

Wanted: Educational Leaders Ready, Willing and Able to Create “Healthy” LOTE Departments

Elvira Morse, Ed.D.
Oceanside Public Schools

During the summer of 2002, the state of corporate and other organizational “health” issues dominated national, state, and local news headlines. The accounting scandals of Enron, WorldCom, and Adelphia fueled an outcry of attacks on big business. The constant stream of news articles, broadcasts, editorials, and internet bulletins focused on the ethical standards and practices of American businesses, especially their leaders. President Bush proposed a variety of measures designed to “monitor, investigate, and enforce high ethical principles” in all sectors of government, public, and private institutions. Restoring confidence in the integrity of America’s business leaders and corporations became his mantra of the summer.

In New York, State Education Commissioner Richard Mills began the challenging process of restoring confidence in the Roosevelt Public Schools for residents of that community. On Thursday, July 12, 2002, he and Roosevelt Superintendent Horace Williams unveiled a draft plan to improve instruction and finances in the district. They urged the residents to review the plan and to contribute their ideas at scheduled educational summits throughout the summer.

Indeed, increased accountability and scrutiny of all institutions has become a way of life. The creation of ethical codes and standards and their respective implementation have become barometers of an organization’s “health.” As primary purveyors of knowledge and values, our schools must model and promote positive, ethical, and constructive learning communities. Educational leaders must possess the skills and attributes to ensure that all members of a school community are involved in creating a “healthy” learning climate.

Recent editions of ASCD’s *Educational Leadership* (May 2002) and NSDC’s *The Journal of Staff Development* (Summer 2002) focused on the powerful influence of a school’s culture in promoting

high-level staff and student learning. A school’s culture is comprised of its norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths. Visitors to a school can learn a great deal about the school (or an academic department) by engaging in activities such as observing relationships in the main office, listening to stories told by both veteran and novice teachers, reading weekly newsletters, analyzing bulletin board displays, and participating in the school’s celebrations. According to Sparks (2002), a school’s culture is also present in the “web of relationships” that exist within and around the school (p. 3). The web is complex and oftentimes covert. Barth (2002) refers to these relationships as “nondiscussables.” Such “nondiscussables” may include important topics related to the goals of education, the nature of learning and teaching, students’ capacity to learn and teachers’ ability to teach all of them to high standards, the leadership of the school, and the role of race, social class, and family background in forming expectations for learning. (p.8). Barth (2002) stated: “The health of a school is inversely proportional to the number of “nondiscussables”: the fewer “nondiscussables,” the healthier the school; the more “nondiscussables,” the more pathology in the school culture.” (p. 8). Therefore, if educational leaders are to create “healthy” environments for all stakeholders in the school community and make necessary cultural changes, they must possess the courage, the will, and the interpersonal skills to address the “nondiscussables.”

It is essential that educational leaders consistently articulate that the fundamental purpose of the existence of schools is to promote learning for students, staff, and the community. All decisions and actions must be driven by that purpose. King (2002) outlined what educational leaders need to do to successfully achieve this purpose: (a) they should participate in regular, collaborative professional learning

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Researchers who study teaching and learning in the classroom and who assess the results have long been aware of the fact that there are many external variables that influence what takes place in the classroom. A few of these are factors such as the teacher's own social background, ethnicity, preparation, motivation and personality; parallel characteristics of the students, and the climate that exists in the school, the community and the nation, as well as the culture(s) of the foregoing. The situation is a very complex one.

The articles in this issue address a number of these variables from different perspectives. In the first article, Elvira Morse addresses the issue of organizational "health" at a variety levels, and suggests ways create a "healthy" LOTE department. Then, Joanne O'Toole reports the results of a rigorously conducted survey that will help teachers to give reliable answers from the LOTE perspective to the question "What do colleges want?". Her results certainly can be helpful in motivating students to stay in the LOTE program at higher levels. Finally, in an article reprinted from ERIC, Kathleen M. Marcos and Joy Kreeft Peyton talk about ways in which different players can help to foster the development of a language-proficient society.

