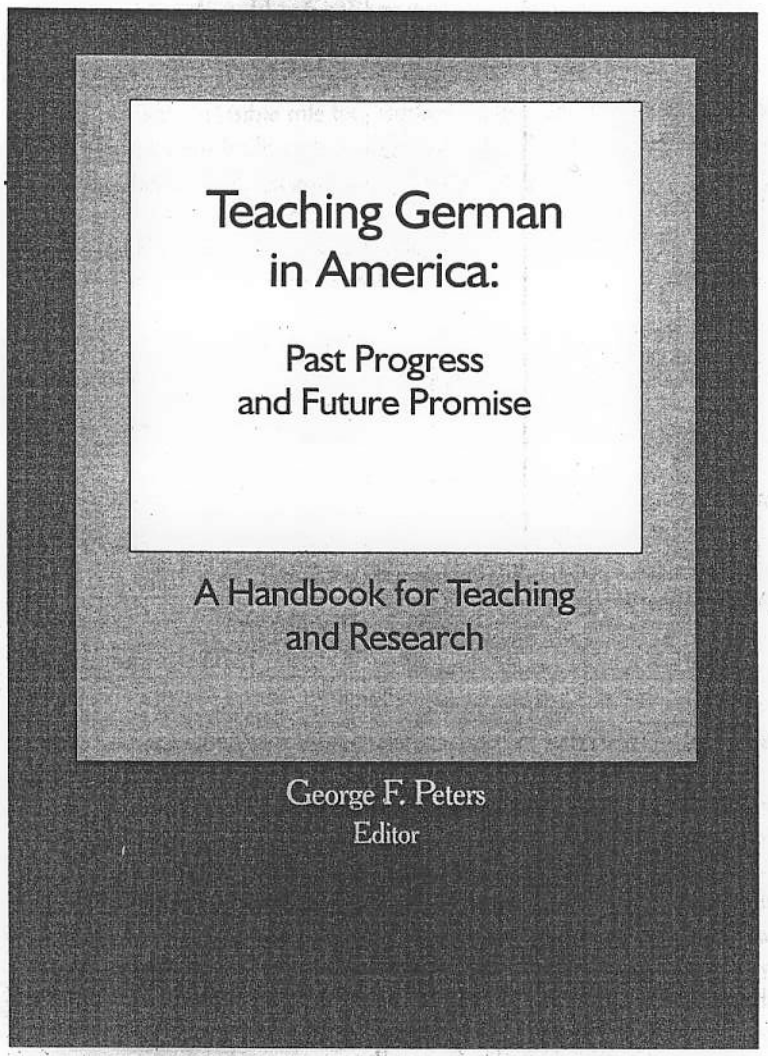

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Re-Shaping the "College-Level" Curriculum: Problems and Possibilities

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Introduction

In writing this chapter, I am very much aware that not many of my colleagues in the senior professoriat of foreign language departments are likely to read it. Nor indeed are many of those who aspire to the senior professoriat. They do not go to conferences like the Northeast Conference, and they do not read volumes like the Northeast Conference *Reports*. Why should they? They are no more professionally interested in the teaching of foreign languages than are nuclear physicists. It is not their field.

This is a problem. It is at the root of a whole complex of problems facing those who would like to reshape in a major, comprehensive, and lasting way the curriculum of foreign language departments in the universities and colleges of the United States. I am not suggesting that such change is impossible. On the contrary. I am writing this report precisely because at this time some very bright possibilities are dawning on the horizon. At some levels of the educational system and in some kinds of educational institutions, these have every chance to see the full light of day. But in the halls of academe, unless we openly face the real problems, and begin to solve them, the brightest of our possibilities will surely "fade awa' like morning dew."

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For this reason, writing as I am for those workers in the field and warriors in the trenches who *do* read the Northeast Conference *Reports*, I do not apologize for tackling the possibilities and the problems head on and in a personal tone which does not pretend to the seeming "objectivity" of reporting. This is the only mode of comment open to me in what I perceive to be a time of crisis.

Interlocking Problems of Identity and Organization

The Unreal Time Frame

I shall begin by discussing the vexed question implied by the quotation marks in my title. What do we mean when we talk about a "college-level" curriculum or "college-level" work? It has the connotation of being a higher level than something else. It is presumably a higher order of work than is done at high school—but higher in what sense? Different? Harder? More? Or what? I have frequently heard the question asked of foreign language teachers at the universities: Are you doing college-level work or just teaching skills? Behind this is often the implied or openly stated question: Does this work deserve college credit or should it be non-credit like remedial work, a necessary prerequisite for the higher form of study known as "college-level"? Such questions are legitimate and not easy to answer. Of course students at college should not be doing work which they could just as easily have done at the age of eleven. And obviously they could have learned the basic skills of language and arithmetic at the age of eleven and younger. Equally obvious, however, is the fact that they cannot do "college-level" work without them. The large remedial programs in English and mathematics introduced into many universities testify to our recognition of this fact.

In foreign languages, the unfortunate necessity of having to acquire basic skills before one can do anything at all, let alone "college-level" work, is strikingly apparent to all who have tried to stammer their way around Paris or Madrid, *a fortiori* around Beijing or Cairo, where even letters and numbers are, as we say, hieroglyphic. But the question of where, when, and how to acquire these skills and whether it is the job of the universities and colleges of the United States to teach them for credit, presents a problem with no simple solution.

Some of us look enviously at the Europeans; we see that they teach foreign languages at the "high school level," and that students who study at the universities have frequently studied the basic skills for upwards of six years before they go on to "college-level" work. It should be pointed out, of course, that we are not

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talking about very many languages: English, French, German, some Italian, some Spanish, some Russian, and apart from Latin and some Ancient Greek, not much of anything else. So even in Europe, people who want to go on to academic levels in the less commonly taught languages have to acquire basic skills at the "college level." Students are, however, for the most part expected to have completed their *general* education in advance, and can therefore spend the greater part of their university time on their chosen language and its literature; some of this time will certainly be spent in the country of this language. The same very large amount of college time will be spent on rather high level work in language and literature by the student of the commonly taught language who has already often spent at least six years learning the basic skills at school.

The college curriculum as a whole is very different in the United States where the presumption is that general education must continue through the university years; students do "college-level" work in a variety of subjects throughout these years. Nothing equivalent to European "college-level" specialization therefore can possibly occur until the graduate level. The American liberal arts curriculum has much to recommend it. It works well in subjects where the essential basic skills are reading, writing, comprehending, and speaking the English language. Provided that one has learned to read and write well at high school, one can receive an excellent general education at college, with an emphasis on, for example, history. The history major can go on to graduate school admirably prepared to launch into specialized work. Those who emerge from American graduate schools in most liberal arts subjects are probably among the best educated people in the world, certainly as well educated in a specialized sense as equivalent Europeans, and infinitely better educated in the general sense than equivalent Britons who have essentially been "specializing" since they were sixteen years old.

In foreign languages, however, the US system as it stands is a recipe for disaster, or, to put it less dramatically, for frequent inadequacy and disappointment. Even if students take four years of French in high school, and go on to major in French in college and even if they are among the privileged few who spend a year or a semester or a summer in France, they will still have spent infinitely less time on acquiring basic skills and working towards a high level of literacy than their European counterparts. Such Americans, by the end of their four years in college, are just about ready to *start learning* to work with the skills of high-level literacy. If they go straight on to graduate school, however, they find that the work there presumes that they have already reached a highly specialized linguistic level. They are supposed to read, write, speak, and comprehend like a native, because if they do not have what the job ads cheerfully call "near-native fluency," they cannot, for example, discuss and write about the finer points of structuralist

criticism in French. Do the graduate schools consider it a major part of their business to teach the skills needed for this "higher than college-level" work? No, that should have been done before in college. However, these students were not adequately taught the skills they needed for the college level because they should have been taught them before at a lower level. Is it very surprising that the "near-native fluency" required from fresh PhDs is provided more often by actual "natives" or "semi-natives" than by those aspiring non-natives who have struggled through various levels of the system?

Of course numbers of individual Americans reach and have always reached the highest levels of achievement in various foreign languages, but if they do it the conventional way through high school and college, then they do so in spite of the system and not because of it. The reason does not lie in the content of the curriculum, nor in poor teaching methods; these are important but secondary considerations. The reason lies in the system itself, its false expectations, and its unrealistic goals at every level. It has survived because the United States is a nation of immigrants. The basic flaws in the system have been masked by the abundance of native speakers at all levels of the foreign language teaching profession, especially at the top. European countries cannot match this and so have been obliged to design systems in which foreign languages can be seriously taught to their own people.

Surely abundant resources of native speakers of every language, including the less commonly taught ones, *should* put the United States ahead of the entire world, not behind it, in its capacity to teach foreign languages.[1] Perhaps it could, if the masks were stripped away from the system, the basic organizational flaws were recognized, and the expectations and goals were adjusted to the realities of general as distinct from specialized education. American general education is a noble experiment in mass education with no equal anywhere in Europe. The problem for us is that the "college-level" curriculum in foreign languages is not designed for it. It is designed for a time frame which is nonexistent, and for students who are somewhere else. Meanwhile we are losing the opportunities for using the real time which does exist in the college curriculum and for teaching real students who are sitting in real classrooms. Despite all the public furor surrounding general education at the moment, its overall structure is probably not going to change in the foreseeable future. Change in the college-level curriculum in foreign languages will have to occur within it and take into account its constraints.

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The Split Personality of the Profession

In sounding a note of crisis, I do not wish to follow in the footsteps of the recent tribes of report-writers on the state of American education in general and foreign language education in particular. Their strategy has been tellingly described by Dale Lange as "alarm, negate, propose" ("Nature and Direction," 240). Such accounts, from the pace-setting report of the President's Commission *Strength through Wisdom* on, have indeed followed this pattern: They sound a note of alarm, proceed to paint the flaws of the system in the gloomiest of terms, and then they propose changes, paying scant attention either to real problems of implementation or to successes of the past and successful attempts at change now in progress. *Strength through Wisdom* itself did set off a great deal of very useful soul-searching. It contains some solid statements of principle which apply directly to the college curriculum: for example, it deplores the epidemic elimination of foreign language requirements, urges their reinstatement, and asks furthermore for the "careful integration of early language instruction with higher levels of study" (29). But when it comes to the specific chapter on college and university programs (67–100), its emphasis is on "international studies" programs with scarcely a mention of the actual teaching of foreign languages or of how such teaching is to be integrated into a program of "international studies," still less into the traditional college curriculum.

