Language Media: An Article Series

Language Media: Our Professional Future

by Nina Garrett, CTW Mellon Project

[Editor's Note: With this issue, IALL Acting President Nina Garrett inaugurates a series of "keynote articles" on the role of the language media center and the future of the language media profession.]

Introduction

I'm honored by the invitation to start off the *IALL Journal's* new series of "thought pieces" with some of my own thoughts on our profession, and I hope that all of the articles in this series will lead to a good deal of discussion on paper, in our regional meetings, at FLEAT III / IALL '97, and on-line.

This is a time of transition—for many of us as individual professionals, for the institutions where we work, for the complex field in which we operate, and thus inevitably also for IALL itself, as a professional organization representing us and that field. What I'd like to do here is raise some fundamental questions about how we as individual professionals, and we as IALL, want to shape our role in the academic world in the coming years. I don't pretend to have the answers—and indeed I doubt that any general answers can be found that would apply to all of us. As the *IALL Lab Management Manual's* module on "The Role and Job Description of the Learning Resource Center Director" makes clear, we are a group with astonishingly diverse backgrounds, academic situations, and responsibilities. (I hope that all of you will avail yourselves of this very rich publication; even if you already know everything that's in it—and few of us would dare to claim that—you'll find it a useful resource in making points to your administrators!) I want to start us thinking beyond the roles and job descriptions discussed there,

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exploring the implications of some current trends and taking a hard look at our professional future. I've laced the thinking with queries which I hope will stimulate your thinking, or provoke you into arguing with me if I make unwarranted generalizations.

Advanced Technology Qualifications

First, though, I want to make a familiar point that must be made often and forcefully. It goes without saying that the increasingly rapid rate of change in the technology itself is creating demands that many of us were not trained to meet. That fact is sometimes used by administrators as a reason for "redefining" the language lab director's position and opening up a search for it in such a way that the incumbent is effectively made ineligible. This practice is not only blatantly unfair; it is also blatantly stupid, because the institution thus deprives itself of the most important aspects of the experience and expertise of its director. Even if new equipment and capabilities—computers, multimedia, networking, Web access, etc.—are being added to the language center, in-depth technical expertise should not be the most important criterion for the position. Our experience in managing facilities, in training and supervising student help, in planning budgets, and most of all in working with language/humanities faculty and students to support and educate them in integrating any technology into teaching and learning, is absolutely essential. Such experience is very seldom to be found in graduates of instructional technology programs—not necessarily even in teachers who have developed considerable expertise in materials development or in integrating technology into their own teaching. Still, language center directors who haven't yet been able to acquire basic familiarity with advanced technologies should insist that their institutions provide them with enough training so that they are comfortable with the day-to-day management and operation of new facilities and provide them with the necessary assistance, because it would be short-sighted and counter-productive to resist the move to include digital technologies in our facilities.

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As a footnote to the suggestion that many language technology directors need more training, though, let me emphasize that we also need to be articulate about the importance of our own particular specialized technical expertise. Instructional technologists and academic computing support staff seldom have experience in dealing with intensively interactive audio. They are right in believing that in principle we can do everything with digitized audio that we have been able to do with tape, but they tend to have very little awareness of

what it takes to deliver the audio capabilities that language learning requires—the high level of interactivity, the sound quality, the need to switch around among audio sources, the ability to record, etc. Whether we are giving up our tape facilities or moving computers into them to co-exist until the materials development effort catches up, we must insist on maintaining the audio services that our faculty count on, and information technology people may not know as much about this aspect of technology as they think they do.

How can incumbent directors without high-tech experience get the training they need to add to their current expertise when their labs acquire computers? Who among you has succeeded in acquiring such training, and how did you do it? How could IALL help? If IALL were able to conduct summer institutes providing such training, would your institutions pay for you to attend?

Expanded Clientele

Beyond the constantly increasing complexity of the hardware we must deal with, we face other changes. Quantitatively, the number of programs and faculty using technology is rising rapidly—and not only in language but across the academy. It is ironic, given America's notorious public disdain for foreign language learning, that we in language education are becoming highly visible because among all the disciplines we are the ones who most obviously know how—and perhaps more importantly why—we want to make use of multimedia in our teaching. As a result, growing institutional emphasis on integrating technology use into undergraduate teaching often has the effect of putting language labs in the spotlight. Institutions wanting multimedia showplaces for their campuses sometimes urge or even impose new technology on their language programs, whether or not the language faculty have well-thought-out plans for using it. Another consequence is that many of us who have in the past supported only language departments are now being asked to create or direct facilities supporting all humanities technology. Sometimes this is an effort to streamline services—audio-visual services as well as computing—for faculty who are increasingly demanding "one-stop shopping." (The aforementioned *Management Manual* module also contains an excellent discussion of the vexing issue of whether computing or technical specialists without any background in language pedagogy can or should direct technology facilities which serve language education with or without equal commitment to other disciplines.) But the management of facilities with such an expanded mandate not only takes much more staff, but also sets up an entirely different politi-

cal relationship for us. We are asked to serve new constituencies, support more materials development projects in disciplines we're not familiar with, and train faculty who may have much less sense of how to integrate students' outside-of-class technology use into their teaching than do language teachers who take language lab use for granted.

