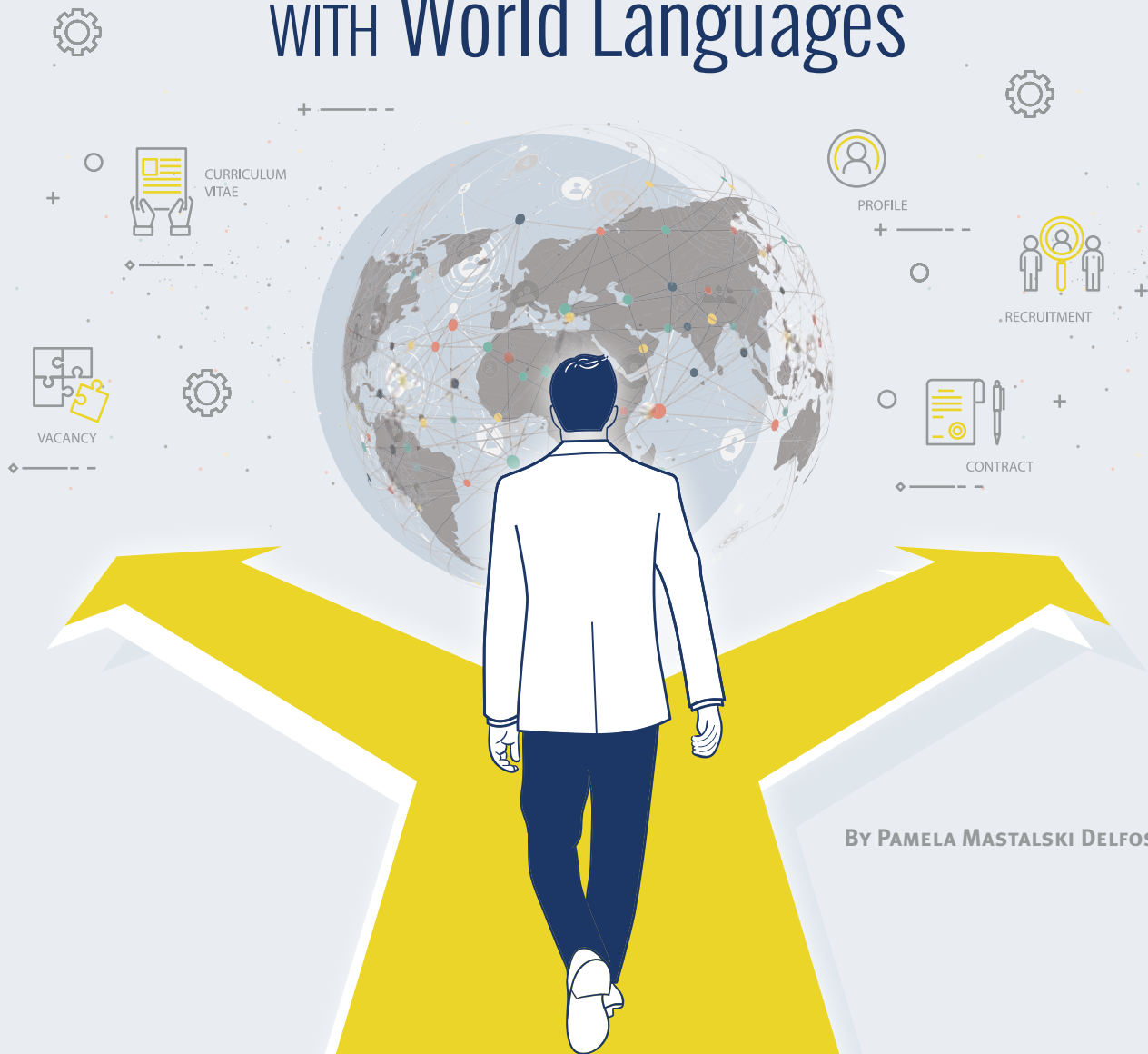



# Workforce- AND World-Ready WITH World Languages



BY PAMELA MASTALSKI DELFOSSE

Educational leaders often define a shared vision for teaching and learning by creating a profile of a graduate who is described as “college- and career-ready.” These profiles usually include disciplinary knowledge, future-readiness skills, personal wellness, and more. They are influenced by our social, economic, and political climate, and have changed over time.

Indeed, the term “college- and career-ready” itself is now in its own state of evolution as we recognize that it privileges some forms of postsecondary education and occupations over others and omits the critical role of preparing students for community engagement and responsibility in our democracy.



World language educators have a critical role to play in the process of developing more inclusive and responsive language to frame the goals of schooling. Our job is to prepare students who are able to transfer what they learn to future learning, the workplace, and their local and global communities. Aligning world language education with other future-facing programs that are designed to build student competencies will benefit students, employers, and our communities.