Similarly, in the *Report to the Academic Community* of the Association of American Colleges, *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, there are quite concrete and legitimate criticisms of the failure of faculty curriculum committees to break away from the tradition of defending departmental turf in order to challenge "the fundamental assumptions and practices of the academy" (9). There are also very solid proposals for "study in depth" and "sequential learning" (27–32). But when the writers try to fit foreign languages into this picture, they subsume them blithely under the general heading of "international and multicultural experiences." In the midst of fine phrases about opening the eyes and minds of students to ethnic diversity and the aspirations of women, there appears one actual mention of foreign language: "The study of foreign language and literature can be enriched by exploring the culture of which it is an artifact" (23). This is all very well, but let us remember that in this report there is a primary and welcome stress on in-depth study: The writers correctly identify certain characteristics of such study—a "central core of method and theory," a "range of topics," a "sequence that presumes advancing sophistication" (29). Where in the present college curriculum is the time and the space for this kind of in-depth study in a foreign language? One is left with the sense that the members of these well-meaning commis-

sions and study groups do not really know or perhaps have forgotten what it actually takes to learn a foreign language from scratch and to study its literature and its culture *in depth*. "Integrity" in the foreign language curriculum will not be achieved until that curriculum is constructed honestly by people who do know and have not forgotten—college foreign language teachers themselves.

The general comments made in *Integrity in the College Curriculum* on the profession of college teachers are important and timely. The writers deplore the lack of training for teaching at the college level: "Only in higher education is it generally assumed that teachers need no preparation, no supervision, no introduction to teaching" (35). They recognize that the reward system in higher education must measure teaching performance as well as research (37). They believe that the responsibility for teaching undergraduates should be shared by all faculty, including senior research faculty, and they urge teachers to give ample office hours and frequent helpful advice on written work (38). What they and the public in general do not understand is how very complicated it is to effect even these obvious and basic reforms in the field of foreign language teaching. The split nature of the field is such that general statements of principle cannot be applied in practice without a multitude of particular reforms. Some of these are at least now under discussion.

The general agitation about the college curriculum which has spread in the 1980s is reflected in the journals of foreign language where the word "ferment" crops up frequently to describe what is going on. The journals are refreshingly full of impassioned debate on the concrete questions of how to teach and test proficiency in foreign language. "Methodology" is certainly in ferment, as is teaching practice and teacher training. Less discussed is the question of how the newly fermented foreign language teaching programs are to fit into the overall college-level curriculum.

What seems to be a tacit agreement among the public report-writers to group foreign language learning with something called "international studies" would come as a surprise to many college professors in foreign language departments if they were to read these documents. They consider themselves to be firmly rooted in the humanities tradition of the liberal arts curriculum and would probably be quite disturbed to discover, for example, that according to Humphrey Tonkin, many "language experts and humanists have been working over the past few years to de-couple foreign language and the humanities" ("Language and International Studies" 5). He points out that foreign language instruction in colleges in the United States began with programs in the humanities and grew out of the study of philology and history. "The teachers of foreign languages," he writes, "were and have largely remained professors trained in the intricacies of literary

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and linguistic research, and their aim was to create in their students a sufficient knowledge of a given language to make the literature of that language accessible" (5). Many of us on the side known as literary would recognize ourselves in that description. Certainly, I recognize myself. However, I have been involved in the recent "ferment" in foreign language teaching, and so also recognize that to many people this description conjures up some sort of dinosaur whose days are numbered. "Passive and scholarly" are the words which Tonkin uses to characterize the purposes of such a teacher (5). This seems in itself foreign to those of us who do not regard literary scholarship as passive; helping students to open the doors of a language into a new storehouse of magnificent literature seems to us an exciting goal; far from being passive, the whole endeavor requires great mental agility on the part of teacher and student.

Tonkin, however, sees what many have as yet failed to see. New demands are being made on the academic community, and they hold dangers: "Foreign language instruction entered the curriculum as literature, the teaching of values, not as a skill, like calculus or composition. To deny received convention is to risk undermining the philosophy of the entire enterprise" (6). He suggests redefining the mission of the foreign language department by recognizing that language departments are engaged in two activities—training students to learn languages and training students in literary studies (7). Others see more radical solutions to the same problem. For Theodore B. Kalivoda, foreign language departments that rest on a liberal arts bias towards content-oriented teaching may be miscalculating the security of their position. He cites the current discontent of teacher-trainees, and the possible growth of discontent in the general public, and suggests that foreign language departments may lose responsibility for language teaching which will be assumed by language centers or institutes. He maintains quite rightly that some professors would welcome freeing the college curriculum from lower-division courses, sending the responsibility (if not the students) back to the high schools, or elsewhere. At the same time, he warns that "this would eventually destroy the foreign language departments since it would hit at the core of the students" (15). This is something which most professors fear, even those who have not taught a language class for years.

If we as professors in the humanist tradition allow ourselves to be even more cut off than we are now from the "college-level" teaching of foreign languages, then we shall certainly lose in institutional power, but more importantly, as humanists, we shall lose mightily in moral stature. We shall be abdicating our responsibilities as humanists in our field, by failing to ensure that the humanistic teaching of foreign languages, literatures, and cultures is upheld in the college curriculum. We shall, however, be equally guilty of such abdication if we try to

keep control of language teaching at one remove, i.e., if we try to keep the language courses in our departments to ensure our survival as departments, yet do nothing ourselves to try to improve the present sorry state of these courses, ignoring the aims and efforts at improvement being made by those for whom foreign language teaching is a primary interest and/or research field. A lot of activity and very hard work is going on in language teaching at the college level, and it is a travesty of our humanist obligation to sit like blocks in the way of this work; better we step out of the way and remove ourselves into the isolation which some people wish upon us.

I understand very well the impulse which says: Leave the scholars and teachers of literature alone to become gradually isolated while the real action goes on elsewhere. This is in the short run unrealistic. They may lose moral stature, and ultimately even power. But the latter will take a long time. Meanwhile they are sitting in a lot of jobs and in a lot of important places. The larger part of the university professoriat cannot just be written off as an esoteric group fiddling with the intricacies of literary and linguistic research. They are still teaching at least half of the college curriculum—the upper half. It is unrealistic to think that foreign language teaching experts together with untenured assistant professors, teaching assistants, and a handful of professors at the upper ranks can change the college curriculum on their own.

Light is already being cast on some real possibilities of change as well as some real problems: Concerted efforts are already going into the reorganization of lower-level courses in some universities. Barbara Freed has trained and supervised teaching assistants at the University of Pennsylvania through a period in which some languages have instituted a proficiency requirement based on a set of functionally defined proficiency standards. She reports that there is much more cooperation among teaching assistants, and they have more understanding of what they are doing. There is also "increased faculty awareness of, interest and involvement in, decisions concerning basic language instruction" (225). Admittedly the enormous amount of detailed organizational work in implementing the requirement "typically falls not to senior faculty but to untenured assistant professors," but in at least two departments, senior faculty do share the responsibility of interviewing hundreds of students using the ACTFL test. This seems to be a hopeful first step towards integration, but the problems of recasting the lower level curriculum and leaving the upper level curriculum untouched are great, and, paradoxically, they will become greater as the lower level is better and more realistically taught.

At the University of Minnesota, comprehensive proficiency-based entrance standards and graduation requirements have been introduced, and comments by

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Lange illustrate precisely the way in which a lower-level program, well organized and sequenced and realistic in its goals, actually widens rather than narrows the already yawning gap in the curriculum. In a most illuminating report on the Minnesota experiences in developing and implementing proficiency tests based on the ACTFL/ETS/ILR guidelines, he writes:

> Senior professional staff are interested in literary and linguistic research, thereby effectively removing themselves from issues of language learning and teaching. They have relegated their responsibility to the "language coordinator." But the expectations of this senior staff for language competence in the four modalities in the upper division language courses is at the Superior level of the guidelines, creating tension between attention to language development and an ideal but unrealizable competence. The implementation of the guidelines in lower division courses makes that tension grow because some instructors will probably pay more attention to the development of language competence in students and less to the outrageous expectations of senior faculty. This tension needs to be resolved if the guidelines are to be implemented at all ("Developing" 284).

This tension in Minnesota, so clearly described by Lange, must be resolved nationwide if we are to create a coherently functioning college curriculum.

Richard Brod, reacting in 1980 to what he rightly called the "shopping-list report" of the President's Commission, wrote: "What has been needed all along, and what is still needed, is a comprehensive program for all levels of education, developed by our profession with the consensus of educational decision-makers" (10). Eight years later, this is still lacking and still very much needed. A new "college-level" curriculum needs to play an integrated part in a new continuum from elementary to high school to college to graduate school. It needs to function as a coherent continuation of high school foreign language instruction, as an end in itself, and as a precursor to graduate school instruction. There is a chance for this now. Cooperation on an unprecedented level is going on between some secondary schools and some colleges and universities. The opportunity for a totally reformed college curriculum, however, cannot be grasped until the two main segments of the college teaching profession, the foreign language teachers and the literary scholars, cease regarding themselves as two distinct groups. Unfortunately, in the present "ferment," they sometimes seem to be splitting further apart.

The Yawning Gap in the College Curriculum

There is a point in the traditional college curriculum at which the gap so often felt at the professional level between the two distinct fields of language acquisition and literary research is actually experienced with considerable pain and not

seldom cries of protest by the undergraduate students themselves. I am going to suggest—with unabashed optimism—that the closing of this gap may present us with a chance to begin closing the professional gap.

It is the point at which the student traditionally proceeds with little ceremony from skills acquisition courses to the study of literature. R. A. Parsons recently searched the professional journals, and of the countless articles on pedagogical matters published in recent decades, he found only five which offered concrete and practical ways of helping students overcome the difficulties they experience in beginning literature courses. He says, quite rightly: "The skills required to succeed in a foreign language course at the elementary, intermediate or conversation-composition levels are fundamentally different from those needed to appreciate and to engage in analysis of literary texts written for educated native speakers of the target language" (213). He goes on to suggest some good practical measures as to what can be done in the upper-level courses, such as desisting from the time-honored practice of moving chronologically through a series of survey courses, and he proposes some down-to-earth techniques for introducing students to the terms of literary criticism. These are good suggestions in themselves, and they are made in the context of Tonkin's understanding of the gap which the students are being asked to bridge: Parsons quotes, "The gap is not between elementary and advanced knowledge within a single discipline but between disparate disciplines" ("Foreign Languages and the Humanities" 15).