Who among you has been faced with this need to expand clientele? What does it take to do so successfully? Can the special needs of languages continue to be met? What are the problems or obstacles? What were/are your campus' strategies for such expansion?

General and Specialized Facilities

The problems that this trend causes are not only quantitative ones. If they were, the challenge to us would be mostly one of securing adequate space and adequate budgets for hardware, software, and staff support—and as we all know, that challenge alone would be more than enough to keep us awake nights. Much more problematic are the qualitative changes in the demands that are being made on us and the widespread lack of understanding of these changes on the part of those who need us—both as to what we can and should be doing for them, and as to what kinds of institutional and disciplinary support must be in place if we are to address their needs.

Most language centers with more than a few computers can no longer exist independently of the academic computing services. Installing and debugging software (especially software in languages like Japanese and Chinese, Hebrew and Arabic), maintaining full interactivity with laserdisk players, CD-ROM drives, printers, scanners, and devices for digitizing and editing video and audio, and most of all maintaining a network that manages all this, requires a level of expertise to which many senior IALL members cannot aspire. That fact requires us to establish new administrative and technical alliances which are often highly political and problematic—and ones with which our traditional departmental allies are inexperienced as well. We must develop new working relationships with information technology staff, getting the support we need—hardware maintenance, repair, and upgrading, networking management—without letting them take charge of our pedagogical agenda, which they are not necessarily prepared to fully appreciate. (Academic computing staff should certainly not be seen as "the enemy," but those trained in generic instructional technology, even humanities computing, cannot be assumed to understand the special challenges of supporting interactive language learning.) How these new relationships are to be established

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and how the responsibilities should be divided up will be different on every campus, but we must anticipate this need and plan for it. On many campuses language labs have existed in a kind of protected enclave, answerable to the language department[s] but not closely related to other units, and in such cases we may have been essentially independent of much of campus politics. But that era is over, and we imperil ourselves and our enterprise if we don't accept that and adjust our own politics accordingly.

Regardless of whether you direct a language facility or a broader-purpose one, how do you (those of you whose facilities include a major component of high-tech) handle the maintenance, repair, network management, etc.? Do you yourself have the experience, or do you have enough experienced staff, to handle it in-house? If not, how do you work with your academic computing support units to complement your direction of the facility?

Spaces vs. Distributed Facilities

But we need to think even further ahead, past the issue of whether "our space" is to be dedicated to language learning or opened up to other disciplines. We need to anticipate that in the not-too-distant future our facilities may to a considerable extent disappear as dedicated physical spaces. Many campuses now have central servers and networks connecting libraries, dorms, and classrooms, so that students can accomplish much of their textual computing without coming into general purpose computing labs. As yet, however, we can't easily or inexpensively deliver multimedia over these networks, and we can't count on all our students having audio and video capabilities on their dorm or home computers, but those obstacles will disappear within the next few years. At the point when campuses have a fair number of networked classrooms capable of receiving and showing multimedia, they are likely to stop maintaining specialized facilities. And we won't be able to prevent language labs from disappearing simply by voicing indignant protest; we need to articulate cogent reasons why they should continue.

What are those reasons? How do we articulate them so as to identify an ongoing role for ourselves? Should we stop referring to ourselves as language lab or center directors, so as make our positions independent of physical spaces? How will faculty and student support demands change when there is less need to visit a physical space to use language technology?

Expanded Support Demands

Traditionally we've seen ourselves as supporting faculty and their students not only by maintaining facilities and services, but also by training them to use them well, within

the scope of the faculty's own pedagogical goals and pur-
poses. When audiotape and videotape were the only tech-
nologies we were responsible for, faculty training was hardly
needed for anything technically more difficult than running
a console. But the use of computers, multimedia, the Web,
etc., is vastly more complicated, controversial, and threaten-
ing for teachers, and the responsibility for training them to
use advanced technologies, or perhaps even to develop new
technology-based materials, radically changes our relation-
ship with them. What are the roles and responsibilities we
are taking on?

