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**ATTAINING HIGH LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY:
CHALLENGES FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES**

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INTRODUCTION

Recent events have highlighted America's security, military, diplomatic, and business needs for individuals who can speak and understand languages other than English. In fact, the September 26, 2001 report of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/2001_rpt/hrep107-219.html accessed 10/30/01) states that language is the single greatest need in the intelligence community. Former Senator Paul Simon (2001) has pointed out, "Today, some 80 federal agencies need proficiency in nearly 100 foreign languages. While the demand is great, the supply remains almost nonexistent. Only 8 percent of American college students study another language."

Not surprisingly, if relatively few individuals in the United States learn languages other than English, even fewer learn them to high levels of proficiency. Yet, high levels of proficiency are demanded for the purposes that would meet the nation's needs in all languages. Of particular concern are the large number of languages that are seldom taught (or learned), the so-called "less

commonly taught languages” (LCTLs) (languages other than Spanish, French and German). In order to meet these language proficiency goals, significantly greater resources are required, particularly in the higher education community. There is great promise in recent developments for many languages, but the challenge is great, given the number of languages and the investment needed to attain high levels of proficiency, especially in the LCTLs. In this paper, we investigate the adequacy and availability of selected new pedagogical methods and tools, information technologies, and testing procedures for language training for achieving high levels of proficiency. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the successes and challenges of current approaches in foreign language teaching and learning and recommend ways to help develop high-level learners of foreign languages in the United States.

DEFINING “HIGH-LEVEL” LEARNER

In the language teaching field, the term “high-level learner” traditionally refers to the “3” or higher levels according to the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale or “Superior” according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines. The *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines--Speaking* (1999) provide the nationally accepted description of Superior-level oral proficiency as follows:

Speakers at the Superior level are able to communicate in the language with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They discuss their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency and accuracy. They explain their opinions on a number of topics of importance to them, such as social and political issues, and provide structured arguments to support their opinions. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities. When appropriate, they use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations. Such discourse, while coherent, may still be influenced by the Superior speaker’s own language patterns, rather than that of the target language.

Superior speakers command a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic and lexical devices, as well as intonational features such as pitch, stress and tone. They demonstrate virtually no pattern of error in the use of basic structures. However, they may make sporadic errors, particularly in low-frequency structures and in some complex high-frequency structures more common to formal speech and writing. Such errors, if they occur, do not distract the native interlocutor or interfere with communication.

(ACTFL 1999)

As indicated by the description of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines--Speaking*, speakers at the ACTFL-Superior (or ILR 3) level can operate in the language in a professional context.

Although Superior-level speakers are not perfect speakers, they are able to communicate without any specific pattern of errors and with native speaker interlocutors. Important characteristics of the Superior level include the “ease” and “fluency” with which they can communicate; this means that hesitations do not interfere with communication. Additionally, speakers at Superior level can use abstract language; that is, such speakers can talk about ideas or concepts.

Although an ACTFL-Superior level of proficiency is certainly desirable, and, according to most, difficult to achieve in a traditional U.S. educational sequence, ACTFL Superior, or ILR 3, is not the highest level of proficiency; the ILR scale also includes a 4 (or ACTFL Distinguished) and a 5 (educated native speaker). The main difference between an ACTFL Superior level speaker (ILR 3) and an ACTFL Distinguished-level speaker (ILR 4) is that a learner at the Superior/3 level still relies on the first language when speaking at length, whereas a learner at the “Distinguished” level “begins to approach the level of an educated native speaker” (Leaver and Shekhtman 2002).

In addition to requiring a great deal of language proficiency, a speaker at a high proficiency level (Superior or greater) must also possess academic skills, such as the abilities to hypothesize and persuade, and discourse skills that any *educated* person in the target culture

would have acquired. In many regards, a speaker at this level requires professional proficiency in both the language and in a specific field; therefore, a high-level speaker must have a professional background or profession about which to conduct discourse at this level. In other words, language alone is not sufficient to achieve a high level of proficiency; high-level speakers must also possess high-level academic skills typical of those of an educated person in the target culture. For this reason, all native speakers of a language are not automatically assumed to possess high-level language proficiency for the purposes being described here. In addition, academic skills must be encouraged and taught in the foreign language classroom.

CONTACT HOURS AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The U.S. postsecondary educational system offers opportunities for students to develop language proficiency through language learning and cultural studies, including literature. However, the typical undergraduate program offers only three contact hours per week, which after two years yields, at most, 180 hours of instruction. Development of even the Advanced level of proficiency can take up to 720 hours; for the Superior level in a language such as Russian, the minimum number of hours is 1320, according to estimates of the Foreign Service Institute (Omaggio-Hadley 2001).

Such estimates are staggering, when one considers the amount of time students need to devote to the study of language to achieve a Superior level of proficiency. Many LCTLs are not taught in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. Therefore, most students usually cannot begin a language learning sequence in a LCTL until reaching college.