For my own part, I suggest a more radical response to this situation: *In the framework of the American general education degree, it is pointless to design a four-year curriculum which requires students of a foreign language to cross that gap from one discipline to another.* None but the exceptional few can possibly progress from elementary knowledge of the language to working within the discipline of literary criticism or within any other serious academic discipline during four undergraduate years. And most students will need the kind of help which Parsons describes, and more, if they want to tackle work within a discipline at the graduate level.

The report-writers who lay the blame for decline in educational standards squarely on the shoulders of the teaching profession, implying that teachers in other countries have done much better, seem to forget the enormity of what is expected of the teaching profession in this country. Sixty percent of all high school graduates in the United States now attend college—twice as large a percentage as the 25–30% of eleven-year-olds in, for example, the Federal Republic of Germany who attend the *Gymnasium* where they spend seven to nine years preparing for their entry to the university. One or two voices in our profession have pointed to this question of population-percentages in their pleas for an understanding of

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the real situation. Donald K. Jarvis, for example, with rare directness makes a plea for a change in the reward systems of our universities: "Failing to reward good teaching is simply immoral in an era when sixty per cent of all high school graduates in the United States attend college, many the first generation in their families to attend, and many miserably prepared for it" (34). Rewards for good teaching are certainly crucial in the present situation, but they are not enough. The best teaching in the world cannot achieve the impossible, and it would be impossible even for that relatively small percentage of relatively well-prepared students who populate the European universities to advance in four years from zero knowledge of a language to the linguistic level required to work in the discipline of literary criticism if they were also studying a dozen other subjects at the same time and, as often as not, working for a living. The whole notion is absurd.

One can imagine horror breaking out on the faces of one's colleagues at the thought of transforming not only the required courses but the entire college curriculum into "skills-acquisition courses." I am indeed suggesting the transformation of the entire college curriculum in foreign languages, from the beginning required courses to the end of the major, into an integrated sequence of courses, grounded firmly in humanistic, literary content, but teaching linguistic skills actively throughout. A radical change in the content of the curriculum and in its humanistic purposes is not in my opinion necessary or desirable. Literary scholars, humanists of all stripes, could and should play an important part in the recasting of the college curriculum.

There have been moves in recent years towards what is called "diversifying" the college foreign language curriculum — introducing film courses, women's studies courses, area studies, and so on, and why not? Such topics are not outside the humanistic framework nor outside the framework of the American general liberal arts degree. But simply diversifying the subject matter of courses will not improve language instruction unless these courses are a part of a program that is linguistically sequenced. A series of upper-level courses in the foreign language on topics other than literature will not necessarily help the student to progress in mastery of the language any more than a series that works through periods of literature from the seventeenth century to the present day. The materials themselves may be more accessible, and even apparently easier for students, but when it comes to discussing such materials at the "college level," the students will not automatically be better prepared.

Richard D. Lambert has suggested various interesting ways of having students use a foreign language in subjects outside the foreign language departments. He suggests, for example, that students majoring in anthropology, history, political science, etc., should "study a second language" and be required to take a

course in their major subject in that language (48). This is a fine idea. But how, for example, is the political science major going to find the time in his college career to acquire the skills needed to read, write, and talk about political science in a foreign language? It is frequently suggested that students will be more likely to take foreign language courses if area studies or *Landeskunde* programs are available, and some people look to these as a way of the future (e.g., Hohendahl). This may indeed in the short term be a way of swelling enrollment figures, but if such programs are to be genuinely preprofessional as is optimistically suggested (10), if they try to do specialized work in the language at undergraduate levels, then they will face the same linguistic gap as the literature programs. Area studies need the same careful linguistic sequencing based on the realities of students' proficiency levels as do literature programs.

When all is said and done, the real knowledge and expertise of the foreign language faculty is still in literature, and this will not change on a large scale in short order. In a recent list of new PhDs, chosen at random, a survey of "doctoral dissertations related to the teaching of German and completed in US universities in 1986" (Benseler), there are eighty-two entries covering the fields of comparative literature, linguistics, and second language acquisition. An entry by entry check reveals five on second language acquisition, six on linguistics, two on general cultural topics, and sixty-nine on literary topics. This is an indication of the reality of the situation. There is, however, an important change which could be made in fairly short order, if we put our minds to it: Instead of attempting to shift our college curriculum away from literature, we could use the massive resources of the literature profession to create a curriculum which would offer all students a chance to become sufficiently proficient in a foreign language by the end of their college careers so that they really could then use that language to begin to pursue specialized research interests in literature, cultural studies, linguistics, or any professional field. The college curriculum, in other words, has to do a better job at teaching language. It has to make it possible for more than native speakers or the exceptional few to make their way to the upper professional levels. It falls down now in this, not because of its concentration on literature, but because of its attempt to specialize in literary criticism while failing to teach linguistic skills. It is trying to be something it cannot be, and the students who disappear into that crucial gap between skills acquisition and literature do so because their teachers have not closed the gap in their own profession.

This problem has emerged clearly into the harsh light of published day in recent times because of "proficiency testing." So far the responses to it have necessarily been piecemeal, because the people involved in the reform of the curriculum towards a proficiency-based one have been working mainly with lower division classes. Isabelle M. Kaplan has described an attempt to deal with it at Northwestern University. Looking at the upper-level French program there, she writes: "By passing directly from the first two years of instruction in a language to a content-oriented program, most foreign language departments' curricula expect students to operate orally as if they had the skills of at least a Superior-level speaker on the ACTFL scale or level 4 on the Government scale, the most difficult and the least likely to be achieved in undergraduate years. The existing distinction between Introduction to French Literature and a topical course on French Classical Theatre or Flaubert is not a linguistic one. The level of linguistic ability required for one is no less than for the other" (493). At Northwestern they tackled this problem by creating two new conversation courses at the third- and fourth-year levels, and they report some success in raising the levels of oral proficiency of the students in these two courses. The rise was more quantifiable in the first course than in the second, and plans were underway to restructure third- and fourth-year grammar and composition courses, using the ACTFL guidelines. This was certainly a sensible way to tackle the problem, and the students no doubt benefited.

Attempts such as those made by Parsons to help his students deal linguistically with his literature courses, and by Kaplan to help her students deal with language problems in separate language classes are infinitely better than ignoring the problem and merrily talking over the heads of the students. I would like to describe the attempt which we have made in the German Department at Hunter College to go one step further and tackle the total curriculum, language and literature. Out of this attempt springs my own optimism for bridging the gap at the student level as well as at the professorial level, and so I shall describe it in some detail.

Integration and Reform on a Small Scale: A Case Study[2]

The Oral Proficiency Interview as Catalyst

In describing our work, I am not suggesting that I have all the answers nor that everybody should do what we have done. I am certainly not an authority in the field of foreign language pedagogy, indeed "it is not my field." Like many others whose field it is not, I have taught the German language for many years, often with a strong sense of my own inadequacy. We have worked at Hunter College for six years with the Oral Proficiency Interview and the *ACTFL Provisional Profi-*

ciency Guidelines. I do not claim that the *Guidelines* are perfect nor that they have solved all our problems, but they have certainly opened our eyes and made us ask a lot of questions. The answers to these questions will not be found in the *Guidelines*, but only in a great deal more research and experimentation. I am interested here in sharing our experiences with high school and college teachers who may not be experts in the field of foreign language acquisition, but whose own research and experiment in the classroom will be sorely needed in the years ahead.

Six years ago in the fall of 1982 when we first encountered the Oral Proficiency Interview in an ACTFL familiarization workshop, our curriculum was probably fairly typical of foreign language departments in the United States. We had the usual ostensible goal—"all-around proficiency in reading, speaking, writing, and listening comprehension"—and we had little idea of what that all-around proficiency was supposed to mean. We had a twelve-credit requirement, and so taught four required courses with three contact hours per semester. We had very large classes, ranging from 25 to 35 or more students. Our teaching method was the usual mixture: some loyal echoes of audio-lingual, some brave attempts at functional-notional, but basically a governing obligation to finish the textbook in the first year, covering most of the grammar of the German language. In the second year we routinely subjected our students to the shock of abandoning the firm ground of the grammar book and took them through a series of reading texts, usually short stories, a play, a short novel. After that, for those who went on, direct language instruction was largely over.

We are a small department—five full-time faculty and some six or seven adjunct teachers. All of us in professorial ranks have always taught basic language and advanced literature courses, but this did not mean that there was much carryover from the intermediate to the advanced courses. The major consisted mainly of a choice of literature courses covering various periods of literary history, or genres. These courses were taken by a variety of students: some native speakers of German, some students out of our own required courses, an occasional student with four years in high school and some students who had picked up enough of the language here or there not to belong in our basic courses. The mixture of linguistic ability made these classes difficult to teach and something of a nightmare to grade.

The first time, therefore, that I encountered the then "Foreign Service Scale" and thought that there might be a rational way of measuring linguistic ability, and dividing classes accordingly, I clutched at it, as the proverbial drowning man clutches at a straw, without asking whether it was perfect or whether it had a sound theoretical base or whether it was suited to academe. After six years of working very hard with the ACTFL version of it in an academic setting, I think I

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can say that it is, while not perfect, certainly not only a straw. In any case, as teachers of the elementary as well as the advanced classes, as teachers of language and literature, we no longer feel that we are drowning.

We began by learning to conduct Oral Proficiency Interviews. There has been some concerned adverse criticism of the Interview, of the *Guidelines*, and of the instructional implications of both in recent professional publications,[3] followed by some measured responses.[4] For the moment I would only suggest that it may help those who are seeking a way through the conflicting mass of arguments on the subject if they hold on to one thought about the Oral Proficiency Interview itself. It is only a test. It is not a teaching method, nor is it wedded to any particular teaching method. Because of this, it helps us to look at various methods not from the standpoint of a devotee of any particular method, but from a position outside. It has the refreshing effect of widening our awareness, and inviting us to rethink what we do and what we want to do, without dictating to us how we are to do it.

The first and most important thing it did for us was to teach us to listen to our own students. It provided us with specific evidence about the way they actually spoke, and so it gave us insight into the realities and possibilities of foreign language teaching and learning as it was going on in our particular setting. The Interview had, in that sense, very personal and particular application. At the same time, the evidence we collected was not random and variable. It was organized and it followed certain patterns, and so enabled us to set goals for our students, both individually and in groups, which had a more solid empirical basis than any we had devised before. We were freed from the frustration of pursuing unrealistic goals and trying to match impossible expectations.

