Startalk Russian for High School Students at UCLA:
What Works in Heritage Classrooms
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Today I will talk about the STARTALK Summer Russian Program for High School Students at UCLA, which we have offered for the last four years, carrying out STARTALK’s mission “to increase the number of Americans learning and speaking... critical need foreign languages by offering students of these languages creative and engaging summer experiences.”
1. High School Student-survey results
2. Content of a Russian class for heritage high school students
3. Best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students
4. Main Teaching Strategies
The STARTALK Summer Russian Program for High School Students at UCLA, which has outcomes-driven design and standards-based curriculum, offers:

• **a beginning Russian class** for high school students with no prior exposure to Russian who are interested in learning the language (‘non-heritage’ class);
• **a Russian class for high school students who are exposed to Russian at home** and want to learn to read and write or to develop their speaking, listening, and literacy skills (‘heritage’ class).

Website — [http://hslanguages.ucla.edu/hslanguages](http://hslanguages.ucla.edu/hslanguages)
UCLA is hosting a three week summer language day camp in beginning Russian for high school students. This Russian camp is for students with no prior exposure to Russian who are interested in learning the language.

UCLA предлагает курс для учеников старших классов, которые говорят дома по-русски, но хотят научиться читать и писать на родном языке или улучшить свою грамотность.

JULY 7-24
COST: $200
REGISTER TODAY!
WWW.HSLANGUAGES.UCLA.EDU
FOR MORE INFO: 310.825.2510
Our Russian heritage class is always larger than our non-heritage class. We have around 10-18 Russian heritage students (K 9-12) every year. We hope that a number of students enrolled in the Russian heritage class will increase over the years. And I believe that students’ motivation to learn Russian has the greatest impact on their decision to enroll in our classes.

Each year we conduct a survey on motivation among our students asking the students: ‘Why do you want to take this course?’ We have surveyed 40 Russian heritage speakers since beginning the program.
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

The survey results show that these students tend to study the language for different purposes:

- 83% wish to communicate with their family, friends and community, to maintain their culture
- 61% want to explore their background and identity
- 33% want to travel to Russia
- 2% are interested in Russian for professional reasons
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

I would like to quote some of student’s answers:

‘Why do you want to take this course?’

• To improve my communication with my babushka who only speaks Russian. I also want to learn to read and write.
• To improve my Russian and to meet other Russian teens.
• To continue to learn about my heritage and native language.
• I am very interested in languages history and other arts type activities. This program will give me the opportunity be challenged & learn things (like Russian language & culture). I want to learn that is not available in my traditional school setting.
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

‘Why do you want to take this course?’

• I am interested in Russia and would like to learn the language. I'd like to work for the State Department one day.
• I am planning on taking Linguistics as one of my majors once I have finished High School so I believe learning Russian would be a great start.
• I have been dreaming about taking a summer class at UCLA.

And students who take the class more than once have responded in a way that is very rewarding for us: “I really enjoyed the class last year!” Our program has a large number of ‘returnees’.
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

Answering the survey’s question: ‘Why do you want to take this course?’, students also mentioned that they want to:

- improve speaking skills in Russian (80%)
- learn how to write and read (60%)
- improve their knowledge of grammar (20%)
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

I believe that the results of our survey can help to plan a class and determine class content that can meet students’ expectations and get them excited about learning Russian.
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

Let me give you a couple of examples.

#1

If one of the Russian heritage student’s motivations is to **communicate better with family and friends**, the content of your class can include such topics as, for instance,

- family and community history,
- the history of Russian immigration,
- family values,
- friends and friendship values.
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

#2

If a Russian heritage student wants to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots, the content of your class can include topics in Russian history, Russian Art and literature, and the history of Russian words.
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

# 3

If students want to explore their own identity (double identity), the content of your class can include such topics as

- comparing Russian and Americans lifestyles, values, family relationships, customs and traditions,
- teenage life and interests in Russia and America.
# High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

**Students’ motivation**

1. to communicate better with family and friends
2. to learn about their cultural and linguistic roots
3. to explore their own identity (double identity)

