

The Nature and Direction of Recent Proposals and Recommendations for Foreign Language Education: A Response

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WHILE REFORM OF EDUCATION HAS BEEN ALMOST a constant concern since public education began, the past ten years have seen a meteoric increase in reports and proposals for that purpose. The rhetoric of the various reports and proposals for the improvement of elementary and secondary schools, teacher education, teaching, higher education, including foreign language learning and teaching, appears to use the same strategy: alarm, negate, propose. Instead of building on examples of a positive direction, blanket condemnation of current practice seems to be the requisite for recommendations. And, in turn, these point toward the improvement of the political, economic, and security position of the United States in relation to some other political and economic system against which it needs to be defended. The betterment of education appears to be but a secondary issue.

My intent here is to examine the most recent reports and proposals for the improvement of foreign language education in the context of recommendations for the enhancement of education in general. First, there is an examination of the most important document for elementary and secondary education, *A Nation at Risk*, an example of the rhetoric which pervades other reports on higher education and foreign language education in particular.¹ Once an example has been analyzed and the context established, the reports and proposals for foreign language education are critiqued in the same fashion. Those documents include: 1) the report of the President's Commission on Foreign

Language and International Studies; 2) a report by the Association of American Universities; 3) the report of the MLA Commission on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics. Finally, specific criticisms of the discipline, foreign language education, which appeared in a proposal for the creation of a national foreign language center, in the recent recommendation of the Association of American Universities for the establishment of a national foundation for foreign languages and international studies, and in a volume from the Social Science Research Council.² My final section indicates concern with current developments. The critique provided in these three sections is targeted mostly toward the manner in which those recommendations are made. Yet, I raise specific concerns related to potential directions of the proposals and their potential impact and flaws.

SET THE SCENE: THE GENERAL CRITIQUE OF EDUCATION

A Nation at Risk. This report provides a basic example of the rhetoric of "alarm, negate, propose." It provides the context into which the reports and proposals for foreign language education fit and is an excellent example of the concerns about education in the political, economic, and security climate of the United States in the 1980s. It demonstrates that those areas have priority over the importance of education. Relating to those concerns, we find the following examples:

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. . . .³ If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. . . .

We have squandered the gains made in the wake of the . . . Moreover, we have dismantled systems which helped make those . . . have, in effect, been committing . . . ing, unilateral educational disar . . . The risk is not only that the . . . mobiles more efficiently . . . [of . . . Koreans recently built the world . . . mill. . . . It is . . . that these d . . . a redistribution of trained capab . . . globe. Knowledge, learning, info . . . intelligence are the new raw m . . . tional commerce and are today sp . . . the world as vigorously as mira . . . fertilizers, and blue jeans earlier . . . improve on the slim competitive . . . in world markets, we must dedi . . . reform of our educational syste . . . all. . . . Learning is the indispen . . . quired for success in the "infor . . . entering (pp. 6-7).

In examining these three p . . . that the first paragraph conta . . . nation is at risk. It is being . . . petitors. The language use . . . shock; it is negative for the p . . . the reader. The second para . . . and negates. A war-like im . . . through expressions like ". . . power . . .," ". . . act of . . .", ". . . act of disarmament . . . the alarm raised in the first p . . . such as ". . . squandered th . . . achievement . . ." and ". . . tial support systems which h . . . gains possible . . ." indicate . . . have detected a process of det . . . taken place in the schools v . . . such as "squandered" and "dis . . . cally. The third paragraph su . . . to the economy not only dire . . . three lines, but also in the in . . . "knowledge, learning, inform . . . intelligence are the *new raw m* . . . added] . . ." and in the comp . . . spreading through the w . . . as *miracle drugs, synthetic fe* . . . jeans . . ." [emphasis added] . . . economic and product orien . . . to do with the process of ec . . . The remainder of the docu . . . the first three paragraphs. . .

We have squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. . . (p. 5). The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently . . . [or] . . . that the South Koreans recently built the world's most efficient steel mill. . . . It is . . . that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans earlier. If only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all. . . . Learning is the indispensable investment required for success in the "information age" we are entering (pp. 6-7).

In examining these three paragraphs, we find that the first paragraph contains the alarm: Our nation is at *risk*. It is being *overtaken* by competitors. The language used is intended to shock; it is negative for the purpose of jarring the reader. The second paragraph both alarms and negates. A war-like image is conveyed through expressions like ". . . an unfriendly power . . .," ". . . act of war . . .," and ". . . act of disarmament . . ." and continues the alarm raised in the first paragraph. Phrases such as ". . . squandered the gains in student achievement . . ." and ". . . dismantled essential support systems which helped make those gains possible . . ." indicate that the authors have detected a process of deterioration that has taken place in the schools when using terms such as "squandered" and "dismantled" categorically. The third paragraph supplies the relation to the economy not only directly, as in the first three lines, but also in the images used, as in "knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the *new raw materials* [emphasis added] . . ." and in the comparison, "[they] are . . . spreading through the world as vigorously as *miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans* . . ." [emphasis added]. The images are economic and product oriented, having little to do with the process of education.