The ability to define rather precisely teaching and learning goals makes it easier to manage the difficult business of articulation between courses through sequences, from the beginning of a program to the senior level. Similarly, it makes it easier to coordinate work across numerous sections of a single course. In giving our program more internal coherence, we are not closing it, but on the contrary making it more clearly accessible to students who come into it from the outside, be it from high school or elsewhere. New students, no matter where they come from or how they have been taught, can be tested by the same method, and placed at a level in the course sequence where they will be working with students whose speaking matches approximately the same description in the *Guidelines* as their own. It is worth emphasizing that the descriptions of the various language levels in the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* are precisely that—descriptions. They are not theoretical statements about how people learn foreign languages, they are not prescriptive statements about how people ought to learn, they are purely and simply descriptions of how people speak at various stages of the spoken language.

One finds in some of the literature on the subject sentences beginning with, "The *Guidelines* claim ... " or "The *Guidelines* maintain ..."; this is an inaccurate and confusing way of talking about what they do, and is best discounted, whether the writers are for or against the *Guidelines*.

It is sometimes said that the Oral Interview and the rating scale with which it works have no theoretical base. I can only say that after conducting and listening to hundreds of interviews, the *Guidelines* do describe what one hears. At Hunter College we have a wide variety of students from every linguistic, ethnic, and educational background; we have young native speakers fluent in the current language and senior citizen native speakers with considerable language loss. We have "street-speakers" and "school-speakers." We have all sorts and conditions of people, and we have interviewed a good many of them. It seems to us that while one can quibble over details, the speaking descriptions in broad outline hold up. What becomes interesting after a great many interviews is a certain inevitability of the sequential order of functional mastery which the interviews reveal. In other words, the order of the level-descriptions in the *Guidelines* from Novice to Superior broadly reflects an order which appears to exist in what is known as real life.

This has been called an "experiential hierarchy based on what learners actually do" (Omaggio) and objections have been made to using this for curricular planning. There may indeed be legitimate theoretical objections, but in practice this "experiential hierarchy" provides a working framework in which curricular change can be made. The details of the level descriptions are far less important, from the organizational point of view, than the broad outlines of the functions. Some confusion may be caused by the use of the word "function." We are not talking here about the "functions" of the functional-notional method which have no essential hierarchy. There is nothing which makes it inevitable, for example, that a person should apologize in his first semester of a foreign language, but should only express congratulations in the second. It is a matter of chance whether in real-life learning you need to do the one before the other, and it is a matter of choice in the classroom which one the teacher decides to teach first. By contrast, the sequence of what Heidi Byrnes describes as the "broad task-universals" ("Proficiency" 45) does emerge as being valid in an experiential sense, no matter who the speakers are, or how they have learned the language. For example, people do not analyze the complexities of family relationships before they can describe simply the members of their family. People do not speak in connected prose, combining words and sentences smoothly with connecting words before they can speak in short sentences. People do not argue abstractly before they can narrate concretely. These things simply do not happen. And these broad sequential differences, intuitively obvious but now clearly demonstrable, have enormous

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implications for the kind of work which we can expect our students to do, and the sequence in which we can expect them to do it, from the elementary language sequence all the way through to the end of the literature major.

Needs Revealed

When two senior professors in our department had trained as oral proficiency testers, and also attended a workshop for trainers, we proceeded to train two assistant professors and a teaching assistant as testers. Together, we have been able to test a large percentage of our students. We have come to know what levels of speaking proficiency they actually reach at certain points in the curriculum, and as the years go on, we shall have a way of testing whether those levels change if we change or modify our teaching methods. At present, after two fourteen-week semesters with about twenty-eight students in a class, our average student does not test out higher than Novice High (in speaking). The occasional very good student might be an Intermediate Low. After two more semesters, the average student will not rate higher than an Intermediate Mid (in speaking). Again, the occasional very good student might be an Intermediate High.

Novice High speakers, in terms of the *ACTFL Guidelines*, can ask questions or make statements with reasonable accuracy only where short memorized utterances are involved; there are some emerging signs of spontaneity but errors are frequent. The description in the *Guidelines* cannot be simplistically turned into a curricular goal. Obviously, there is little to be gained by saying that the goal of the first year of college German is to produce students who make frequent errors, display fractured syntax in every utterance, and have great difficulty making themselves understood. Yet it is helpful to realize that this is in fact how most of our students will speak in an oral interview after one year of college German, as we teach it, even those students who write 100% on achievement tests of mastery of structures learned.

Intermediate Mid speakers can converse simply on essentially personal everyday matters, still with a great deal of grammatical inaccuracy. They can "survive" in the country of the target language, provided that they do not run into complicated situations. Those who are looking at the contribution of required foreign language courses to the general education of the American student might not hold this to be a very ambitious goal, but having worked explicitly towards it, we know now that it is by no means easy to achieve. It is complicated by the fact that inevitably in our system students who intend to stop their foreign language study at this point are in the same classes as students who might want to go on with the language to higher levels. It is extremely difficult to do justice to classes in which

these two kinds of students with potentially different needs sit together. One can no doubt teach more efficiently by addressing the needs of one or the other, but it seems to us that we have to try to address both. We want to give all students a chance to speak at "survival" level, but we are, after all, offering a college program in foreign languages, not crash courses for potential tourists, and we predicate our own courses on the assumption that some students will indeed want to progress through the entire sequence of courses to become actively literate participants in our most advanced courses. Our goal is to open this opportunity to all students. We do not therefore put an exclusive emphasis in beginning language courses on conversational skills. Defining such skills as those which ultimately enable a person to engage in intellectual discourse in a foreign tongue, we think that they have to be taught (and tested) from the beginning in conjunction with the other skills a literate person needs: reading, writing, and listening comprehension. It is important to note that this is not something which the *Guidelines* "dictate." It is what we have chosen to do in our particular circumstances.

We are developing proficiency tests in the other skills, and have found the *ACTFL Guidelines* helpful up to a point. In writing, where the development of active skills tends to run more or less parallel with the development of speaking skills, they are much more helpful than in the assessment of reading and listening comprehension. We conduct in any case traditional achievement tests and test the knowledge of German grammar. We have given up attempting to "cover all the grammar" in one year, but we do cover it in the course of three semesters. (For more details, see Kuhn-Osius) We attempt from the beginning to work actively with reading and listening texts, and in the third and fourth semesters gradually to increase the concentration on literary texts, so that we by no means eliminate literature from the introductory four-course sequence, but we avoid, as best we can, the notorious leap from grammar or textbook to reading text which used to take place at the beginning of the second year.

For the first time, we are taking into account in the curriculum itself the fact that students who have been taught all the basic grammar of the German language do not, typically, use very much of it, in speaking or in free writing, in their first four semesters. The discrepancy between paper knowledge and speaking ability is great in these early stages. This is, of course, something which we have always known, but the Oral Interview brings it out into the open in a quite striking way. In the past, we tended simply to ignore this gap, but we cannot do this now. Our testing has shown that from the beginning to the end of our college curriculum, including the major courses, most of our students are operating in the active skills of speaking and writing at the Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced levels of the ACTFL scale. It is a rare undergraduate other than a native speaker who rates Superior.

This fact alone has forced us to look very critically at our overall curriculum. A Superior-level speaker can state and defend opinions, describe in detail, hypothesize, and deal with abstract topics. An Advanced-level speaker cannot. Even an Advanced Plus speaker can only do these things intermittently. And yet almost all our upper-level courses have traditionally been literature courses, conducted entirely in German. What were our Advanced-level speakers doing in such courses, to say nothing of our Intermediate Mids coming straight out of the foreign language requirement? It seems that we were taking these students at the Intermediate level and putting them directly into a situation that required Superior-level skills. We were bypassing altogether the crucial stage of the Advanced level. We were not really reaching it in the introductory sequence, and we were ignoring it in the upper-level courses.

It has recently been suggested that you cannot produce genuinely Advanced-level students in the classroom context. They have to study abroad first. At Hunter College our students cannot, for the most part, go to Germany during their undergraduate careers, and if they manage it at all, it is usually for a short time during the summer. Most of them not only cannot afford the money for the trip, they cannot afford to give up the jobs with which they are earning their way through college. So the classroom is all we have. What we have done, essentially, is to transform our entire program from the fourth semester on into a steady march through the Advanced level. This has only been possible because we have regarded the whole curriculum as a continuum from the beginning courses through the intermediate courses to the last of the advanced courses. We could not have done this without the involvement of all the literature courses.

Changes Made

The fourth semester tended in the past to be seen as the "end of the requirement" but it now plays an important pivotal role in the overall curriculum. A similarly important pivotal role might be played by the fourth year of a high school curriculum if high school and college teachers could work together on planning an eight-year curriculum beginning in high school and building carefully towards and through the college major.

In our new fourth semester, we still work with literary texts—short stories and a play—but we do not try to involve the students in discussion or argument; we concentrate instead on everyday conversational dialogue, on describing people and places, and on telling stories in present and past time. We do not review com-

plex grammar but work at consolidating basic grammar. We are aiming here, very modestly, for a better Intermediate-level speaker and writer which in fact we can produce, rather than grandiosely for a Superior-level speaker and writer which we cannot hope to produce at this point. For students who want to continue the study of the language, it is important that they work towards control of basic grammatical structures in spontaneous speaking and writing, and that in reading, they can grasp most of the main facts and events of a story in standard German by a modern writer such as Heinrich Böll or a play by a writer such as Max Frisch. They will not grasp all the inferences, nor the complexities of relationships between things and people, but when working at their own pace and with a dictionary, they should be able to get the gist of what is going on without the help of an instructor. They are ready, in our terms, to *begin* working on the threshold of Intermediate High/Advanced.

