****

**We Teach Languages Episode 122: Collaborating to Build a Content‑based Language Program with Gwen Barnes‑Karol and Maggie Broner, Part II**

**Stacey Margarita Johnson**:  [00:00] This is "We Teach Languages," a podcast about language teaching from the diverse perspectives of teachers.

[00:07] [background music]

**Stacey**:  [00:07] I'm Stacey Margarita Johnson. Today on episode 122, we hear the second half of my interview with Gwen Barnes‑Karol and Maggie Broner from St. Olaf College in Minnesota.

[00:26] In the first half, they told us a little bit about how their program has transformed over the years to move away from a grammar syllabus to focus more on content goals. What does a liberally educated adult need to know about the Spanish‑speaking world? How can students start doing college‑level work, even in a third‑semester Spanish course?

[00:53] In the second half of the interview, we are going to learn more about what that third semester course looks like. In fact, about what all of their courses look like, and some of the student work and student reactions that they've gotten using this model of academic language.

[01:11] At one point, Maggie mentions a quote by Heidi Byrnes. There's another Heidi Byrnes quote, also, from one of her great articles called, "The Cultural Turn in Foreign Language Departments." I have the reference and a link to that article in the show notes if you're interested.

[01:31] One of the things that Heidi mentions in that article is that having individually great teachers is really not enough to enact real transformation in language teaching.

[01:44] Heidi says, "For example, if the profession is serious about helping students attain the kind of upper‑level discursive abilities that a cultural studies program requires, then individual teacher excellence in individual courses, the building block that we relied on in the past, is by definition insufficient to the task of fostering students' long‑term interlanguage development.

"[02:12] Indispensable instead are consensus building on a jointly constructed knowledge base and carefully coordinated joint pedagogical action that motivates individual teacher decision‑making in a well‑considered framework."

[02:30] I think that is, for me, what has been really special about learning from Maggie and Gwen. These are not just two great teachers working independently in a not‑great system.

[02:45] These two wonderful educators are collaborating and coordinating across an entire department that is entirely committed to student success and is not trying to arrive at any quick fixes, either. They've been working on this for well over 20 years, building this program up little by little, bringing people in.

[03:08] This has been, for me, a very personally motivating series to listen to. I would love to hear your reactions, as well. After you listen to part two today, please hit us up on Twitter or on Facebook. Just let us know what you're thinking, if this episode has inspired you to think about your own teaching differently or to work towards some specific changes in your department.

[03:33] Without further ado, here is part two of our conversation about content‑based language teaching.

[03:40] [music]

**Dr. Maggie Broner**:  [03:40] Teacher expectations have to change, students' mindsets have to change, but then you also have to really provide a curriculum, content, and tasks that will support that. That means giving them the language to be able to do the work. In our case, it's academic language.

[04:00] It's the idea of being able to give them sentence frames to be able to talk about complex thoughts. Teaching them how to do inferences and justifying those inferences using evidence to do that. Teaching them the vocabulary that it is the disciplinary vocabulary for the contents. I guess what we want to say is that it can be done.

[04:19] I hope that in the data that you saw today, we presented some pre‑data and post‑data from a couple of students of what they could do, what they had learned in 10 weeks in terms of content, academic language, and some of the comments that they had about the reflections of what they did.

[04:37] I think that you can do it. You can break free from that very narrow focus, "Grammar is what we do." Heidi Burns has this quote. It's like, "Content from the beginning, and languages [indecipherable] the end."

[04:52] I do think that the gap still exists, but I do think that there are ways of really being able to bring some of those functions that we practice and teach at the major level down to the language sequence and then extending the developmental sequence and language because, as we know, they're not going to just learn it in one year.

**Dr. Gwen Barnes‑Karol**:  [05:17] What's really exciting is ‑‑ we did this with one test we're doing ‑‑ we used data from an oral comment, unrehearsed, based on a photograph. We did, one time, a photograph. We gave it to students in Spanish and had them do a little commentary. We gave it to some students in anthropology.

[05:43] This was a photograph of a llama or something. Spanish students were like, "There's a llama. There's a mountain. The llama has a red and blue blanket." "Oh, my friend has a llama." "I'm going to tell a story about a llama."

[05:55] Kind of the thing that students are trained to do. You get a picture, you describe it, and maybe you make up a story about it if you're running out on material.

[06:01] The anthropology students did something very, very different with that llama. Was talking about indigenous people, climate, mountain geography, the llama, and whatever. I can't even remember the content.