The remainder of the document is similar to the first three paragraphs. Different sections

indicate: 1) the nature of the risk (further definition); 2) indicators of the risk, where a list of shocking statistics is used to alarm; and 3) hoped for values of the society, in learners, and of educational systems. The section on findings of the Commission relates only to the negative aspects of the then current educational climate in the content, expectations, amount of time spent on learning, and teaching. The bulk of the document contains the blanket recommendations of the Commission—intended to improve a totally negative situation.

The context has been set. The alarm has been sounded. Existing practice has been denigrated. Sweeping recommendations for the reform of education have been announced. The cure has been found. The problems of society and the role of the United States in world politics, economics, and security lie with the schools. Beyer provides a detailed analysis of the political, economic, and security issues inherent in *A Nation at Risk*.⁴ He indicates that the "risk" is not just with the schools, but also with the entire social context in which we find our schools.

THE SCENE: CRITIQUE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Strength Through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability. Having set the context, let us examine the first document in foreign language education. The rhetoric and the order of arguments is approximately the same. The "alarm" is sounded in response to the charge of the Helsinki Accords which has asked the signers to encourage the study of foreign languages and cultures: "We are profoundly alarmed by what we have found: A serious deterioration of this country's language and research capacity, at a time when an increasingly hazardous international military, political, and economic environment is making unprecedented demands on America's resources, intellectual capacity, and public sensitivity" (p. 11).

In this particular case, security is mentioned before the political and economic environmental concerns. It appears to be first and foremost in the minds of the authors of the report who indicate that security is of top priority, but who also use the political and economic contexts in their arguments as well:

Nothing less is at issue than the nation's security. At a time when the resurgent forces of nationalism

and of ethnic and linguistic consciousness so directly affect global realities, the United States requires more reliable capacities to communicate with its allies, analyze the behavior of potential adversaries, and earn the trust and the sympathies of the uncommitted (p. 11).

The President's Commission believes that our lack of foreign language competence diminishes our capabilities in diplomacy, in foreign trade, and in citizen comprehension of the world in which we live and compete (p. 12).

Next (p. 12), we experience the negative with a sweeping statement, "Americans' incompetence in foreign languages is nothing short of scandalous, and it is becoming worse." The evidence for this scandal is laid directly on schools and colleges in three statements (p. 12):

- Only fifteen percent of American high school students now study a foreign language—down twenty-four percent in 1965. The decline continues.
- Only one out of twenty high school students studies French, German, or Russian beyond the second year. (Four years is considered a minimum prerequisite for usable language competence.)
- Only eight percent of American colleges and universities now require a foreign language for admission, compared with thirty-four percent in 1966.

These statements are immediately followed by examples of deficiencies of American language capability relating to competition with the Japanese and by one for the concern of foreign affairs agencies of the US government having to spend money on language training because of the lack of study in schools and colleges.

The scandal moves then to the inadequate understanding of world affairs. The following examples (p. 12) are cited: "In a recently published study of school children's knowledge and perceptions of other nations and people, over forty percent of the 12th graders could not locate Egypt correctly, while over twenty percent were equally ignorant about the whereabouts of France or China."

In all of this discussion, not one positive mention is made of anything successful happening in schools, colleges, and universities. Even after millions of dollars have been spent by local school districts, colleges and universities, and private foundations, on foreign language instruction, the report ignores any of the successes that could have been used as examples

of excellent programs which have been documented, not to discuss those not documented.⁵

Finally, the recommendations appear, with accompanying explanation, in the areas of foreign languages, kindergarten through twelfth grade (foreign languages and international studies), college and university programs, international educational exchanges, citizen education, business and labor needs abroad, and improvements within and without the government. The explanations rehearse the rhetoric once again without pause: alarms, negations, and recommendations. As a "profession," they inform us of our failures. I recognize that we can improve instruction in foreign languages on all levels, but we cannot allow ourselves to be solely "guilty" for a situation that relates as much to the social, political, and economic conditions in the United States as it does to education. Certainly, the schools, colleges, and universities reflect the general culture, but an assignment of guilt is inappropriate when directed solely toward educators, in this case in foreign languages.

