Arabic Teachers’ Professional Development: A View from STARTALK

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ACTFL 2011
Today...

• A view from STARTALK data
  – Topics in STARTALK Arabic teacher training programs
  – Gaps
  – Arabic teachers’ own perspective on their professional development

• A view from the field
  – Training of Arabic teachers over the past 4 years of STARTALK
  – Trainer’s experience in preparing teachers of Arabic (issues, questions, illustrations)
Background

• With high enrollments in Arabic, high demand for well-trained qualified teachers
• Training opportunities for teachers of LCTLs scarce
• Training for Arabic teachers in universities across the United States limited to two institutions (MSU, Boston)
• STARTALK and LCTL teacher preparation and training since 2007
Teaching Arabic

Context of teaching Arabic in the U.S.
Shift from grammar-based teaching to communicative purposes of teaching
Teaching diverse learners: heritage, native, non-native
Teachers largely with several years of on-the-job experience but not necessarily with language education background
Few institutions with programs to prepare Arabic language teachers
STARTALK

• Federal initiative to increase foreign language capacity of US citizens via intensive summer programs

• From 2008-2011:
  – 33 STARTALK workshops designed specifically for training Arabic language teachers
  – Over 1130 Arabic teachers enrolled and trained via STARTALK

• Training connects with STARTALK principles, ACTFL standards, and is designed to
STARTALK Principles

• Implementing a standards-based and thematically organized curriculum
• Facilitating a learner-centered classroom
• Using the target language and providing comprehensible input for instruction
• Integrating culture, content, and language in a world language classroom
• Adapting and using age-appropriate authentic materials
• Conducting performance-based assessments
Question 1:
What topics have been addressed in STARTALK Arabic teacher training programs during the past four years?
Data for question 1

- Review of STARTALK program curricula from 2008 – 2011
- Content analysis of curricula
Topics of Training
View from the field...
Five Years look at Michigan State University Startalk Program

2007 Arabic Language Teaching Methods with focus on communication skills, The first C.
15 Teachers Completed the Program

2008 Enhancing Arabic through Culture: The Second C
15 Teachers Completed the Program

2009 Learning Arabic and Making Connections: The Third C
16 Teachers Completed the Program

2010 Collaborative Program: Teaching and Learning Arabic in Action
20 Teachers Completed the Program

2011 Teaching Arabic to All, What Really Works. The focus was on differentiated language instruction
21 Teachers Completed the Program
Question 2
What are Arabic teachers’ perspectives on their own professional development experiences and needs?
Source of Data for question 2

- Survey questionnaire designed for the study
- Total of 27 teachers from two 2011 Arabic STARTALK programs
Teachers who responded

- All native speakers of Arabic except one
- Mostly female (n=21); male (n=6)
- Bachelor degree (n=14), Master’s degree (n=10)
- Most taught for five years or more (n=12)
- 12 taught Arabic overseas, 14 never taught Arabic overseas (1 no response)
- K-8 was the most taught grade level (62% of responses)
Main professional goals?

Arabic teachers' main goals for participating in STARTALK training

- To gain a master's degree or higher: 35%
- To become certified: 25%
- To increase my professional knowledge: 30%
- To gain new skills: 20%
- To prepare myself to teach in a STARTALK Student Program: 15%
- Other: 10%
Data suggest?

• Competing needs: immediate (skills, strategies), and long term (certification)
VIEW FROM THE FIELD...