[06:15] Students at the same level, when you ask them to do a task like they would do in a Spanish class, or doing an enumeration of objects, a description and making a story, the student, when we asked them to talk about it doing an anthropological, they were looking at it anthropologically. Basic.

[06:36] Once again, we're starting with different goals. We want our Spanish class to be intellectually challenging like the anthropology class. We're not anthropologists. We're not sociologists. We're working with...

**Dr. Maggie**:  [06:51] We do textual analysis and discourse analysis. We know how to do that.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [06:57] A textual analysis, a discourse without any materials for a general public that touch on issues that are the similar thing. What we have to do is train those students to look at that photo as something other than a Spanish class task.

[07:08] We have to give them different tasks, the language and whatever. We are seeing people do it. What we're seeing, too, is they're transferring the knowledge from our class to the other classes.

[07:18] They'll get to environmental studies and they say, "Oh, profesora, in class yesterday, I told them about what we've been doing in Spanish because I had all this data from Spanish, and nobody knew that. I could bring in this case study from Bolivia and nobody in environmental studies knew it, but I could show them another example."

[07:37] Because that student has read in Spanish, discussed in Spanish, could do it in English. That activity we did in Spanish now contributed to that student's environmental studies.

**Stacey**:  [07:47] One of the things that the research on adult learners also tells us is that they don't like to be infantilized. They want to be able to hold on to their sense of competence. A language classroom is a place where you just can't feel as competent as you would in your first language.

[08:04] When we also give them infantilizing content, instead of actually talking about things that might happen in the news, in current events, or in their other courses, that's a double level of infantilization for a college student. I love that you're redirecting to academic language just from that sense.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [08:22] That's where you also need to think that you need to bring the students into...There's a method to the madness. This is why it pays off to teach students about, "This is what second language acquisition is all about."

[08:37] You don't have to call it second language acquisition. You can give it different names.

[08:41] [crosstalk]

**Stacey**:  [08:41] If you're doing an academic language, why not? Why not teach them about another field?

**Dr. Maggie**:  [08:45] Exactly. What I mean is you don't have to be a linguist. Again, I think it's important for everyone teaching languages to have knowledge of what SLA is and what the processes are, but it's not that you need to be an expert. Matt Patton would say that we need more experts, and I agree with him.

[09:04] We talk to students about what we're trying to do. We talk to them about why we're trying to get them to think as college students inside the Spanish class. We do know that we have to break free from, in a way, the hold that the traditional textbooks have had on the profession.

[09:31] There are amazing teachers. We know from all the workshops that we've done that people are doing incredible things. The reality is that most of us have to use a commercially available text. What we do in one of the workshops that we do is how do you start? Baby steps.

[09:48] We have done a complete re‑conceptualization. We threw away the book. We have our own materials. You can work with a commercially available text, but you just have to think about it in a different way. It can be done.

[10:00] The most important thing for us is really to empower students and to see themselves as college students, to see themselves as people who have ideas to share. My students know what learner language is because they have analyzed their own learner language. My students know what multicompetency is. My students know about what's an ideal L2 user.

[10:21] Again, certain ideas from the field that can give them a new vocabulary to talk about the processes that they're seeing in their own language development. They know that language is developed.

**Stacey**:  [10:36] It was really powerful in your presentation the learner talk examples before and after the class where, coming from really traditional programs, your students were only seeing their deficits and their lack of grammar accuracy. Then after just one semester, they're starting to understand where they are succeeding and where they're competent.

[10:55] You want to share some examples?

**Dr. Maggie**:  [10:56] Yeah. Let me share just very quickly a couple of the examples that the students used. For example, we had students transcribe a little language sample that we had them do.

**Stacey**:  [11:09] I'm sorry. Was this the pre and post sample you're talking about?

**Dr. Maggie**:  [11:11] The pre and post, yeah. At the beginning, they said, "I think that I'm unimpressed with my language. I'm frustrated. It was a struggle to listen to my speech. It was painful. I was disappointed. My sample had many errors."

[11:26] I think that we're a little bit to blame about that. We are asking students to produce perfect sentences, to fill in the blanks. If not, I'll take points off. The red pencil, this is what they have been trained into this kind.

[11:41] After they did the self‑assessment, after we exposed them to some key concepts like the ones I mentioned before, they said things like, "Overall, I think the content was good. I just need to work on vocabulary." Vocabulary always comes up.

"[11:52] I found that I did make sense. Overall, I was surprised at how well it went. It was fun to transcribe the recording and see what I actually said. Learning a language will not make us a native speaker. However, being an L2 user is something we should take pride in."