Beyond Growth. Here the rhetoric shifts somewhat. Inclusion of criticisms based on societal needs for competence in foreign languages and international studies continues, using alarm to draw the reader into the discussion. Concern here is expressed, however, only for *adult* learning in the colleges and universities and in the federal government.

Everyday yet another international crisis on the front page of our newspaper reminds us that insular America disappeared with high-button shoes. . . . Our armed forces are deployed in many countries throughout the world, and in many places they are in a state of semi-siege. . . . A significant and growing portion of our national product is sold abroad, but many of our customary markets, both domestic and overseas, have been increasingly penetrated by aggressive foreign manufacturers and exporters. . . (p. 1).

The direction of the report's criticism is subtle and carefully targeted; it steers at a lack of resources for foreign languages and international studies in higher education on the part of the federal government and at differences between learning languages for security and for academic reasons. Criticism (p. 11) is directed toward external, rather than internal forces: "For one thing, in 1973, the number of lan-

guage and area centers for support was provided under N cut from 107 to 46. . . . W eral government compoun funding created when the Education Act of 1967] bor rialize. . . . Overall, langu grams have lost out in the ternal funds. . . ."

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guage and area centers for which federal support was provided under NDEA Title VI was cut from 107 to 46. . . . With this cut, the federal government compounded the scarcity of funding created when the IEA [International Education Act of 1967] bonanza did not materialize. . . . Overall, language and area programs have lost out in the competition for external funds. . . ."

A major shift takes place with these recommendations. Differences are demonstrated between campus and government language programs, indeed even between campus programs. The authors assign greater worth to programs in foreign language education in Title VI Language and Area Studies Centers than in the regular programs for the majority of students because Language and Area Studies programs train specialists. Yet even in such centers, the report indicates, students are more interested in area studies than in languages. A positive value is then handed to government language and area training (p. 30): "DOD [Department of Defense] training, on the other hand, is geared almost entirely to the acquisition of a working language competency and deals almost exclusively with languages as they are in current use."

Here, contrast and comparison serve as subtle criticism of campus language programs. Neither the alarm nor the critique (in the form of contrast and comparison) is disturbing; but the direction of the recommendations must concern academics. Invariably, each is associated in some way with the activities of government language schools and is intended to respond to the report's concern for foreign language and area studies competence within "the national interest." Eight of the recommendations in this volume are for language competence.

The first (pp. 34-35) calls for the sharing of information on problems, pedagogy, technology, and materials in conferences of both academic associations and the Inter-Agency Language Roundtable. Such sharing could be appropriate, keeping in mind the distinct purposes of the academy and the government. Here, the connection of higher education with the government for the improvement of higher education language programs is made by the authors. However, no significant data are presented with the recommendation to indicate the superiority of the government language programs over their academic counterparts.

External control of language programs appears in the second recommendation. It comes (p. 44) in the form of a specific recommendation for Title VI funds. "A supplemental national support program should be devised to assure the continuation of our capacity to teach the least commonly taught languages on our campuses. Some Title VI funds should be specifically earmarked for this purpose instead of coming out of the sixteen percent of general center support currently allocated for language instruction. Each major center receiving support *should be required* [emphasis mine] to cover at a minimum one of the least commonly taught languages relating to its area. . . ." This statement, in such a specific form, hints heavily at a type of control of academic programs that would reside outside the university where they are offered. It implies that the government would dictate how language education resources would be apportioned within a program supported by Title VI.

The link between the government context and higher education continues (pp. 44-94) in several of the remaining recommendations in the following areas:

- Experimental programs for the *up-grading* [emphasis mine] of campus programs should begin with Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Arabic (based on government descriptions of difficulty and on the need for research in these areas as well).
- A common metric of proficiency for the less commonly taught languages should be undertaken by both the Inter-Agency Roundtable and academic institutions. It is unclear, though, if such a metric can be developed since the two contexts offer different rationales for their curricula.
- In raising the level of competence beyond the initial stages, a recommendation is made that the level two proficiency be required as minimal for advanced language and area studies training, that extensive funding be available for existing overseas training centers, and that government and academic language teachers collaborate on teaching technologies to raise levels of listening and speaking proficiency.
- Major collaboration between academic and government language teaching contexts should develop a research agenda for the development, maintenance, reinforcement, restoration and upgrading of language competencies for existing language and area specialists and to deliver language instruction to a geographically dispersed clientele, including learners who are not degree-seeking students.

- Many of the above recommendations would be accomplished through language resource centers with emphasis on the less commonly taught languages.
- A federal fund should be established for the support of research and program development in language pedagogy. In developing this last recommendation, the authors suggest (p. 91) the centralization of policy for both the commonly and less commonly taught languages. "Preferably, an existing unit among the federal granting agencies should expand its definition of mission to include this important national objective."

