
J.E.T.T. Interviews the President-Elect of the International Association for Learning Laboratories (IALL)

The President-Elect of IALL is Sue K. Otto, Associate Director of the University of Iowa's Language Media Center. In addition to her general administrative duties, she directs all the Center's video and computer-related activities, including the operation of a microcomputer cluster, an extensive videotape archive, and a video viewing facility. A language specialist, she studied Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, German, French, and Russian. She holds the B.S. degree in Modern Languages from Iowa State University and the M.A. (1972) and Ph.D (1977) degrees in Spanish from the University of Iowa; she has taught Spanish at the high school and university levels.

For the past seven years, Sue Otto has worked in foreign language CAI research and development, generating interactive materials for English, Spanish, French, German, Russian, and Italian. She gives many presentations and workshops on CAI and teaches a course in foreign language CAI. Her current projects include development of a videodisc image retrieval program, a Portuguese reading package, a database for archival video materials, and interactive video software for the Project for International Communication Studies—for which she also serves as technical coordinator.

The Editors of J.E.T.T. interviewed Dr. Otto on December 23, 1986.

J.E.T.T.: *Tell us something about yourself.*

Otto: When I began teaching Spanish in a small Iowa high school in 1969, I never imagined that ten years later I would have a new career in mediated foreign language instruction. In fact, it was not until 1977, while finishing my doctoral dissertation in Spanish stylistics at the University of Iowa, that I even considered doing anything other than teaching Spanish. At that time, strictly for economic reasons, I took a 1/4-time graduate assistantship to develop computer-assisted instruction (CAI) materials in Spanish. Because of institutional support emerging for technologies and because of my interest in the field, the position and I became permanent, first as the Program Associate for Foreign Language CAI and later as Associate Director of the University of Iowa Media Center and Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. In addition to my general administrative duties, I direct all the Center's video and computer-related activities, including the operation of a microcomputer cluster, videotape archive, and video viewing facility. I teach a course called BASIC Programming for Foreign Language CAI and am involved in a number of research and development projects including development of video resources and interactive video software for PICS (the Project for International Communication Studies).

J.E.T.T.: *How long have you been a member*

of IALL and when were you chosen to be its new President-Elect?

Otto: I joined IALL five years ago. Of course at that time the organization was known as NALLD (National Association for Language Laboratory Directors). I became President-Elect in May of 1986.

J.E.T.T.: *How would you describe the mission/purpose of IALL?*

Otto: In my view, the mission of IALL is to facilitate the exchange of information among our colleagues who use technology in language learning and take an active role in promoting effective applications of that technology. Through the journal and sponsorship of sessions at national conferences, IALL performs several functions: disseminates information on current methods, materials, and equipment for mediated language learning, stimulates dialogue between language media professionals, and provides a forum for examining new research directions. In addition to the journal and conference sessions, IALL offers a unique benefit to its members in the form of free consultation service for planning new facilities or renovating old ones.

J.E.T.T.: *When you take office, what do you hope to accomplish?*

Otto: My goals for the organization are much the same as those of Glyn Holmes who is currently the President of IALL. Our energies are directed toward building and broadening the membership, supporting the journal editor in her efforts to revitalize the journal, and in general, encouraging communication among those of us working with language-related media.

J.E.T.T.: *What do you consider the most important issue of your upcoming term of office?*

Otto: Successfully recruiting informative, worthwhile presentations for the ACTFL and CALICO conferences. The sessions constitute one of the more visible aspects of IALL as an organization and, by and large, these sessions have been very well received. I feel very good about that.

J.E.T.T.: *Why do you want to serve as president?*

Otto: I was attracted by the prospect of working for the organization that exists for my specific interests. I feel that IALL has great potential to make a significant contribution to the field of technology and language instruction.

J.E.T.T.: *What are the duties and responsibilities of the IALL's top office?*

Otto: During my two-year term, I am specifically charged with recruiting media-related presentations for national meetings. Right now, we have cooperative agreements with ACTFL and CALICO for their annual meetings, but we hope to expand to other organizations such as TESOL or the Northeast Conference as the IALL membership grows. The task of finding presenters involves a considerable amount of research and telephoning, but it's a great way to get to know who's out there and what they are doing.

J.E.T.T.: *From your perspective, what do you see as the next wave in language learning laboratories?*

Otto: In recent years, the traditional single-medium (audio) language laboratory facilities have been transformed at many institutions into language resource centers that offer a variety of media including audio, video, and computer. If the realities of language learning laboratories follow current research and development, the next wave computer technology will merge with audio and video equipment on a broad scale to provide intensive individualized work with language materials. The lab will not only serve the listening and speaking skills but the reading and writing skills as well.

J.E.T.T.: *How would you define the role of the computer in the language learning lab?*

Otto: The role of the computer in the language learning lab is twofold: as an administrative tool and as an instructional tool. Since lab administrators must contend with budgets, personnel records, correspondence, me-

dia library cataloguing and circulation, and facilities planning and management, many have begun to computerize operations using a whole repertoire of programs that include word processors, spreadsheets, and database managers. In addition, computers have come into many labs as delivery systems for instruction. The most widespread instructional use of the computer at present is a kind of electronic workbook with which students practice and test grammar and vocabulary skills. Computers are also quite well-suited to reading and composition activities, simulations (games, problem-solving activities and the like), and tutorial presentations. Beyond this, computers can be used to control audio and video machines. The advantages of merging the computer with audio and video materials are that the computer can provide precise, flexible control in playing and replaying any portion of the program, built-in help for the student (glossaries, hints, transcriptions, etc.), comprehension checking mechanisms, and usage and performance recordkeeping. I could go on and on, but I won't.

J.E.T.T.: *There are those who criticize the language lab as never having fulfilled its promise to relieve the drudgery of drill and practice. How do you respond to this?*

Otto: My usual response to this is a groan followed by a very lengthy, carefully-worded speech about the old days of behaviorist linguistics and how we've come a long way since. But for you, the short version—no groans. In general, I think that those criticisms belong to the old methodologies, unrealistic expectations, poor materials, and the people who misapplied them rather than to the language laboratory per se. As with anything new, it takes time to research and develop proper techniques and decent materials for any new technology. There are excellent, im-

aginative, effective language laboratory materials available now that engage the student's mind and provide authentic and instructive language experiences. The persistence of language laboratory technology and the renewal of interest in language media of all types are as good an indication as any that the language laboratory is here to stay and has a significant contribution to make to the language learning process.

J.E.T.T.: *As a member of IALL, what would you say to a prospective member to get him or her to join?*

Otto: The benefits that IALL offers are definitely worth the modest membership fee: a journal that provides up-to-date information on a variety of topics about the rapidly-changing and sometimes bewildering technologies that confront us all; help from experienced colleagues in evaluating and selecting machines and materials; and a link with other professionals who face the same problems and issues in applying technology to language learning.

J.E.T.T.: *As you well know, there are many organizations for educators. What's unique about IALL?*

Otto: It is the only organization for language professionals who work with all kinds of instructional technology. We are a combination of high-tech and language pedagogy, and that is where we differ from other organizations.

J.E.T.T.: *Where do former IALL presidents go and what do they do?*

Otto: Some go on to lead productive lives; others just reel away and nobody hears from them again.

J.E.T.T.: *We doubt that any of our readers will believe that Sue Otto will just reel away and never be heard from again.*