

# Gotta Catch 'Em All: Reach Every Learner with High-Yield Strategies

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Identify Similarities and Differences

Nonlinguistic Representations

Set Objectives and Provide Feedback



**W**hat can world language teachers learn from our diverse learners? In short, everything.

Strategies that work for these learners allow us to be effective teachers for all of our students, whether or not their learning differences are documented.

From my students with anxiety, I've learned how to provide better support ahead of and during interpersonal performance assessments. My students with executive function challenges have made me focus more on devising systems for storing important class papers, such as color-coding handouts and providing pre-printed binder dividers. Learners with ADHD have shown me the value of regular brain breaks and incorporating movement into my daily lessons. As Canadian teacher of Japanese Colleen Lee-Hayes once blogged, "*Thank You for Having an IEP.*" Not surprisingly, our students are our best teachers.

According to its 2019 position statement, "ACTFL values diversity and strives for inclusion across world language teaching and learning contexts ... [and] believes strongly in equal access to world language

study and *equitable opportunities for all individuals to develop linguistic and cultural competence and pedagogical knowledge*" [emphasis added]. It is unfortunate that in the past and still today, some believe that language study is not appropriate for students with learning differences. Educators have an ethical and professional obligation to build effective toolboxes of strategies and accommodations to support diverse learners.

Beyond this obligation to help every learner, we can also aspire to increase enrollment and retention rates by demonstrating a willingness and ability to make language courses work for all students. These students may have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or 504s, be English Language Learners, have ADD/ADHD or anxiety, and/or take remedial courses. Some may qualify for services that their families then decline, while others may need support but not qualify for it. When we world language teachers are successful in our work with diverse learners, we normalize language learning as something that every student can do, demonstrate our skill as educators, and can even become models and mentors to colleagues in other disciplines.



So, what strategies help “catch” the greatest number of students and respond best to their needs? Consider the high-yield strategies presented by Robert J. Marzano in *Classroom Instruction That Works* (2001). Marzano identified nine instructional strategies across content and grade levels that were most likely to improve student achievement and ranked them by effect size (e.g. increase in achievement). His work was updated in a 2012 edition by Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, and Stone.

Here are five of the high-yield strategies that are easily adapted to the world language classroom and well-suited to a variety of learners.



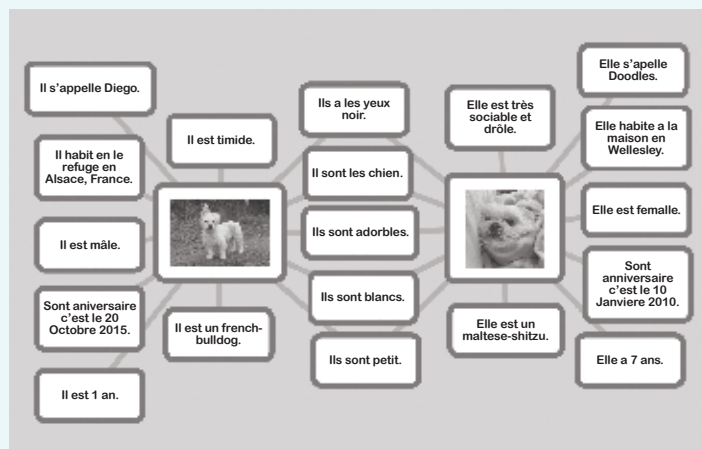
## 1. Identify Similarities and Differences

Comparing and contrasting is a top strategy considered “the core of all learning” and associated with a 25% increase in achievement (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012, p.119). This will hardly be news to language teachers who are familiar with Comparisons in the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* goal areas and the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements*. When teachers work with intentionality to have students identify similarities and differences, they provide access to a “power tool” for studying both language and culture.

Even students who may balk at the idea of writing several sentences at a time in the target language can find success while using a graphic organizer to compare and contrast. In my middle school French classroom, students frequently create double-bubble maps (see below) to:

- Document what they learned from a peer interview (e.g., How my partner and I spend a typical weekend);
- Compare personal information with facts they’ve found on an authentic website (e.g., How my own pet compares to a pet available for adoption on the French SPA website); and/or
- Organize information about cultural products (e.g., What Senegalese and French teens wear for formal occasions).

### Double-Bubble Map Made on Popplet



*A Novice student uses model sentences to compare and contrast two pets: a dog available for adoption in France and the student’s own dog.*

Double-bubble maps give students more flexibility and clarity than a Venn diagram which has limited space for similarities, forcing students’ writing into a small, pre-defined space, while the double-bubble provides ample space for similarities and differences, and room for countless bubbles. This facilitates students’ written output and ensures a user-friendly map. Students can create the map on paper or with an app like Popplet or Inspiration Maps.