As mentioned above, the authors of the report project a trust in government language programs with support data. Through several recommendations, they suggest a rapprochement between government and academic language pedagogy, materials, testing, curriculum, and research. Communication between the government and the academic world is appropriate, but when centralized control and monitoring are deemed an appropriate governmental role, the threat to academic freedom cannot be ignored. Referring to parts of *Beyond Growth* not covered here, Przeworski demonstrates the concern of social scientists at that part of the report calling for the centralization of language and area studies supposedly for the "national interest."⁶ Przeworski warns (p. 82): "I find the entire project quite chilling. The technocratic impulse of the report is evident in its combination of the language of 'the' national interest with the call to centralize and bureaucratize control over all social science activities, public and private. The vision offered by the report is of one Central Agency, the custodian of the national interest, which will plan, distribute funds, and monitor everyone." From the directions this report has taken, it is appropriate to argue that any attempts at the centralization of control over language and area studies, both in the academic and government worlds, must be viewed with considerable caution. Those two worlds are different and are not easily associated, particularly if directed by a governmental agency.

MLA Commission on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics. The Commission's recommendations are not preceded, interspersed, or concluded with any kind of rhetoric. The MLA recommendations are neither alarming nor negative. They simply build on position papers,

hearings, and interviews with leaders in the field. The MLA recommendations recognize that foreign language education is an expanding field which is having an effect on classroom language teaching. Such an attitude is reflected in the Commission's discussion of the need for a national center for language teaching:

Several theoretical, methodological, and technological developments have had important implications for language teaching. The extensive data collected on the acquisition of English as a second language have given us insights into how language proficiency is gained. The theories advanced concerning the relation between language acquisition research and language [teaching] methodology call into question some of the traditional practices of the language classroom. A new focus on testing language proficiency instead of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is profoundly affecting methodology, and rapid developments in the technology of microcomputers and video recordings are generating a great deal of interest in the application of these tools to language programs.⁷

This approach to the renewal of foreign language education is striking in contrast to the others analyzed here. It recognizes that: 1) the field is developmental in nature; 2) change has taken place in language instruction; 3) language is more than learning grammar and vocabulary; 4) means of evaluating language competence exist; and 5) technological advances are important to language instruction. Pervading the report is a clear sense that the future must build on positive contributions of the present.

The MLA Commission's recommendations are developed under four headings: 1) a national center for language teaching; 2) summer institutes; 3) MLA pilot projects; and 4) curriculum. They serve as four themes throughout the document. The recommendation for a national center is focused on the needs of the academic community in all languages and literatures, for research in language learning, materials and curriculum development, use of technology, and the evaluation of language competence. The summer institute activities relate to these same themes, but also focus on linguistic abilities of language minorities in the US and the recruitment of language minorities for the profession. The MLA recommendations are divided into short- and long-term projects. Short-term projects have as their focus second-

ary school language teaching, teaching, the contributions of foreign language teaching, and language teachers to consider recommendations. Long-term projects address needs for beginning and intermediate on the college level, and information materials for the advisement of future teachers and graduate students. Curricular recommendations cover both relatively simple and complex recommendations for both the undergraduate and graduate curricula in language.

In summary, the recommendations of the MLA Commission on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics are understandable, positive, and reasonable. They are free of polemic alarm. In short, they are trustworthy. In a generally accusatory climate, the commission's proposals deserve careful consideration.

SOME SPECIFIC CRITICISMS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Many aspects of the field of foreign language education to be discussed here are criticisms. Unfortunately, these criticisms allow us to examine only a few: 1) lack of concentration on the development of language competency for area studies; 2) "fragmentation" of the field; and 3) over-empiricism. These three criticisms are discussed for the creation of a National Center and a National Foundation for Language and International Studies. In the documents, *Points of View*, the agenda for the National Center adds its criticism of language education in schools.

The documents focus on the fact, the phrase, "particularized language" appears in different forms. The Center's priority for "upper level skills in [less-foreign languages . . . for interpreters or translators]" is on "adult" populations.⁸ And the Language Competencies set the outset the focus of attention on the agenda for foreign language education be fixed firmly on adult co-

ary school language teaching, computerized teaching, the contributions of linguistics to foreign language teaching, and a workshop for language teachers to consider pedagogical recommendations. Long-term projects respond to needs for beginning and intermediate materials on the college level, and information and materials for the advisement and recruitment of future teachers and graduate students. The curricular recommendations cover a wide range of both relatively simple and complicated recommendations for both the undergraduate and graduate curricula in language programs.