We cannot expect the strategies suggested in these articles to show immediate results, but if enough of us adapt them and adopt them, the context for teaching and learning languages other than English will certainly become increasingly positive.

experiences to improve teaching and learning by working together with teachers; (b) they should make the improvement of teaching and learning the highest priority; (c) they should inspire teachers and other professionals to take on instructional leadership roles; (d) they should create opportunities for all stakeholders to be part of a professional learning community; (e) they should use data from a variety of sources to make instructional decisions, and (f) they should make creative and effective use of all resources – people, time, and money – to build a healthy and high achieving school culture. (pp. 61-63). Sparks (2002) concurred with these suggestions. He also encouraged educational leaders to (a) promote goal-focused, team-based approaches to professional learning, (b) understand the power of stories to help shape culture, (c) question and respond appropriately to student, staff and community members' beliefs, assumptions, and actions, and (d) value and model reflective processes. (p. 3).

One of the most difficult challenges for educational leaders is to convince the teachers and other staff members to bring school issues to the table, even diverse views, to participate in decision making, and to examine assumptions about the school community. Kohm (2002) described her efforts to build a stronger and healthier school climate. She restructured faculty meetings and employed such strategies as brainstorming, dot voting, round-robin discussions, and six points of view to examine issues. She developed an inclusive planning process that involved the creation of standing committees and ad hoc committees, mindful to include a parent voice as well. Finally, she created study groups to examine assumptions about how children learn. She and the teachers read and discussed articles and books. Participation in the study groups galvanized the staff and created an enthusiasm and excitement that influenced the students and their achievement. (p. 31).

As the new school year begins, I look forward to building a strong community of LOTE learners. My district's new professional development initiative will provide various opportunities for novice and veteran teachers to (a) seriously dialogue about sound pedagogical practices and the implementation of *The Modern Languages for Communication* syllabus, the *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning*, and the *NYS Languages Other Than English Learning Standards*, (b) foster open and trusting relationships with the supervisor and with each other, and (c) create collaborative planning time for peer connections. The inclusion of a professional period in the school day as well as a myriad of after-school workshops (to be presented by the teaching staff and outside consultants on topics generated by the LOTE staff) promise to facilitate genuine instructional leadership, learning, and collaboration.

One of my favorite summer 2002 reading selections was a book entitled *Fish!* by Stephen C. Lundin, Ph.D., Harry Paul, and John Christensen. This business bestseller helped me to understand the importance of creating a healthy, positive, and constructive environment for the teachers with whom I work. Its compelling messages also served as a "wake-up" call for how to live one's life. The authors used a parable about the successful Seattle Fish Market to help a manager transform her "toxic dump" department into a thriving, fun, vital and contributing department of the organization. The four lessons of the fish market were:

1. *Choose your attitude.* (i.e., Who do we want to be while we do our work?)
2. *Play.* (i.e., How can we have more fun and create more energy?)
3. *Make their day.* (i.e., Who are our customers and how can we engage them in a way that will make their day? How can we make each other's day?)
4. *Be present.* (i.e., How can we be present for each other and our customers?) (p.78).

I plan to present these lessons and ask these same questions to the LOTE department teachers (by substituting students and families for customers) at one of our early department meetings of the 2002-2003 school year. I hope these questions will stimulate genuine reflection about the LOTE department and will unlock any "nondiscussables" via open and honest communication. Utilizing suggestions from the aforementioned authors, I hope to provide the means to continue to nurture an already "healthy" and thriving LOTE department climate. I want to ensure that we are committed to high-level teacher and student learning. My desire is to continue to promote the value of learning foreign languages and cultures by working collaboratively with all stakeholders in the school community. I will seek numerous and varied ways to publicize the accomplishments of our students and teachers. Above all, I want to create meaningful and purposeful learning experiences for everyone so that they are empowered with the tools and knowledge to maintain a "healthy" learning, working, and living environment.

