

Let's Get Moving Again*

Helen P. Warriner

EACH MOMENT THAT WE HAVE is a unique opportunity to seize and do something with in every dimension of our personal and professional lives. Each time that I've written a speech, I've thought, and often said, that the 'moment' for what I had to say in that speech was especially propitious. I think that this is a special occasion and that 1976 is a vital year for ACTFL, because I think that this moment is filled with a potential waiting to be realized in the world of foreign languages.

I sense a readiness among us to change and a cry for the leadership to effect that change, and I believe that ACTFL is ready, more ready with each passing month, to respond. During the last several months, I have noticed that people are increasingly looking to ACTFL, and especially to ACTFL, to do things for the foreign language profession and for foreign language education. This is a healthy sign, for when expectations are high, it becomes easier to gain support for the efforts that need to be made. ACTFL is not in a position to be the miracle worker, but I am convinced because of the attitudes that have formed, the decisions that have been made, and the plans that are being developed that this organization is going to play a more vital role in foreign language affairs, beginning now and continuing into the foreseeable future.

I shall be directing most of my remarks to the foreign language leaders in this country. I define as leaders those who make the speeches, write the articles and the books, conduct the workshops, are responsible for foreign language programs, and who, by various other means, influence people and help to establish direction in our field of education. I shall analyze the leadership issue from three points of view: curriculum and instruction, the political structure of the foreign language profession in the United States, and ACTFL's role in that leadership.

My topic is "Let's Get Moving Again," and that is what I want us to do. Fifteen years ago, we were

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at the beginning of a revolution that had the potential for greater impact upon foreign language learning in the United States than anything that had ever happened within our profession. Few of us have thoroughly evaluated that revolution, I believe. On the one hand, it was a revolution from teaching reading and writing to teaching four skills--reading, writing, listening, and speaking--and treating culture differently. On the other, it was a revolution in methodology that had to accompany the revolution in philosophy to make the achievement of the increased objectives possible.

In the philosophical realm, it was resoundingly successful, I would say. Almost no one today disagrees with the four-skill philosophy. We introduce every curriculum guide with it. We plan our workshops and title our books with some aspect

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Helen P. Warriner (Ph.D., The Ohio State University) is Supervisor of Foreign Languages in the State Department of Education, Richmond, Va.

of it. If, however, the revolution succeeded philosophically, methodologically the results were very different. We changed the textbooks so radically, and sometimes so naively, that we could hardly recognize them as language books any more. NDEA institutes helped us learn to orchestrate pattern drills and cope with minimal pairs. Administrators bought us language labs, and we went abroad to learn the language that we didn't 'know' but had been teaching.

But, to every action, there is a reaction. To every left stroke of the pendulum, there is a right stroke. To every revolution there is a counter-revolution. It was hard to teach using those 'funny,' new textbooks. It wasn't easy to sell books that teachers didn't know what to do with. And, it takes years to change the college curriculum, so we never really revamped teacher preparation. How was one to follow a Nelson Brooks, a William Riley Parker, or a Wilga Rivers at the podium and attract attention without taking issue with what they had said? So, we learned to argue. We disparaged our leaders for getting too far ahead of us, when perhaps we were not trying hard enough to catch up with them.

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Textbook publishers began to offer us books that incorporated the 'best of the audiolingual and traditional approaches' and that mixed philosophies and methodology about as successfully as oil and water blend, and we gladly bought them. Then came the era of eclecticism, supposedly embracing any methods that led to the achievement of the goals, but which, if we really want to be honest about it, resulted in an excuse to slip back into the comfortable routine of teachers talking, students listening, and texts occupying the constant attention of both.

What were the speakers and the writers--the leaders of the profession--to headline their articles and their speeches with now? Who would listen if they all agreed? It's hard to tell funny stories or get people excited about eclecticism. Specialization had to be the answer! This is the age of specialization. Why not foreign languages, too? So, we got individualization, humanization, interdisciplinary instruction, career education, communicative competence, etc. Furthermore, not everyone could individualize, do career education, or be interdisciplinary, at least not as they read and heard that they should, and many of us developed professional guilt complexes or became

lonely disaffected because no one was talking to us. We had so many torches at the front of the troops that we hardly knew which to follow--and the torches didn't always move in the same direction.