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In many cases we have become the primary general tech
support for faculty learning to use advanced technologies.
Even when the campus academic computing staff offer
general or discipline-specific faculty workshops on using
word-processors, e-mail, the Web, spreadsheets, or databases,
writing home pages, scanning, digitizing and editing audio
and video, etc., it is not at all unusual for language faculty to
request such workshops instead from language center staff,
because they find our presentation style more
comprehensible. We and our student staff are regularly asked
to make faculty "house calls"—installing and debugging
pedagogical, authoring, and font software on their office
computers, making their printers work, hooking them to the
network, showing them how to surf the Web and write home
pages, etc. These demands are likely to continue to increase,
regardless of what facilities we direct.

*Do we have the staff to meet these demands? Do we want this
basic support to be our responsibility, or should we delegate it to
campus computing and use our resources to deliver language-
specific support? Does your academic computing staff hire
discipline-specific technology support? Or does your campus fund
faculty technology mentors or "distributed gurus"? Or do you play
this role yourself?*

Support Roles

In addition to the several other roles referred to in the
Management Manual module—"personal trouble-shooters,"
"gophers," lab-class baby-sitters—many of us are asked to
become research assistants to the faculty: finding out what
software is out there that they might want to use, locating
Web sites for them, reading a variety of listserves and
forwarding information of interest to them, as well as
collecting data on how their students are using technology
and making those data available and meaningful to them.
We may be their teaching assistants as well: administering
audio- or video-based tests, running video-viewing sessions

for regular or occasional class hours, training their students to use the technology to carry out their homework assignments, and training student assistants to do tech support for faculty.

Are these responsibilities becoming common? Does your position description include them? What kind of support do you need to carry them out without their being an imposition on all your other responsibilities?

Changing Pedagogical Support Needs

But perhaps the most far-reaching change in our relationship with the faculty is likely to come as a result of the increasing fusion of technology and pedagogy. In the past it hasn't been our responsibility to educate the faculty in the pedagogy of using technology—or at least it hasn't been since the proliferation of language labs in the 1950s and 1960s along with the surge of ALM methodology. The pedagogical integration of audio materials is a topic generally covered in teacher preparation courses and methodology textbooks, and it is supported by the teachers' manuals that accompany the textbooks and audiotapes. Efficient and pedagogically productive use of video may not be quite so obvious to neophyte teachers, but there is by now ample literature and pedagogical guidance on how to use video in class—choosing short enough clips, giving students pre-viewing assignments so they will learn what is intended from them, and developing post-viewing discussions and activities based on them.

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However, when it comes to using computers, multimedia, and the Web, teachers need far more than training in how to use the hardware and how to install the software. They also need a new in-depth understanding of how technology use affects teaching and learning. Very few teachers have had any pre-service training, or more than an occasional conference workshop session, in how to evaluate the pedagogical value of existing software, how to think about pedagogical design when they want to author software, how to integrate students' outside-of-class technology use into their curriculum, or how to evaluate what technology use is accomplishing for their students. Even more problematic is the anxiety voiced to me by some of the faculty taking advantage of the CTW Mellon Project for Language Learning and Technology that I direct—that a surprisingly high number of post-secondary language faculty have had little or no training in pedagogy at all. Many are native speakers of the languages they teach, and many of these have become truly excellent teachers by virtue of their personal qualities, intuitions, and classroom experience. Most of those who are not native speakers—equally talented in

many different ways—earned their doctorates as literature students, teaching language sections to earn their way, often with minimal pedagogical training or supervision. Some of the faculty at CTW tell me that when I ask how they prefer to teach which skill, or what kinds of language learning they think their textbooks do not address adequately, or what pedagogical problems they would like technology to help them address, so that I can suggest appropriate ways for them to get into using technology, they don't have the training, the professional vocabulary, or the insight into their pedagogy to be able to answer me.

The prevailing attitude is still that advanced technologies simply offer either a new way to deliver materials or activities which teachers already know how to offer in other media (with the goal of freeing up class time to devote to communicative activities), or that they enhance or add time-on-task and input, especially with authentic materials that improve cultural awareness. From that perspective, our responsibility may still be limited to supporting existing approaches to teaching and learning. But there is a growing sense—and an increasing body of research to confirm that sense—that genuinely integrated use of sophisticated interactive technologies can do much more than merely extend a conventional curriculum. It can change the relationship between what learners do on their own outside of class and what they do with the teacher in class. Even more important, it can change the way language learning happens. Many teachers are reluctant to accept these implications of technology, resisting the idea that the capabilities of the gadgetry should be taken to have pedagogical significance beyond their fit with the tried and true. But those who are aware of this kind of potential are likely to turn to us for help. And it is altogether likely that in the not-too-distant future we will be asked to collaborate with faculty in carrying out research as well—not only research on the efficacy of using technology to support language learning, but also pedagogical research in which the computer collects student data in the performance of a wide variety of pedagogical activities, and second language acquisition research as well, thus becoming research partners with language faculty.