In summary, the recommendations of the MLA Commission on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics are clear, readable, understandable, positive, and probably doable. They are free of polemic, they do not alarm. In short, they are truly a breath of fresh air in a generally accusatory climate. The Commission's proposals deserve our attention and careful consideration.

SOME SPECIFIC CRITICISMS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Many aspects of the final three documents to be discussed here are critical of foreign language education. Unfortunately, space limitations allow us to examine only a few. They are: 1) lack of concentration on the development of language competency for adults; 2) "disaggregation" of the field; and 3) a weak tradition of empiricism. These three themes permeate discussions for the creation of both a National Center and a National Foundation for Foreign Language and International Studies. The last of the documents, *Points of Leverage*, focuses on the agenda for the National Foundation and adds its criticism of language education in schools.

The documents focus on adult learners. In fact, the phrase, "particularly adult Americans" appears in different forms throughout both. The Center's priority for ". . . development of upper level skills in ['less-commonly-taught'] foreign languages . . . for foreign service officers or translators" is one way of restating "adult" populations.⁸ And a section on Adult Language Competencies states that ". . . from the outset the focus of attention of the national agenda for foreign language instruction [must] be fixed firmly on adult competencies."⁹ Men-

tions of the functions of the Foundation abound with references to business and management and other schools, the federal government, and colleges and universities.¹⁰ But one finds hardly a mention of support for the entire spectrum of language instruction—from *Kindergarten to adult learning*.

Both the Center and the idea of a foundation will be insignificant in foreign language education if attention is given only to adult needs and to the less-commonly-taught languages. Improvement in language instruction, additional and improved research, development and implementation of a common metric, use and evaluation of different curricular models, and the development of improved teaching materials will not necessarily improve all of foreign language education when concentrated on a few persons at very advanced levels.

It seems to me that the entire system must be emphasized. Teachers must work with colleagues in several languages and educational levels; researchers must communicate with teachers; curriculum developers need input from teachers and researchers. Such communication must be across language, educational levels, and areas of expertise. Such a statement does not prevent the prioritization of effort when there may be a particular need. However, the lack of attention to initial instruction in these recommendations in elementary and secondary schools and colleges and universities, upon which advanced learning is based, is a political flaw. Neither the work of the Center nor the funding available from the proposed Foundation will have credibility for the majority of language teachers, researchers, professional associations, and leaders in the field if the signaled direction becomes reality. Significant and substantial questions related to the direction of the Center concept are already being asked by the professional associations, particularly since the director of the Center is a social scientist and not a language educator.¹¹

The "disaggregation" comment appears in both of these proposals. It is specifically mentioned in the Center proposal (p. 4) and appears in the Foundation proposal (p. 2) and in *Points of Leverage* (p. 11) in a slightly different form of language. "The nation requires a stable, comprehensive system. . . ." The language of the Center proposal is more categorically nega-

tive with such words and phrases as "totally dispersed . . . totally fragmented," while that of *Points of Leverage* is positive: "An attempt to create a coordinated national agenda comes at a propitious time . . ." And the impression of total lack of communication is given (Center: p. 4) by the following: ". . . Teachers of uncommonly taught languages have few conversations with those teaching French, German, or Spanish, and those teaching English as a second language talk to neither. Our vast, and in many cases more sophisticated, governmental language teaching institutions—e.g., the Defense Language Institute or the Foreign Service Institute—have no way of relating to what goes on on our campuses. And no one relates to the proprietaries, which tend to monopolize the teaching of adults outside of the government."

While one can be sympathetic at frustration over a perceived lack of a central research focus, and while communication can always be enhanced, this representation strikes me as misguided and overstated. Communication takes place in many areas and on numerous levels between and among teachers of commonly and less-commonly-taught languages, including ESL: in the pages of professional scholarly journals such as *The Modern Language Journal*, *Foreign Language Annals*, and the *TESOL Quarterly*; at meetings of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, TESOL (which includes more than teachers of English as a Second Language), the regional language teachers conferences such as the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, the Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Southern Conference on Language Teaching, the Pacific Northwest Council on Foreign Languages, and the Southwest Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, and finally, the Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics, to name but a few. The Inter-agency Language Roundtable of the federal government includes representation not only from the governmental language schools, but from the academic sector as well. Further, both academic programs in colleges and universities contribute as well when teachers in all languages, both commonly and less-commonly-taught, are brought together in the same courses in preparation for elementary and sec-

ondary school certification. Finally, numerous individual faculty members cross languages as well.

