

## **PROGRAM FOR ACCELERATED QUALIFICATION OF ARABIC LANGUAGE TEACHERS**

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### **Background**

In the wake of September 11, 2001, there was a huge demand for Arabic in collegiate and pre-collegiate institutions accompanied by a severe shortage of trained (and untrained) teachers. The Modern Language Association reports in its 2002 survey *Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education* that Arabic has the largest percentage increase since 1998 among all foreign languages. The enrollments were 10,596 in 2002, a 92.5% increase over the 1998 enrollments. The Arabic profession has recognized the urgent need for a basic training and development program for K-16 teachers without requiring them to get another university degree. In the United States, certification is the mandate of individual states that is normally undertaken by one home institution of higher education within the state. The system is fine for the majority of student teachers who can get intensive training in the area of their specialization. Such programs require substantial time commitment and funds. Nonetheless, the majority of K-12 teachers have neither the time nor the wherewithal to seek full certification. Some teachers work in a few public schools that offer Arabic (e.g., Michigan, Illinois, Virginia) and the majority are employed by private Arabic and Islamic schools. These are estimated to be about 200 schools, not counting the numerous weekend schools.

This project is conceived to meet a dire need and to fill a gap in the Arabic field. It should not be considered an alternative to full-fledged certification because it lacks the depth and width of such programs. It offers only the basic concepts in the subject areas listed below. They are by no means treated extensively.

This paper describes an accelerated program for qualification and development for K-16 Arabic teachers. However, a brief overview of the Arabic Professional Standards<sup>1</sup> is in order because this document lays out the knowledge base that teachers should have in order to be effective teachers. The Professional Standards document has two aims:

1. to make recommendations concerning the knowledge base and skills of a qualified teacher of Arabic, both at the school and university levels
2. to guide the development of a teacher certification program offered on a physical campus and/or through distance study

The Arabic Professional Standards serve as the guiding principle in the current project. The Standards expect awareness of the following principles on the part of teachers:

1. Language is not learned for its own sake. Meaningful, functional context must be the vehicle of instruction (i.e., language as “object” versus language as “communication”).  
Corollary: emphasis on communication translates into ample opportunity for students to interact in the classroom with other students via well-designed classroom tasks.
2. Learning language in context makes it multi-faceted and multi-dimensional (i.e., context enriches meaning which is dependent on the social and cultural context).
3. In learning Arabic, students integrate cultural and sociolinguistic appropriateness. In this regard, the learners’ awareness of the sociolinguistic situation should be raised, and they should be informed of the benefit of study abroad programs in teaching the language in the native environment.
4. Teachers have a commitment to students and their learning.
5. Students vary in their backgrounds and abilities, but all of them can learn.
6. All students are treated equitably regardless of their background or purpose of learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Published in Wahba, Taha & England (eds.) *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, New Jersey, 2006.

The Professional Standards expect teachers to have an understanding of the following areas of knowledge:

- A. Professional knowledge, including proficiency, psychological and cognitive theory, culture, pedagogy, curriculum design, and assessment.
- B. Conceptual Framework. Although most teachers prefer practical techniques and information to apply directly in the classroom, a conceptual framework is still needed. The intellectual aspect of the knowledge base helps Arabic teachers to achieve a theoretical grounding in several knowledge areas, including the following:
  - Methods of teaching a foreign language
  - Theories of language
  - Language use
  - Arabic language and linguistics
  - Familiarity with modern Arabic literature and issues thereof
  - Awareness of the diglossic nature of Arabic
  - Knowledge of the history of Arabic and Arabs
  - Knowledge of the Arab world geography and contemporary life
  - An understanding of Islam and Islamic values and practices
  - Error correction and interlanguage
  - Assessment
- C. A reflective approach to teaching: Effective Arabic teachers reflect systematically on their practice retrospectively and introspectively and learn from experience. They reflect on their practice before, during, and after teaching.
- D. Action Research: Involvement in action, or collaborative, research enhances the teachers' status as professionals. It puts them in contact with researchers and other professionals, increasing their knowledge, widening their horizons, and honing their skills as teachers and fledgling researchers.
- E. Achieving Professionalism through certification, collaboration with colleagues, networking, applying for grants to develop materials and tests, involvement in professional meetings, and participation in mentoring programs.

