



## Changing language program practices in community for sustainability

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On September 10, 2025 a “Notice of Non-Continuation of Grant Award” from The United States Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development was sent to the National Resource Centers, the Foreign Language and Area Studies Programs, the Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Programs, the International Research and Studies, the Centers for International Business Education, the Language Resource Centers, and the American Overseas Research Centers (Hull, 2025). Even though the U.S. Department of Education (2025) states on their website that “ED’s mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for *global competitiveness* [emphasis added] by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access” the grants for these internationalization initiatives were discontinued with the following justification from the U.S. Department of Education:

Based upon the Department’s judgment that the purpose of and functions of the international and foreign language education programs are not a priority of the Administration, the Department exercised its authority to reprogram the funds to grant programs that are a priority for the Administration. This determination is further reflected in the Department’s FY 2026 Budget Request, which did not request funding for the programs noted in this decision, as being programs that “*are inconsistent with Administration priorities and do not advance American interests or values.*” [emphasis added] As such, the Department has determined that continuation of the following programs is *not in the best interest of the Federal Government* [emphasis added] and has exercised its authority to repurpose available funding for other available uses. (Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2025)

This announcement is one of the most explicit examples of how ideologies have shifted away from seeing languages as critical for national security and economic prosperity (Kramsch, 2005), and back to an English-only movement that was particularly prominent in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Schmid, 2001). Another sign of the English-only resurgence is the March 1, 2025 presidential Executive Order declaring English the official language of the United States (White House, 2025). The consequences of these ideological shifts have been a long time in the making, and have been felt in language programs, in part through the continued decline in language enrollments (Lusin, et al., 2023).

Facing these realities, program leaders and language educators operate in fight-or-flight mode as they navigate the existentially important work of student recruitment and program advocacy. Keeping their programs alive against the backdrop of ideological devaluation has increased emotional labor for language educators and program administrators. As Crane and Warner (2025) point out, language program administrators have been operating in a reactive crisis mode and could benefit from reframing our current context to a responsive change mode, so that programs cannot just survive but thrive.

In the first section of this volume, five articles focus on describing challenges of and pathways for sustainable working conditions in language programs. In the second section, five articles describe the work in language programs as work in community, a lens through which they reimagine assessment, instruction, and/or teacher training. As in the last volume, we have made the choice to present different sections in the journal not based on publication type (i.e., report vs. article), but by theme: (1) Sustainable working conditions; and (2) Language learning in community. This structure is intended to foreground the content and avoid hierarchical presentation based on type of research (i.e., praxis reports vs. empirical research). While we ordered contributions within a section by last name in the previous volume, this volume follows a thematic arch, as outlined below.

## **Sustainable Working Conditions**

The first three articles set the stage for understanding educators' emotions and its interplay with sustainable workloads and are followed by a survey study and an auto-ethnographic perspective on workload experiences in the face of change. We start with **Julia Goetze** (University of Wisconsin, Madison) laying out theoretical frameworks related to emotional labor and applying it to a well-being analysis of different stage educators; continue with **Megan Ferris** (Union College) illustrating systems-thinking activities to identify and reframe workloads (many of which are emotional) in these fragile times for language programs; and conclude with **Kimberly Morris** (University of Wisconsin, La Crosse) who provides a three-pronged model (outreach, collaborative research, and program reform) to address the vicious cycle of enrollment shortcomings. Moving on from the frameworks of emotions and workload, **Theresa Schenker, Jorge Méndez-Seijas, Andrea Thompson, and Shiri Goren** (Yale University) discuss a move to a blended model of language teaching in ten language programs developing out of the COVID-19 remote teaching experiences, which had a positive impact on educator wellbeing. **Paul Sebastian** (Appalachian State University) reflects on the emotions and emotion labor in response to the COVID-19 disruption of the study abroad program he directed. This article rounds out the story of the interconnection between workload, the unique landscape of the work in language programs, and the impacts on well-being. In the following, we provide more details on each of the articles on sustainable working conditions.