**Stacey**:  [12:09] That's so good.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [12:10] That's my favorite. "Learning a language is a process. I think that that's been an important...Then I now see Spanish and language learning in a new light."

[12:18] These are comments from our students just based on the language part of it. We have just this compelling comments on what they talk about, what they actually learned in the classroom. Gwen mentioned some of those learnings that they're now even taking to their other classes, but they have said incredibly compelling things.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [12:39] One of the final activities, and it's evaluated, is students do a PowerPoint presentation on a topic of their choice. The nature of it has changed. Something that relates to the broader Spanish‑speaking world, relates to one of the topics we've talked about.

[12:57] Recently, I've been asking them to do something that really resonates with them that hopefully connects up to some interest they have in other academic areas or future career goals.

[13:08] They have to explain the phenomenon and get background. They have to make connections with course materials. They have to relate it back, look at how it connects with things we've read or films we've seen or look at it and contextualize it within the course.

[13:24] It's amazing. They do some research. They have to make it comprehensible to their classmates. We talk about PowerPoint strategies and how to make vocabulary. If it's new for you, it's new for the class. All these things like this.

[13:38] The topics they choose are incredible. This is the end of third semester. Why they choose them are really interesting. I've had nursing students interested in prenatal care do things on maternity care in a certain Latin‑American country and looking at differences between providing healthcare in an urban area and a rural area.

[14:03] This is pretty sophisticated for students at the end of a third semester class. They're using statistical data, or talking about problems, or talking about the impact of Zika, or things like that, on infant mortality. These are presentations that they could do something similar in English and that actual content wouldn't be that different in English.

[14:32] They get up and they see what they can do in a public way, something that resonates with them and they see a connection between what their academic and life goals are to something in the Spanish‑speaking world.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [14:47] That's probably one of the most powerful activity that the students do. I think what the takeaway is that we have given them the apparatus for them to then now do it with any topic that they want to do.

[15:03] Now, they have to get the vocabulary for that particular topic. They know how to look for evidence. They know how to process evidence. They know how to read data. They know how to analyze it. They know how to use the sentence frames that we have provided them so that they can actually deploy their knowledge.

[15:21] They know how to contextualize knowledge. They know how to organize the paragraph. They know how to...Everything that...

**Stacey**:  [15:29] They know how to process really complex text.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [15:30] Right, exactly. Yeah, exactly. They know how to process those. It's my favorite course to teach. I love teaching linguistics and I love teaching upper level courses. I love my majors.

[15:43] It's very powerful to see what students at the end of a first semester can do. When they started, the student that we showed you today, which was literally minimal language, basically entering the intermediate level and not even...

**Stacey**:  [16:02] I think that's very generous. [laughs]

**Dr. Maggie**:  [16:04] Yeah, but getting away from memorized material, being able to do something and being able to see what the students can do at the end. For us, it's the data, in a way, that has really shown us that yeah, the students can really do it. You have to think differently about what is it that you're teaching and how you're teaching it.

**Stacey**:  [16:27] That's great. Another thing that has struck me while I was listening to you all speak right now is, there's two kinds of knowledge that exist in both of your classes, the implicit and the explicit. It seems like the implicit is always the language development, right?

**Dr. Maggie**:  [16:45] Yeah.

**Stacey**:  [16:45] That hasn't changed much. Language development is still happening no matter how we teach the course. The explicit knowledge went from explicit knowledge of language structures and vocabulary to an explicit knowledge of academic content that is part of the major track that they're on.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [17:03] Exactly.

**Stacey**:  [17:05] Their language development actually seems like maybe it's improving on the new track, which I think is counter‑intuitive for so many teachers who are afraid if they give up that explicit language knowledge, student language development will falter.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [17:18] No. Again, for that, just look at all the research in immersion education. They will still not have [indecipherable] but they will be able to do math in Spanish. What can I say?

**Stacey**:  [17:32] What do I say to my colleague who only teaches literature courses, who berates me in faculty meetings because my students get to his class without [indecipherable] ?

**Dr. Maggie**:  [17:40] They won't have it. They will graduate...

**Stacey**:  [17:42] I'll just say I'm sorry, it's not helpful. [laughs]

**Dr. Maggie**:  [17:45] It's the hard truth. When you are tapping into their implicit knowledge, they will not have it because they have not reached that stage of the development to sequence. Now, when they're writing, when they have time to edit, if it's what in proficiency we call a hothouse special...