Another source that guides the current project is the recently published volume<sup>2</sup> containing language learning standards for ten foreign languages, including Arabic. No teacher development program is complete without knowledge of these two documents (i.e., the Professional Standards and the Learning Standards). In short, the learning standards have five interconnected goal areas: communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities. Each one has two content standards except communication, which has three standards for the three communication modes: the interpersonal, the interpretive, and the presentational. The standards describe the knowledge and abilities that learners should acquire. Each standard is followed by sample progress indicators for grades four, eight, twelve, and 16 (university level). They provide only sample content to teachers and curriculum designers.

### **Structure of the Accelerated Program**

The accelerated program is composed of three major components: (1) on-site intensive workshops, (2) distance learning, and (3) assessment.

1. **On-site intensive workshops:** These are modules of specific content offered in a location where there is a high concentration of Arabs and Arabic schools, such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, New York, and Houston. More than one workshop can run simultaneously at different sites with different topics. Alternatively, they can also be offered at institutions with relatively large Arabic programs where participants can attend workshop lectures and observe classes taught by experienced teachers.

#### *Workshop Content and Design*

Each workshop is three days long and it targets a specific topic such as methodology, testing, teaching the different skills, and so forth. They are conducted in the target language. Actual workshops that have been offered over the past five years in the United States and abroad<sup>3</sup> have the following topics:

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<sup>2</sup> *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Allen Press, Lawrence, KS, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> The author conducted teacher training workshops at the American School in Bahrain, Aleppo University, Syria, Damascus University, the University of Maryland, Georgetown University, San Diego State University, the Ohio State University, Chicago area teachers, New Horizon School in Pasadena, and Al-Amal School in Minneapolis. In addition, The National Capital Resource Center (NCRC) has offered K-12 teacher training workshop in the past few years and the National Middle East Languages Resource Center

- Teaching reading and listening and assessing comprehension
  - Development and adaptation of instructional material
  - Teaching and testing at the Superior level and above
  - Curriculum design and material development
  - Testing oral proficiency levels
  - Learner strategies
  - Levels of proficiency and text type
  - Conceptual background in foreign language methods and approaches
2. Distance learning: Designed in the form of modules with topics similar to those of the workshops, but it uses more extensive material in English and Arabic. This material constitutes the bulk of the program. Each participant will have the chance to work with a mentor and occasionally with the trainer, and has three months to finish reading and understanding the content. The participants will be provided with a core reading list to be amplified by the participants themselves as they proceed in their reading assignments and get more familiarized with the field. The courses are envisioned to be asynchronous.
  3. Assessment: This is a threefold process. First, the participant selects eight articles of his/her choice (six from the list in the syllabus and two from other professional sources of their choice) and critiques them. Each critique should include a one-page summary and a two-page opinion statement with arguments to substantiate one's opinion. Second, a substantial research paper on a topic in any one of the subject areas that shows profound understanding of the issues. Third, a one-hour face-to-face or telephonic interview that covers topics discussed in the workshops, the distance courses, and in the research and reaction papers submitted by the participant.

## **Subject Areas**

In addition to the pedagogical subject areas mentioned above under workshop content, participants read selected articles and book chapters in the following subjects:

## Accelerated Teacher Qualification Program

Arabic syntax and morphology

History of Arabic

Arabic linguistics

Arab culture

Modern Arabic literature and the media (print, audio, video)

Arabic Professional Standards

Arabic Learning Standards

Conducting empirical research

Use of digital media

### **Requirements for a certificate of qualification**

In order to be awarded a certificate of qualification, a participant should:

1. have a university degree in any discipline
2. have a target language proficiency rating no lower than Advanced High (ACTFL) or 2+ (ILR)
3. read all the assigned articles and chapters
4. participate in at least one workshop
5. submit the required papers
6. take the oral interview

This undertaking is expected to have the support of the profession represented by the American Association of Teachers of Arabic (AATA) and several institutions of higher education. The certificate may be issued by AATA or by a new entity created by a consortium of institutions interested in this effort.