In her article, **Julia Goetze** provocatively asks “thriving or surviving?” as she explores emotional and psychological wellbeing, physical health, and emotion regulation in 254 language educators by career stage. Even if educators are surviving (i.e., not leaving the profession), they might be suffering from burnout and other stressors that leave them far from thriving. She summarizes existing research: “Language teaching, which is characterized by high emotionality and significant emotional labor due to its highly (inter)personal and social nature, has long recognized emotional exhaustion as a chronic stressor linked to burnout and attrition.” (p. 5). In her analysis, Julia Goetze discovered that mid-to-late career language educators have greater psychological well-being, physical health, and self-efficacy than novice language educators. She suggests that support structures (e.g., peer support groups, collaborative teaching, community-building activities, mentorship programs, etc.) are needed for educator wellbeing, especially for novice language educators.

Much of language educator workload is emotional and invisible. Hence, **Megan Ferry** led her department through a variety of systems thinking tasks to better understand the complexity of the dynamic systems in which the work is situated: (1) ecosystem mapping, (2) model of faculty workload, and (3) visual map of actual workload. In the process they were able to identify needed tasks to better position their work, which ironically increased the workload. In addition, they confirmed that the alleged 40/40/20 contract is in reality a lot more service heavy in language programs due to the many co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, the number of non-course related teaching activities (e.g., advising, undergraduate research, TA supervision, coordination), independent studies due to enrollment shortages, the fragile status of programs necessitating a more significant contribution to marketing and recruitment efforts, and the diversity of roles that need to be fulfilled with limited personnel. At the core is a conflict between the student needs, the budgetary landscape, and the sustainability of the faculty workload.

The unsustainable, invisible, and emotional labor that can lead to issues in emotional well-being are resulting in large numbers of language educators leaving the profession, as **Kimberly Morris** outlines with the example of the state of Wisconsin. She identifies a viscous cycle that is leading to spiraling declines in enrollments and continued teacher shortage: K-12 teachers leave the profession leading to K-12 program closures, which leads to fewer students entering with language skills in the universities, which leads to fewer enrollments, which leads to fewer classes, which leads to fewer majors, which leads to fewer teacher candidates, which leads to fewer teachers, starting the cycle all over again. Like Megan Ferry, Kimberly Morris talks about emotional labor in the face of uncertainty and the additional work in responding to these uncertainties. In order to better support teachers and programs, Kimberly Morris took a three-pronged approach: (1) outreach, (2) research, and (3) curricular reform. Specifically, she created various outreach and marketing campaigns to create program visibility and form relationships within and beyond campus; she conducted research with and on teacher candidates to ease their transition into the profession and keep them connected; and analyzed barriers to degree completion to create multiple pathways for diverse learners.

While the first three articles within this section of volume six focused on an analysis of the conditions to then recommend and in some cases implement changes, **Theresa Schenker, Jorge Méndez-Seijas, Andrea Thompson, and Shiri Goren** are raising the question “is it worth it?” in response to a change at their institution. The institution made room for ten language programs to move instruction to a blended model (i.e., four face-to-face days and one asynchronous online day). Buy-in to the change was high, which the authors contribute to training sessions provided by a resource center, the experience with remote teaching during COVID-19, and the design freedom given to programs (i.e., which courses, how). Educators were happy with the new course delivery format, found it effective, and had varying opinions on the workload. Educators reflected on challenges and benefits as well as best practices for a blended approach (e.g., which tasks to complete in which modality). The reduced time on campus was perceived as beneficial for wellbeing.

