

# Speaking a New Language

For the 13th year, CALA summer institute offers unique way to quickly learn and teach foreign language

By Brian Roberts | Roberts is assistant director of the Center for Accelerated Language Acquisition and holds a Master of Arts in Teaching from MTSU.

A math coach from Franklin said "I learned more in this class than I learned in a semester of school."

One Spanish teacher from Blackman High School said the CALA approach "has revolutionized my thinking about language acquisition and instruction."

For the 13th year, the Summer Language Institute brought together students, teachers, and members of the MTSU and larger community to study the Center for Accelerated Language Acquisition's unique approach to teaching and learning world languages.

The series of five-day accelerated classes in various world languages was hosted at the Paul W. Martin Sr. Honors Building. New offerings—Japanese and Tamil (a common language in India)—joined Chinese, French, and Spanish this summer. CALA has also previously offered instruction in Arabic, German, and Latin.

In the CALA classroom, activities such as games, songs, and storytelling are used to engage in fun, relevant, repetitious, and social elements of language interaction similar to those characterized in early language learning.

The Summer Language Institute experience was called "a breath of fresh air—fun and exciting, as well

as educational," by the math coach, who added that "learning in context makes such a huge difference."

The Blackman teacher "experienced success with comprehension and production" every step of the way. "The varied, yet related activities held my interest and motivated me to learn more." Additionally, a Central Magnet language teacher was impressed how quickly students can attain fluency in a new language.

CALA came about when MTSU's Shelley Thomas, a French professor with nearly 40 years of experience,

embarked on a journey in 2001 to change the way of looking at and learning languages in a classroom setting. She began investigating new tools and techniques for helping students not only to learn about a new language, but also to acquire it—to feel and use the language naturally, as we do with our native language. Thomas, who

researched whole-brain learning, discovered activities that foster natural, stress-free language acquisition, and long-term retention by engaging both hemispheres of the brain.

Many deserving Rutherford County teachers and students had their tuition costs generously covered by the Jennings and Rebecca Jones Foundation.

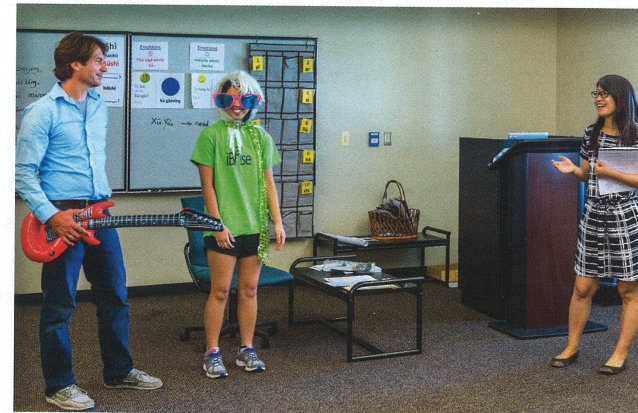


Tamil participants sit in a circle and touch vocabulary pictures called out by the instructor.

In addition to improving their language skills, some participants took advantage of the teacher training workshop, a 12.5-hour exploration of CALA's interactive teaching tools along with guided practice. Each year, CALA offers this program free as a professional service to K-12 and university teachers.

For instance, a technology teacher from Memphis-area Arrington plans to incorporate the impressive method more in the classroom, saying it helped with visualizing content and meaning.

The training CALA has provided teachers has received the attention of area administrators interested in implementing CALA's engaging, interactive approach to language learning in their own schools. The Webb School in Bell Buckle has invited CALA to train its entire foreign language department. In addition, the Tennessee Foreign Language Institute, which hires CALA-trained teachers, is now purchasing CALA textbooks. [T](#)



Chinese participants Alex Tyshkevych and Mary Mancuso have leading roles in a story designed for learners to practice their Chinese.



CALA's Spanish Part 1 class takes time out for a class photo.

## Breaking Down Language Barriers

**International instruction:** CALA's teacher training also reaches internationally through its partnership with the Confucius Institute. This summer, it continued its annual tradition of providing instruction and coaching in brain-based learning to English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers from universities in Inner Mongolia, China. An English teacher from Tongliao, Inner Mongolia, said the student-centered and effective methods are quite different from traditional methods in China and are welcome approaches.

**Translation help:** CALA partners with local organizations working to improve community connections and outcomes. Salvation Army Capt. Monica Seiler contacted CALA to assist with a much-needed translation effort for its Angel Tree Project, which provides holiday gifts to local families with financial need. CALA was able to translate forms and documents in order to facilitate the Salvation Army's work with local Latino families.

**Outreach for outside the walls:** CALA is also now a part of Doors of Hope, an organization offering training and material support to men and women nearing release from incarceration in Rutherford County. Maridel Williams, Doors of Hope founder, invited CALA to join the program by piloting Spanish classes to women. These efforts have been helpful in promoting successful transitions from incarceration to community life. [T](#)

**For more information** on CALA's community partnerships, year-round evening classes, teacher trainings, and language learning programs, please visit [mtsu.edu/cala](http://mtsu.edu/cala).