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If the faculty members with whom we work have had little or no training in basic language pedagogy, let alone training in thinking about the ways technology use affects pedagogy, how do you support them? How do help them develop appropriate pedagogical activities based on technology use? Do your faculty want this kind of help? Are you recognized as pedagogical partners with the faculty, or are you simply asked to provide the facility within which they

carry out their own pedagogy without realizing that technology use can and should change it? Do you need training to fill this role? Can/do you run workshops or bring in outside presenters to suggest these possibilities?

New Professional Identities

Of course there is often a mismatch between the job descriptions according to which many of us were originally hired and what we've been doing for years, but today's searches are increasingly problematic, as the often heated responses to them on LLTI testify. We are the ones who should be educating search committees as to how the job descriptions for today's and tomorrow's language technology directorships should be worded.

What responsibilities do you want that you don't now have? What responsibilities do you have that should not be assigned to you ? How should your time be allocated? By what criteria should your performance be evaluated?

What training do you need (pre-service, in-service) to be able to assume those responsibilities? What summer institutes should be offered? What released time would you need to work with academic computing people on campus to get up to speed? What kind of computer and networking capabilities, and what management software tools, do you need to manage the job appropriately?

What staffing support do you need to free you up to take on new responsibilities? What new staff positions should be funded?

Do you know the directors of other discipline-specific computing labs on campus (social sciences, physical sciences)? What kinds of departmental and institutional support do they get? Are they comparable to you in status, budget, number of faculty or students supported, staff lines?

Is there institutional funding for staff development ? Can you run workshops, bring in presenters, run a mini-conference? (Hosting a meeting of the local IALL affiliate organization can be a way of raising visibility and prestige.)

If you agree that our profession is moving in some of the directions I've suggested above, what implications do you see for how our positions should be conceived, described, and supported in the future? How do we see ourselves as professionals?

Supporting New Learning Missions

But the questions that we need to ask ourselves go well beyond those that can be expressed in terms of the job description or responsibilities. If we are to develop a clear picture of where we are headed as a profession, we will need to consider broader curricular and institutional changes.

In many institutions the responsibilities of language faculty and departments are also changing. The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) in Washington, DC. and the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) are conducting (with Luce Foundation funding) the Language Mission Project, in which sixteen institutions of all scopes and sizes are examining the purposes which their administrations, faculty, and students want language education to serve. These self-study projects are finding rising demands for content-based language learning and languages-across-the-curriculum to complement international education, for expanded offerings in the Less Commonly Taught Languages, for programs meeting the special needs of heritage learners (those who speak a home language other than English but can't read or write it), for language proficiency in a variety of professional areas, for pedagogically responsible distance learning. All of these shifts in the conventional structures supporting language programs create enormous opportunities for new uses of technology to support language learning, and thus potentially create new roles for and demands on us.

How is the enterprise of language education changing on your campus, and what role can technology play in new initiatives? Should the nature of the language technology center on this campus change? Or the role of its director?

Campus Politics

What political arenas are you entering? Whose agenda are you supporting or threatening, within our constituent departments, in other departments, or in academic computing? Does the administration want to push the language department[s] to do technology? How do the literature faculty see technology? Does the administration hope that computers can replace teachers? Do the adjuncts, or the faculty, *believe* that technology is intended to replace them? Does the campus have a foreign language requirement or not, and if so what kind of requirement? Do faculty in other departments want or oppose a requirement? Is technology seen as a way to address problems with enrollments in courses or programs with too many or too few students?

Do you know the development office people, so that you'll hear about requests for proposals from funding agencies and can ask for searches to be done for funding opportunities from local foundations? Are there grant-writing workshops you could attend? Do you know who in other departments might be interested in doing Foreign Languages Across the Curriculum (FLAC) projects? Do you know who is on the campus Promotion and Tenure Committee and how they regard lan-

guage teaching, how they regard technology work? Does the faculty handbook have any language in it about recognizing technology-based work in promotion and tenure dossiers? Are you allowed to be an activist supporters of your faculty users of technology on the campus level?

