



LANGUAGE LEARNING

Profiles

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ROSLYN SCHOOLS

TEACHERS AT ROSLYN SCHOOLS' ACCOMPLISHED LANGUAGE LEARNING PROGRAM GO BACK TO SCHOOL FOR TECHNOLOGY.



Vincenza Graham, Language Department Chair at Roslyn School District, uses the digital language lab for her Italian and Spanish classes.



Roslyn Union Free School District, located less than 20 miles from midtown Manhattan, regularly meets and exceeds curriculum development standards set by the NYS Board of Regents. With a robust world language program for grades 6-12, the district wanted to integrate technology into their language curriculum. They chose the Sony Virtuoso™ and Soloist® digital language learning software from SANS Inc. and added an aggressive professional development plan to facilitate curriculum integration. One year later, the staff have successfully created technology based lessons for all languages, increased student participation, and seen improved grades.

One full year of foreign language learning begins in the sixth grade. 90 percent of their high school students continue language studies into their senior year. Their language program offers Spanish, French, and Italian. They offer multiple college level language learning courses for college credit in conjunction with a local university. And they have a great average for students seeking higher education.

These accomplishments belong to the Roslyn School District in Roslyn, New York. It's a public school with a forward thinking administration that recognized, for a school with a language program this progressive, the next logical step up would be to integrate digital technology into their language curriculum.

After extensive research, the team at Roslyn, headed by Dr. Edward A. Salina, Jr., equipped their new language lab with the Sony Virtuoso™ and Soloist® digital language learning software acquired through their local SANS authorized reseller, Chester Technical Services.

Putting teachers in the learning seat.

As teachers and administrators at Roslyn Schools quickly learned, introducing advanced technology into a curriculum is as much a learning experience for teachers as it is for students. Before taking control in the digital language lab, teachers at Roslyn Schools first put themselves in the learner's seat.

After receiving some initial operational training on basic functions of the software, Vincenza Graham, Language Department Chair, discovered that, in order to fully utilize the tools available, teachers needed more training in how to integrate the technology. Graham then met with central administration and asked for additional professional development. As a result, the school began working with Sandy Hayward of Language Lab Training and Resource Inc., a company specializing in professional development focusing on SANS and Sony language lab

technology curriculum integration. With a fall technology session and a refresher course the following spring, as well as implementation of a structured language lab schedule, goals for the technology use began to become a reality. "It really worked out," said Graham. "This extended professional development is what promoted the lab and ameliorated the usage of the system."

According to Graham, the new teachers coming right out of college have already been exposed to language lab technology at the university level. But for teachers who are new to the concept, the training has made a phenomenal difference in their lab participation. "Last year was an incredible year in the sense that teachers had a completely different outlook about the lab," said Graham. "In the training sessions we learned how to come up with Plan B if something goes awry versus just knowing the basic functions. The training provided us with some real life examples, and we were able to ask questions while using the system."

For continuity, Graham plans to have on-going on-site sessions well as web based professional development for teachers needing refresher courses.

Mastering the tools to improve student learning.

Graham believes the implementation of their digital language lab has had positive impact not just on students' learning abilities but on their grades as well. "The lab has given students the opportunity to self-reflect and assess their language skills by listening to their own voices, their peers, and real life access to media and music. All of these contribute to improving not only our AP® scores but all of the foreign language classes that we offer at the middle and high school level," said Graham.

Graham considers the ACR (Audio Comparative Recorder) feature in the language lab software to be especially advantageous. This feature allows teachers



to create spoken lessons to which students listen, record their responses, and receive a speaking score, which is an important component of their overall grade.

Graham also uses the ACR feature to set up IEPs (Individualized Education Plans). “For students with an IEP, we can customize the lessons to their needs,” said Graham. “If a student needs a question repeated more than once, we can build it in for them without the rest of the class being aware of it. That is a distinct advantage,” she added.

Creating customized tests for IEP students is easily accomplished with the ACR feature: teachers set up a test, copy it, save it as a new file and edit it to the student’s requirements. It helps achieve what Graham refers to as “differentiated learning,” which is an important benefit to students. “In a digital language lab, differentiated learning is achieved in a seamless manner,” said Graham. “What students may think is random pairing or grouping is actually strategic to their level of learning.”

Scores high with AP® tests – and teachers too.

The average AP (Advanced Placement) score at Roslyn before and after the digital language lab has improved from 3.52 in one year to 4.22 in the following year.

When asked what she thought attributed to the improvement in the AP scores, Graham responded, “More lab time, much more practice with speaking and listening. That is essential. You can never give students the one-on-one in a traditional classroom that you can by being in the lab.”

But how do students grade the lab?

By using the internet and the built-in Sony web browser, teachers are able to engage students in ways they never could before. Students can link to Italian newspapers and read current

events; go to the BBC language website and participate in the interactive exercises and games; watch a Spanish sitcom; or take a virtual tour of a famous French museum, for example. “Students can learn while having fun,” said Graham. “The random pair feature is phenomenal. You can throw out a topic and ask them to speak for two minutes, and it’s amazing. Once they put those headsets on, they want to speak. The timer keeps them focused; the headsets keep them on task,” explained Graham.

Integrating digital technology into the curriculum.

At Roslyn Schools, textbooks are not the basis of the curriculum but are used as resources, just as the language lab is used as a resource. So how do the language instructors integrate the technology into the curriculum?

“After having used the lab for one full year, our superintendent, Dr. Dan Brenner, gave us the opportunity to do our summer curriculum writing projects based on just lessons for the lab,” said Graham. “Now we have lessons made up for level one, two and three for each language and also AP lessons for Spanish. It’s now a curriculum for the entire department with lessons created specifically for the language lab. This is a big thing for us,” she added. “And this school year we are implementing it.”

Learn the technology, and the language speaks for itself.

At Roslyn Schools, teachers can sign up for the language lab only after they have received training. Their staff even includes a tech-savvy teacher, who teaches a fundamental class in between the professional refresher courses. Graham firmly believes that the key to a successful language lab is professional development.

“The lab isn’t something you can go to for training for one day and feel comfortable using it,” said Graham. “It really takes a full year of implementation to learn it. Support is so important. You need consistent, ongoing support from central administration as well as the IT staff – not just the language department. We are fortunate to have that,” she added.

You’ll get by with a little lab help, from your colleagues.

In future, Graham would like to see her teaching staff digitize their own materials, create more lessons, and find more creative ways to integrate internet based resources into lab lessons. “We are still in the practicing application stage of what the system can do; we are learning and adding to what we know,” said Graham.

But as the success of Roslyn’s language lab has proven, the payoffs are significant: improved learning abilities, more student participation, and improved grades. “There is much more collaboration in a lab,” said Graham. “All the teachers help each other. And as you’re helping, it creates a dialogue, and that helps you also.”

For more information on Language Lab Training & Resource Inc., please visit www.languageabtraining.com.



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