The idea of leading in one's own sphere of influence supports differentiated individual growth, with multiple points of entry and multiple leadership outcomes.

Since the first LILL Institute in June 2015, at Ohio State University, leaders at all stages of their journeys (potential, emerging, practicing) have been nominated by their state, regional, and national language associations to come together each summer to study and learn from one another.

Participants delve into writings and thoughts of current and past leaders from all fields. They learn from one another through the ups and downs of each participant's leadership journey as laid out in their personal action plans. Each journey is as unique as the individual who embarked upon it, but every journey involves a moment of stepping into early leadership, a word of encouragement from a mentor or a colleague, and an opportunity to offer more.

The following stories from the first two groups of LILL leaders and participants, Cohorts I and II, highlight a few of the myriad LILL journeys in leadership.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Leadership Initiative for Language Learning empowers individuals to become agents for change, in order to foster a growth mindset focused on effective teaching and learning, and purposeful nurturing of leadership skills, all in the service of learners.

Planning Your Parallel Paths

- Where are you on your leadership journey?
- What spheres of influence do you work in?
- Do you partner with someone who can guide you toward new opportunities?
- Where could you present a best practice found in your classroom?
- Can you expand your voice on a local, regional, or national board that reflects your values?
- What can you contribute to those around you?
- What kind of leadership skills do you have to offer?
- What PLNs can you join to be empowered and to empower others?

Emily Bugbee

Emily's story starts with a colleague who inspired her to reach for teacher leadership. Since then, her winding journey has attracted partners and mentors who have identified her qualities and pushed her toward leadership positions.

Starting locally in her district, she first served as a technology representative and a leader of professional development, a coach, and as a school improvement team member. National Board certification prompted her to map her wandering and NECTFL (Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) served as a springboard. Her district-wide presentation led to her nomination to the MFLA (Maryland Foreign Language Association) Board of Directors, which in turn offered her the opportunity to represent Maryland at LILL.

"LILL is the biggest driving factor in my teacher leadership today," says Emily. She continues her parallel journey in the classroom and throughout Maryland, still being inspired by her mentor and inspiring others with her presentations and passion on the MFLA Board.

What keeps Emily motivated? People who are excited about her ideas and who encourage her to pursue and implement those ideas.

Emily Bugbee teaches high school Spanish in Cecil County, Maryland.



Jenny Delfini

When Jenny answered the call to share her successes and struggles with colleagues, she found direction not only in her own teacher leadership but also in helping others push beyond their limits in service to students.

A mentor and friend led Jenny to the NYSAFLT (New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers) Leaders of Tomorrow program and the state organization has helped her present at conferences, undertake valuable inter-school networking, and

reflect on her profession. Due to her tech prowess, Jenny was recruited to be a consultant for NECTFL, and through regional and national conferences she has been honored to meet in person those with whom she collaborates virtually.



Jenny's leadership journey has taught her that leaders generally do not define themselves as such. A true leader can come in many guises, such as collaborator, cheerleader, conversationalist—all roles in which Jenny has found success.

Jenny Delfini is an elementary school Spanish teacher in New Paltz, New York.

Haydee Taylor-Arnold

Haydee's graduate degree program in Spanish Literature encouraged its candidates to participate in professional development. As part of her coursework she attended her first conference, where she clearly saw her next step in leadership: becoming a presenter.

"I was a recipient, getting information from my peers. But then my time to give back knocked at my door and I accepted this new stage of my life." Haydee not only added "presenter" to her résumé, she also

became a more active member and representative of FLAM (Foreign Language Association of Missouri) and has used her technology skills to collaborate virtually with many world language colleagues.

Now an active participant in regional and national professional networks, Haydee also brings her leadership abilities to the local table within her school and to LILL. Haydee believes that her leadership activities improve her relationships with her colleagues as she supports them; help her students as her practice improves; and are personally valuable as she learns.

Haydee Taylor-Arnold is a high school Spanish teacher in Ladue, Missouri.