In his auto-ethnographic study, **Paul Sebastian** analyzes his own experiences and responses to the COVID-19 crisis and associated program disruptions as an education abroad leader in Spain. As in the works by Julia Goetze and Theresa Schenker and colleagues, COVID-19 is seen as a change agent that brought already-existing issues to the forefront. Paul Sebastian describes his resistance to the expansion of his role from instructor to tour guide, Dean of Students, and Residence Assistant, expressing that he felt “less like an educator and more like an administrator” (p. 76) and “more like a parent” (p. 76). As he navigated this role expansion, he found neither joy in the expansion, nor did he feel prepared for and supported by the home institution for these roles. The roles were further expanded and even less supported in the face of the program closure due to the pandemic. Implied in his call for better support is also a need for assistance in navigating self-regulation as described by Julia Goetze.

In combination, these five articles tell the story of the complex and dynamic context within which language educators operate. Whether as teachers or administrators, pressures lead to unsustainable and often invisible labor, in turn impacting the emotional well-being of those within the profession and thereby the viability of our profession. Each piece provides concrete recommendations for structures and processes to better support the humans within our programs. *The Routledge Handbook of Language Program Development and Administration*, a recently published co-edited volume, includes several chapters that can be resources for language administrators: Estela Ene’s “Developing a strategic plan and connecting to institutional priorities;” Kate Navickas, Kristi Murray Costello, Jacob Babb, and Courtney Adams Wooten’s “Emotional labor in program leadership;” Willim Nichols’ “Language advocacy in higher education;” and the aforementioned chapter by Cori Crane and Chantelle Warner’s “Agile language program administration: Navigating crisis and change.”

## Language Learning in Community

This section of volume six focuses on the significance of community as language programs reshape their

processes and practices. In each of the articles, community plays a crucial role in reimagining assessment, instruction, and/or teacher education. We start with **Sophia Strietholt** (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), who describes the “pedagogy lab” as a community of practitioner-researchers developing as language educators; **Nafal Ossandón Hostens** and **Ellen Jones Schoedler** (University of Texas at Austin) illustrate two different examples of creating assessment tools in community with the learners; **Joy Egbert** (Washington State University) and **Seyed Abdollah Shahrokni** (Texas A&M University) present an educational escape room communal activity that aimed to enhance developing teachers’ understanding of English comma usage; **Helena Vesaranta** (University of Helsinki) and **Kaisu Rättyä** (Tampere University) developed a model of assessment literacy for Finnish-as-a-second-language educators, in which culture and community play a major role; and **Alfredo Urzúa**, **Gisselle Velarde**, and **Claudia Woodard** (San Diego State University) present the results of implementing tasks focusing on possible selves and imagined communities in Spanish as a foreign language and Spanish as a heritage language course. Together these five articles present the work in language programs as a social process in communities of practice. The articles cover different aspects of language program work (i.e., language learning, language assessment, and language teacher education) and represent a variety of contexts (e.g., US, Finland; second language, heritage language, and foreign language; English, Finnish, German, Spanish).

The “pedagogy lab” designed by **Sophia Strietholt** is a practice-based seminar that combines practitioner research, guided microteaching opportunities with feedback cycles, and a portfolio to develop reflective teaching identities in graduate student educators. In contrast to other graduate educators, language graduate educators are typically solely responsible for teaching their courses, perhaps following a common syllabus, but making all day-to-day decisions on their own. Traditional orientation sessions are often overwhelming and not contributing to the knowledge that learners need in the moment. The “pedagogy lab” is a semester-long, research-informed, reflective, inquiry-based practice in a peer-supported community. The lab, with its weekly cycles of microteaching and feedback, has the goal of developing research-informed teacher identities. Through this process of teaching, the pedagogy lab creates a community of scholar-educators and “... affirms that teaching is not an auxiliary skill but a scholarly and professional practice worthy of deep engagement” (pp. 86).