To help the student towards and across this threshold, we originally thought along the same lines as Kaplan in her experiment described above, that is, in terms of adding language courses. We have done this, but we found very quickly that one conversation and composition course does not take students across the first threshold to Advanced, and one more conversation and composition course will certainly not take them across the next threshold to Superior. We have therefore recast our upper-level literature courses and guide our students through them.[5]

We have divided these courses into two levels. With more staff, we could profitably divide them into three or four levels, but the two-tier system is at least a workable beginning. Because in any given class there is still an inevitable variety in level, we work with individualized learning goals, particularly in writing and speaking, though we are beginning to do the same in reading. On the basis of an initial oral proficiency interview and a writing and reading test, each student receives from the teacher a set of writing, reading, and speaking goals. These take into account individual differences, but in the active skills they also divide the students into two general groups for the purposes of preparation of classwork, dialogues and presentations, and for writing assignments: Intermediate to Low Advanced have to work at their ability to narrate, report, and describe simply, and higher Advanced and native speakers are already in a position to work at their ability to support opinions, present arguments, hypothesize, and describe in detail. The classes themselves are not divided, and the same literary works are read and discussed by everyone. Writing assignments are given on the text under discussion, but there are parallel sets of questions appropriate to these broad categories of functional ability, and each student is advised which to tackle.

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Far from interfering with the courses' demands in terms of literary understanding and development of critical ability, this approach encourages less advanced students to read carefully and describe precisely, while the more advanced students cannot achieve easy grades simply by performing correctly language tasks which do not develop their critical ability and powers of expression. It is our experience that the quality of instruction in the Advanced-level literature classes has improved, and even at this level, where progress is much slower than at the Novice and Intermediate levels, the students themselves discern some progress and are not frustrated by the sense of taking one literature course after another, never seeming to improve.

We have abandoned the attempt to "cover" periods of literary history. We teach courses on the same topics as before, such as the twentieth-century novel or nineteenth-century drama, but our choice of texts is now based less on the need to cover content areas than on our newly developing sense of what texts we can work with actively in the classroom at specific proficiency levels. It has become clear, for example, that grammatical and structural difficulties of the language used in a text are much less crucial than the amount of background knowledge needed to work with it. To take a simple example, we used to read Thomas Mann's *Tonio Kröger* early in the literature major, but the issues in this *Novelle* are very obscure to our 1980s students in New York City. The conflicting drives of the artist and the bourgeois citizen, for example, mean very little to them; low Advanced-level students cannot even ask the kinds of questions about the text which they need to ask. Kafka, on the other hand, creates his own self-contained world within a given story, and depicts psychological states of isolation and fear, with which our students can readily identify. "Difficult" as he is, therefore, in many ways, his shorter works turn out to be an excellent choice even for a first-level literature course.[6] The class can work straightforwardly with the content, practicing description and narration, because the narrative framework is generally understood. Forcing students through a preestablished canon of great works does not help them to make the necessary slow and careful progress in linguistic proficiency.

To assist this progress, we have added new language courses at the upper levels. We have already established two courses—Advanced German Conversation and Comprehension and Advanced German Conversation and Composition—which work on the Intermediate High/Advanced-level threshold and supplement the first-level literature courses. We are seeking ways of supplementing the literature courses at the next big threshold from Advanced Plus to Superior which the students approach at the end of the major. We have accepted the impossibility of dealing functionally with really advanced grammar in the elementary

course sequence. In the kind of proficiency-oriented foreign language evaluation with which we have been working, accuracy is not viewed and assessed in isolation but always in conjunction with two other key aspects of the total speaking performance: function and content. Intermediate-level functions—for example, asking and answering simple, down-to-earth questions—can be adequately performed in the Intermediate-level content area of everyday survival topics with a relatively low degree of grammatical accuracy. As students proceed through the Advanced-level functions, describing events and people, expressing facts, reporting, and narrating, the content areas with which they can deal multiply, and the need for accuracy increases. As they approach the Superior level, precise structural control and grammatical accuracy become indispensable since one simply cannot perform the Superior-level tasks without them.

This realization has prompted the introduction of a new grammar course late in the major. It is a very different grammar course from any which one might have taught previously at this level. While working in a quite old-fashioned way with memorization and grammatical drills of the complex grammatical forms needed for Superior-level argument, the course does not lose sight of the need to consolidate the Advanced-level function of narration in all timeframes. Throughout the semester, the students write narratives, tell stories in class, and retell stories that have been orally presented, gradually complicating these narratives syntactically as the term progresses. Most students at this level are Advanced-level speakers and writers, and as they become better, so they can work with good chance of success towards the Advanced Plus/Superior threshold. We again coordinate the materials of the course with those being taught in the parallel upper-level literature course. This provides us with a form of elementary transition point between linguistic and literary analysis. In analyzing in the grammar course, for example, a reported conversation from Kafka's *The Trial*, students have to disentangle the subjunctives of indirect speech. This helps them in the parallel literature course on the modern novel to isolate the speakers' voices and establish the narrative point of view. Such a task might simply go over the head of an unprepared student, but it can be satisfactorily performed by students who have worked their way through to the later stages of a carefully constructed program.

We no longer expect our students to become literary critics in four years, but we do not consider that we have therefore lowered our standards. We have tried to raise them by building into our program a workable and demonstrable form of that "indepth study" which was so justly demanded by the writers of *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, study which does indeed "presume advancing sophistication" (29). Instead of expecting students to bridge a formidable gap from language acquisition courses to courses in literary criticism, our goal is rather that

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they should perceive the college-level curriculum as a smooth passage: From knowing little of a language, they gradually work up to the point where they can begin to use the language to work in any discipline which they might choose.

Just as the fourth year of a foreign language at high school might function as a pivotal course on the threshold from the Intermediate to the Advanced Level, so the last language and literature courses of the college curriculum could function as pivotal courses on the threshold from the Advanced Plus to the Superior Level. As such, however, they presuppose the continuation of language study at the next level of the educational system. It remains to be seen whether the graduate schools will be able to rise to this challenge and ensure a further smooth passage from the new college curriculum into graduate level work.

Interlocking Possibilities for Large-Scale Integration and Reform

Cooperation at the College Level

I have described our own small-scale experiment in reshaping the college curriculum in some detail not simply because we have ourselves derived a great deal of pleasure out of it, though of course we have, despite the amount of hard work and great investment of time which it has taken. The department is quite a different place since we started our work. The number of students completing the foreign language requirement in German has increased by one-third, and in our upper-level courses, literature and language, there are more than twice as many students as there were before we began our curricular reform. We do not attribute this to any particular teaching method, but rather to the fact that the curriculum has changed from being a kind of obstacle race into a working support system for the students. There is a new sense of purpose among faculty and students and a new sense of satisfaction. I do not know whether we shall be able to sustain our work in coming years. Certain factors—professional, logistical, financial—militate against it, and in completing this chapter, I shall try to set the broader framework in which these can be understood.

We were able to effect our small revolution in our own very small territory partly because we *are* small, partly because we have had some financial support from the outside and very strong support from our own administration, but also and perhaps primarily because we worked together. One senior person, however enthusiastic, could not have done it; two or three junior faculty alone could not have done it; a separate language teaching unit could not have done it. I would

like to suggest similarly that on a much larger scale, piecemeal efforts, no matter how strenuous and well-conceived, will not lead to wholesale reform of the college curriculum in foreign languages. They will need financial support, administrative support, and faculty cooperation.

There are many professional obstacles in the way of such cooperative effort. Claire Kramsch, who sees clearly the damaging effects of a divided profession, points out that the division is not simply between language and literature but "between tenured and tenure-track faculty members engaged in scholarship of various kinds and non-tenured lecturers or preceptors engaged in foreign language pedagogy" ("The Missing Link" 31). This traditional split, she maintains, is still the model at most institutions, even those where faculty members teach literature and language, and where faculty research has expanded to include film studies, women's studies, and area studies. I find this reflected in my own experience and in all my reading of professional literature: the "research" faculty have their research interests elsewhere than in language and pedagogy, and the teachers of language are by and large not expected to have research interests. "The proficiency challenge," says Kramsch, "has not yet prompted the faculties of most foreign languages and literatures departments to rethink their goals in any overarching way that would integrate their research and teaching charge" (31). This seems indeed to be the case, though one should remember that the "proficiency challenge" is yet young. It is in fact already prompting some of us, perhaps even many of us, to "rethink our goals" in a way that might be described as "overarching"; it certainly involves our ideas about literature differently from the way our former teaching of literature did. We are much more intensely concerned than we used to be with the nature and analysis of texts from the point of view of how language learners at various developmental stages understand them.

Literary scholars are not going to transform themselves en masse into language acquisition scholars. There is no reason why they should, but in the present situation they do face a quite real professional problem: If they teach in the kind of work-intensive, proficiency-based program just described, they have very little time to do research and publish "in their own field." There seems to be a possibility that some literary scholars might indeed, through their attempts at proficiency-based teaching and testing of language and literature, pursue a line of research advocated by the writers of the report *Integrity in the College Curriculum*: research "directed towards understanding how students learn (or fail to learn) specific subject matter, what difficulties they have with various modes of abstract logical reasoning, what preconceptions or misconceptions impede their mastery of concepts or principles in the given subject ..." (12). Such research, as the report-writers point out, requires "deep, expert knowledge of specific subject matter" (12), and it would challenge someone with such knowledge to do this kind of research on the linguistic/literary borderline, for example, of Advanced Plus to Superior, or, to put it another way, on the linguistic/literary borderline of college and graduate school.

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Kramsch is right when she suggests that foreign language acquisition research "offers an intellectual and pedagogical rallying point for language and literature departments at all levels of the curriculum and syllabi, all the way down to lesson plans and teacher and student responses in the classroom" ("The Missing Link" 34). We need time for such common research ground to develop, hoping that it will indeed be common ground and not serve to divide further an already divided profession. Sander Gilman writes eloquently, sadly, even bitterly, about the lack of rewards in today's academic world for the "ancient and now dying art of philology," and he describes how, as reward patterns have changed, it has been driven out of favor by subjective literary criticism and literary theory, by the new science of linguistics. Looking darkly to the future, he sees new fields of study "foreign language acquisition" and "applied linguistics" among them—which will achieve the status of respectable and rewardable research areas. Without great hope, he wonders whether it would not be possible to have an open-ended system of rewardable undertakings. "Could we add new areas of research," he asks, "and instead of discarding other areas, maintain a level of respect for older as well as newer approaches and questions?" (45). He is justifiably skeptical about the possibilities of this. There are others who are justifiably skeptical that foreign language acquisition research will ever be adequately rewarded. But should we not all strive for an open-ended reward system? There is ample room in the human intellect for the ancient art of philology and the new field of foreign language acquisition. If there is not room in the reward structure then this is because the collective mind of the faculty is too narrow. Faculty influence the reward system. We cannot always blame "them," even in these days when it is fashionable to regard everything as hopelessly out of our own personal and moral control.