## Connections and Communities

As schools strive to fulfill a comprehensive vision for graduates, most continue to schedule and “deliver” learning in single-subject periods of time. This results in competition across the curriculum and the artificial isolation of bodies of knowledge and skills that in life are integrated and best understood through their relevance within an authentic context. Connecting what happens in the classroom with the world of work and community life helps both students and teachers make meaning from and find purpose in learning.

The Connections and Communities goal areas of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (2015) remind us of this need for relevance in our programs. Relevance and future-readiness are at the heart of Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, Academic and Career Planning (ACP) initiatives, and School to Career Pathways which are designed to prepare all students for success beyond high school. Students benefit when we include language, intercultural, and global competence within these school-to-work programs, and also when we make career connections a component of world language curricula.

Recent efforts in Wisconsin to prepare workforce- and world-ready graduates by linking CTE, ACP, and Career Pathways to world language and global education programs could prove to be replicable elsewhere. Opportunities exist at all levels of engagement for administrators, teachers, students, employers, and community members to learn from one another and lead for equity through this work.

## Equity Through Proficiency

The demand for world language skills in the workplace and in our communities is unquestionable. Meeting that demand requires standards-based curricula, instructional resources, learning experiences, assessments, and feedback designed to increase language proficiency.

Delivering on the promise of language proficiency development includes preparing students for language use within authentic communities and contexts. Ensuring relevance by learning through authentic texts, tasks, and contexts also motivates learners and prepares them with skills that are transferable to life beyond the classroom.

The *Wisconsin Standards for World Languages* (2019) support this vision with proficiency-based performance benchmarks for interpersonal, interpretive, presentational, and intercultural

communication, as well as for global competence and community engagement. Performance indicators within each standard are organized by proficiency sub-levels based on the *NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements*. This organizational framework provides a common language and landscape through which to improve equity with proficiency development across world language programs in our state.

We believe that making progress toward more proficiency- and standards-based programs will increase the number of students with access to the state’s Seal of Biliteracy (SBL) credential. In addition to the SBL credential, students in Wisconsin may also participate in a Global Scholars Program and receive a Certificate of Global Competence (CGC) by meeting program criteria related to global learning, cultural literacy, and community service.

These two credentials are being added to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction’s State-Certified Student Credentials/Academic Career Planning program website. Positioning these talent-marking credentials alongside those for pre-engineering, marketing, nursing, and other CTE areas will improve their visibility and invite students to diversify and connect their areas of expertise.

## Career-Focused Language Skill Development

ACTFL’s *Making Languages Our Business* (2019) report revealed the high and growing demand for language skills in the workplace with 9 out of 10 employers surveyed citing a reliance on bilingual employees and 1 in 3 reporting a language skills gap. Wisconsin business leaders interviewed during the *Wisconsin Language Roadmap Initiative* (2018) revealed a significant need for bilingual personnel with intercultural adaptability. Employers also communicated a need for staff with language skills specific to their industry.

To develop the advanced language skills needed for the workplace, an extended period of effective, proficiency-based language learning is essential. Students who begin that process in the early grades will have time to take specialized career-focused language coursework in high school. The time is now to work with Career Pathways leaders to innovate, design, and implement language learning pathways that meet employer (and community) demands for language learning.

The California Subject Matter Project includes world language education in its Career Pathways framework with specialized language courses such as Spanish for Patient Care, French for Marketing, and Chinese for Entrepreneurship. Courses of this nature help students understand and prepare for language use within our communities.

## Career Clusters

The 16 Career Clusters in Advance CTE’s National Career Clusters Framework (2020) include:

- Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources
- Architecture & Construction

- Arts, A/V Technology & Communications
- Business Management & Administration
- Education & Training
- Finance
- Government & Public Administration
- Health Science
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Human Services
- Information Technology
- Law, Public Safety, Corrections & Security
- Manufacturing
- Marketing
- Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics
- Transportation, Distribution & Logistics

Seventy-nine Career Pathways are currently defined within these Clusters and are being used to guide school-based Academic and Career Planning programs and support systems. Many of these pathways lead to dual-credit opportunities, work-based learning, and credentials recognized by postsecondary programs and employers.

States implementing ACP and promoting high school Career Pathways collaborate with employers and schools to define employability skills for each pathway. These often include communication and cultural/global awareness. World language and global educators can support the work of our CTE colleagues by providing working definitions and development frameworks for language proficiency, intercultural skills, and global competence.

The framework for global competence in Wisconsin is based on the work of the Asia Society's Center for Global Education and the international Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the agency responsible for global Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) testing.

Recently, I invited a colleague responsible for ACP and Career Pathways leadership to our high school Global Learning Summit to talk with teachers about the value of global competence in the workplace and to encourage world language and other global educators to connect their teaching to the world of work. Developing students' employability skills including language, and intercultural and global competence can reduce opportunity gaps that have historically been reinforced by how world language programs have been situated in the educational landscape as an elective primarily for academically able, college-bound, parent-motivated students. Partnering to include world language learning within CTE-ACP program development for all is beneficial for students, employers, and communities.