Building on the concept of the scholar-educator, **Nafal Ossandón Hostens** and **Ellen Jones Schoedler** report on two experiments of including student voices in assessment within the confines of multi-section language programs, where the space for individual experimentation can be limited. In particular, the two scholar-educators explored two different ways of evaluating participation. In one course the students provided input on the construction of the participation rubric, which was then used by the instructor; in the other course students graded themselves based on the rubric created by the instructor, with the instructor reserving the right to change the grade. Both innovations were situated in a willingness to participate and willingness to communicate framework. Students responded well to the innovations, both in their attitudes toward the assessment and in an increased willingness to participate. Such collaborative evaluation methods reduce hierarchies and provide agency to learners in the evaluation process and are connected to the fruitful discussions about ungrading prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., McGregor & Coleman, 2025).

A completely different innovation, which sits at the intersection of teaching, learning, and assessing, is the implementation of educational escape rooms in English teacher education by **Joy Egbert** and **Seyed Abdollah Shahrokni**. Their article provides step-by-step reflection with connection to online resources, so that readers can consider their own educational escape rooms through a design-based research approach. Following a needs analysis and an iterative design process, the authors created a set of activities designed to teach comma rules to graduate educators. Reflections and pre- and post-test were used to assess perception of the innovation and the learning outcomes. Graduate educators enjoyed the collaborative and innovative learning environment and tests showed significant improvements in the understanding of comma rules.

Continuing with assessment and the importance of community, **Helena Vesaranta** and **Kaisu Rättyä** present a new model for assessment literacy, an important component of teacher knowledge. The article

provides details about the multilingual linguistic and educational landscape in Finland, and the changing needs as more multilingual learners enter the educational spaces. Assessment practices are guided by the needs of the changing learner population, the Finnish National Agency for Education, and the Common European Framework of Reference. The model of assessment literacy has an educator's linguistic pedagogical content knowledge as the foundation, which guides the curriculum and the role of assessment within it. Based on their linguistic pedagogical content knowledge and their understanding of the curriculum, teachers then make choices in their practice on what to assess, when, and how. What is crucial in this model is the understanding that the educational culture and context as well as individual educator's beliefs are a critical component of assessment literacy and practices.

Like Sophia Strietholt's article, which opened this section, the last article centers community. **Alfredo Urzúa, Giselle Velarde, and Claudia Woodard** present an empirical study on using tasks that focus on possible selves and imagined communities in foreign and heritage language learning classes. The research is embedded in the work on identity, imagined communities, and investment, as well as motivation work that focuses on the ideal self and the ought-to self. Specifically, the authors investigate "how different types of learners navigate between present realities and their desired futures, how they integrate past experiences into emerging self-concepts, and how educational contexts can facilitate this identity work" (pp. 139). While the results were similar across groups, foreign language learners showed gratefulness for their families, whereas heritage language learners expressed the importance of giving back to their families and communities; while foreign language learners focused on personal goals, heritage language learners intertwined their goals with the goals of their community; while foreign language learners focused on graduate school as their professional goals, heritage language learners focused on professional attributes and values.

What the papers in this section have in common is a willingness to collaboratively experiment and a perspective of language program work as a community of practice, whether it is in the language learning, the teaching, the assessment, or the teacher education realm: development is a collaborative process that happens in community. This brings us back to the proposed language program administration model from Cori Crane and Chantelle Warner (2025), which stressed the importance of agility and psychological safety to create a culture of experimentation and shared decision-making.

## Intellectual Leadership in Language Program Administrators

In the busy day-to-day operations, it can be easy to forget that the work of language program directors, supervisors, coordinators, and administrators is more than just logistics, but rather intellectual leadership. Sonja Fritzsche, William Hart-Davidson, and Christopher Long (2022) proposed a new way of looking at faculty work: Charting Pathways to Intellectual Leadership (CPIL), which looks at intellectual leadership as sharing knowledge, expanding opportunity, and providing mentorship and stewardship rather than the traditional teaching, research, service categories. As the editorial team for *Second Language Research and Practice*, we strive to showcase the intellectual leadership of language program administrators and make room for scholar-practitioner voices. We welcome not just the success stories, but also the iterative stories that include moments of failure to tell the full story of experimentation and innovation. We aim to highlight the work described by Crane and Warner below:

