ON THE COVER:

At the Summer Workshop of Slavic, East European and Central Asian Languages (SWSEEL), held each summer at Indiana University at Bloomington, students participate in a variety of cultural activities including cooking, music, and dance. Pictured here are Central Asian language students at the summer music festival and performance.

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 5
OCTOBER 2008

Departments

Perspective *ACTFL President Ray Clifford*	7
Breaking News	8
Tech Talk	16
Legislative Look	38
Milestones	42
Inside ACTFL	46
So You Say	54
Web Watch	60
Upcoming Events Calendar	62
Advertiser Index	63

The Language Educator

Features

18
LET'S CELEBRATE LANGUAGES!
Discover Languages Events, State Festivals, and World Languages Days Put the Spotlight on Language Learning Across the Country
Susan Reese

24
BIG *DISCOVER LANGUAGES* EVENT HELD AT CALIFORNIA STATE FAIR

26
FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND THE ENVIRONMENT
A Collaborative Instructional Project
Eleanor E. ter Horst and Joshua M. Pearce

32
LESS COMMONLY TAUGHT, YES—BUT STILL IMPORTANT IN THEIR OWN RIGHT
Patti Koning

43
In the Classroom:
CONNECTING STUDENTS TO CULTURE THROUGH THE USE OF COMING-OF-AGE NOVELS
Susan Wehling

48
INTERVIEW WITH ACTFL KEYNOTE SPEAKER NEIL HOWE

50
JAPANESE TEACHERS ENJOY A LONG TRADITION OF SUPPORT
Patti Koning

56
LEARNING LANGUAGES: WHAT WORKS AFTER A BRAIN INJURY
One Teacher's Perspective
Stacy Attafi

Perspective

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Ray Clifford
ACTFL President

What Does it Mean to Learn *a Language?*

A recent conference on "accelerated learning" provided the opportunity to reflect on three basic questions:

1. What does it mean to "learn"?
2. Is "language learning" different from other learning?
3. Can the process of language learning be "accelerated"?

Some have defined learning according to the complexity of the subject matter to be learned, according to the nature of the tasks to be mastered, or by a combination of both of these dimensions. However, there is a much simpler classification of types of learning, a three-level classification which—despite its simplicity—reveals that not all types of learning are either equally difficult or equally useful.

According to that three-level classification schema, the simplest type of learning is rote memorization. With this type of learning there are very limited expectations that what was learned will be transferable to new situations. If students were to memorize a dialog for the sole purpose of being able to recite it in the classroom, they would be engaging in learning for a rehearsed, direct application of their learning with little expectation of being able to transfer that knowledge to other situations.

In contrast, the most difficult type of learning includes the expectation that what is being learned must be applied across a wide range of unrehearsed settings. This is the type of learning expected of students who—after an extended sequence of language courses—are prepared to use their language skills in unpredictable, real-world settings.

Between these two learning types of "limited-transfer" learning and "far-transfer" learning, there is a third category of learning called "near-transfer" learning. Near-transfer learning prepares learners for the ultimate goal of unrehearsed communication ability by providing controlled practice and promoting spontaneity within familiar settings. Role-playing activities in situations related to a memorized dialog can often motivate students to go beyond rote learning and engage in near-transfer learning.

Every serious language student would benefit from understanding that to become proficient in another language requires learning what is being studied for near transfer and eventually for far transfer use. Teachers may find that they can use the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines to help students gain that insight. A review of the guidelines reveals that:

- Reaching the Novice level requires only rote, limited-transfer learning.
- Because the Intermediate proficiency level learners are expected to "create" with the language being learned, that level clearly implies near-transfer language abilities.
- At the Advanced (and higher) proficiency levels, the real-world communication tasks described require the application of the far-transfer language skills.

Can language learning be accelerated? Most every attempt to accelerate language learning has done so by restricting the language learning process to "limited transfer" activities, with the natural result that the learners in those programs have not progressed beyond the Novice Level.

As one might expect, it is more difficult to accelerate far-transfer learning than it is to accelerate limited-transfer learning. Therefore, serious attempts to optimize the process of language learning have done so not by trying to save time, but by recognizing that language learning is not merely a rote memorization task and including near- and far-transfer learning activities in the curriculum.

Still there are students (and perhaps their parents) who believe that language learning is merely a rote memorization task. You may wish to remind them that because language learning requires all three types of learning, it may be the most challenging of all educational endeavors. If they understand the need for "transfer" learning, they will also better understand the role of the teacher in the language classroom. While textbooks can provide a starting point for language learning, the goal of language learning is not to merely cover the textbook but to actually develop real-world communication skills.

Can language learning be accelerated? Yes, it can, by making the entire process as effective as possible. That is best accomplished by pedagogically astute teachers—teachers who are not satisfied with rote learning outcomes, but rather who teach for proficiency by melding the subject matter with the learners' developing abilities and artfully orchestrate an engaging mix of iteratively more challenging learning activities combined with helpful formative feedback. Other approaches are not short cuts, but dead ends.