Whether you are a LOTE educational leader (i.e., administrator, supervisor, chairperson, director, lead teacher) or a LOTE teacher at the elementary or secondary levels, it is important for you to take the time to reflect on your role in helping to make the LOTE department of your school a "healthy" component of a positive school environment. It is imperative that you build on your capacity to be a "total foreign language leader." Schwahn and Kline (2002) defined the "total foreign language leader" as being (a) *authentic* because she/he is able to articulate a

clear and concise foreign language mission and model its values and principles, (b) *visionary* because she/he is able to create a concrete picture of what the foreign language department will look like when operating at its ideal best (and this vision is based on research, demographics, future considerations, and core values), (c) *cultural* because she/he involves all stakeholders in the change process, (d) *high quality* because she/he is able to focus, identify, develop, and empower the teaching staff, and (e) *service-oriented* because she/he knows how to manage the structures of the school system and its culture and make her/his vision a reality (pp.181-206). Are you ready to commit to being a “total foreign language leader” and create a “healthy” LOTE department in 2002-2003? Hopefully the answer is a resounding “yes!”

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Dr. Elvira Morse is the Director of LOTE and ESL with the Oceanside Public Schools.

What Do Colleges Want?

Some Answers to Share With Your Foreign Language Students

Joanne O' Toole
Baldwinsville Central Schools

In my high school, the annual ritual of recommending and recruiting students for elective foreign language classes (4, 5, and AP) is always fraught with questions and concerns. Students demand to know how continuing to study a foreign language will benefit them. They ask many questions and, generally, I can answer those questions quite confidently. There is one question, however, that I have never – before now – felt capable of answering with any kind of expertise. That question is: “What do colleges want?” Consequently, in the fall of 2001, I decided to actively pursue answers to that question...answers that would better equip me – and my colleagues — to answer that question.

After dialoguing with colleagues in the foreign language and guidance departments, I turned my students' questions and ours into a nine-question survey. Then, my technologically adept son created a website through which the 97 colleges and universities that I would contact could respond to this survey. Even though my initial intention was to survey only four-year, residential schools in New York State, I added select out-of-state schools at the request of my high school's guidance department. Ultimately, I sent the survey to the admissions departments of 75 New York State and 22 out-of-state, four-year residential colleges and universities. Of those 97 schools contacted, 61 completed the survey, 48 from New York State and 13 from out of state, a 64% response rate. Their responses to seven of the nine questions are as follows:

Question 1: How important is a student's advanced study (levels 4, 5, AP) of a foreign language in your admission decision?

	All	NYS	Out-of-State
Very important	23%	25%	15%
Somewhat important	48%	44%	62%
Neither important nor unimportant	19%	15%	15%
Slightly important	7%	8%	0%
Not important	8%	8%	8%

Question 2: How many years of foreign language study do you generally consider meet your **minimum** admissions' requirement?

	All	NYS	Out-of-State
5 years	0%	0%	0%
4 years	3%	4%	0%
3 years	48%	58%	8%
2 years	39%	27%	85%
1 year	10%	10%	8%

Question 3: How many years of foreign language study do you consider **optimal** for admission to your university?

	All	NYS	Out-of-State
5 years	21%	25%	8%
4 years	39%	40%	38%
3 years	28%	29%	23%
2 years	10%	4%	4%
1 year	2%	2%	0%

Question 4: Which university fields of study do you believe are **enhanced** by knowledge of a foreign language?