A student beginning a language such as Russian in the first year of college can hope to achieve a maximum of 360 hours of classroom instruction on campus in an average program with three contact hours per week for four years, or half the number of hours needed to achieve

even an ACTFL-Advanced level of proficiency. Students with less than an ACTFL Advanced level of proficiency will have difficulty using their language skills in any professional context. It is important to note here that many LCTL programs in languages such as Indonesian or Arabic do not offer a full four years of instruction, when they are offered at all. This means that students in an average LCTL program with only three hours of instruction per week rarely have the opportunity to achieve the level of skills they need to be able to use the language studied in college in a professional context after graduation unless they find ways to supplement the language learning sequence and/or continue it after graduation. Because of the cost factor, and the extraordinary amount of time needed to devote to additional language learning, supplementing language learning is difficult. In addition, for students who have studied LCTLs, it is challenging to find such courses or other organized learning experiences.

As a result, traditional methods alone (that is, study in foreign language classrooms within the United States) are not likely to be sufficient to develop high-level speakers. It is therefore crucial to look beyond the traditional foreign language classroom to investigate ways to develop high-level learners by strengthening the capacity of higher education and related structures to support such development.

DEVELOPING HIGH-LEVEL LEARNERS

This paper reviews selected approaches that have resulted in high levels of proficiency in language learners. In examining innovations, we will suggest ways to combine the traditional with the new to enhance high-level language learning. In addition, if we want to encourage learners to progress to high levels of proficiency, we need to be able to assess that achievement. There is a critical need for valid, reliable, and practical measures to assess proficiency in many languages, particularly at the higher levels (Swender and Hamlyn 1999), in all four skill areas.

For many languages, the only tests to measure high-level skills are found at the federal government's Defense Language Institute, and such tests are not necessarily appropriate nor available in civilian contexts.

PATHWAYS TO PROFICIENCY

Because so few high-level learners of foreign languages exist, there are few proven approaches to “develop” such speakers. Moreover, to the extent that formal school-based instruction is relied on, many instructors lack the training and background necessary to teach proficiency-oriented courses, and, as we have seen, the number of instructional hours available in higher education is insufficient. However, there are several possible approaches or combinations to developing high levels of proficiency in learners: building on the language background of heritage speakers; starting language learning early to build a strong basis for second, third and more language learning; and providing intensive immersion experiences for students at the postsecondary level, including overseas study in a target-language culture. Each is discussed briefly in this paper, with special attention to the specific challenges and needs in developing high levels of proficiency in LCTLs.

HERITAGE SPEAKERS

The profile of a “heritage speaker” is difficult to define precisely, but one leading expert in the field has written:

The term "heritage" speaker is used to refer to a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language.

(Valdés 2000, 1)

As emphasized in a number of recent publications and two recent national conferences dedicated to issues of maintaining the language abilities of heritage speakers, this group is a resource that is as yet largely untapped (Peyton, Ranard, and McGinnis 2001). At present, over 175 languages are in use in the United States (SIL International 2002). However, these languages are not widely taught in U.S. schools, and as a result, heritage speakers have few opportunities to develop their language skills in academic and professional contexts (Brecht and Ingold 2002). In a national, Rhodes and Branaman (1999) found that language classes for native speakers were available in only 7% of secondary schools. The dearth of courses for heritage speakers is not limited to U.S. secondary schools; Ingold, Rivers, Tesser, and Ashby (2002) conducted a survey of selected college and university Spanish language programs. Of the sample, only 18% offered classes for native speakers.

The results of such surveys raise particularly thorny issues, because heritage speakers, especially in LCTLs, have a headstart on building high levels of proficiency in their heritage language. In addition, heritage speakers, having learned two languages already, are excellent candidates for learning another language (or languages) to a high degree of proficiency. However, high-level speakers, as defined earlier, must have some academic background in the language in order to use the abstract cognitive processes that emerge at such levels. If heritage language learners are not educated in their heritage language, then they often do not encounter sufficient opportunities to develop language at the high levels. Gambhir (2002) reports:

In some university programs, heritage language learners greatly outnumber traditional foreign language learners. The presence of these heritage language speakers presents new challenges to educational institutions unused to dealing with students who already have an intimate, if unevenly developed, knowledge of the language being taught. These challenges are compounded when the languages attract only a small number of learners.

(Gambhir 2002, 208)

A major concern, also pointed out by Gambhir, is that many instructors lack the training and experience to help heritage language learners develop their proficiency. Kono and McGinnis (2002) state that, with the exception of Spanish, little attention has been paid to preparing foreign language teachers to instruct such learners. This is particularly problematic, because the skills and abilities of heritage language learners differ from those who have learned languages in traditional foreign language classrooms. Such instructors need to understand how to appropriately structure a syllabus and activities and to select materials relevant for heritage learners.

EARLY LANGUAGE LEARNING

Many countries around the world begin language instruction for the majority of their students in the elementary grades, while most schools in the United States do not offer foreign language classes until middle school or high school (Pufahl, Rhodes, and Christian 2000). Early language learning offers many advantages to students, related to high proficiency goals. First, an early start provides additional time to progress toward high levels of proficiency (increasing the total available contact hours). In addition, there is evidence that younger learners may have a greater likelihood of achieving native-like pronunciation, contributing to a better chance for high-level proficiency (Long 1990; Black 2000). Finally, students who become acquainted with other languages and cultures at an early age may be better prepared and more disposed to learn additional languages as they move through school.

