



LANGUAGE LEARNING

# Profiles

Exclusive Licensor of Sony Language Learning Software



NORTHERN VALLEY REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

## HOW PROGRESSIVE TECHNOLOGY IN THE LANGUAGE LAB TRANSLATES INTO MORE PROGRESS FOR LANGUAGE STUDENTS.



If a choice of six foreign language courses plus ESL defines “progressive,” then the world language program at Northern Valley Regional High School (NVRHS) in Bergen County, New Jersey, definitely fits the bill. And aptly so, since both of the school’s two campuses, in Demarest and Old Tappan, were ranked in the top 30 schools in New Jersey in the 2011 “Ranking America’s High Schools” special issue by The Washington Post. Their language program consists of 22 instructors teaching Spanish, French, Latin, Italian, Japanese, Chinese and English as a second language to about 900 students in each high school. Many students come through middle school having taken Spanish, but at the high school level, students are presented with a rich variety of language options.

According to Jim Buoye, District Supervisor of World Languages at NVRHS, the ultimate goal of their world language program is to have students come out of the program being able to communicate in their chosen language. “Ideally we want to give them the foundation so they can continue into college and hopefully also use that language in their professional careers,” said Buoye.

NVRHS has two language labs, each consisting of 25 Mac® computer stations running dual-boot operating systems. This system has been successfully integrated

with the Sony Virtuoso™/Soloist® digital language lab software acquired and maintained through their local SANS reseller, Chester Technical Services, Inc. They recently upgraded from Virtuoso Apprentice to Virtuoso Minor software, because they wanted to focus on AP® testing and also expand their lab capabilities beyond recording to incorporate video and media sources. “Using technology to teach is what makes the lab great,” said Buoye, “because teachers can more easily utilize resources like YouTube, video clips, authentic text sources, and even use material they’ve created, which they can then push out to the students,” he added.

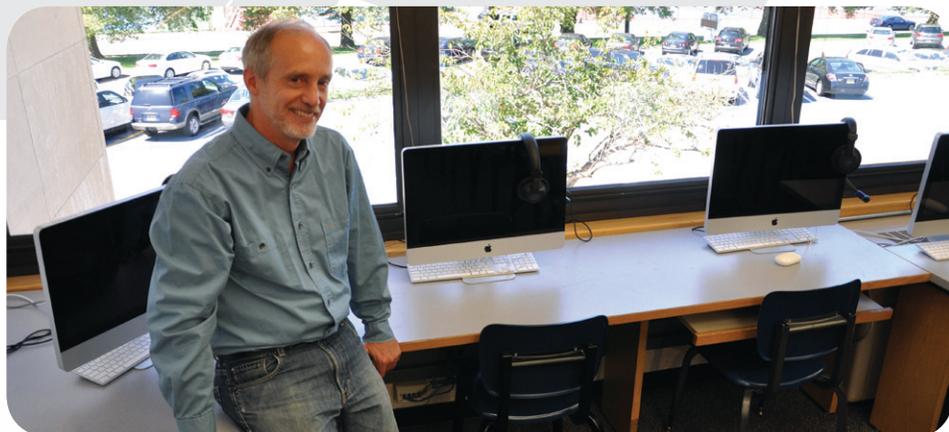
### Making the language lab accessible to all.

How have teachers reacted to the lab? The question Buoye hears most is, “Why can’t I get in more often?” His efficient method of setting up the lab schedule is to post it as a Google Doc™, so that all the teachers can log in. All classes have an assigned slot, but if a session becomes open, a teacher can simply sign up for the empty slot, without having to physically go to the lab. “The teachers really like it because they feel the students are much more comfortable speaking in the lab,” said Buoye.