	All	NYS	Out-of-State
art, art history	70%	73%	62%
business, management	82%	77%	100%
communications	79%	77%	85%
computer science	33%	33%	31%
economics	49%	50%	46%
education	85%	88%	77%
engineering	36%	35%	38%
English language, literature	77%	79%	69%
geography, history	67%	67%	69%
mathematics	38%	38%	38%
music	59%	58%	62%
political science	69%	71%	62%
psychology	57%	63%	38%
sciences	46%	48%	38%
technology	41%	42%	35%

Question 5: What percentage of your currently-admitted students have advanced high school foreign language study (levels 4, 5, AP)?

	All	NYS	Out-of-State
76 – 100%	31%	27%	46%
51 – 75%	25%	25%	23%
26 – 50%	25%	27%	15%
0 – 25%	20%	21%	15%

Question 6: How much importance does your college put on study-abroad experiences at the university level?

	All	NYS	Out-of-State
Much importance	46%	48%	38%
Some importance	36%	33%	46%
Neither importance nor unimportance	11%	13%	8%
Slight importance	5%	4%	8%
No importance	2%	2%	0%

Question 7: What is your university's foreign language requirement for a bachelor's degree?

	All	NYS	Out-of-State
Depends on major	36%	27%	69%
No requirement	10%	13%	0%
4 semesters or 2 years	11%	10%	15%
3 semesters	8%	8%	8%
2 semesters or 1 year	23%	27%	8%
1 semester	8%	10%	0%
Unknown	3%	4%	0%

The following noteworthy observations can be made from responses to these seven questions of the survey:

- Advanced study of a foreign language is either very or somewhat important in the admission decision at 71% of the schools responding to the survey.
- New York State colleges and universities consider 2 or 3 years of foreign language study a minimum admission requirement in 85% of their responses (3 years – 58%, 2 years – 27%).
- The optimal number of years of foreign language study for admission is 4 or 5 years according to 60% of the schools responding to the survey (5 years 21%, 4 years 39%).
- More than 65% of the schools responding identified art, art history, business, communications, education, English language and literature, geography, history, and political science as university fields of study enhanced by a knowledge of a foreign language.
- Over 30% of the schools responding indicated that all university fields of study are enhanced by a knowledge of foreign language.
- Study-abroad experiences at the university level rank as having much or some importance at 82% of the schools responding.
- A specified amount of foreign language study is required for a bachelor's degree in all majors at 50% of the schools responding. Another 36% require foreign language study for some of their majors to earn a bachelor's degree.

Although the results of this survey allow for generalizations such as the preceding ones, they provide more of a “big picture” of individual schools than an overall picture of college and university expectations. Many of the numbers represented in the data were accompanied by additional comments that put them in greater perspective. For example, although SUNY Albany indicated two years of foreign language study as the minimum admission requirement, it added this comment: “Three years of language is preferred.” The University of Dayton (Ohio), which also indicated a minimum of two years, stated, “We encourage students to take as many college preparatory courses as possible, including foreign language courses.”

To allow students, teachers, counselors, and administrators to see this “big picture,” I have compiled the complete school-by-school survey results in a booklet and on a website. I have distributed the booklet within my district. The website, however, is available to everyone in and outside of the Baldwinsville school district. It can be accessed at: <http://www.aiusa.com/otoole/results.htm>. By clicking on the name of a responding college, the viewer can see that school's unedited responses to the nine survey questions. For a quick overview, the website also includes a spreadsheet of the college responses.

An additional feature of the website is a pamphlet for students who are unsure about continuing to study foreign language. The pamphlet, which can be downloaded, cites responses to the two remaining survey questions. It brings a fresh, influential voice to the advocacy of foreign language study. Here are the two survey questions and some of the encouraging and insightful comments found in the pamphlet:

Question 8: If a college-bound high-school student is contemplating discontinuing study of the foreign language after completing the beginning levels (1, 2, or 3) what advice do you have for them?