I do not mean to be making fun of anyone, and I include myself among those whom I am indicating because I became associated with interdisciplinary learning. We all had good intentions. As leaders, however, we have not provided the direction that the foreign language profession needs and deserves. We have inadvertently encouraged the trading off of instruction directed toward our basic, four-skill philosophy for specialized aspects of foreign language teaching. Those aspects or approaches or techniques certainly have an important role to play, but they are not ends themselves. We allowed them, even encouraged them, to become just that.

There is another instructional problem, perhaps related to the diversity--to the fragmentation of programs--that I have just been describing, that I would like us to consider. In the course of my job, I am in hundreds of classrooms. Other supervisors with similar experience share my concern that the textbook is omni-present and ever open. I use the term 'textbook' in a comprehensive context--it might be a learning activity packet or a newspaper--but, whatever the instructional materials, they dominate teachers and students. They have again become a crutch for both, just they were in the pre-audiolingual days. Take them away, and communicative competence in any skill becomes nearly impossible. German is a subject between the covers of the book. Humanization? Teachers and students aren't even looking at each other, for their eyes are glued to texts.

We know what good foreign language teaching is; teachers today are more competent and most are more committed than ever before; we have more options and opportunities at our disposal than previous generations did. We are capable of excellence in foreign language teaching. I think that we have simply lost our sense of direction. I think that teachers are weary of being asked each time they pick up a professional journal or go to a meeting to revamp their curriculum or their methodology to accommodate the latest new thing. I think that in our fervor to innovate, we have encouraged, perhaps inadvertently, the trading off of four-skill instruction for aspects of language teaching, specialized interests, or specific techniques. Means have become ends, and I think this is primarily the fault of the leadership in the profession.

I call upon us to address ourselves to putting perspective back into foreign language programs. By no means am I saying that we must discard the options and innovations, but I am urging us to insist, first and foremost, on classrooms in which the students are active participants--Latin students, too--speaking the target language much of the time. Speaking isn't the only objective, but, in my experience, if students can control this skill,

they can also perform well in the other three. If the options and innovations assist in achieving this, well and good, but let's make sure we use them so that they do indeed contribute.

There is nothing that will assist us in getting back on target better than some of the excellent theory that appeared during the early sixties. I hear people scoff at Nelson Brooks, and I cringe, because I believe that he and his generation of writers provided theory and methodology for us that are unsurpassed in their potential impact on foreign language teaching. Go back and review Wilga Rivers' four assumptions in The Psychologist and the Foreign Language Teacher. Dialogues, adaptations, pattern drills, and other good audiolingual activities can be combined by skillful and artful teachers to create exciting foreign language classrooms. We allowed the inept, who made their use a dull, boring, mind-numbing process, to propagandize the profession with ignorance and cynicism. We never changed the preparation of teachers for four-skill teaching. Thus, we abandoned the effort before we were even ready to try it.

It is time for the leadership of the foreign language profession to give serious thought to the overall impact of what we are saying to teachers today. Are we really providing direction, or are we helping to dissipate their efforts? Are we offering incentive and reassurance, or are we breaking their spirit when we ask them to individualize, humanize, get involved in career education, teach for communicative competence, take the students abroad, and conduct a language festival? I believe that we have presented the options as mandates. I sense confusion and frustration among our ranks. We can change this without abandoning the options. We can do it by saying at every opportunity that, whatever the approach, the methodology, the option, or the level, students must be using the language actively and enthusiastically a good portion of their class time. We can do it by recognizing that we know much about what good teaching is and by advocating adherence to those principles, whatever the options. We can do it by relaxing a bit in our almost frantic search for innovations which tends to obscure the basic principles--and even causes us to doubt that we have any.

I turn now to a second manifestation of the need for better leadership and direction for the foreign language profession: the multiplicity of professional organizations. We are one of the smaller disciplines in education in numbers of teachers, and we have more organizations than any of the others. We are fractionalized, segmented, and disjointed. We are parochial, provincial, and chauvinistic. Each language is represented by language-specific groups at the national and state or local levels. Each state has a comprehensive association encompassing teachers of all languages; ACTFL and the Modern Language Association exist at the national level. Many teachers subscribe to the Modern Language Journal and think they belong to an organization. The Joint National Committee for Languages came into

being to try to unify the profession, but a committee that meets only twice a year, has no professional staff, and spends very little money can hardly accomplish more than good will. It's quite a challenge for the teacher to know what all these

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groups are--to know what the structure of the profession is.