The authors of these proposals have accepted the arguments of *Beyond Growth* for centralization of policy, research, materials and curriculum development, and training. They are correct in stating that control is dispersed and that a centralized management system is nonexistent. But they do not demonstrate, to my satisfaction at least (and I suspect to that of the majority of the profession), that centralization will solve our problems or enhance the quality of our endeavors. Education in the United States is controlled locally; since foreign language education is part of that system, I am skeptical that centralized control of our efforts would work. If compromises are not made on the centralization issue raised in these proposals, a second major political flaw in the establishment of the Center and the Foundation will evolve. Teachers, researchers, language associations tend to distrust those whom they perceive as power hungry. While some attention to the development of policy, better materials and curricula, a more focused research program, and the development of a common metric is laudable, the proposers must recognize that centralization of power without the recognition of local control and compromise with it is an "Achilles' heel." While some recognition of this fact does appear in *Points of Leverage*, the recommendations are still quite centrally focused.

These documents (Center, p. 2) claim a ". . . surprisingly weak tradition of empiricism in the search for what works and what does not work," or ". . . an absence of sustained and systematic research in language pedagogy. . . . In place of solidly grounded practice, we have wildly exaggerated claims for one or another way to teach a foreign language. In place of theory linked firmly to applied study, we have staunchly asserted opinions on how students learn. In place of carefully formulated relationships among practice, theory, research, and curriculum and materials development, we have teachers, theorists, researchers, and pedagogues each going their separate ways. And none of them is relating to the social scientists where some of the expertise which needs to be brought to bear on the problem resides." Similar criticism appears in summary form in *Points*

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of *Leverage* (p. 18) where it is stated that: ". . . applied research in language pedagogy is precisely what is needed that the existing national program of research, both public and private, fails to reach."

Two assumptions in the report need to be addressed: 1) empiricism does not answer to classroom learning problems; and 2) foreign language education, unlike other fields in finding theoretical and practical problems, lacks research.

It is clearly not possible to conduct an evaluation of the value of research in foreign language education. But some qualified statements can be made: in the past thirty years, empiricism has given us clear indications of what does not work in foreign language education, particularly with comparative studies. Before, it has not yet provided solutions to problems and questions. For example, some of the large studies that have established that we teach what we are taught, that research on language learning has broad approaches to language learning complicated due to a wide variety of variables, that means for us, that the results are tenuous at best, and that the studies raise more questions than they answer. If we were status studies which compared different studies which provided no clear answers, the studies proposed to compare different ways, as suggestopedia, counseling, direct method, intensive learning, "trials," etc., are likely to follow the same pattern. The studies may be more effective if they call the "micro-level," where the learning task(s) can be examined.¹³

The major issue here is that the report itself is limited. Other approaches to theoretical and practical research need to be in order to study the context of learning and to go beyond the rote manipulation of variables and numbers. A qualitative paradigm is needed for that purpose. Studies need to identify categories of error that students make when they both learn and use language, and how language and its affect on the quality of instruction, effect

of *Leverage* (p. 18) where the author suggests that: "... applied research in the field of language pedagogy is precisely the kind of inquiry that the existing national programs in support of research, both public and private, tend not to reach."

Two assumptions in these statements need to be addressed: 1) empiricism provides clear answers to classroom learning issues and problems; and 2) foreign language education is unlike other fields in finding resolutions to theoretical and practical problems through research.

It is clearly not possible to begin or complete an evaluation of the value of empirical research in foreign language education in this article. But some qualified statements can be made. In the past thirty years, empirical research has not given us clear indications of what "works or does not work" in foreign language teaching, particularly with comparative studies. Therefore, it has not yet provided the hoped for resolutions to problems and directions. For example, some of the large comparative studies have established that we tend to learn what we are taught, that research on comparisons of broad approaches to language learning is complicated due to a wide variety of uncontrolled variables, that means for measuring variables are tenuous at best, and that research tends to raise more questions than it answers.¹² These were status studies which informed us, but which provided no clear answers. Similarly, studies proposed to compare approaches such as suggestopedia, counseling learning, silent way, intensive learning, "traditional" learning are likely to follow the same path. Empirical studies may be more effective at what Carroll calls the "micro-level," where specific aspects of the learning task(s) can be controlled and examined.¹³

The major issue here is that empiricism by itself is limited. Other approaches to theoretical and practical research must be included in order to study the context of language learning and to go beyond the representation and manipulation of variables as represented by numbers. A qualitative paradigm is appropriate for that purpose. Studies of the kinds and categories of error that students make as they both learn and use language, classroom language and its affect on the learner, uses of time, quality of instruction, effectiveness of teachers,

as examples, require approaches that are other than quantitative.¹⁴ Clearly, such approaches need to be included in the research plan of any center.