At least in areas with decidedly common interests, we can try to work together. The "proficiency challenge" has in fact brought some of us, perhaps not into the field of language acquisition, but at least into much soul-searching and hard work on the frontiers of foreign language teaching. And there we hope to find, if not perpetual harmony, at least cooperative work towards common goals. Some people coming new to the professional literature in the field might be less than sanguine about this prospect, and find themselves distinctly confused, for example, by some of the current controversies surrounding the Oral Proficiency Interview and the *ACTFL Guidelines*. I agree with Sandra J. Savignon in her concern about the possible bewilderment, even annoyance, of classroom teachers

at the rapid changes of teaching fashion which they are asked to follow: "Audiolingualism was once in, now it is out; communicative competence came along, but it, too, is now passé; the new bandwagon in foreign language teaching is proficiency, so you should hop on board' (130).

In the cause of clarification, as one bewildered classroom teacher to another, I would emphasize that "proficiency" as I understand it is not a teaching method. It does not replace "communicative competence" nor indeed "audiolingualism." Proficiency-oriented or proficiency-based teaching and testing of foreign languages is essentially *any way of* teaching and testing that concerns itself with the ability of the student to *use* the language rather than just to *know* about it. This is why people who criticize so-called "proficiency," often appear to be criticizing a wide variety of contradictory positions on teaching language. The critics are in fact often taking issue quite genuinely, not with "proficiency" which does not exist as a fixed entity, but with various methods advocated by people who are identified with the "proficiency movement." Renate Schulz, for example, warns that it is dangerous for a language program serving a liberal arts requirement if it limits itself to oral proficiency goals; she points out that

> because of the prominence given the measurement of oral proficiency ... we have now some "missionaries" who advocate oral skills development as the sole objective of language instruction, who recommend throwing away textbooks and dictionaries, who proclaim the uselessness of grammatical analyses and error correction in classroom language instruction, and who define the content of instruction solely in terms of practical language functions, trivializing and limiting the value of foreign language study to routine travel needs, minimum courtesy requirements and everyday survival topics (the context/content descriptors of an intermediate level speaker on the ACTFL/ETS Scale). (377)

Schulz is right. There are such missionaries. But how confusing for the bewildered classroom teacher who turns to the writings of Savignon or James P. Lantolf and William Frawley or Bill VanPatten, all of whom point with dismay at the strong emphasis in the proficiency movement on grammatical accuracy. VanPatten, for example, writes: "An integral part of the Proficiency Movement's concern for the learners' approximation of native-like grammar is error-correction" (62). This seems a far cry from Schulz' missionaries, yet these critics are right too. There are people working with the ACTFL scale who in various ways and for various stages of learning and various reasons emphasize accuracy, just as there are those who de-emphasize grammar.

It may help the classroom teacher to realize, therefore, that there is no point in judging the *Guidelines* or the Oral Interview by the teaching methods associated with them. These methods are many and various. Important for all of us, no matter what teaching method we espouse, is that the *Guidelines* give us a rating scale; it is as yet imperfect but it is the only one we have at the moment which is complete enough to serve as a framework for much needed organizational reform. There is an enormous amount of work to be done on improving the scale, perhaps replacing it altogether in the skills of reading and listening comprehension, and this can only be done cooperatively by large numbers of researchers practicing a wide variety of methods in the classroom.

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Positive moves towards such cooperation are already underway: Schulz, who justly fears that if we wait until "all the theoretical objections to proficiency testing have been satisfied, we will never get off the ground" (24), repeats a call for a *national* effort in the area of proficiency testing in lower- level, postsecondary language instruction: This arose at a "one-day intensive discussion between the Educational Testing Service and representatives of twenty-one interested institutions or university systems nationwide" instigated by the Oregon State System of Higher Education (26). It is to be hoped that this call for national cooperation will be widely heeded. Similarly, in the sphere of published scholarly debate, it may be hoped that one of the paths taken by Lyle F. Bachman and Savignon will be followed: They point out the similarities rather than the differences in the definitions of communicative competence and the definitions of proficiency included in the *Guidelines* (381), thus seeking common ground on which different kinds of "methodologists" can work. To any who might take a doctrinaire and inflexible position at this time of great need, no matter how dedicated and well intentioned and in some senses "right" they may be, one would be tempted to respond with the words of the Rev. Jesse Jackson: "You're right—but your patch is too small."

Lange, who has done a great deal of practical work with the *Guidelines*, fearing that "politics and personal agendas" could indeed obscure the crucial issue facing us, defines the latter thus: "The issue is that, in order to include communication and comprehension in the assessment of student capacity in a second language, we need to cooperate in developing the tools for that evaluation" ("Articulation" 15). He is right, and he is seeing the larger picture of the whole American system of foreign language teaching. Much more is at stake than the rightness or wrongness of one particular teaching method. There is an opportunity now for the "comprehensive program for all levels of education" which Brod recommended in 1980. The cooperation of the whole community of university professors, in literature and in language, is desperately needed if this opportunity is to be grasped.

Cooperation across the Secondary/Postsecondary Levels

Throughout the United States, the "ferment" in foreign language teaching is taking the form of the restoration of foreign language requirements at all levels of the educational system—college graduation requirements, university entrance requirements, new state mandates for foreign language instruction in the schools. Other contributors to these *Reports* are discussing activities in elementary and secondary education, but I would like to consider what these activities mean in conjunction with possibilities for reform of the college curriculum.

I began this chapter by defining the term "college-level." There is no question that the present first two years of college instruction in foreign languages could take place in high school or sooner. They would be much more effective then because they could be spread out over four or more years and could be taught by trained and fully employed professional teachers instead of by frequently untrained and transient teachers such as the teaching assistants employed by so many large institutions to do this "college-level" work. It is true that such instruction at the secondary level will only be possible for some time in the more commonly taught languages, but here at least some efforts at coordination are underway.

At the University of Minnesota, where an organized transition has taken place from a seat-time graduation requirement to a proficiency-based entrance standard and graduation requirement, students of French, German, and Spanish must possess a specific and clearly defined level of competence in the four skills to meet the entrance standard. If they do not meet this, they must enroll in an appropriate course for which they receive no credit. They do receive credit if they begin study of a less commonly taught language such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, or Russian (see Lange, "Developing," 277). This new system is already in place and the initial implementation is described in detail by Jermaine D. Arendt, Dale Lange, and Ray Wakefield. There are many impressive aspects of this undertaking, from the leadership and active involvement of the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts at the University to the handling of the enormous and time-consuming job of creating, administering, and scoring tests for some 2,000 entering students. Perhaps most impressive of all is the way in which, at every step of the planning process, the University worked together with the schools and community colleges of Minnesota. Dean Fred Lukermann, in his introduction to the guides for teachers of French, German, and Spanish, *Foreign Language Proficiency Standards for Entrance and Graduation*, writes: "The entrance standard signifies C[ollege] of L[iberal] A[rts] support for foreign language instruction which occurs prior to admission to CLA in elementary schools, secondary schools or in

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other colleges and universities." Arendt *et al.* allude to the lack of communication which had previously prevailed for decades between secondary school teachers and CLA language departments (150). They describe the way in which mutual distrust was initially overcome in a three-week summer proficiency workshop in 1984 attended by representatives of all levels of the system. The first week was devoted to learning how to conduct Oral Proficiency Interviews, during which people were working together, interviewing and then discussing the interviews in the group. The writers recount an experience which I too have had in similar workshops: "The critiques helped establish a spirit of camaraderie: participants helped each other regardless of language capability or of education level" (151). At the risk of "becoming a bit sentimental," they remember the tension and rivalry which have not abated through various generations of innovations in language teaching method, and ask: "Is it possible that proficiency-testing and teaching-for-proficiency is the broad issue that may bring us back together as colleagues?" (153). We can hope so, but, sentimentality aside, this kind of cooperation is urgently needed if the newly mandated state syllabi in secondary schools across the country are to mesh in any sensible way with the college curriculum.

The *ACTFL Guidelines* were used as the basic framework for the requirements in Minnesota with a clear-headed realization of their possibilities and limitations. As Lange says:

> We make no apologies for using the *ACTFL Guidelines;* we decided to use them in spite of flaws. The *ACTFL Guidelines* are the only complete system upon which we could build our requirement. The decision to use them was a conscious one; we did it with open eyes. ("Developing" 283)

The precise use made of the *Guidelines* in Minnesota can be examined in the published guides for teachers (*Foreign Language Proficiency Standards*, 1986). The issues and problems in the implementation of the requirement are also explained very clearly by Lange—problems such as preparing teaching assistants to understand and use the guidelines in order to score the test, and indeed the preparation of teaching assistants to teach the courses for incoming students. The Minnesota project is a model for the nation, regardless of the problems yet to be faced.

A quite different set of problems is bound to arise where a state has mandated a syllabus and introduced new requirements in the secondary schools, but with no attendant planning for reform or reorganization of university entrance standards and requirements. This is the case in New York State, where a syllabus, *Modern Languages for Communication*, has recently been issued to school district personnel. The syllabus was created by the Bureau of Foreign Languages Education of New York State with "consultants from the field" of teaching at the university and

high school levels, but without any major organized involvement of the universities. Some consultants contributed their experiences with the curriculum model for functional communication developed by the Council of Europe (vii), but the *ACTFL Guidelines* seem to have been used only as peripheral reference. The syllabus contains words such as "functions," "proficiencies," "situations," but these do not mean what they mean in the terminology of the *ACTFL Guidelines*. As a result, in comparison with the Minnesota situation where their guides for teachers "are already facilitating communication across educational levels such as elementary to secondary and secondary to college and university" (4), the New York State Syllabus will inevitably create problems of communication between the secondary schools and those members of the college community who have spent the last few years working hard with the *ACTFL Guidelines*. No one can blame the drafters of the *syllabus*, and it is as yet not an insoluble problem, but if in New York State we are to derive the greatest benefit from the newly instituted language requirements in the schools, then a concerted effort at communication across the educational levels should immediately be attempted.