The consequences of this fractionalization are serious. The financial resources of the profession are dissipated among the several groups, making our 'professional overhead' extremely high. Human resources and energy are not sufficiently concentrated to cause maximum impact. Identity with the profession as a whole is practically impossible, for we have an alphabet soup of organizations. I find that teachers who feel a responsibility to belong to a professional organization often are not well enough informed to make intelligent choices. Think what happens to our identity outside of the foreign language profession. Administrators know that NCTM represents math; NCSS, the social studies; NCTE, English, etc., but they don't know what to ascribe to us. What does this do to our image and say about the foreign language profession?

We have a plethora of organizations with too many budgets, too many bulletins, too many officers, too many journals. It is a luxury that we cannot afford. Many of us are concerned; the Northeast Conference Reports of 1971 recognized the problem of professional dissipation. Rudolph

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Masciantonio addressed himself to the question in the September 1976 issue of The Classical World. His example from the classical segment of the profession is analogous to the entire profession.

It may seem radical to suggest that the two national (classical) organizations merge and that the regional organizations become chapters of the new national organization or that state and local organizations become chapters of the regional organizations. But unification and centralization of resources and effort is precisely what is needed. This is not to say that existing national, regional, state, and local organizations must lose all identity, but firm constitutional links must be forged so that the present duplication of effort and lack of communication and cooperation are ended. A national office readily accessible...is a *sine qua non* for a unified and strong profession (p. 18).

I know that the solutions are not easy. Long histories, traditions, and personal ties are associated with each of the organizations. In spite of this, I feel compelled by professional responsibility and integrity to address the issue, for it is one of the most serious problems that we have. And it is symptomatic of the bigger problem--the

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need for better leadership for our profession. We must make a beginning; we must initiate a solution. I think that beginning must somehow be made through cooperative financial support on the part of the several organizations on behalf of some of the serious needs of the profession. At the last meeting of the Joint National Committee for Languages, a decision was made which indicates that the climate for such cooperation and unified effort has improved. I hope that my assessment is right, and that this is just a beginning.

ACTFL exists because of the need for unity and strength in our profession. I assure you that the present Executive Council and the professional staff are actively searching for new and better ways of achieving more of both.

A related issue is that of the strength of the state constituent organizations--the state foreign language associations--and of their relationship to ACTFL. My work as 1975 Chairperson of the Membership Committee for ACTFL and appearances that I made on programs of these groups on several occasions have confirmed my belief that the state organizations are not nearly as effective as they should be. There are exceptions, of course, but I present the following observations for your consideration. Membership is low in many instances. It is sometimes almost impossible to find out who the officers are.

Programs are often poorly planned and advertised, and attendance at meetings is low. Some of the governing bodies remain almost static, with the same individuals rotating through the offices, rarely encouraging the infusion of new blood. Some organizations are almost exclusively high school oriented; others are dominated by college instructors. The immediately obvious consequence of these conditions is that too many of the state organizations contribute little to the advancement of foreign language programs or the profession within their jurisdiction.

For ACTFL, there are other consequences. Most of the constituent associations existed prior to the founding of the national organization, and they, therefore, have little identity and responsibility to ACTFL. Some state officers are not ACTFL members. It is virtually impossible to succeed in having an ACTFL membership chairperson identified in some states. A number do not see to it that they are represented at the ACTFL Assembly meeting. Many of the state organizations are not really ACTFL's chapters in function, and as a result our impact at the state level is greatly reduced.

I am particularly concerned at this point, for the new bylaws place the responsibility for the nomination of all Council members and officers--the leadership of ACTFL--in the hands of the Assembly. The Assembly has to realize the import of those nominations. It must see that the positions are filled with wise, dedicated people who have the needs of the profession and of ACTFL clearly in mind and who come willingly to work hard, long, extra hours beyond their regular responsibilities for the organization.