When you provide a sample map with a few completed bubbles as a model, students can visualize the final product and get a sense of the expected text type. This is particularly helpful for learners who may find it hard to envision such a map in their heads. When everyone follows the same basic set-up, learners find it easy to exchange information on their maps with peers.

You can also provide additional scaffolding via sentence starters, or even provide a sentence “bank” that students sort into the appropriate spot (same/different) on the map. Completed maps become a jumping-off point for related interpersonal tasks, where students may reference their map as they speak about a topic. This is a helpful support for students with anxiety and/or low working memory.



## 2. Summarizing and Note-Taking

Summarizing and note-taking “have positive effects across content areas and grade levels, with note-taking having a significantly higher impact on learning than summarizing does,” (Dean et al., 2012, p.79). When integrated with fidelity, the two strategies yield an overall combined effect size of 1.00. Giving Novice students a pre-prepared note-taking document, such as a table or other graphic organizer, helps them to focus on what matters most and primes them for what’s to come. This works for many types of learners because the document:

- Makes explicit what content needs their attention;
- Saves time and avoids frustration for students who struggle to set up notes effectively on their own;
- Supports peer collaboration. Since every learner is using a common format, they can compare “apples to apples;”
- Boosts target language use, especially when you provide headings that are written as questions in the target language, so that students can easily ask for the information they need; and
- Generates a document that supports subsequent interpersonal or presentational activities.

For example, after my French 8 students research events and attractions in Quebec City, they share what they’ve learned at a class travel fair. Classmates take notes in French on a pre-prepared table on which I include related questions in the target language to guide them (*Where is the attraction? When can I visit? How should I get there?*). A few days later, these notes serve as a support during the interpersonal assessment when students discuss in groups the itinerary of the places they’d most like to visit.

### Pre-Prepared Note-Taking Table

| Travel fair. Today you will listen to your classmates describe some of the attractions and events they’ve researched for their projects. Take notes here IN FRENCH on what you’ve learned. |  |                      |                                   |                                       |   |
|--|--|----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Comment s'appelle l'attraction/ l'évènement?   | Qu'est-ce que c'est? (un musée? un parc? etc.) | Où est-ce que c'est? | Quand est-ce que je peux visiter? | Pourquoi veux-tu visiter cet endroit? | Est-ce près ou loin de l'hôtel? Comment puis-je aller là-bas? |
|  |  |                      |                                   |                                       |   |
|  |  |                      |                                   |                                       |   |

*A Novice student listens to classmates present attractions in Quebec City and records information here in French.*

While this type of discussion is not yet a truly spontaneous exchange of ideas, it is a stepping stone toward successful interpersonal communication. Allowing students to refer to notes, even if they hardly glance at them, lowers their affective filter. The practice also reduces students’ cognitive load during the activity. Since they are not scrambling to remember the address of a particular attraction, for example, they have more brainpower available to focus on the quality of their communication. Students with anxiety and/or low working memory especially benefit from this support for their interpersonal speaking skills. What’s more, students who struggle to see the “big picture” find that summarizing and note-taking make the big takeaways of a lesson more explicit.



## 3. Nonlinguistic Representations

While movement is a staple in many world language classrooms, did you know that nonlinguistic representations bring a 19% increase in achievement (Dean et al., 2012, p.65)? I find it helpful to check my daily lesson plans to ensure that each includes both a physical brain break (ideally with cross-lateral movement) and at least one activity that gets students up and out of their seats. No longer do I need to send a “bouncy” student on a made-up errand to provide them with a moment of movement during my class. Instead, movement is on everyone’s menu daily.


Target language videos illustrating fingerplays and gestures for children’s songs are staples in my Novice classes. These are also high-impact skills for students to share with families at home as evidence of their progress. Nonlinguistic representations allow learners who are less verbal to demonstrate their understanding without words, for example, by acting out a word to show that they know its meaning.

You can take advantage of a 1:1 environment (or even individual whiteboards) to have students draw what they hear or read. One model for an engaging information-gap activity is to have students work in pairs, with Student A describing and Student B drawing. Then students do a “big reveal” to see how well their descriptions and resulting drawings match up.

The color, symbol, image thinking routine is another powerful nonlinguistic task. Students choose a color, symbol, and image to represent a text they are studying and then share about their selections and the logic behind them.

