

## From the Associate Editor

Andrew Ross  
University of Richmond



After watching coverage of the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy, I started to ponder my choice of career. It's not easy to be heroic when you run a language resource center (LRC): aside from enforcing the "no food or drink" policy, there's not a lot of confrontation or catching perpetrators in the act. I don't save lives, I don't foil nefarious plots, I don't bring comfort to the bereaved and injured in the course of my job. I run a language lab.

I thought some more, and finally came to a couple of conclusions that I'd like to share with you. The first is that what we do does in fact matter a great deal in the broader scheme of things. Many of us not only direct LRCs that provide instructional support to tens of faculty members and hundreds of students, but we also teach a variety of languages. Perhaps the greatest collective failing prior to September 11<sup>th</sup> was our national myopia concerning the need for language awareness, let alone language instruction. As Walter Pincus notes in his article on the House Select Committee on Intelligence report of October 2, 2001,

"The need for analysts and case officers with language skills and expertise in foreign areas was repeatedly emphasized by the panel. 'At the NSA and CIA, thousands of pieces of data are never analyzed, or are analyzed 'after the fact' because there are too few analysts; even fewer with the necessary language skills,' the committee said."

Now, obviously, not all of our institutions offer Pashtu, Farsi or even Arabic. Hence, we're not directly supportive of the present needs of the state, and we probably shouldn't be. LRCs provide much more than simple support for language instruction, though. We offer spaces within which students come into contact with languages that we don't teach – we rebroadcast SCOLA, we offer taped news broadcasts for our students and

faculty to use, we support multilanguage Web browsing, we offer the tools to learn to read and write in two-byte and right-to-left languages. Many of the epiphanic moments that constitute language learning and the building of cultural knowledge occur in our centers, as well as in the classroom. We as LRC directors have contact with a greater number and broader variety of students than most of our colleagues will ever see. We and our centers stand for the plurality of languages and cultures in ways that our teaching colleagues cannot, constrained as many of them are by the demands of individual curricula and administrative division. In other words, we are not the (Spanish) language resource center, nor are we the (Japanese) language resource center. We support all languages taught at our respective institutions, and we should offer access to as many others as we can, whether or not they comprise part of our department's current offerings.

My final conclusion was that LRC directors need to take the initiative to create ongoing, working relationships between our respective institutions, to share resources that will help our students to learn languages and cultures that may not be taught at our own schools. Of all our colleagues, we are the ones with the knowledge and the tools to make such collaborations possible. Some consortial groups are already beginning to form links between their constituent members; the Associated Colleges of the South, for example, is pursuing an initiative that will offer a Russian culture course and a searchable media archive to its member institutions. The MERLOT project is a shining example of the possibilities open to us as a profession. There are many other ongoing collaborations that will no doubt result in vastly improved networked instruction throughout secondary and higher education. IALL, and particularly the LLTI listserv, do a wonderful job of keeping us informed and giving us a sense of community.

I run a language lab – I don't save lives, I don't confront evil (except for those students who sneak fried chicken into my lab ...), I'm not a hero. But maybe my students and the kids who use my lab every day will be. Perhaps they'll begin to understand what we as a nation have not – that we are ineluctably joined to a greater world, that the world speaks a myriad of languages, and that we must seek to understand the world on its terms, not ours. ♦