**Class content**

- family and community history, family values, friends and friendship values
- Russian history, history of Russian Art and literature
- comparison of Russian and Americans lifestyles, values, family relationships, customs and traditions

*(O. Kagan. Heritage Teacher Training Workshop “Professional Development of Teachers of Heritage Language Learners,” University of Iowa, 2013)*
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

Our Russian instructors in recent years have shared their experience about what Russian heritage high school students are interested in class. I want to quote one of our instructors Boris Dralyuk, who is himself a heritage learner of Russian:

‘The high school students were interested in learning about Russian history and culture, and were surprised at how much cultural information a single Russian word can contain. When discussing personality traits, we came across the adjective “raskreposhennyi,” which, in the context, means open and free; etymologically, however, the word refers to the institution of serfdom. A discussion of this etymology led to a brief lesson on Russian history, which was fascinating to the students.’
High School Students survey results and what to teach heritage high school students

*L. Karkafi* wrote: “... the students were interested in recapturing their cultural heritage, hence reading short stories by famous Russian novelists worked.”

“One of the things that worked very well was reading real Russian literature. For example, we read Pushkin's Baryshnia-krest'ianka. I provided vocabulary lists, of course, and we did exercises based on the text, but the overall point was to have them read a Russian work in the original and they enjoyed it and (I think) felt a sense of accomplishment in being able to do so.” *E. Furman*

So, as you can see, teachers’ class observations *confirm* the results of our students’ survey.
Best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students

In addition to what to teach heritage students, we still need to discuss the best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students.

We believe that the best approaches are project-based, content-based, and community-based.

“These approaches make it possible to teach heritage students at different levels of language proficiency together and also to base your teaching on students’ general learning skills.”

Best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students

I’ll talk briefly about these approaches and give you a couple of examples.

Project-based learning

Markham describes project-based learning (PBL) as: "PBL integrates knowing and doing. Students learn knowledge and elements of the core curriculum, but also apply what they know to solve authentic problems and produce results that matter..." (Markham, T. “Project Based Learning. Teacher Librarian,” 2011)

The purpose of project-based learning is that students focus on the project rather than on learning a language, but they have to use the language to work on the project. This kind of work makes it necessary for them to use the language in a natural setting, so they use it more authentically than they would through grammar/vocabulary instruction, which doesn’t give them a reason to use the language.
UCLA/Startalk Summer Russian Program for High School Students

In 2011-2013, we offered 5-week Russian class for heritage HS students. Thematically, this class was organized around the topic of **teenage life in Russia**. Students explored how the life of their peers in Russia is at once different from and similar to theirs.

Students created **a number of projects**, from simple posters and short presentations about best friends, their favorite movie, computer games they like, etc. to a 10-minute presentation about a college in Russia that they considered and have researched, and a profession that is of interest to them.

Beginning with short presentations (one minute) helps students to build confidence when speaking Russian in front of the class; a majority of students don’t have such experience. So, by the end of the program students can present on more advanced topics with a high confidence level.
Мой лучший
Подруга
Настасия
Паркер
Мой лучший
подруга, забыть
не запись. Ее
сейчас
Семнадцать лет. Она сейчас
dehydatur
ходатя
хозяин мой niche,
мы с женой
чай блюдце
раскраска
с нами
испытываться
написать
какой
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всем
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саран
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но Thủype
подруга
Анна. Ее семнадцать лет. Мы знаем
ное слово, но не скажем.
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но
но
UCLA/Startalk Summer Russian Program for High School Students

I would like to share with you this video clip, in which students exchange information about their best friends.
ЧЕБУРАШКА

СЦЕНАРИЙ: Заура Зойкин
ПРОДЮСЕР: Рина Козлов
ОПЕРАТОР: Тигран Багдасарян
Композитор: Владимир Шапошников
Главная роль исполнена: Клюк Грин (чуерашка)
САМ: 1971

БРИЛЛИАНТОВАЯ РУКА

РЕЖИССЕР: Леонид Гайдай
АВТОР СЦЕНАРИЯ: Леонид Гайдай
СЦЕНАРИЙ: Леонид Аронский
ОПЕРАТОР: Владимир Хунаков
Композитор: Александр Волин

С 1931 года театр поставил более 300 спектаклей.