In spite of the magnitude of the problem, I believe that a critical need to which ACTFL must address itself in the near future is strengthening the state organizations. Preliminary discussions are occurring at the present time which I hope will lead to a specific plan of action.

The third facet of the leadership problem is ACTFL's role in the leadership of the profession. First, I offer a brief progress report. I feel that in the last several years we have succeeded in improving the communications between the membership, on the one hand, and the Council and the Executive Director's office, on the other. I think that members understand better how and why decisions are made, and I know that the Executive Council and headquarters are more responsive to members' opinions. We believe that the membership is basically pleased with the new format of Foreign Language Annals, although we are not yet satisfied. The quality of the annual meeting is consistently good, according to the thorough evaluation that is made each year.

The budget will be balanced this year. We have worked diligently to do this, sometimes with great odds against us. We may even have a slight surplus, which is critically needed in order to build a reserve fund to avoid starting each fiscal year with little cash on hand and to serve as a cushion against

unforeseen emergencies. A Reserve Fund has been established to assist in this regard.

The Materials Center sales have exceeded the limits of our imagination; we feel good about this, because it is obviously the kind of service the membership wants. The decision to move our headquarters office has been made, and the relocation will take place early in 1977. After much study of several areas of the country, invitations for proposals offering space and facilities, and thorough consideration of the needs of ACTFL, the choice was to remain in New York. We are getting past the point of spending an inordinate amount of time on housekeeping details, such as budgetary management, legal incorporation, bylaws preparation, and headquarters relocation, and we will be able to devote more time to considering the real professional issues and the goals for which ACTFL exists.

In the final analysis, what I feel best about is that ACTFL is growing up. Many of the developments which I have enumerated are indicative of the fact that ACTFL is on the verge of becoming--of offering a far greater measure of the leadership that is needed. More and more, I sense that the foreign language profession is looking to ACTFL for this leadership and expecting it of us. That really is an expression of confidence in our ability to lead.

We are presently discussing ways in which ACTFL can provide more services to its members at the grass-roots level. Regional meetings and pre-packaged or especially designed workshops may be ways of accomplishing this. The Materials Center will almost inevitably be expanded. ACTFL is discussing the administration, on behalf of the Joint National Committee, of a dissemination center for language promotional materials. We are seeking ways in which to bring bilingual-bicultural and foreign language education closer together. We are beginning to look at means by which to strengthen the state constituent organizations. We are moving in the direction of seeking extramural funding to support needed services and solve problems that ACTFL cannot manage alone. Under serious consideration for the very near

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future is the sponsorship, possibly under joint circumstances, of a national symposium to broaden the assessment of the foreign language profession's needs and to indicate direction in addressing those needs.

We need committed, dedicated members. Even

one individual who believes in an objective enough to work for it can achieve an almost impossible task. I'd like to cite a specific example in which this indeed occurred. The ACTFL Bibliography was at one time a rather expensive budget item which served a relatively small percentage of the membership. In the struggle to balance the budget

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in those days, some things had to be deleted or cut drastically. In considering the priorities for the total membership, the Executive Council reluctantly dropped the Bibliography. Some members opposed the decision but understood the position of the Council. Nevertheless, they did not give up; a few individuals, working closely with the Executive Director and members of the Council, found a way to revive the Bibliography and continue it. This is a good example of responsible members willing to work for what they believe in. We need more of this type. I urge you to increase your professional commitment and to convince our absent colleagues of the need for everyone to get involved.

I feel a good measure of excitement in the air. I feel good about where ACTFL is today, but we have a long way to go. I sense your expectancy and feel that ACTFL is on the verge--on the verge of providing more and better services and greater leadership for the profession. We need a ground swell of leadership; the potential for foreign language education among our constituency is perhaps far greater than any of us have the foresight to realize. With every shoulder at the wheel we can get things moving again for foreign language education in this country.

Letters of Interest Invited

ACTFL currently has two proposals being reviewed by the Office of Career Education of the U.S. Office of Education. Should either or both proposals be funded, additional staff members will be needed. The potential maximum is eight positions--four of a professional nature and four in support capacities.

Individuals interested in being considered for these positions if funding is received are invited to submit letters of interest and current résumés to C. Edward Scebold, ACTFL Executive Director, 2 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016. ACTFL is an Equal Opportunity Employer.