CTE, ACP, and Career Pathways initiatives are supported by and accountable to significant sources of funding for statewide infrastructure development. In Wisconsin, this includes CTE

course participation rates within our district and state reporting and accountability systems. Many states have enacted legislation to also report on participation rates in arts education in this same way.

We all know that what is measured and reported is what is perceived to be of value. As we continue to advocate for the intrinsic value of language learning, it is both strategic and responsive to students to make connections between languages and other priority areas within our educational system.

### The Human Factor

I recently attended a conference focused on preparing "future-ready" students and another on Academic Career Planning. In both contexts, there was a focus on preparing students with "soft skills," or social-emotional competencies such as empathy, adaptability, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, perseverance, creativity, and communication. World language teachers would likely make the case that these skills are developed in our classrooms.

However, they are far too important to leave to chance. As we plan curricula, units of study, lesson plans, and learning experiences, let us intentionally embed, call attention to, and provide student feedback on the development of these skills for human "being" and interaction. The ideas communicated by Klaus Schwab in *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (2016) challenge us, as educators, to identify the value of language learning beyond that provided by digital translators.

Sometime in the very near future we will have ready access to effective and efficient language translator tools. We need to focus now on the human factor in how languages are used. Future-ready "soft skills" and language used for interpersonal relationships will add relevance to our work and add value to students' language competencies.

We also need to commit to keeping students at the center within our learning environments. As we advocate for the value of language learning it is important for us to support other areas of student development within our language programs. Language has roots in identity; language learners need to find ways to engage and expand their sense of self through a new voice and cultural context discovered through world language learning.

A colleague who was leading our state's work with Academic Career Planning and Career Pathways development called me out on my one-sided agenda during our very first meeting. I had initiated the meeting to establish a working relationship and to make the case for keeping language learning on the radar as we promoted ACP and Pathways work with employers and school districts. She was very receptive and listened carefully to learn more. She then said, "Tell me more about how world language teachers address

career exploration and planning in their classrooms.” (Mic drop) What a moment for learning! Her revealing question led to the inclusion of a new text box in our standards- and proficiency-based thematic unit planning template. It reads:

**Connections to Academic, Career, and Future-Readiness:**

*How will this unit/project prepare students for life beyond the learning environment and beyond the present?*

It can feel overwhelming to think about content beyond the traditional boundaries of our language curricula, classroom, or textbooks. We need to get better at letting students personalize their learning through inquiry and project-based units.

We do not need to know and teach the language of every occupational field, we just need to get out of the way and provide students with opportunities to learn language related to their areas of interest and then from each other as they share their work. This helps us make the transition from teaching about language to supporting students as they learn to use the language for relevant purposes.

### Future Language Educators

As we provide opportunities for students to learn about themselves and careers of interest, there is an important career path that we should highlight in gold stars. The next ACP Career Pathway to be developed in Wisconsin will explore and prepare for a career in teaching. This is one career area that we as world language educators can get behind with passion and wisdom.

Think about ways we can introduce students to the benefits of meaningful work as a language educator including the many opportunities it would provide to use their language, and intercultural and global competence. The relationship between world language teachers and their students is often one filled with inspiration and imagination. We introduce kids to the world. We can also help them see themselves as able to help future generations find their place in the world by becoming a teacher.

ACTFL's *Educators Rising 2.0* (2019) modules are a great place to start. Talk to students about your journey to teaching. Ask them to interview other educators. Boost their confidence as language users by sharing a vision of their potential as future language teachers. Be open to learning from them, especially when planning for remote and online learning experiences. Explore opportunities for them to intern as teaching assistants for credit and encourage them to shadow other teachers and attend a professional conference. Future students need them. Their path to advanced language proficiency and a career in teaching can begin today. Sometimes all they need is for us to “see” them in order for them to imagine their future selves.

### Equity

It is important for us as world language educators to examine our practice through the lens of equity. Do we frame our discipline and facilitate learning in ways that provide equitable access to the benefits of language, and intercultural and global learning? What compromises our progress with equity work? What can we do to improve equity through our work? What is our role in anti-racist, anti-oppression education?

Partnering with colleagues engaged in CTE, ACP, and Career Pathways will increase our capacity to include equity within world language education programs and within our school communities. Integrating an ACP mindset as an element of our programs brings the purpose for learning front and center. This will help us teach for transfer as we prepare students for success with language performance so that they can increase their proficiency for language use during life beyond our learning environments.

All students are preparing for life after high school. It is thus our responsibility to help all students prepare to communicate, contribute, collaborate, and compete to realize their full potential within their lives, workplaces, and communities.

Connecting world language learning with CTE and career exploration can bring life to learning and learning to life.

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