Основатель театра Сергей Владимирович Образцов.

Количество мест в зрительном зале - 390.

Кукольный театр в Москве создан в 1931 году.

Самый большой Музей театральных кукол - более 4000 кукол.

Знаменитые спектакли-сказки:
"По щучьему велению",
"Хитрый ежик",
"Конек-горбунок."
As a final class project, students made two movies, one about UCLA – “Journey Through UCLA” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkC8iYT83ko), and another about parent-child relationships – “Back to the Future” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpWhEz0aZWE)

A movie festival, where movies from Beginners and Heritage Russian classes were presented, was well attended by students’ parents and friends. A Russian potluck was a part of the festival. It was fun! Students liked it a lot.
Best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students

Content-based learning

CBL is designed to provide second-language learners instruction in content and language. Students learn a second language more successfully when they have a chance to use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself. Language learning is more motivating when students are focusing on something other than language, including ideas, issues and opinions.

When students are motivated and interested in the material they are learning, they make greater connections between topics, elaborations with learning material, and can recall information better. (Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, “The role of subject-matter knowledge and interest in the processing of linear and nonlinear texts. Review of Educational Research, 1994, 64, 201-252)

In short, when a student is intrinsically motivated the student achieves more.
In 2014, we offered Russian summer camp, a 3-week Russian class for heritage HS students.

Thematically the class was organized around the topic of Russian theater and its importance in Russian culture. The goal was for the students to discover the world of theater as an art form that includes acting, painting, dancing, music, film and literature. It was a content-based course.
UCLA/Startalk Summer Russian Program for High School Students

The first week of classes was organized around the topic of Russian cinema and literature, the second week focused on Russian museums and visual arts (painting, graphics, sculpture), and the third week on Russian theaters and stage art productions, including Russian ballet, opera and drama.

Students discussed written narratives (short biographies, excerpts from plays, short stories, poems), watched cartoons, scenes from plays, operas, ballets, and movies, listened to lectures on art by a Russian art critic.
Let me share with you this video clip, in which students are talking about going to a movie and discussing what movie is best to watch.
The theatrical production «Беда от нежного сердца»/"The trouble from a tender heart" was this year’s final project, and we posted it on youtube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kThLpYawJho).

Some students performed in the play while others helped to direct, create a play poster, invitations for parents and friends, decorations, and supervise musical arrangements. The premier was successful!!! Parents and other family members were very supportive and exited.
UCLA/Startalk Summer Russian Program for High School Students
Students also had dance and music classes in Russian, where they learned about Russian folk dances, songs and instruments, and had lessons in playing the balalaika, domra, and other folk instruments. Students’ final music performance was very impressive and loved by parents and friends.
UCLA/Startalk Summer Russian Program for High School Students
Best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students

Community-based learning

Community-based instruction is defined as systematic instruction that integrates community settings with meaningful learning and it is age-appropriate to the skills of the students. *(Perin, D. Facilitating Student Learning Through Contextualization. Community College Research Center, Working Paper No. 29: New York, NY Columbia University, 2011)*

Implementing community-based projects in our classes, such as, for instance, field trips, are useful as they help enhance learning outside the classroom.

Taking about field trips, I would like to suggest, first of all, that field trips should not be held sporadically and, secondly, that they should include the possibility for students to learn from social interaction, such as, buying food, books, etc. in a store, interacting at a restaurant, and interviewing people in the community (artists, writers, etc.), using the target language.
2011-2013 field trips to Russian Hollywood
As I already mentioned, In 2014 UCLA/Startalk offered Russian arts and theatre class for heritage students. We tried to build an exiting program to keep students happy and motivated to study language. Our students went on a field trip to Hammer museum in LA for an exhibition of contemporary art and made a virtual field trip to the famous Tretyakov gallery in Russia (to look at classic Russian paintings).