**Stacey**:  [18:07] What's that?

**Dr. Maggie**:  [18:08] The hothouse special is stuff that you have actually practiced.

**Stacey**:  [18:13] Performance?

**Dr. Maggie**:  [18:14] It's performance. Right. It's something that you actually had a chance to practice. Because that means that the student has had time to script it, edit it, think about it, and regurgitate it.

[18:25] Even then, you'd be hard‑pressed to find a subjunctive. Even then, even when it's rehearsed, unless they're reading it. So, no, you are not going to get subjunctive. You are not going to get [indecipherable] . Maybe we shouldn't say you're not. You are most likely not going to get [indecipherable]. Those things are not going to grow.

[18:44] What is going to grow is the ability of these students to think critically, to be able to talk, to do inferences and justifications, to use evidence, and to be college students in Spanish. And they will be able to show you that. I think that that is incredibly powerful.

[18:59] Yes, maybe the [indecipherable] isn't there but let's not concentrate so much on that. Continue to teach language in the upper levels. That's the big Heidi Byrnes thing, right? This is something that we don't do with the classes, we don't do in literature classes. In a way, it's more appropriate to talk about, for example, relative pronouns when they're actually doing...

**Dr. Gwen**:  [19:24] Complex sentences about literary things or whatever.

[19:27] [crosstalk]

**Dr. Maggie**:  [19:28] complex sentences, textual analysis about some literary work. Why not bring it back there and not expect everything to happen at this level?

**Stacey**:  [19:36] There's literally no level of a first language course where they're not referring back to language issues. They're like, "Hi, how are you doing in your English major?" You're always going to be looking at form and style mechanics.

[19:47] [crosstalk]

**Dr. Maggie**:  [19:47] Form and style mechanics.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [19:47] That's right. When you're asked about that colleague from literature, these students, once again, if you gave them a [indecipherable] exam or a [indecipherable] exam, fill in the blanks, they might do pretty well.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [19:59] Yeah, but that's explicit knowledge.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [19:59] Once again, that's explicit. But what they will have is they will have a lot of experience working with texts. They may not be literary, but they've been reading unedited text for general public scaffolded with activities in class, but they're not going to be afraid of a text.

[20:18] They're not going to be afraid of a multi‑page text that wasn't written by a textbook author who had a limited corpus of words because they're the words that are going to be in the language...

[20:29] [crosstalk]

**Dr. Maggie**:  [20:27] Yeah, high‑frequency words.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [20:28] They're used to that, and it's like, "No, we're just going to read more stuff."

**Stacey**:  [20:32] Do you guys worry that your students aren't acquiring high‑frequency words?

**Dr. Maggie**:  [20:37] They are. We also tell students that they should think of themselves as members of different communities of practice. One thing is what we do in our class for 55 minutes, but we also have them engage or invite them to engage in different activities.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [20:54] We also talk about BICS and CALP.

**Stacey**:  [20:57] Interesting.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [20:58] It could be the first day...

**Stacey**:  [21:00] A lot of our listeners who might not know those acronyms.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [21:02] It is Cummings' ideas.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [21:06] We use the most simple presentation of Cummings' ideas that we present in class. BICS, Basic interpersonal communicative skills...

**Dr. Maggie**:  [21:19] Basic interpersonal communicative skills.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [21:21] Then CALP, cognitive academic language proficiency. We say BICS. That's your language to be an everyday person. That's to go to the store, talk with your friends, go get a pizza, say you like the recent movie. That's what you do every day.

[21:37] Cognitive academic language proficiency is the language that you acquire, in our case, in an academic setting. Starting with when you go to school as a kid, it's the language that you learn.

**Stacey**:  [21:50] These are concepts that are in ELL circles are really widely discussed?

[21:54] [crosstalk]

**Dr. Maggie**:  [21:55] Yes.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [21:55] We bring that to our students and we say, when I mention in the first day, "What did you do in your previous Spanish classes?" Then after we do that, "Well, most of the things you were doing is we're in this [indecipherable] ."

**Dr. Maggie**:  [22:08] And it's important. We also stress the importance.

**Stacey**:  [22:11] It's how you make friends, it's how you...

[22:12] [crosstalk]

**Dr. Gwen**:  [22:12] Right, how you get a meal in a restaurant if you travel. It's your language to be a friend, a person, a tourist, whatever. Now, this course is going to be primarily CALP. If you meet a friend from a Spanish‑speaking country, you can have an intelligent discussion about things in their country and how they fit in the world.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [22:32] There are there are different ways the Spanish conversation table attending that...

