

WIDA Goes Global

A leader in multilingual learning spreads its can-do attitude abroad

Just one phone call from China helped connect the Wisconsin Center for Education Research to schools around the world.

In 2008, the Shanghai American School contacted Timothy Boals, executive director of the WIDA Consortium at WCER, about using WIDA's acclaimed research-based standards and assessments to help English-language learners. "A teacher there had used our language development tools in the States and recommended them," Boals recalls the conversation that unofficially launched the WIDA International School Consortium.

Today, WIDA's international program has pioneered the improvement of teaching and learning for multilingualism around the world. It has grown into a worldwide ELL network of more than 400 accredited preK-12 international schools where English is the language of instruction, in more than 100 countries.

These international schools not only benefit from WIDA's research-grounded assessments and instructional resources, but also its year-round professional learning opportunities, technical support and global network of language educators who share innovative research on teaching and learning practices.

"What makes WIDA so unique is that we transform the conversation from what multilingual students can't do—to what they CAN do. And we empower teachers to build on the strengths of all their learners," says Jon Nordmeyer, WIDA international programs director who travels over 100 days a year delivering professional learning and support to international schools through onsite visits, seminars and conferences. "We support and connect educators, whether they're in New Jersey or New Delhi."

Inside

WIDA International School Consortium	1-3
Publications/Findings From WCER	3-4

For an expanded version of this newsletter, visit wcer.wisc.edu/news/newsletter.



(Left to right) Jon Nordmeyer, WIDA international programs director; Mariana Castro, WCER deputy director; and Timothy Boals, executive director of the WIDA Consortium

(Continued from page 1)

WIDA has a proven track record, both here and abroad. Nordmeyer says more than 80 percent of schools in the WIDA International School Consortium renews its annual membership—and most new international members say they heard about WIDA from another international school.

The International School Nido de Aguilas in Santiago, Chile, is one of those enthusiastic partners. They needed help in refining their assessment tools to evaluate English language proficiency. “WIDA stood out to us because we could use their tools to design instruction, set language objectives for our learners and provide a platform for conversations with parents and colleagues,” says one teacher.

A small school in South Korea was overwhelmed by a wave of new English learners. Middle school teachers were inexperienced in teaching ESL, so the school made a considerable investment in WIDA training for staff. Now they send ELL teachers to WIDA institutes and workshops every year. “Having such widespread and in-depth understanding of WIDA programs among faculty has benefited the school tremendously,” says a school administrator.

Reciprocity is key.

Nordmeyer is quick to point out that the relationship with international schools has been reciprocal. “We are learning a lot from these innovative international spaces, too, that is helping to strengthen WIDA as a whole.”

Unlike U.S. schools, international schools are not guided by federal or state regulations, so they have more freedom to be creative in the classroom. “While many international schools use Common Core or Next Generation Science Standards, they have to create their own policies and programs, and look to WIDA for help,” says Nordmeyer.

For instance, a school in China challenged middle school students to build a smartphone. These students, whose native languages were Mandarin, Italian and Spanish, had to work collaboratively to source phone components. For the final exam, they conducted a video conference call with their parents on the homemade device.

Boals was impressed. “There is some very creative curriculum being implemented in these international schools. It gives us an interesting context in which to contrast our work with U.S.-based schools and try out or share new ideas.” Boals says he’d like to bring these ideas back to the U.S. to strengthen our country’s language-learning curriculum. “I mean, why couldn’t we do that here?”



International educators explore the WIDA standards and assessment system at the WIDA International Institute in Dubai, December 2018.

Anchored in research.

Mariana Castro, WCER’s deputy director and interim director for the Department of Research, Policy and Evaluation at WIDA, wears many hats as a member of the WIDA International School Consortium team.

She works closely with teachers in the consortium to answer questions related to WIDA’s standards and assessments, offers technical assistance, serves as a principal investigator on research-related projects, speaks at a number of conferences and symposiums throughout the year, and helps Nordmeyer with the professional development of international teachers.

Castro, who grew up in Mexico and speaks four languages, is passionate about multilingualism. “Sometimes teachers see English learners through a deficit lens rather than thinking about everything positive they bring into a classroom.”

She says educators are more successful when they recognize the strengths of language learners, what they “can do,” to leverage learning in the classroom, such as demonstrating their cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills and ability to tackle projects from multiple angles.

Over the years, Castro has contributed a wealth of research to help develop WIDA resources, most recently for a study in the international consortium. Castro, Nordmeyer and WIDA colleagues Jen Wilfrid and Madina Djuraeva collaborated to investigate distributed leadership systems in international schools.

“Leadership really makes a difference in what a school’s goals are,” says Castro, whose research focuses specifically on how schools build systems that support effective teaching and learning for multilingual learners. “There isn’t a lot of research out there about multilingual learners in international schools, so we hope to publish this study soon.”

Long-term vision for the international consortium?

For WIDA’s executive director, it’s a simple numbers game. “There are over 10,000 English-medium international schools. In 10 years, that number is expected to double. WIDA serves 450 of those schools right now, so imagine the potential,” says Boals, looking ahead.