Finally, a choice menu provides options to match the learning styles of every learner. Notice the variety of choices for learning vocabulary, some linking L1 and L2 (creating a table or flashcards), some using vocabulary (in sentences or a dialog), and some focused on nonlinguistic representation (an option for students to create illustrations or unique gestures for words, which they can teach their peers during class).

## Choice Menu for Learning Vocabulary

|   |   |  |            |                       |          |              |
|---|---|--|------------|-----------------------|----------|--------------|
| <p><b>Table</b><br/>Create a table with 4 columns. In column 1, write the word in French. In column 2, write the word in English. In column 3, write any variations of the words (feminine or plural form if irregular, for example). In column 4, write a full sentence with the word following the guidelines in the “Sentences” box.</p> | <p><b>Puzzle Flashcards</b><br/>For each vocabulary word, make a “puzzle.” This means cutting a flashcard in half in an interesting shape. On the left side of the card, write the word in English; on the right, write the word in French. Use real cardstock flashcards, <b>not</b> regular paper. Store cards in a sealed, hole-punched bag/envelope in your binder.</p> | <p><b>Fray Model</b><br/>For each vocabulary word, write the word in the middle of a flashcard. Then put the definition, characteristics, non-examples, and examples in the 4 corners like this:</p> <div data-bbox="564 363 769 470" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Definition</td> <td style="width: 25%; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Facts/Characteristics</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 25%; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Examples</td> <td style="width: 25%; border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">Non-examples</td> </tr> </table> </div> | Definition | Facts/Characteristics | Examples | Non-examples |
| Definition  | Facts/Characteristics   |  |            |                       |          |              |
| Examples  | Non-examples  |  |            |                       |          |              |
| <p><b>Sentences</b><br/>For each vocabulary word, write a sentence in which you demonstrate your understanding of the word’s meaning and proper use. <u>Underline</u> the vocabulary word in every sentence. <b>NO ENGLISH.</b></p>   | <p><b>Situation</b><br/>Write a dialog between two people that includes every vocabulary word. The dialog should make sense (it can be creative, too!) and show that you understand the words’ meanings and proper uses. <u>Underline</u> the vocabulary word in the dialog. <b>NO ENGLISH.</b></p>   | <p><b>Quizlet</b><br/>Create a French-English Quizlet on the website or app. Look at ENGLISH side of cards and write the words in French on a sheet of paper. Correct your list, using the vocabulary sheet as a reference. Bring in your hand-written list of words marked with + √ or - for self-evaluation. Alternatively, you can use the LEARN function until you get to 100% and screenshot it.</p>  |            |                       |          |              |
| <p><b>Gestures</b><br/>For each vocabulary word, create a gesture or movement that represents or explains it. Keep a list of the words and a description of the gestures to remind you.</p>   | <p><b>Picture Words</b><br/>For each vocabulary word, draw a picture that includes the picture in letter(s) of the word. Do this on 8.5x11” unlined paper so that you can write big. Example:<br/></p>   | <p><b>Visual Flashcards</b><br/>For each vocabulary word, write the word on one side of the card and draw/paste a picture on the back of the card. Use real cardstock flashcards, <b>not</b> regular paper. Store cards in a sealed, hole-punched bag/envelope in your binder.</p>   |            |                       |          |              |

Students who benefit from nonlinguistic representations may choose to create gestures to remember the meaning of words.

taking over and making an effort to include everyone (Individual Accountability, Equal Participation). To ensure individual accountability, each student receives five glass gems (e.g., Kagan’s “talking chips”) at the start of the conversation. They put a gem in the middle of the table each time that they speak, with the goal of getting rid of every gem by the end of the conversation.

## Group Interpersonal Speaking Assessment



Students take turns discussing a unit’s essential question in the target language using speaking chips. The teacher assesses using the TALK rubric.

Having a visually apparent way to track students’ participation creates personal accountability while building students’ social skills as they aim to interact in a supportive way so that everyone can give away their gems. Students with low working memory may opt to bring a reference card with basic question words or question starters to use during the conversation, and students with anxiety may choose to complete the conversation in a smaller setting, for example with only a friend and you during lunch.



## 4. Cooperative Learning

Developed by Spencer Kagan and described by Dean et al. as featuring “positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills, and group processing,” cooperative learning also provides an achievement boost in learners (Dean et al., 2012, p.36). Cooperative learning is different from other sorts of group work because of these characteristics, sometimes summarized by the acronym PIES: Positive Interdependence, Individual Accountability, Equal Participation, and Simultaneous Interaction. Students with low self-confidence, weak self-advocacy skills, and/or anxiety can benefit greatly from this type of learning.