As agile approaches reward experimentation, it is important to recognize that reporting on innovations in language programs should also include honest accounts of difficulty and even failure. Too often our profession privileges scholarship that focuses on what worked well, when there is much to be learned also from reports that attempt to explain the complexity of real problems that do not produce expected or hoped-for outcomes. Collaborative research that engages multiple practitioner perspectives can be helpful in investigating how administrators deal with some of the most pressing systemic challenges in post-secondary language education such as the two-tiered system, precarious labor trends, and changing student populations." Crane & Warner (2025, p. 653).

This particular volume focused on the socio-emotional aspects of the practices in language programs. As is typical for SLRP, the volume started out with a call for papers under the theme: “New normal, new urgency: Invisible and emotion labor in language program advocacy.” Megan Ferris, Julia Goetze, and Kimberly Morris were the three original authors who helped kick off the topic in a panel at the 2025 Modern Language Association (MLA) Convention in New Orleans. Additional authors contributed purposefully to the theme, while others submitted manuscript not specifically intended for the theme. As we reviewed the submissions, we saw the broader topic of sustainable workload from the individual perspective; and the experimentation within community for better conditions and outcomes as two distinct themes under which we organized the ten articles.

Building on the themes, we hosted a panel on “Language education reimaged: Words matter!” at the MLA Convention in Toronto in 2026 which included presentations by Francesca Beretta on “Whose words matter? Rethinking authority in Humanities advocacy.” Vera Felder and Christopher Kaiser on “Reaffirming the Humanities in an AI-driven world.” Krista Chambless, Kelly Moser, and Linda Egnatz on “The future of world language education: Amplifying the Global Seal of Biliteracy’s impact.” Through their work, the panelists showcased how we can or perhaps must reshape the narrative about language education in a world where stakeholders focus on career readiness and return-on-investment in higher education decision-making. It is therefore not just the changing ideologies about language learning, but also the changing ideologies about higher education more generally that are creating additional invisible emotion labor for language program leaders.

At MLA 2027 in Los Angeles the panel confronts the question “why do we teach world languages.” Lucian Rothe (University of Louisville) and Luis Penton (Vizja University, Warsaw) will lead a panel that explores motivations, challenges, and futures. Anna Becker (International Scholars Alliance) will kick off the panel with a presentation on “What or who are we doing this for? LOTEs, international scholars, and the politics of belonging in U.S. higher education.” Emily Heidrich Uebel (Michigan State University) builds on her research on language enrollments and requirements: “Exploring language requirements for admission and graduation across the Big Ten Academic Alliance.” L. J. Randolph Jr. (University of Wisconsin-Madison) pushes for “Undoing coloniality in the future of LOTE education in the United States.” Come joins us at the MLA in 2027!

The MLA panels in 2025, 2026, and in 2027 are exploring the following questions: What are we are we doing? Who are we doing it for and with? What is the cost of doing the work? How do we tell our story and the importance of our work to stakeholders? Folks have been learning and teaching languages for centuries, yet the field of second language acquisition is relatively young, and the professionalization of the role of language program administrators is even more recent. As the editorial team for SLRP, we aim to contribute to the professionalization of the field through the manuscripts in our journal, organizing panels at the MLA, and highlighting new resources in the field.

Two new resources are *The Routledge Handbook of Language Program Development and Administration* referenced in this manuscript as well the expertly curated asynchronous online self-study course on *Language Program Direction* (CARLA, 2024) put together by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA). This is yet another example of the high quality informative and practical resource for developed by the Title VI Language Resources Centers mentioned in the beginning of this introduction. In our roles as SLRP editors, we not only want to thank them for their financial and logistical support to SLRP over the years, but the plethora of resources they have provided.

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