**Dr. Gwen**:  [22:37] BICS.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [22:38] BICS or primary discourse, this idea of the everyday language that we bring before we even go to school. This idea that there are different ways that they can find it. When they read novels, there's a whole bunch of everyday language in a lot of...If we're doing biographies or the offered...

**Stacey**:  [22:58] Depending on the author, sometimes it's just intense detail related to that everyday language.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [23:03] Yeah, exactly. There's a lot of input that they can get. We encourage them to listen to the news. Again, some of us have done service learning projects. Again, you're engaging in communities where you're talking about everyday things.

[23:15] I think the lesson that we have got is that they know how to be language learners. Let's say that we didn't talk about washing ‑‑ how do you wash your clothes, like we were talking this morning ‑‑ but they're good language learners. They have the tools. Now they see themselves as people who have agency that if they really needed to do that, they know how to go about it to do it.

[23:38] I think that it's teaching the students the tools that they need to continue their growth, to see where their gaps are and trying to find the ways of how to fill in those gaps.

[23:50] We make a decision that we were going to do academic language with content that had to be similar to what they do in other courses at the college level. We have the luxury, perhaps, that we can do that.

**Stacey**:  [24:05] There are many ways that you could go with this also. You can do good work in a lot of different paths.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [24:10] Yes.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [24:10] Yes, definitely.

**Stacey**:  [24:11] This is one choice that I think for a lot of liberal arts colleges who want a rigorous program that also creates proficient language users, this is a really successful thing you've hit on. I'm excited to get to talk with you about it.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [24:25] It's exciting for us as faculty because we got the ball rolling but this is a collaborative effort. All of our faculty colleagues are...

**Dr. Maggie**:  [24:35] Incredible energy.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [24:36] A lot of them come because they want this. Over the years, oftentimes, somebody will talk to colleagues or sometimes job candidates.

[24:46] Half of my teaching load a year is typically this third semester course. How often do I teach any literature seminar in my own research? Practically never. Somebody from the outside might think, "Half of my teaching load is going to be third semester Spanish. Is this a job I want?"

[25:06] This is so exciting for us, because we're constantly...

**Dr. Maggie**:  [25:11] Innovating.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [25:13] Innovative, using new materials. These are things that people are talking about, climate change from the perspective of the Spanish‑speaking world. Globalization. These are things...

**Dr. Maggie**:  [25:24] Are big questions.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [25:26] These are things that are interesting. We read things that we would not read in English or Spanish if it weren't for this course. We're engaging with undergraduates in talking about things that are important for the world. This is really interesting for us. It is.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [25:40] The professional development at the department level has really been incredible. Everybody who starts working with us gets a copy of "How Languages are Learned" by Lightbown and Spada, gets a copy of Virginia Scott's "Double Talk."

**Stacey**:  [25:54] Double Talk.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [25:56] Those are accessible, well‑researched that they're based on good research. We have also read Clueless in Academe by Gerald Graff. We've read Kern's...

**Dr. Gwen**:  [26:10] Kern's. I can't remember the title but it has to do...

**Dr. Maggie**:  [26:13] Literacy.

**Dr. Gwen**:  [26:14] Literacy.

**Dr. Maggie**:  [26:14] Literacy. We talk about the concepts of multicompetence. We have created our own community of practice where we read the documents of our profession together, the MLA 2007 Report. We talk about these things and then how this relates to what we're teaching in the classroom.

[26:33] We're also using this as a real, powerful professional development tool for ourselves.

**Stacey**:  [26:39] Maggie and Gwen, thank you so much for sitting down to chat with me today. This is really great.

[26:42] [background music]

**Stacey**:  [26:42] We would love to hear your feedback on this episode. You can find us on Twitter or Facebook, @weteachlang or you can leave a comment the episode page on our website at weteachlang.com.

[27:00] We would like to say a special thank you to the PEARLL Foreign Language Resource Center for partnering with us to provide transcripts and other professional development resources related to the episodes. You can learn more about PEARLL by going to pearll.nflc.umd.edu.

[27:25] Thanks so much for listening. Bye‑bye.

|  |
| --- |
| Podcast transcripts are provided through a partnership with **PEARLL** (Professionals in Education Advancing Research and Language Learning), a Title VI Language Resource Center at the National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland. Find additional transcripts: **www.pearll.nflc.umd.edu/podcast** |

Transcription by CastingWords