1) Hi, Chris! Thanks for coming by today. Let's start by you introducing yourself to the TCGIS Community. Who are you? What is your education? Where did you achieve this education? Where are you from?

I'm Chris Tabisz, originally from Silver Spring, Maryland. Aside from my 11th grade year at a *Gymnasium* in Bernau bei Berlin, I grew up and spent the first 22 years of my life in the Washington, DC, area.

I studied German and Linguistics at the University of Maryland in College Park before spending my Fulbright year teaching English in Schönebeck an der Elbe (just south of Magdeburg). Upon returning to the US, I went to the University of Wisconsin-Madison for my M.A. and Ph.D. in German Linguistics. My focus was in sociolinguistics: perceptual linguistics and linguistic profiling.

2) How has your first year at TCGIS been? What are some highlights of this first year?

I have been really enjoying my first year at TCGIS. I have loved getting to know the students, parents and teachers. I am so happy that the entire TCGIS community is so supportive of one another.

My highlights are the many wonderful projects that I have been able to do with the students. I have also enjoyed the simulations in class, like the *Bundestagswahlen* (German national elections) and the *Flüchtlingskrise* (refugee crisis).

3) Please discuss briefly 2-3 projects you've done with your students this year.

The first project was the *Bundestagswahlen* in the fall, and the entire middle school participated. The 6th, 7th and 8th graders did extensive research on the various political parties in Germany, the process of German elections and the setup of the German parliament. They created informational posters and advertisements for the six largest political parties. All middle schoolers had the chance to go to the polls and vote for their candidates and their political parties. We tried to make the entire process as authentic as possible with election notification letters and life-like ballots. The 8th graders acted as election officials afterward and counted the ballots and created graphs of what the German parliament would look like, had our students been able to vote.

The second project that the 6th graders really seemed to enjoy was the *individuelles sozialwissenschaftliches Forschungsprojekt* (ISF / individual social science research project). This was largely based on research projects that I had seen done at Wingra School in Madison, where I worked last school year. At that school, students in 1st grade begin individual research projects based on their own interests, and each year, these

projects become more developed, to the point of large presentations and term papers by 7th and 8th grade. The TCGIS 6th graders learned about many different social sciences and chose a specific social science topic to research. They spent about 2-3 weeks researching before preparing their presentations for the social science fair, where they gave short 20-30 second presentations about their research. Afterward, they had to write up their entire process and submit it. The 6th graders wrote in their reflections that they really enjoyed being able to choose their own social science topics according to their own interests.

4) I've observed you several times in class. I've been very impressed with your emphasis on the importance of creating thematically-organised teaching in your classroom. Talk about about your interest in thematically-organised units and how it helps students learn.

Ten years ago, I began my teaching career at Waldsee, the German Language Village in Bemidji, and I take a lot of my educational strategies from that philosophy, which strongly connects context with the material to be learned. The Concordia Language Villages focus mostly on language and culture education, but they merge many disciplines to make the learning noticeably relevant to the learners. There will always be times when the students will ask, "Why are we learning this?", but in these thematic units, they are able to bring together their knowledge and skills from various disciplines: art, science, German, etc. I have seen this model work well in the language-immersive setting at Waldsee and in a relatively normal school environment at Wingra School. In the end, the students seem to be more motivated and genuinely interested in the subject matter.

5) You seem to have a very special interest in the lives of young people, specifically 5th and 6th graders. How did this interest come about and what are a couple of specific connections you wish to make each year with your students?

I've taught German and English to students of many ages, kindergarteners through senior citizens. I love the energy and genuine motivation to learn that children bring with, but I also love the determination and individual interests that high schoolers, college students and adults have. In the years of teaching many different age groups in various educational settings in the US and Germany, I found that this middle school age seems to have a great mix of the children's energy and the more individualized focus in learning. My hope is to facilitate the students' learning by focusing on their individual and group interests, and as I said already, I believe that this is possible through the projects that we have been doing in class.

6) What hobbies do you enjoy? When you have free time, what do you enjoy doing?

Outside of work, I enjoy running, anything from short jogs around the lake to marathons. I also love being involved in culture and language groups. For several years, I have been involved in Scottish Country Dance groups, and since moving to the Cities, I have become involved with the Icelandic and Dutch cultural and language groups in Minnesota. As I am still relatively new to the area, I hope to keep exploring other running and multicultural opportunities in the Cities.

7) What is it you have come to appreciate in your first year working at TCGIS?

As I said before, I love the supportive nature of the staff, parents and students at TCGIS. Although I have seen bits of this in other work settings, it seems to be very strong in the TCGIS community. I truly appreciate that.

Chris, thanks for this interview!