- “The longer a student has studied foreign language, the more competitive his/her application will be.” - *Colgate University*
- “We would recommend that they complete as many levels of foreign language as their ability and schedule allows.” - *Penn State University*
- “The more the better.” - *SUNY College at Fredonia*
- “Consider these three questions as you make your decision:
 1. Am I highly confident that I will never need those additional levels of foreign language?
 2. Would taking the high level classes help improve my overall GPA or not?
 3. Have I fully considered that having more foreign language classes would not hurt me but that having less could?” - *University of Connecticut*
- “Foreign language study leads to cross-cultural understanding that is critical in the worlds of science, technology, and business. While the English language is prevalent, it is by no means a universal language.” - *University of Rochester*

Question 9: What advantages do you believe students with advanced foreign language study bring to the college program?

- “Students with an enriched study in foreign language typically are better prepared academically and therefore do better in college.”
- *Alfred University*
- “They add a more global perspective to their studies and to the classroom.”
- *University of Dayton*
- “Advanced foreign language study, like all advanced coursework, gives us the cue that this is a student who will bring passion for a discipline and intellectual curiosity to his/her college learning.” - *Hamilton College*
- “Students have appreciation of other cultures, an invaluable attribute to a college culture. The skills needed to master or learn a foreign language transfer into other curriculum areas and prepare the student for success in college.” - *Hartwick College*

- “It can enable a student to be a better citizen, less ethnocentric, and perform at a higher level of awareness in any major field of study.” - *SUNY Buffalo*
- “Students with advanced foreign language usually bring enhanced sensitivity to international issues and international students.”
- *SUNY College at Plattsburgh*

I undertook this project in order to answer one question: “What do colleges want?” In return, I received a multitude of answers and a tremendous amount of support for foreign language study from the 61 responding colleges and universities. It is my hope that by sharing these answers with my colleagues at NYSAFLL, we will all be able to answer that question with expertise and give our students more reasons to continue to study foreign language.

Putting It All Together: Fostering a Language-Proficient Society

Kathleen M. Marcos and Joy Kreeft Peyton
ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics
Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C.

The following action plan for parents, teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and business community members outlines specific tasks that can be performed to foster the development of a language-proficient society. Many of the ideas listed are discussed in more detail in Curtain and Pesola (1994) and Rosenbusch (1991).

What Can Parents Do?

- Expose your children to people from varied language and cultural backgrounds.
- Go to local events where language and cultural diversity are celebrated.
- If you speak a language other than English, use it with your children.
- Speak positively to your children about the value of learning another language.
- Provide videos, music, and books in other languages. Public libraries have many of these types of materials
- Send your children to summer language camps. For older children, consider programs in which they can study languages abroad.
- Explore having an exchange student in your home.
- Investigate opportunities for language study for your children, beginning as early as preschool and extending through their high school years.
- Support your local Sister Cities program¹ or begin one if your community does not already have one.
- Reinforce existing language programs by expressing your support for them to local, state, and national representatives.
- If your child is participating in a language program, talk to the teacher about what you can do to reinforce the learning that takes place in the classroom.
- If your child's school does not have a language program, talk with other parents, PTA members, and the principal about the feasibility of getting one started.

What Can Teachers Do?

- Find out which languages are spoken by school staff, by students, and in the community at large. Speak with parents and administrators about options for using community resources to promote language and cultural awareness among students.
- Use resources from school and local libraries and from the Internet to enhance and enliven your foreign language lessons.
- Set up an in-class lending library with books, magazines, and videotapes for students and parents to use.
- Align your curriculum with the national standards for foreign language learning.
- Plan activities that encourage students to develop an awareness and appreciation of the linguistic and cultural diversity represented in your classroom.
- Give your students opportunities to use foreign languages outside your classroom (for example, within your school, at other schools, or at community events or agencies).
- Encourage parents who speak a language other than English to use it with their children.
- Talk to parents about activities and study habits that can improve their children's language learning.
- Invite community members who use foreign languages in their careers to discuss career opportunities with middle and high school students.
- Collaborate with other foreign language, bilingual, and English as a second language (ESL) teachers to share resources and work together toward common goals.
- Pursue professional development activities (for example, attend conferences, read journals and newsletters, and take courses and seminars) to keep up to date on language learning research and on new approaches to language teaching.

