

SECONDARY SCHOOL UPDATE

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I am pleased to have been asked to serve as the columnist for the secondary school column. As a frequent attendee at conferences and workshops, I have long felt that secondary schools need a greater voice in organizations dealing with language learning and technology. The practices and needs of secondary schools vary greatly from those of higher education in many areas. Since the 1992 ACTFL Conference when my department served as a technology demonstration center, I have received calls and inquiries about a variety of issues of concern to secondary educators. A few of these areas which secondary schools are trying to adapt to their environments are as follows:

- lab planning and installation
- lab management
- distance learning
- less commonly taught language instruction
- satellite dish installation and use
- proficiency activities for the lab and classroom
- outcome based education
- appraisal objectives
- hardware and software appropriate for demonstration and independent work
- conferences applicable to secondary language instruction

This list only begins to deal with relevant issues.

My hope for this column is that many of you will share information, reviews, short-cuts, etc., with the rest of us. Since time is a critical factor for middle and high school teachers who teach five or more classes per day, any help we can give each other will save time and frustration. My initial plan is to deal with one main topic per column plus any interesting items of information I may come across dealing with technology or any of the issues listed above. I urge you to submit any materials you may have already written or would like to write for inclusion under your name in this column.

How to Plan for a Lab

This first column is perhaps a departure from those which will follow. Since, however, the information I am most frequently asked for is how one begins to set up, decide on equipment for, and develop the plans for a new or renovated language lab, I thought I would begin with an exploration of this topic.

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What do we need?

The first step toward the development of a lab is to determine up-front what needs you would like the equipment to fulfill:

1. *Is the lab to be used as an alternate classroom or as a resource area as well?* This answer will help you determine your basic area needs, number of positions you can accommodate, and the type of set-up you will develop.
2. *Will staff be expected to operate the equipment themselves or will help be available?* This information will lead you to research how user friendly the equipment needs to be, or cause you to consider what a lab manager can do to expand the resources in the facility. The secondary lab installations I am familiar with all include a console for teacher control of student operations. Since most secondary schools use the lab as a teaching station first of all and secondarily as a resource area for students to do independent work, purchase of a console is almost a given. Secondary school labs do not necessarily have a lab manager or director on site; many rely on teacher operation of the lab during their regularly assigned classes.
3. *Is the lab to be primarily a testing site?* If so, the method of student audio input retrieval that the lab equipment is capable of becomes very important. Will the equipment allow you to retrieve student audio through set times or by voice sensing their responses on their tapes? You will also need to give some thought as to whether the test item analyzers that are available with several types of equipment are something that you want to budget for. If you would like students to see their results immediately on individual test items, some of the equipment is capable of this function.

4. *What kinds of instructional techniques will your staff want to use?* Do you need program transfer to tape capabilities (from the console to individual cassettes at student stations)? Should the equipment allow students to be put in groups or pairs, either randomly or in assigned pairings? How many different functions can the equipment accommodate at once? In how many groups will the equipment allow you to place students? Do you wish to have audio and video output capabilities and how many of each at the same time? Can several teachers be accommodated by the equipment to work independently with students through the console at the same time? Do you wish your lab to be equipped with computers as well, or do you have other facilities in your school which could handle this demand for you?

A survey of your department can serve to provide you with many of the answers to these questions and also encourage those who might be neutral or negative toward the addition of a language lab to consider the possibilities for expansion of their instructional techniques which a lab will provide.

Selection of equipment:

After you have analyzed the needs of your staff, you will be well on your way to selecting the particular equipment you want. Contact representatives of the systems you are interested in. Be advised that once you take this initial step, you will be the object of unflagging attention until you make your purchase. Lab equipment is a highly competitive market, and you will be subject to information about a representative's product and misinformation about that of his or her competitor. Ask for the names of schools that have recently installed the products and call these schools to arrange for visits. The major players in the lab equipment

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market have good products that vary in their particular capabilities. Your selection should be based on what you need; many schools are happy with either of the two major systems available.

Ask the schools you visit about the durability of the equipment. Since all equipment will eventually need repair because of the heavy use it encounters, find out whether major repairs have been needed. The first situation will cause you to close down your lab; the second can be handled fairly easily by purchasing extra recorders and exchanging them yourself so you can send the defective one in for repairs with no down time. Lab equipment suppliers establish a partnership with a company that provides installation and repair services for them in regional areas. Ask the schools you visit who that service agent is, how long it takes for the company to respond to their request for repair, and how satisfied they are with the service they get. This factor alone may help you decide on a particular product if your decision is a close one.