Greta Lundgaard

"Accidental leadership" is how Greta describes the beginning of her journey. When unforeseen opportunities suddenly arose, Greta prepared herself personally and professionally to rise to the occasion. Through these experiences, she began to value the process involved in a leadership journey: "A cycle of accepting a challenge; preparing based on initial needs and perceptions; taking action; collaborating with others; getting feedback from mentors; re-preparing, taking additional action; collaborating; getting feedback and re-preparing again; and then personally growing and learning from that experience."

When she joined the SWCOLT (Southwest Conference on Language Teaching) board, many of the veteran board members served as mentors and became role models for ego-less leadership, sticking to one's mission, and leading through change. Greta reflects that, at this point in her leadership journey, she truly enjoys giving back what her mentors and role models have given her.



Greta Lundgaard is a former World Language Coordinator in Plano, Texas.

“Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flowcharts. It’s about one life influencing another.” –John Maxwell

Mike Bogdan

A college internship at the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (NECTFL) office catapulted Mike on his leadership journey. After graduation, the Executive Director at the time pushed Mike to present locally at NECTFL, and nationally at ACTFL. A fourth-year teacher, his eyes were opened to the possibility of becoming a teacher leader early in his career. Mike continues to be motivated on his leadership journey by the opportunity to cultivate new leaders in his spheres of influence, serving as the 2017 and 2019 Pennsylvania State Modern Language Association (PSMLA) conference co-chair and as the 2021 NECTFL conference chair. As an active participant in his state and regional professional networks, Mike works tirelessly to offer opportunities for others to learn and grow by coordinating local workshops in central Pennsylvania, achieving 100% participation by his department colleagues in professional associations and conference attendance, and mentoring student teachers.



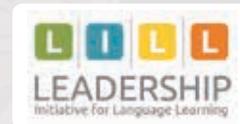
Mike Bogdan is World Language Chair in South Middleton, Pennsylvania.

My Story

Friends and strangers alike noted leadership traits when I was still a child, so it came as no surprise when, during my first year of teaching, I was asked to lead the K–12 curriculum team. My desire to help my colleagues in deep ways pushed me toward a graduate degree, and my mentor encouraged me to develop short- and long-term leadership goals. Each new opportunity since then has offered opportunities to grow, share, learn, and change, as well as providing some perspective on the next stretch of road. These joys of the journey started at a hyperlocal level within the school and have branched out to district, state, and national activities with a variety of organizations. I love supporting teachers in research-based practices that lead to positive change in the classroom nearly as much as I love to coach students into positive change in their lives.



Beckie Bray Rankin is a high school French teacher in Lexington, Massachusetts.



These stories share some important similarities. Each of these LILL participants point to a mentor or a colleague who identified an opportunity and encouraged him or her to pursue it. This first push out of the nest into making a presentation or sitting on a board is a chance to experience the deep sense of satisfaction that leadership engenders.

Whether the educator’s journey is daily in the classroom or supporting the classrooms of others, the value of having supportive colleagues cannot be overstated. You could encourage an educator to start on the path of leadership by passing on opportunities, by inviting the colleague to partner in your spheres of influence, and by plugging this educator into communities that encourage these parallel paths.

There is no one recipe or how-to list for achieving teacher leadership. Each leader’s story is unique and begins in a different manner. LILL participants represent many languages, wear countless hats, belong to many organizations, run the gamut of personalities, and are at different points on their journeys. Their spheres of influence overlap, however, because each one can claim this as a goal: to positively impact the world of language education. These stories are as yet unfinished journeys because the road goes ever onward as each voice continues to contribute within new networks, to deepen understanding by researching more practices, and to build capacity within the profession by lifting up more leaders.

To reflect upon your own journey thus far, consider mapping your spheres of influ-

ence and how you have worked to impact and expand them. What are you contributing to those around you and how are you bringing others’ contributions back to influence your students? Where else could your voice make a difference? The answers may point you to department-level professional development, district initiatives, state or regional conferences, or national committees. As you plan the journey ahead, think about exchanging best practices of your classroom with others around you, leadership skills you can offer, and professional learning networks you can join to be mentored and to mentor.

“Leadership is not about titles, positions, or flowcharts,” states leadership guru John Maxwell. “It’s about one life influencing another.”

Whose life will you influence today?