Nordmeyer is working hard to leverage the global WIDA community to help schools learn from each other—shifting from a sharing network to an improvement network. “There is great potential in educators working collaboratively around the world to improve teaching and learning.” He says independent schools can feel isolated; so it’s exciting to connect, for example, an international school in São Paulo to schools in Moscow and Singapore because they are asking similar questions.

It is this goal to facilitate more global interaction between multilingual educators that is driving a new collaboration between the WIDA International School Consortium and Professional Learning and Community Education (PLACE) at UW–Madison’s School of Education. Richard Halverson, associate dean of Innovation, Outreach and Partnerships, is



Educators from WIDA member schools in China, Korea, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia and Singapore gather at a two-day WIDA Symposium hosted by United World College, Singapore.

leading the charge with PLACE to develop virtual, online versions of WIDA’s international professional learning.

“We will be helping WIDA International extend its reach through virtual conferences and workshops to serve the WIDA audience more broadly,” says Halverson.

But it is the connection to scholarship that really matters to teachers, says Nordmeyer. “When I meet educators in other countries, they are thrilled to connect to scholars at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.” The world traveler drives it home, “The real value comes from connecting our global network to the university and the research that we do here.”

Publications/Findings From WCER Researchers

DIGITAL LEARNING

“Promise and Pitfalls for Improving Educational Opportunities and Outcomes”

Annalee Good and Emily Cheng of the Wisconsin

Evaluation Collaborative contributed to a longitudinal study of the integration of digital tools in K-12 classrooms in urban school districts. Findings include patterns in which students tend to be in online courses, the impact of courses on academic outcomes, such as credits earned and GPA, and challenges in implementation. Published in the *American Journal of Education Research*.



INTERNSHIPS

“Exploring Student Perspectives on College Internships”

In this working paper, Matt Hora and his team document words or phrases most significant to students considering internships. The most salient terms were: “experience,” “learning,” “paid” and “connections.” Students said internships are something to “get” for one’s resumé, and important to career- and self-exploration; and they stressed the importance of compensation. Findings suggest colleges should avoid one-size-fits-all approaches to internships and tailor experiences to different student groups.



LANGUAGE LEARNERS

“Creating an Overall Composite Score as an Indicator of English Language Proficiency for ELs”

Tameka Porter, H. Gary Cook and Narek Sahakyan illustrate models and procedures in this working paper to calculate overall composite scores to identify an indicator of English language proficiency. It is based on composite scores for ELs with 504 or individualized education plans missing one or more domain scores on the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for ELLs assessment for state monitoring, achievement and accountability.



EDUCATION INQUIRY

“A Model of Two-Year College Students’ Postsecondary Pathway Selection”

Rich Halverson and Erica Rosenfeld Halverson propose the idea of education research as the study of design for learning. Scientific inquiry measures effects of design on schools; practical inquiry studies how new designs are implemented and developed; and critical inquiry examines the gap between designs and reality of teaching, learning and society. A design approach invites each research type to see itself in a broad cycle of improving education for all learners.



PREK-12 STEM EDUCATION

“Creating Inclusive PreK-12 STEM Learning Environments”

Rita MacDonald, WIDA associate researcher, contributed to this brief that draws on NSF-supported research to highlight considerations for educational leaders and others who make decisions about supporting inclusive STEM education. It summarizes new learning about inclusive STEM classrooms, the role of families and communities, and the impact of educational systems, presenting five action steps for creating inclusive PreK-12 STEM learning environments.



WIDA™

“The Use of Theory in Research on Broadening Participation in PreK-12 STEM Education”

This working paper co-authored by WIDA’s Rita MacDonald identifies theories relevant to broadening STEM participation across marginalized student groups. Compiled by current and recent DRK-12 grantees, it provides information not easily accessible elsewhere, since some of these innovative projects have not been published yet. It provides clear guidance on the use of relevant theories, supported by examples from funded DRK-12 research.



News

\$1.8 million grant awarded for college internship study

WCER researchers will use a \$1.8 million grant on a mixed-methods longitudinal study to learn more about college internships and how students of color enter the workforce from college. The grant was awarded to the Center for Research on College to Workforce Transitions (CCWT). The funding will allow CCWT Director Matt Hora to expand the College Internship Study from its current five campuses to six new institutions.



Grau and partners win \$400K to raise family incomes

A community team, including Beth Graue, director of the Center for Early Childhood Education (CRECE), has been awarded \$400,000 in the Alliance for the American Dream competition. This grant will develop innovative ideas to expand and strengthen the U.S. middle class through campus-community partnerships with Wisconsin Early Childhood Association, Reach Dane, the UW Schools of Social Work and Education, the City of Madison and Madison Out-of-School Time.



For more findings, news and events, visit: wcer.wisc.edu/news/newsletter.



**Wisconsin Center for
Education Research**

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

1025 West Johnson Street, Suite 785, Madison, Wisconsin 53706

608.263.4210 | wcer.wisc.edu

Media inquiries: Janet.Kelly@wisc.edu | Contact the editor: armitage2@wisc.edu