Teachers’ own words reflecting on their practices and defining their professional needs.
I Should Stop

- Using English to explain Arabic (this is the most common remark)
- Focusing on grammar
- Being afraid to hand over the reigns to the students (i.e. make the class student centered)
- Making culture class a once-a-week event (incorporate culture all the time)
- Relying on summative assessment only
- Focusing on completing a textbook
- Using only paper based tests
- Viewing language in and of itself as the goal
- Using technology in a way that is still teacher-centered
- Speaking English more than 10%
- Not simplifying the target language in order to make it accessible to learners
- Focusing on grammar of speaking
I Should Start Doing

• Speaking in the target language is possible, even from day one
• In order for the language to be useful, it must be at the appropriate level
• Signing a pledge to speak the target language will reduce chattiness
• Class can be teacher-centered for a moment as new concepts are introduced, but then the students must practice them
• Even the alphabet can be explained with limited use of English
• Review is necessary for retention
• Grammar must be introduced in context
I Should Keep doing

- Making culture an important aspect of the class
- Using technology as a tool to expose students to authentic materials
- Making creative lessons with various activities
- Student-centered activities are being employed
- Activities are being designed to get the students participating
- Sharing resources with other teachers
- Using body language and other techniques to explain a word without reverting to English
Most needed areas of PD as self-reported by teachers

Topics in PD that Arabic teachers feel they need most

- Implementing a standards-based curriculum: 20%
- Maintaining Target Language/Comprehensible input: 25%
- Learner-Centered Approach: 5%
- Incorporating Technology: 10%
- Incorporating performance-based assessment: 15%
- Integrating Culture, Content, and Language: 0%
- Differentiated instruction: 20%
- Using thematic units in lesson planning: 15%
- Adapting and using authentic materials: 5%
- Working with Heritage learners: 0%
- Issues related to teaching Arabic specifically: 5%
Data suggest...

• Differentiated Instruction is a major concern...why?
VIEW FROM THE FIELD
Who are our Students?
Who is Learning Arabic as
Challenging areas in teaching Arabic

What teachers feel is most challenging about teaching Arabic

- Implementing a standards-based curriculum
- Maintaining a target language/comprehensible input
- Learner-centered approach
- Incorporating technology/online education
- Incorporating performance-based assessment
- Integrating culture, content, and language
- Differentiated instruction
- Using thematic units in lesson planning
-Adapting and Using authentic materials
- Working with Heritage learners

Percentage:
- 30%
- 20%
- 25%
- 10%
- 15%
- 0%
- 5%
Preferred language for PD

Language Preference for Professional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rationale for language preferences

• Arabic only:
  – Frustration with translations
  – Higher level of comfort with native language
  – Confidence in professional expertise
  – “Because I’m an Arabic teacher”

• Both English & Arabic:
  – Useful/important to use and learn professional terminology in both
  – Helpful to have concepts presented in English and explained in Arabic
Data suggest...

- Demand for both building their sense of development as professionals generally, and Arabic language teachers specifically

**VIEW FROM THE FIELD**

A deep analysis of professional development needs of Arabic teachers requires identifying who is teaching Arabic in the US?
Who Are Teachers of Arabic in the USA?

Native Teachers

Heritage Teachers

Non-Native Teachers
Teachers who are Native Speakers of Arabic

- Strong in language command
- Strong in Arabic culture background
- Mostly got their education outside the United States
- Have limited experience with US education system
Heritage Teachers of Arabic

• Born in the US, they are familiar with the US education system
• Strong language pedagogy skills
• Some familiarity with Arabic culture
• Limited ability in Arabic language forms and command
None – Native Teachers of Arabic

- Strong on language pedagogy
- Limited Arabic language ability in forms and command
- Limited familiarity with and exposure to Arabic culture
- Familiar with second language acquisition
Implications for future PD for Arabic teachers

• Provide more content focused professional development workshops based on teachers’ individual needs
• Provide teachers with more practical and individualized ways to accomplish the requirements for teacher certification.
  – Example: a writing workshop for native speakers teachers. Or, a speaking course for non-native teachers of Arabic
• Focusing on different language needs of teacher trainees to facilitate professionalization process
  – Both for Arabic native and non-native speakers and and heritage teachers
• Need to identify teachers as a pre-requisite to training and planning of training
• Beyond STARTALK summer programs...thinking about long-term engagement of teachers’ professionalization
Comments? Questions?
أي تعليقات أو أسئلة؟
شكراً!

Thank you!