There are various efforts we can make to solidify our standing as significant players. We can take the initiative to talk over changes on the campus and the national scene with our faculty colleagues in the language departments, in International Programs, in other departments whose students need languages. We can let it be known that we are active members of a professional organization, that we are aware of what is going on in comparable institutions around the country, that we are ready and able to help our institutions take the right steps to strengthen a range of language education initiatives. We can read the *IALL Journal* and LLTI, as well as other relevant lists (AAHESGIT, the technology-oriented listserve of the American Association of Higher Education, is an unusually thoughtful forum for the discussion of technology use in higher education generally) and forward interesting messages to language faculty, administrators, and academic computing staff.

Career Definitions and Preparation

I should like to urge that we also think about the future of our profession independent of our own careers, and ask ourselves (1) how it is being defined in today's job searches, and (2) where our successors—the candidates in those searches—are coming from. There are major problems in both areas.

As regards (1), the demand for trained language technology professionals is burgeoning astonishingly; a regular fountain of job ads has been spouting on LLTI. We're all familiar with the "walk on water" job ads, which demand an impossible combination of different kinds of expertise and all too often offer a derisively low level of compensation. At least, with these, it's possible to address the misconceptions, to spell out rational objections to the irrational demands. More difficult to address are the job descriptions which spell out a status quo (or even a retrogressive) concept of the roles that today's (let alone tomorrow's) language technology director is expected to play. I have in the past occasionally taken the time to answer such a job ad, trying with the utmost diffidence and diplomacy to explain why the position as described was not well conceived. But once the ad has appeared, it's usually too late to change the nature of the search. We're all, sadly enough, aware of how many search committees and institutions seeking to expand or improve their language tech-

nology capabilities know nothing about IALL and can't avail themselves of the resources IALL offers—the *Lab Management Manual*, the *Lab Design Kit*, the video tours, etc.—before they even design a new or upgraded center, and before they design a job ad for its director.

How can IALL get to language departments and college administrations before they write these inappropriate job ads—before they even begin to define the parameters of the positions, before they even constitute the search committees? Should we attempt to send mailings to all institutions which offer foreign languages but don't have an IALL member on campus? What can IALL do to develop a stronger professional identity in the academy so that both institutions and upcoming professionals in the field are aware of the advantages of being members? And how do we reach language lab directors who aren't yet members? (For that matter, why aren't they?)

IALL and Our Professional Future

As regards (2) above, very few of us deliberately prepared for the positions we find ourselves in now; we came into them after professional training for some other career. (Did anyone amongst us say to him/herself in high school or college, "When I grow up I want to be a language lab director"?) As long as the technology we needed to deal with was only audio tape and videotape, it was easy enough to learn on the job. That is changing; the new demands that have been discussed here— technological, pedagogical, and administrative—mean that it is no longer reasonable to expect newcomers to the field to master these challenges quickly or without support, on the job. But there are as yet very few degree or certification programs that are designed to support entry into this career. It's my hunch that quite a few of us came into language technology either as apprentices (having worked as undergraduates or graduates in language labs or AV centers) or as language faculty who became interested in technology even without any training in it. That is, we either started with a love for technology and became interested in language pedagogy or vice versa. In our positions we have to balance both commitments. In so doing, we claim professional status: we have a professional organization and a professional journal. We know what we do and where we fit into the language education world. But without a well recognized pipe-line we cannot assure continuation of our most important professional characteristics—in-depth understanding of the relationship of technology to teaching and learning, ability to interact productively with faculty and students, and concern for pedagogical validity.

What kinds of degree or training programs are needed to train our successors? How can IALL establish or promote appropriate

professional programs that will build on what we have accomplished and take our expertise into a new era? Should we apply for grants that will allow us to run summer institutes? Could we as an organization agree on criteria for degree programs? Should we maintain a directory of programs that could be recommended to young people wanting to enter the field? How do we educate today's undergraduates to take this work seriously as a career option?

Conclusion   The queries I've posed here aren't intended merely as rhetorical devices; I hope that they, or related questions that you'd like to pose, will lead to intensive discussion in a variety of formats and forums—on LLTI, at FLEAT III/IALL '97, at regional affiliate group meetings. But I'd also be delighted if any of you wanted to write to me with your own answers to any of them, your opinions on the challenges and dilemmas we face, your sense of the future of language learning technology, your ideas of what IALL as an organization can do to serve and promote our profession. ■

Nina Garrett is Director of the CTW Mellon Project and Acting President of IALL.

ReCALL

The European Association for Computer Assisted Language Learning (EUROCALL) is an association of language teaching professionals from Europe and worldwide, which aims to:

- promote the use of foreign languages within Europe;

- provide a European focus for all aspects of the use of technology for language learning;

- enhance the quality, dissemination and efficiency of CALL materials.

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