But I believe that more class content-related field trips, more community based activities, and generally more out of class activities including holding class in another setting can help keep students engaged in learning process. Get students into the community! As an example, you may be able to take your students to an artist’s studio instead of inviting an artist to your class to talk about art!
Main Teaching Strategies

I would like to list main strategies we used in the heritage classroom and to read a couple of our Startalk instructors’ quotes on what works best.

**Target Language.** We used only the target language for instruction and kept the emphasis on communication. We believe that it’s important to encourage students to use the target language as much as possible.
Main Teaching Strategies

**Visualization.** Class Multimedia Presentations with new ‘visual’ vocabulary, spelling and punctuation rules, audio and video clips, etc. were used to help students to grasp and practice new material. Also visual aids and other props were used in classroom to enforce students to understand the language input.

Our Russian instructor, Yelena Severina, who taught Russian arts and theatre class this summer, wrote the following: ‘The videos, which were selected for each class, proved to be an effective visual way to familiarize students with the new material. Every reading assignment was followed by video with additional information on the subject. Students relied on the video presentations to enhance their understanding of the new concepts and their place within the context of theatrical art.

For instance, the passage on the national museum was followed by a video on a short history of that museum or the opera's libretto was followed by the video excerpt from that opera, etc. Students would often watch the materials more than once to discern the relevant information, complete exercises, reenact the dialogs with their peers by using a new vocabulary and lead class discussions.”
Main Teaching Strategies

**Differentiation.** Since heritage speakers have different skills in the target language, in class, they were grouped and assigned to different tasks according to their language proficiency.

For example, after watching a clip from a movie, students with emerging literacy completed a handout that asks them to answer multiple-choice questions. More proficient students answered complex questions that require interpretive skills. This allows all students to participate in the same post-viewing discussion, while challenging them to develop their literacy at their own rate.
Best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students

**Contextualization and connections.** It’s very challenging to teach about the arts to kids, to explain to them why it’s important and valuable, and to select age-appropriate and exiting paintings, sculptures, ballets, operas. And what we have found out, anchoring the material in a broader context that intersects with students’ own interests and enthusiasms can help a lot to activate students’ attention and arouse their interest in arts.

I am taking about so called *contextualization*, which is defined as instructional strategies intended to link academic content with its application in a specific context relevant to the students.

Best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students

Our summer 2014 Russian students’ favorite picture was a painting “Another F” by the artist Feodor Reshetnikov.

The painting shows a sad boy who has just gotten home from school. He looks crushed and each member of his family reacts differently – he’s the object of what might be contempt from his sister, sympathy from his mother, and cluelessness from his younger brother who doesn’t go to school yet. The family dog jumps up and puts his paws on the boy’s chest.
Best approaches in teaching Russian language for heritage students

The picture is very accessible and students were able to put themselves in the boy’s place. It also offered an interesting window into 1950s home life, with details such as parquet floors, the wall-clock, a large table, the sister’s school uniform and the brother’s bicycle.

Students gladly shared their personal stories about their parents’ reactions to their bad and good grades. They asked their parents about their experiences of getting good and bad grades and their parents’ reactions, comparing them with the image of the mother in the picture.

The students’ response to the picture also helped them remember the Russian expression “Another F,” which endures to this day.
Main Teaching Strategies

Combination of modalities. Combining modalities throughout the lesson (so that they listen and speak, read and write, read and speak, listen and write, etc.) strengthens student development in each modality and helps to increase **intensity of students’ engagement**.

In each phase of the lesson, we plan what the learners will do as a group and what each learner will do individually. We avoid “**down time**” for any learner: each learner is always “on.”
Best approaches and Main Teaching Strategies in teaching Russian language for heritage students

- Project-based learning
- Content-based learning
- Community-based learning

- Target Language
- Visualization
- Differentiation
- Contextualization and Connections
- Combination of Modalities
Thank you!