- Travel periodically to a foreign country or countries to expand or update your knowledge of the language and culture.
- Keep up with advances in language learning technology and adopt new and stimulating approaches to teaching languages, such as promoting videoconferencing experiences and international “keypal” (penpal) projects on the Internet.
- Provide resources and professional development opportunities to foreign language teachers.
- Promote and provide opportunities for collaboration among all teachers involved in second language education. For example, establish a committee for second language teachers.

What Can School Administrators Do?

If a language program does not currently exist in your school or district:

- Develop a rationale for establishing a program by reading professional literature on the importance of second language learning and the cognitive benefits of developing second language proficiency.
- Work with school and district administrators or the school board to establish a steering committee made up of parents, foreign language and other teachers, school and district administrators at all levels, and business and community members to investigate the feasibility of establishing a program in your school or district.
- Learn about the different types of foreign language programs to determine the most appropriate program for your school or district.
- Take inventory of existing resources (staff and materials) to determine the type and size of program your school or district can realistically support.
- Generate community support at PTA meetings and teacher conferences. Hold districtwide planning meetings and invite community leaders, business representatives, language and other teachers, and administrators. Ensure ongoing communication among all groups that have a stake in the establishment and maintenance of language programs through regular meetings and updates.
- Promote and support the use of new technologies to enhance foreign language learning.
- Advocate for sufficient instructional time for students to achieve adequate proficiency. This instructional time should be a minimum of 75 minutes per week, but it can be as often as three to five classes per week lasting 45 to 60 minutes each. At the middle and high school levels, foreign language classes should meet as frequently as and for as long as other academic classes, such as math and science.
- Promote articulation of classes—the logical sequencing of courses in the curriculum to avoid unnecessary repetition—at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.
- For middle and high schools, hold career days to provide information about jobs that require foreign language skills.
- Use student and community resources to strengthen the program (for example, through tutoring, international fairs, cross-cultural exchanges, and guest speakers).

What Can Policymakers Do?

If your school or district already has a language program:

- Ensure that all students have the opportunity to study foreign languages.
- Hire trained teachers who are skilled in foreign languages.
- Budget adequate financial resources to establish and improve second language programs in your school, district, or state.
- Support and fund professional development programs for second language teachers.
- Support and fund curriculum development projects carried out by second language teachers. Establish policies that promote the study of second languages at all levels by all students. Support research on the effectiveness of various models and practices for second language programs. Support the establishment of standards for and assessment of student and teacher performance at local, state, and national levels.

- Support policies that respect the diversity of students in your community or state.
- Establish Sister Cities and World Affairs Council relationships in the community.

What Can the Business Community Do?

- Make policymakers aware of the need for workers to be proficient in more than one language. Send company representatives to school career days to talk to students about the important role that foreign languages play in the workplace.
- Talk with teachers and administrators about how they can help prepare students to work in an increasingly global economy.
- Establish partnerships with schools, businesses, and communities to support activities such as student internships, tutoring, and mentoring.
- Ensure that jobs requiring language skills are filled by applicants who are truly proficient in the language(s) needed.
- Provide employees with opportunities to maintain and improve their language skills.
- Provide appropriate cultural training for employees who work in culturally diverse environments.
- Establish partnerships with school districts to provide financial support for starting or maintaining foreign language programs.

To develop a more globally effective workforce and a more knowledgeable and tolerant society, parents, teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and business leaders should work together to provide opportunities for all students to develop fluency in at least one foreign language.

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Note

- ¹ To find out about Sister Cities programs across the country and how to set one up in your community, contact Sister Cities International, 120 South Payne Street, Alexandria, VA 22314; call 703-836-3535; send e-mail to info@sister-cities.org; or visit the Web site at <http://www.sister-cities.org>.

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