Foreign Language Education is like other fields of study. It has its several journals which publish theoretical, research, and practical articles. It offers a special interest group in the American Educational Research Association. Universities offer the highest graduate-level degree, the doctorate, in its subfields, including ESL and the less-commonly-taught languages. Its theorists and practitioners argue with and among each other just as in any other field. The existence of exaggerated claims related to "this or that theory" or "this or that approach" makes this specialty, in reality, no different from others. And "proof" of those claims is difficult to establish. The framers of the Center and Foundation proposals must recognize that their analysis of the state of Foreign Language Education field could be applied equally to them. The borderline arrogance demonstrated by the judgements of their analyses could be quite detrimental in negotiating the cooperation of professionals in this field so necessary to the proposed goals of the Center.

The last issue here is the agenda for language education in *Points of Leverage* (Note 2, pp. 9-25 & 137-47) of some eight points: 1) central planning; 2) needs and use surveys; 3) experimental pilot programs for adults, particularly for the less-commonly-taught languages; 4) a common metric for foreign language proficiency; 5) research in teaching methodologies, attrition, retention, and rejuvenation of language learning, as well as instructional strategies for upper-level skill acquisition, individualized learning, and the application of communications technology to language instruction; 6) a national foreign language resource center; 7) foreign study and sojourn; and 8) foreign language instruction at the pre-collegiate level. Much of the rhetoric in these pages continues the subtle criticism evidenced in the other documents. "This is not to criticize the many hard-working teachers and students now involved in foreign language education. It is various aspects of the system as a whole that present the problem: too limited time . . . ; too many students dragging their feet . . . ; the low average level of foreign language competence of too many teachers; the compartmentalization of instruc-

tion . . . ; the lack of a way to measure . . . competency a student . . . has acquired" (p. 10). Here, however, it is not the criticism that is important. Rather, it is the establishment of an agenda. In this case, one person, an individual outside language education, has set its agenda. While it is necessary that the profession relate to those who are outside its imaginary purview, those outsiders who have interest in this specialty should also communicate with its leaders in the establishment of an agenda. In this case, that communication has not really taken place. Further, an agenda of the nature described is vast and ambitious. No priorities have been set. Without serious consultation and prioritization of the agenda, there is no hope for the success of this set of recommendations.

FINAL STATEMENTS

Several analyses of education in the past decade have taken a particular rhetorical approach to the communication of the need for change: alarm the public, denigrate current directions, and then make comprehensive recommendations for change. Foreign Language Education has not been spared this same rhetoric. It has come in the form of commission reports and proposals, all of which have value. However, the cost of such rhetoric could be high, even though the recommendations can move the field forward. In his 1983 analysis of some of the proposals analyzed here, Nollendorfs reacts to the lack of prioritization of the several agendas and the need for the profession to find a unified manner to respond to them.¹⁵ His major point is that the profession itself must act on these matters, but in consort with others, thereby avoiding professional myopia.

Sweeping negation of current practice, research, and curricular efforts within the field on the parts of teachers, researchers, and professional organizations has been a general approach to the preparation of recommendations in the reports discussed here. The substitution of centralization for local control, focus of language learning on adult populations rather than

on the total system, and an unwarranted research emphasis on empiricism when the research questions require more than one research paradigm, as represented in *Beyond Growth* or *Points of Leverage* should be concerns of every professional regardless of educational level. We need to be extremely careful in accepting such proposals without careful consideration or for political reasons. ACTFL's recent review of proposals to strengthen foreign language and international education, though useful, is not forceful enough.¹⁶ While it suggests that consensus on many issues remains to be reached and endorses the view that any federal agency (referring particularly to the Foundation proposal) needs to support language learning and teaching throughout the educational spectrum, ACTFL and other organizations and persons need to speak out strongly on these issues. The profession must follow developments as closely as possible, present its views to leaders, discuss our concerns with those who are now working to establish the funded National Foreign Language Center, and work directly with our congressmen and senators as new legislation is introduced, particularly the legislation for the establishment of a Foundation for Foreign Languages and International Studies.

We also need to be in control of our future. We must recognize that outsiders, without a complete understanding of the field, have written the proposals that are currently receiving attention by private foundations and the federal government. The proposals for linking academic and government programs, for a common metric, and for joint research are tied specifically to the "national interest." We must consciously decide that these are appropriate directions for academic programs and/or that these are directions to be taken specifically in the "academic interest," as well as their priority. We cannot let others make those decisions—that situation would place us "at risk" ourselves.

Department of Education by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Washington: GPO, 1983 [rpt. Hastings-on-Hudson: American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1983].