*Northern Valley-Demarest is a center of effective teaching and productive learning. Our philosophy is to provide an environment in which each student seeks answers to questions, challenges assumptions, and develops self-worth.*

*We encourage individual academic excellence, aesthetic appreciation, and moral integrity. Recognition of academic and cultural diversity is encouraged to promote mutual respect and acceptance.*



## Speaking of 21st century skills...

Buoye believes that the language lab supports the 21st century skills approach to learning with the emphasis on students being able to successfully communicate in the target language. The motivation behind getting the Virtuoso language lab was to give students an opportunity to be recorded, to give teachers the ability to review those recordings, to assess them, and to give the students feedback. They were looking for the best tools to help them prepare their students for the real world. "Our kids are competing against the best and the brightest in Madrid, in Tokyo, and Beijing," said Buoye. "And rest assured, those students speak their language and English. So it really behooves us to have our kids learning other languages."

## Students are talking too.

For students, Buoye feels the lab is a natural transition. "Students are on their smart phones, their iPads®, or their computers at home all the time. That's just the environment they operate in. So when they come to the lab, it's almost like a breath of fresh air," said Buoye. "They feel very, very comfortable. In some cases the students are even more comfortable than the teachers are, because they're more accustomed to using technology on a daily basis. If students feel comfortable and relaxed, it makes it that much easier to get the content, get the learning across; they don't even realize that they are learning," he added.

Buoye cites that students like coming into the language lab because they can sit down at the computer and have access to authentic sources on the internet; they can view videos; they can speak and record; and they can practice individually or interact in pairs or in groups.

## Measuring progress with student portfolios.

Teachers at the NVRHS language labs use progressive student recordings as an effective teaching tool, not just for assessment but also for student self-reflection. When a student hears a lesson in June that was recorded the previous September or when a senior in AP Spanish hears recordings



made as a freshman, that student is able to hear the difference, gauge the progress, measure the growth, self-evaluate and even self-correct. "I have one teacher who records her class on the first day of school and every time her class is in the lab, so that each student has an individual portfolio, which can be reviewed at the end of the school year," said Buoye. "I know that students do really well when they listen to themselves. They pick up on both the good points and the progress that they've made and also the areas where they could improve," he added.

## Differentiated learning makes a difference.

Another feature of the Virtuoso lab is the ability to differentiate activities and tasks for different learning levels, including students with IEP and 504 plans. "As an example – you can send out the same prompt to all the students in the classroom, but put the students with IEPs into a separate group and give them more time for each one of the tasks," explained Buoye. "Or you can combine honors classes with lower level classes and send tasks to students according to their level of instruction."

One of the main goals of the NVRHS school district is to improve AP scores. As an example of how they hope to achieve this, Buoye and the language lab instructors plan to create Spanish 1 tests that mimic the AP tests but are geared to a Spanish 1 learning level, so that by the time the students get to the actual AP tests, they will be experienced with the process. "The students at the lower levels can be practicing what they will eventually be experiencing when they get to the AP class – but at a level that's appropriate for where they are in their language learning," said Buoye. "And I think, in the long run, that will help boost our district AP scores."

## Making the task of creating tasks – easy.

Another popular feature in the Virtuoso software is the ability for teachers to create tasks using their own voice and readily available resources. "It's very easy to do that," said Buoye. "For example, if I want to create a task in which I am asking questions to the students, I can use the Soloist digital recorder software to record those questions, save, and later go back in and add the amount of time for students to respond. I can add a picture or a video to that file if I want to. And the thing is – it's relatively easy to create. The ease with which you can create those tasks and share them, I think, is one of the nicest features of the Virtuoso software," he added.

## Professional development: the key to success.

Buoye believes that professional development is the key to getting the educational staff up and running and utilizing the lab to its full potential. "If you're thinking about acquiring a Virtuoso language lab, I would encourage you to also avail yourself of the opportunity for the professional development that SANS offers," explained Buoye. "I recently went to a training session, and it really opened my eyes to the potential of what the Virtuoso system can do," he said.

He also recommends the SANS webinars for teachers who can't attend on-site training. "Just in the short time that we've used the Virtuoso system, we've found the SANS staff to be very responsive. If we need customer support, they get back to us right away," said Buoye.



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