Several of the companies provide in-service training for staff on the use of equipment through workshops. Sometimes they will also hold training sessions on equipment repair for local school AV personnel. You will find that you need at least one person in your school who understands the capabilities of the equipment and is able to analyze the situation well enough to determine if out-of-house repairs are needed or whether they can be handled in-house. This person should also understand the various capabilities of the console and be able to train others on an as-needed basis. Staff respond to the technology of the equipment in various degrees of readiness and also in their abilities to develop instructional techniques to incorporate the strengths of the equipment with their classroom objectives.

The Physical Arrangement:

Once a lab equipment supplier has been decided on, representatives will help you determine how to accommodate the equipment to the uses and space that you have. IALL also has a lab planning kit that you can purchase to help you determine the best physical configuration. (*See page 90 for ordering information.*)

The laboratory can be configured as an alternate classroom to which teachers bring classes on a predetermined schedule for practice and instruction. There is a variety of ways to configure such a space so that either the console or students are elevated. Elevation of the console allows for better teacher/lab manager supervision as well as better eye contact with all students. Student stations can be elevated to provide for a lecture room configuration so that students can view monitors or video projections at a more comfortable angle than looking up at a monitor.

Lab furniture such as carrels is usually available from the equipment distributor. Lab carrel sides come in a variety of heights. If pairing or group work are activities that you value, you may well want to install lower walls so students can establish eye contact with one other. Carpeted carrel side panels will minimize damage to student headsets. Most equipment will allow you to limit student access to the tape in the individual recorders, but you might also want to make sure that headset cords are secured so they are difficult to twist by nervous students taking an oral exam. Lab carrels also come in a variety of widths, the wider carrels being capable of accommodating computers as well as the audio equipment and video monitors.

Glenbrook South High School Language Lab

When I developed the plan for Glenbrook South's Language Laboratory, I wished to have the area serve as a resource center as well as an audio/video lab classroom. Our lab is configured with the lab equipment at one end with two wall-mounted 27" monitors and four carrels equipped with 10" monitors for individual student work or make-up. The console is on a platform for better visibility. We have a dual console arrangement with a total of 40 carrels so that we can accommodate a variety of needs. Since our maximum class size is 30 in foreign language, we can accommodate several small classes, a large class and independently working students, a mixed level advanced class, etc., with two adults at the console. At the opposite end of the lab, we have two interactive laserdisc stations for student use and faculty development of materials, six Mac computers for student software use, and a satellite feed station with VCR and tape duplication equipment, several seminar tables, a modem/phone/computer set-up, and the lab manager's station. This arrangement provides for resources in addition to the standard lab equipment and encourages the acquisition of authentic materials through the satellite and on-line set-ups. The single most important element in making the lab function as a resource center is the lab manager, a support staff position like those found in our computer labs and resource centers. I hope to discuss the role of such a position more fully in a future column.

The following are some other items which were kept in mind as the lab configuration was planned. An area for student backpack/book storage was set aside since the aisle space between rows of carrels is limited, and the backpacks will scratch the lab carrels as students take the packs off. We ensured that disabled students would have carrels that are accessible to them; the last row opens onto sufficient space to accommodate wheelchairs. The room itself has two doorways to provide a better traffic pattern. If two classes are sharing a period, one door is used for entering and the other for leaving. The rear door is used for non-class students so that their entrance and exit does not distract the classes working with their teachers on the console side of the lab. A small portion of lab funds was set aside for aesthetics and the purchase of pictures, plants, etc., to personalize the area.

This column has discussed the beginning elements of the selection and installation of a language laboratory in a secondary school. Later topics that might be pursued are the role of the lab manager, uses for lab equipment, instructional techniques appropriate to the lab, and other technology suitable for secondary foreign language instruction. I would welcome your comments, suggestions, and input.

Contributions/suggestions for the "Secondary Update" column may be sent directly to Sue Salay at Glenbrook South High School, 4000 W. Lake Ave., Glenview, IL 60025, FAX (708) 729-0310, or electronic mail: gbsfl@class.org