²⁶Strength Through Wisdom: A Critique of U.S. Capability. A Report to the President from the President's

Commission on Foreign Language Studies." *Modern Language Journal, Growth: The Next Stage in Language* by the Association of American Universities, Richard D. Lambert (Washington: Universities, 1984); "Recommendation on Foreign Languages, Literature, Profession 86 (1986): 46-49; Richard D. Lambert, "Recommendation to Create a National Foreign Language Center," *Modern Language Journal* 1-11; Association of American Universities, *The Nation's Investment in Foreign Languages: A Legislative Proposal to Create a Foundation for Foreign Languages and International Studies* (New York: Association of American Universities, 1984); Richard D. Lambert, *Points of Leverage: An Agenda for International Studies* (New York: Association of American Universities, 1984).

³*A Nation at Risk*, p. 5. [These quotations are from their original context; however, they are in the order of their original presentation.]

⁴Landon E. Beyer, "Education at Risk: The Roots of National Risk," *Curriculum Perspectives* 37-56.

⁵William F. D. Love & Lucille M. Love, *Curriculum Perspectives: A Sourcebook of Innovative Practices in Action, K-12* (New York: MLA, 1981); Sandra B. Hammond, *Award-Winning Programs: Prescriptions for Success* (London: Textbook, 1981).

⁶Adam Przeworski, "The Lamb of God," *Curriculum Perspectives* (Winter 1986): 78-83.

⁷Commission (note 2 above).

NOTES

¹*A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. A Report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States*

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Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies." *Modern Language Journal*, 64 (1980): 9-57; *Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies. A Report by the Association of American Universities, April 1984*. Ed. Richard D. Lambert (Washington: Association of American Universities, 1984); "Recommendations of the Commission on Foreign Languages, Literatures, and Linguistics," *Profession* 86 (1986): 46-49; Richard D. Lambert, *Proposal to Create a National Foreign Language Center*. Mimeo (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1986); subsequently published as, "The Case for a National Foreign Language Center: An Editorial," *Modern Language Journal*, 71 (1987): 1-11; Association of American Universities, *To Strengthen the Nation's Investment in Foreign Languages and International Studies: A Legislative Proposal to Create a National Foundation for Foreign Languages and International Studies* (Washington: Association of American Universities, 1986); Richard D. Lambert, *Points of Leverage: An Agenda for a National Foundation for International Studies* (New York: SSRC, 1986).

³A *Nation at Risk*, p. 5. [These quotes have been removed from their original context; however, they do appear in the order of their original presentation].

⁴Landon E. Beyer, "Education Reform: The Political Roots of National Risk," *Curriculum Inquiry*, 15, i (1985): 37-56.

⁵William F. D. Love & Lucille J. Honig, *Options & Perspectives: A Sourcebook of Innovative Foreign Language Programs in Action, K-12* (New York: MLA, 1973); William D. Sims & Sandra B. Hammond, *Award-Winning Foreign Language Programs: Prescriptions for Success* (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook, 1981).

⁶Adam Przeworski, "The Lambert Report," *Political Science* (Winter 1986): 78-83.

⁷Commission (note 2 above), p. 46.

⁸Lambert (note 2 above), "The Case for . . ." and *A National Foundation*.

⁹Lambert (note 2 above), pp. 21-23.

¹⁰*A National Foundation*, pp. 6-11 (of the actual legislative proposal).

¹¹Robert L. Jacobson, "Teachers' Organizations Assail Planning for National Foreign Language Center," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 12 November 1986, pp. 1 & 44; rpt. *Modern Language Journal*, 71 (1987): 171-73.

¹²George A. C. Scherer & Michael Wertheimer, *A Psycholinguistic Experiment in Foreign Language Learning* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964); Philip D. Smith, Jr., *A Comparison of the Cognitive and Audiolingual Approaches to Foreign Language Instruction* (Philadelphia: CCD, 1970); John B. Carroll, *French as a Foreign Language in Eight Countries* (New York: Halstad, 1975).

¹³John B. Carroll, "Learning Theory for the Classroom Teacher," *The Challenge of Communication*. Ed. Gilbert A. Jarvis (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook, 1974): 113-49.

¹⁴For concise statements on a different research paradigm, see Patricia F. Carini, *Observation and Description: An Alternative Methodology for the Investigation of Human Phenomena* (Grand Forks, ND: Univ. of North Dakota, North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation, 1975); Michael Q. Patton, *Alternative Evaluation Research Paradigm* (Grand Forks, ND: Univ. of North Dakota, North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation, 1975).

¹⁵Valters Nollendorfs, "Of Task Forces, Commissions, and Ourselves: An Outlook Instead of a Review," *Modern Language Journal*, 67 (1983): 1-7.

¹⁶Mary Allison, "A Review of Proposals to Strengthen Foreign Language and International Education," *Foreign Language Annals*, 19 (1986): 533-36.