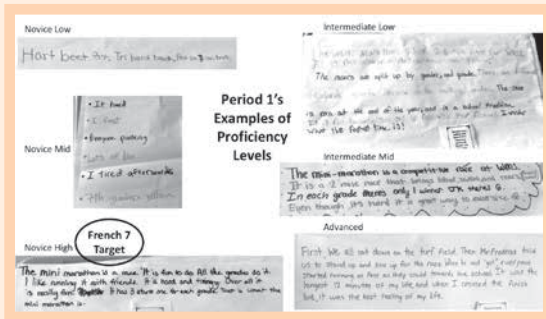
In the classroom, you can emphasize PIES features of cooperative learning during group interpersonal speaking assessments by using Shrum and Glisan’s TALK rubric: **Talking** in the Target Language with appropriate Text Type, **Accuracy** to ensure comprehensibility for group members, **Listening** by answering the questions they are asked (Positive Interdependence, Simultaneous Interaction) and asking appropriate follow-up questions, and being **Kind** by participating in the conversation without



## 5. Set Objectives and Provide Feedback

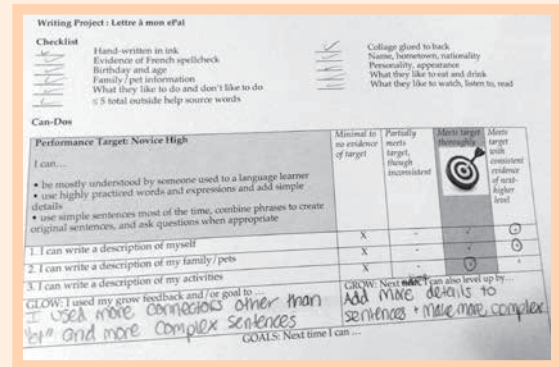
This strategy is well-supported by ACTFL proficiency descriptors and sample Can-Do Statements. Setting objectives and providing feedback yield 12% and 28% increases in achievement respectively (Dean et al., 2012, p.4). You can support students who need explicit direction and build students’ independence and sense of ownership by taking time at the beginning of the year to describe the course performance target. Make sure that students are familiar with that particular target by having them write in various proficiency levels in English (see the Explaining Proficiency Levels to Learners post on the Creative Language Class blog at [tinyurl.com/wo5wn5t](http://tinyurl.com/wo5wn5t)).

## Define Proficiency Levels with Students



Students work in groups to describe a well-known school event at a particular proficiency level. These examples become a year-long reference document when displayed and/or shared with students.

## Glow and Grow Feedback



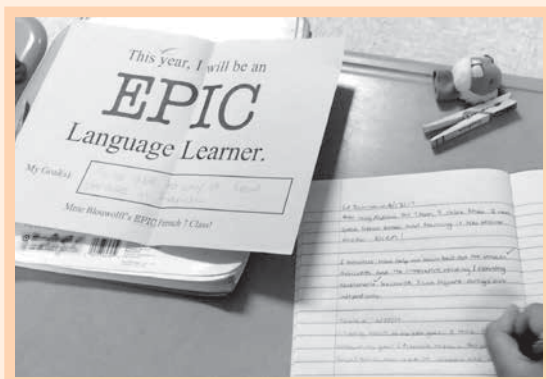
Students use language from the performance target to self-assess their work before setting a goal for further improvement.

My middle school students set goals by using simple exam books as L1 journals from time to time. I invite students to write and share their own EPIC goals:

- E**nvision your outcomes
- P**lan your route to success
- I**mplement your plan, and
- C**ollect data and reflect.

Posters like these from Shelby County Schools in Tennessee build buy-in and provide a reference point over the course of the school year for students to reflect on and adjust their trajectory.

## EPIC Goal-Setting Poster



Students set goals for themselves and reflect on them in L1 journal prompts, where the teacher can comment and ask questions in response.

Rubrics that show students how to level up their performance are a powerful type of feedback that in fact feed forward by pointing students in the right direction for next steps and growth. Consider a single-point rubric that leaves room for you to provide “glow” and “grow” feedback. Once students review this feedback, they can write a personal goal for their next performance. Before that next performance, you can prompt them to reflect on their personal goal and encourage them to meet it.

Used in concert, these five high-yield strategies support many kinds of students and provide a strong platform for their success. You can add each to your repertoire, all the while adapting them to your unique setting and student needs. By including such strategies in our regular teaching practice, we will reach more students and allow them to experience the pride and satisfaction of achieving success in the world language classroom—something that is every learner’s due.

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