The State Education Department in New York has not stipulated curricula for the schools. Each individual school district is free to decide on a curriculum to meet the goals set out in the syllabus. Hundreds of workshops have been held to acquaint teachers with the precepts of communicative language teaching and with strategies for implementing the syllabus. There is some opposition among teachers, but there are also many positive reactions. There is, in any case, much excitement and activity, if also some trepidation. John B. Webb, Chairman of the Foreign Language Department at Hunter College High School, pointed out in a recent internal report to the College:

> Teachers' conferences — local, regional, and state — are heavily attended by teachers seeking additional information and assistance to meet the challenges of the next few years. Attendance at the annual meeting of the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers has risen in the last three years from five hundred to approximately fourteen hundred people.... If the second language teaching profession fails now in its efforts to reach a larger segment of the student population, it will be a long time and a very difficult battle before this opportunity comes our way again. We must succeed.

In view of the quite dire need being experienced in the high schools, it is unfortunate that many colleagues at the college level either do not know that this opportunity exists or tend to see it as something happening elsewhere, i.e., "at the high school level." They have not faced the fact that the high school level and the college level must be properly coordinated if we are ever to progress beyond a situation in which one curriculum simply repeats or substitutes for the other.

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If most students study foreign languages in high school in order to escape the college requirement, then it really does not matter if the colleges' required courses are a carbon copy of the high school ones. But the new requirements at the secondary level will not do much to raise the general level of foreign language literacy in the United States if that kind of thinking prevails. Efforts need to be made to see that years of a foreign language in high school can lead smoothly into years of the same language in college. Students in the next decade who come from four years of a heavily communicative syllabus in high school will be entitled to enter the upper level portion of the college curriculum. If we think of the traditional curriculum that faces them, we might ask whether these students are prepared for it. Or, perhaps more to the point, will it be prepared for them? Only cooperation with our high school colleagues can begin to give American students a chance for the smoothly coordinated eight-year progression in a language which will produce college graduates in any number who are genuinely literate in a foreign tongue.

Logistics and Finances

As more and more states are mandating foreign language instruction at the elementary and secondary levels, many people are asking in some dismay: "Where will all the teachers come from?" I wish to pose a question of my own: Who will teach them the foreign language while they are at college? It appears, from everything one reads, that if they start the language at any large university, they will probably be taught in the early stages by graduate teaching assistants and in the later stages by college professors of literature.

Kalivoda has recently addressed the topic of the training of secondary school foreign language teachers, writing as he says, under the "stimulus of personal experience with teacher trainees who start college language study at the introductory level, take the courses required of foreign language majors, spend thousands of dollars in tuition and then face the harsh reality of not really having learned the language" (13). He is right to be angry on their behalf, and one certainly understands why they feel "victimized by the curriculum." Nevertheless, not all the blame can be attributed to the curriculum itself, neither to the content nor to the methods. Some blame must rest with the short time devoted to learning the language. Kalivoda is rightly concerned that teachers he has described are expected to go out from the colleges into the high schools to teach communicative skills, and he suggests that it is not unreasonable to expect future teachers of communicative skills to reach a level of 3 (Superior on the ACTFL scale). Majors, he suspects, have even higher hopes, aiming at a level 4 on the FSI scale (13). Such expecta-

tions even of a radically reformed college-level curriculum in the present timeframe are unrealistic. It needs to be widely understood that after a four-year college career, nobody is going to obtain a 4 rating, and only a person with genius-like aptitude for foreign languages will reach a 3. If teacher trainees emerge at the Advanced level (2 or 2 plus), the age of victimization will be over. Certainly they will need to be Advanced-level speakers if they are to teach communicative competence in the high schools, and if they are to put their students squarely on the high road to all-around literacy in the four skills.

If, in fact, as seems likely, many of them are still going to be introduced to the language by teaching assistants and other part-time preceptors, another important question arises: Who is going to train these "college-level" teachers? As Schulz pointed out as early as 1980:

> Most assistants, when they begin their teaching assignments on the college level, have less training for—and experience in—teaching than does a beginning high school teacher. Yet most university students expect post-secondary education to be provided by trained and experienced specialists and scholars of a discipline. (1)

Here we have another case of miscalculation. Again the gap between expectations and results causes disappointment and frustration. Schulz suggests that since departments are economically dependent on the TA system, "they *must* provide graduate students with extensive training and supervision" (1). She contributes an excellent checklist of recommendations for a model program of TA supervision and evaluation, beginning with the requirement that TAs take formal training in foreign language pedagogy in workshops or courses that carry academic credit, and ending with the suggestion that TA training and supervision be performed by professionals with special preparation, competence, and interest in the assignment. Some universities in the '80s, if not before, have developed such programs. The MLA survey of Foreign Language Graduate Programs in 1984–85 (Devens and Bennett) shows that the picture is not as totally bleak as the one painted in *Integrity in the College Curriculum* which states in one of its blunter passages:

> Any introduction to teaching comes only incidentally through service as a teaching assistant with only occasional supervision by experienced senior faculty.... The teaching assistantship is now a device for exploiting graduate students in order to relieve senior faculty from teaching undergraduates. (35)

The detailed analysis of five specific institutions, undertaken by Monica S. Devens to supplement the MLA survey, shows that at least one of the five has a centralized TA training program and considers it a high priority (17).

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In any case, with the advent of new language requirements, more and more scrutiny is being directed at the teaching of basic foreign languages, and questions are being raised as to whether the TA system is at all acceptable. A. S. Rosenthal asks a provocative question in the title of his article: "Languages in the core curriculum? By all means, but ..." and one of his "buts" concerns the assumption that we can go on living with the current division of labor. He suggests that since the required courses are the "showcase of the department," the assignment of elementary and intermediate language courses to graduate student instructors is ill-advised:

> We shall need the finest regular faculty for the basic program—persons who are interested in language teaching, who are trained in pedagogical skills and techniques, and who are directed by the most experienced professors. Alas, this is easier said than done, for a formidable obstacle confronts us: the promotion and tenure minefield. (3)

His comment brings us to one of the crucial threads in the complicated web of problems that holds the college language teaching enterprise in thrall. In simple terms, they are as follows:

1. University teachers in foreign languages are not, by and large, trained teachers of anything. This can be said of all disciplines at the university, but the problem is exacerbated in our discipline. Teachers of other disciplines such as philosophy or history know a good deal about philosophy or history, and their students need to learn about the subject matter of these disciplines. In our case, simply being able to speak a foreign language or knowing about its literature does not mean that we know anything about the acquisition of language skills, and yet the majority of our students have to acquire these skills before we can teach them about the subject matter of our discipline.
2. Thus, even if the "finest regular faculty" teach language courses, they often do not really want to do it. No doubt they feel with good reason that they do not know much about it and do not know how to do it. They usually say that they are not interested. Senior faculty avoid it when they can and junior faculty look forward to the time when they are senior and will be able to do likewise.
3. Because they are not trained language teachers themselves, they quite reasonably do not want to be responsible for training other people to teach elementary language classes. So they want the university to hire someone especially to do it. As they often say: "We need a language person."
4. If they become enthusiastic about the language teaching and involved with the reform of the language program and especially if they realize that the whole curriculum must be newly thought out in terms of building linguistic skills, they find that this takes up virtually all of their professional time. The senior tenured professor only sacrifices publications and prestige. Untenured assistant professors risk their professional lives in the "promotion and tenure minefield."

Two factors emerge as vitally important to a general reform of the college curriculum, and they are intimately entwined: the need to train teachers at all levels to teach a new language and literature curriculum, and the need to establish such work firmly in the reward structure of the university. The one cannot really happen without the other.

One can look to the administrators of colleges and universities for support. Present day administrators tend to see the absolute necessity of improving teaching in most fields. However, in the case of language teaching departments, improving teaching is very expensive. It is cheaper for universities to employ hoards of graduate students and adjunct faculty to teach elementary classes than to employ full-time faculty. In most of our departments today there are simply not enough full-time faculty to teach all the courses which are now being required in foreign languages. We hear a lot of talk in administrative circles about accountability. Proficiency-based teaching and testing certainly enhances accountability. But it takes a lot of time and costs a lot of money, Administrators, while wanting good teaching, may not want it to take too long or cost too much.

First of all, it requires reduction in class size. It is not possible to develop proficiency in four skills with classes of more than twenty-five students. Second, oral proficiency testing takes a great deal of time. It cannot be foisted off on part-time teachers. If full-time faculty test on a regular basis, they have to be released from other duties. If part-time teachers and indeed full-time teachers are to be trained in the principles of proficiency-based teaching, the persons who train and supervise them cannot do it in their spare time. They also have to be relieved of other responsibilities. Then there is the problem of part-time teachers, The pedagogical journals give a fair amount of attention to the problems of teaching assistants, but much less to what has been called "the professional underclass" of university teaching, namely the masses of adjunct faculty who teach in university foreign language programs, particularly in big cities. We cannot comfort ourselves in their case that we are "educating" them or "paying" them by giving academic credit for teaching practice. We are simply exploiting them. They are paid by the hour, and laid on and laid off as needed. If we want them to participate in training programs, then in all conscience, or by union contract, they have to be paid for that as well.

There is also the question of Oral Proficiency Tester Training, which has been carried on up to now largely in ACTFL-organized workshops. This, as a system, cannot carry the immense load of work which needs to be done if the whole educational system is to use the *ACTFL Guidelines* to create a common yardstick for standard-setting and curricular reform. The tester-training workshops are expensive for participants and financially unrewarding for the trainers.

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Workshop trainers have to follow up each workshop with two sets of critiques per participant—a task which is far too time-consuming and poorly paid to attract senior professors. Yet more senior professors will have to be involved if the practice of oral interviewing is to take hold in a lasting institutional way. More cooperation between ACTFL and the senior faculty and administrators of universities is urgently needed. More helpful than curriculum workshops, which are inevitably open to criticism from many different sides, would be a nationwide network of trainer workshops, not to prepare people as "workshop-trainers" for ACTFL but to train faculty simply to go back to their own colleges and high schools, and work with their own people.

There are many challenges which face us all, universities and professional organizations alike. Support will be needed from outside organizations, policy-making, and funding agencies. It has to be widely understood that the contribution of the foreign language departments to the general humanistic education of the American must be built on firm linguistic foundations, and these *cost money.* Support will be needed from our colleagues in secondary education who must make it clear to state and district authorities that they are concerned about "college-level" teaching and about entrance standards, that the two enterprises of college and high school teaching of foreign languages stand and fall together. They must support us as we must support them. Support will be needed from a unified profession at the college level, and this means from those who still occupy the positions of most prestige in the hierarchy, namely the teachers of the "graduate-level" curriculum. And before bringing this chapter to a close, let me briefly address their potential contribution to the common good.

Contributions at the Graduate Level

The members of the graduate faculty in foreign languages have two important contributions to make to the "development of a comprehensive program for all levels of education" (Brod). First of all, they can lend their prestige in support of changes in the overall reward structure at the colleges and universities. Brod urged humanists in all disciplines to support the reform of foreign language teaching at all levels. He wrote: "Splendidly educated, literate, articulate, for the most part ethical and responsible, the humanists more than any other group ought to supply the impulse and leadership for the necessary reform of our educational system" (12). Brod was realistic enough to realize that the response to such lofty words might well be "snickers and yawns." Nevertheless, he was sounding a righteous call. Such leadership ought to be forthcoming now, in our present crisis, from senior humanists in our own discipline. Brod coined the phrase "capitalists

of humanistic research" to describe those in power at the top of the profession who, as he pointed out, "control the reward system in academic life" (14). He was not attacking research or disputing its value, but he found it distressing that "the activities of the research establishment have taken priority over practically everything else that is done in the humanities," deflecting the younger as well as the established humanists from what ought to be their central concern: education (12). Is this an unjust characterization of our profession? I think not. People who reap the rewards off the top of an enterprise and have little concern for the masses who work to keep the enterprise going or for the recipients of its products, can hardly avoid the opprobrium clinging to the expression: "capitalists of humanistic research." It is hard to believe that this is the self-image which our senior colleagues seek.

Surely they will not ignore our great needs at this time. It has to be recognized from the top down as well as from the bottom up that great amounts of *somebody's* time need to go into teaching at all levels, into preparation for teaching, into testing and preparation for testing. It is grotesque to expect untenured assistant professors to carry the whole burden of teaching large basic classes, of training TAs, and now of testing hundreds of students, and then to base tenure and promotion decisions on how much they have published "in their own field." It is equally grotesque to discourage idealistic young assistant professors from "wasting their time" on teaching and pedagogical reform, and to urge them to put all their time into research and publication "in their own field," even if such advice may be in their own self-interest. In either case, the profession is ill-served.

Attitudes of teachers at the graduate level have far-reaching effects on the profession as a whole, including small colleges. Parsons writes of the problem of teaching literature courses at the undergraduate level, and suggests that this problem is particularly acute at small institutions where the faculty are few and the pool of students small, consisting of non-language majors interested in acquiring the practical ability to communicate with speakers of other languages. "The language professors," he points out, "are themselves products of large research-oriented universities where the sharp hierarchical division between graduate literature faculty and those engaged in pedagogy and language teaching, primarily teaching assistants, is never questioned. Their graduate experience leaves them with an unshakable faith in the value and priority of literary studies. Many cannot understand the students' lack of interest or inability to cope with traditional literature offerings, and they are ill-equipped to deal with student frustrations" (213–14). This kind of gap between the graduate preparation of college teachers and the reality which faces them in their classrooms is also suggested by the writers of *Integrity in the College Curriculum*. They object that the value system of research

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universities puts little emphasis on good teaching, counseling students, and working with secondary schools and secondary school teachers, and point out that "while this value-system is most evident in the research universities, it permeates all of our four year institutions, imported as part of the baggage that goes with the PhD degree" (10).

In view of what we face in the foreign language profession, the "baggage that goes with the PhD degree" is in drastic need of a major overhaul. This means that the graduate faculty must be asked to do more than lend prestige and a strong voice in public places and committee rooms. The second major contribution to be made at the graduate level is in adjusting the graduate curriculum itself to the needs of the real students who come out of the colleges into the graduate schools, and to the needs of the students whom the graduates will ultimately face when they go into college teaching themselves. Graduate students, including the PhD students who want to teach at the college level, need to be taught *teaching* and the majority of them, in varying degrees, need to be taught *language*.

Wilga Rivers, who has enjoyed much practical experience as coordinator of language instruction at Harvard, has written eloquently of the way in which teacher training courses for future teachers at the university and college levels are voted "in and out of departments with yo-yo-like regularity" (23). There is no firm consensus in graduate schools that such courses belong in the graduate curriculum. Rivers writes: "In the handful of departments where training in teaching for future language and literature professors (and now occasionally culture and civilization professors) is taken seriously, it is built into the structure of the PhD program, with full-credit courses at the graduate level and supervision and guidance in daily teaching" (23). In the recent MLA survey of foreign language graduate programs (Devens and Bennett), the responding departments (about one-third of all those eligible) reported that 80% of their recent PhDs had had some experience teaching language during their graduate studies and 29% teaching literature courses (19). However, of 300 recent PhDs and ABDs who responded to a related survey, only half of the PhDs had received any formal training or preparation for language teaching from their major department; "among the ABDs, however, that figure jumps to 69%" (22). Devens and Bennett deduce from their survey that teacher training activities appear to be gaining ground, at least in language teaching. Certainly, these activities are receiving widespread attention, and among the *Resolutions and Recommendations of the National Conference on Graduate Education in the Foreign Language Fields* published by the MLA Commission on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics are five strong practical recommendations for the implementation of train-

ing programs for graduate students both in second language learning and in the teaching of literature (3).

Much less serious attention is paid, it appears, to the actual teaching of language at the graduate level. The *Resolutions and Recommendations of the National Conference* seem to sidestep the main issue: They mention the "importance of foreign language study in a graduate curriculum in the humanities," and oppose the practice of awarding less credit to graduate than to undergraduate students for beginning language courses in the less commonly taught languages (2), but they do not directly address the difficult question of study of the major language at the graduate level. Barbara Elling has drawn attention to the fact that graduate training in the major language is required by fewer than half of the 133 departments who responded to the recent MLA survey (Devens and Bennett). She points out that in her own experience in graduate stylistics courses, native speakers, who represent one-third of all graduate students in foreign language courses, "need this type of intense and advanced training as much as students whose native language is English" (46). One might perhaps go a step further and suggest that in the case of students whose native language is English, it would be better not to hide behind words such as "stylistics" but to come right out and say that they need language courses.

Just as the need for language instruction at the upper levels of the college-level curriculum has been made blatantly obvious by honest teaching and testing of the elementary and intermediate courses, so, too, honest teaching and testing at the upper levels of the college curriculum make blatantly obvious the need for language teaching at the graduate level. To pursue graduate-level work in a foreign language in any discipline a student needs to be able to function in all four skills at the Superior level of the ACTFL scale. Students who graduate from our colleges —very good and enthusiastic students—at the Advanced, even Advanced Plus, level will need help to cross that next threshold into the Superior level. This will apply particularly to those who cannot afford extended periods of study abroad.

Outside the purely humanistic foreign language field, there are some existing models for graduate level instruction where the teaching of foreign languages is taken seriously. These might be studied with profit by the graduate schools of literature. The Lauder Institute for Management and International Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, for example, has an MBA/MA program in which ongoing language study is a part of each semester's work. Students must demonstrate an oral proficiency rating of 2 on the FSI scale (ACTFL scale, Advanced) for admission (Gaudiani 24). If graduate schools of literature were to set, let us say, an entrance standard of Advanced or Advanced Plus for their entering students, they might hold high-level language or language/literature classes which

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could legitimately be taken for graduate credit at the beginning of the graduate program. A limit could be set on such courses, and the Superior level of proficiency in all skills could be required by some set point in the course of studies. With this practical step, the graduate schools too would play their part in removing the masks from our system of foreign language education and preparing the way for a new curriculum of real integrity.

Conclusion

In bringing my argument full circle, I would like to tell a story. At a recent meeting of graduate faculty, it was suggested mildly that perhaps some students needed help with the language. "But is that graduate work?" was the response. "Surely that borders on the remedial." At the sound of this dread word, silence fell, and discussion passed on to something else. But at the end of the meeting, when a motion for adjournment was already on the floor, a student representative, quite out of order, with a red face and great courage, raised his hand and said, "I would just like to say that I am a remedial student."

It is in the cause of all such students at all levels of the educational system that I have written this chapter. Let justice be done, or, to invoke an even more utopian imperative, let common sense prevail.

Notes

[1]In an excellent discussion of the question of language minorities in the United States, Zentella makes concrete recommendations as to how to "resolve the contradiction between, on the one hand, a national outcry on behalf of foreign language abilities and, on the other, a consistent policy of devaluating the maintenance of the native languages of fifteen percent of the population" (39).

[2]The work at Hunter College was carried on with support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. These findings do not necessarily represent the views of either group.

[3]See, for example, Bachman and Savignon; Bernhardt; Jarvis ("Proficiency Testing"); Kramsch ("Proficiency" and "The Missing Link"); Lantolf and Frawley; Savignon; and vanPatten.

[4]See, for example, Byrnes ("Proficiency" and "Second Language Acquisition") and Lowe.

[5]This description of our work owes much to E. F. Hoffmann, senior professor of German in our department who initiated and carried out much of the initial experimentation with upper-level courses while at the same time supervising the teaching of required elementary and intermediate sequences. Some of the results reported here have been published previously (Hoffmann and James).

[6]Our experiences bear out the position of Bernhardt: "Topic familiarity appears to be the most critical factor in comprehension—more critical, in fact, than text-based linguistic factors such as vocabulary, syntax, length of passage, and conceptual and inferential ability" (26).

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Goethe and Schiller and Me:
Reflections on Figuring out Literature While Teaching Others about It and Life Too in a Language They Don't Talk Very Good Yet

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My name is Bill. I am a recovering Germanist. I have followed a winding path, from a personally fulfilling but rather ordinary undergraduate study of German literature, into graduate study of German, through a dissertation about German science fiction, on to new-hiree language-teaching duties, and thence to a career in second-language pedagogy and educational software. My fiftieth birthday (1998), the 250th anniversary of Goethe's birth (1999), the new millennium, and an invitation from a journal to contribute an article about the Goethe-Schiller friendship gave me occasion to sum up the results of a process of personal and professional *Bildung*. I aim to formulate what the Greats of Weimar mean to me now and what they meant to me half my life ago and more; to limn what that personal comparison tells us about our culture; to suggest what we might do when we engage in teaching languages and literature; and to offer some thoughts about the shape of American *Germanistik*.

Kleist Did Not Die for Our Sheepskins

> Sometimes he spent hours together in the great libraries of Paris, those catacombs of departed authors, rummaging among their hoards of dusty and obsolete works in quest of food for his unhealthy appetite. He was, in a manner, a literary ghoul, feeding in the charnel-house of decayed literature.
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> —Washington Irving, "The Adventure of the German Student," 1824