While any language exposure can lay the foundation for ongoing language development, the most proficiency-oriented approaches to early language instruction involve immersion. In immersion programs, students spend part or all of the school day learning in a second language, including learning subject matter (math, social studies, science, etc.) in that language. These

programs begin at the elementary school level and often include articulated sequences through secondary school. Students in immersion programs typically reach a higher level of competence than those participating in other language programs. Two-way immersion (TWI) programs are growing in popularity as an alternative that promotes the development of language resources of all students (Howard and Sugarman 2001). The TWI model provides integrated instruction for native English speakers and native speakers of another language, with the goal of promoting high academic achievement, first and second language development, and cross-cultural understanding for all students. As in other immersion programs, language learning takes place primarily through content instruction. These programs also foster heritage language development, since they allow non-native speakers of English to expand their native language skills. While most immersion programs are in the more commonly taught languages (Spanish, French, German), some districts offer immersion in LCTLs like Arabic, Dutch, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, and Russian, and TWI programs exist in Korean.

STUDY ABROAD

Overseas study for college age and other students may include a summer, semester or year in a target-language country. For many, study overseas is the only way to progress from the ACTFL Advanced (ILR 2) level into the Superior level or even for moving from the ACTFL Intermediate to the ACTFL Advanced level. Extended time overseas can help learners progress from the Superior level into the Distinguished level.

In addition to giving students the experience of immersion in the target culture, study abroad affords many linguistic opportunities available only in such a setting. For example, many students live with host-country families during their time abroad, and this experience allows the student to hear and use the language in both academic and daily life settings. Most teachers and

learners consider longer study abroad opportunities optimal for language learning; Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1993) and Rivers (1998) examined language gains of study abroad students based on time in the country, as well as the types of classes taken (in English or the target language), living situation (apartment with Americans, dormitory with students from the target culture, homestays) and social opportunities (socializing with other students from the target culture or with other Americans). The Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg study bears out "the traditional wisdom that one does not acquire real speaking competence without a period spent in-country" (Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg 1993, 17), and that learners gain even more if they have had another foreign language in high school, in addition to the one they are learning (ibid., 20). Rivers and other researchers found that proficiency in all skills increased, but that there was little difference in whether the students were in dorms or whether they had homestays. The study also points to the need for training students for study abroad so they can manage their own linguistic input more efficiently.

COMBINATION

Clearly, any combination of the heritage language background, early language learning, and study abroad can and will enhance language development. A heritage learner who can study the language in the United States, coupled with a study abroad experience, is more likely to develop a high level of proficiency than a heritage language learner whose only exposure to the language is at home. Similarly, a student who participates in an early language learning experience and then studies overseas, is far more likely to develop a high level of proficiency than an early language learner who never lives in the target language culture or a student who studies abroad after beginning the language in college.

These pathways, preferably in combination, increase the likelihood that learners will develop high levels of proficiency. Greater opportunities for individuals and incentives for institutions to provide these paths are needed to establish a strong foundation on which language education at the postsecondary level can build.

PROMISING APPROACHES AND RESOURCES

In the remainder of this paper, we discuss the successes and challenges of current approaches and suggest ways to help develop high-level speakers of foreign languages in the United States. We look at pedagogical approaches, technology, resources and assessments available to support high-level learning, highlights the challenges inherent in developing high-level speakers, and suggests future directions for moving forward in this area.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

If the United States is to develop high-level speakers of foreign languages, some classroom experience (in the United States and/or overseas) is necessary to introduce, encourage and maintain high levels of proficiency. In this section, we examine how pedagogical approaches, including intensive institutes, language for specific purposes courses, and study abroad programs, promote the development of high levels of proficiency as well as how stateside courses can assist students in developing and maintaining these levels. The critical role of teacher training for elementary and secondary teachers as well as for university faculty is also reviewed.

Intensive summer institutes. Intensive summer institutes can simulate the language immersion of a study abroad experience without the expense of airfare and overseas

accommodations. Throughout the United States, there are a number of such institutes and language camps.

One of the most well known is the eighty-five-year-old Middlebury summer institute. Middlebury College offers an intensive summer institute which provides students with the opportunity to immerse themselves completely in the target language inside and outside of the classroom with both their instructors and their fellow classmates, including in living situations and dining halls (<http://www.middlebury.edu/ls/introduction.html>, accessed 1/2/03). Currently, Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish are offered for seven or nine-week courses during the summer session. Students show clear gains in their language proficiency after this experience. Of students participating in the nine-week summer immersion program in Russian at Middlebury College, nearly 30% who entered the program with an Intermediate level of proficiency exited with an Advanced level of proficiency. When compared to the number of hours it could have taken for such students to achieve that level of proficiency in traditional classes, the Middlebury data are impressive. Many students report that they learn more language at Middlebury in one summer than they do in a semester or even a year on a study abroad program. Furthermore, language gained in an immersion setting is an excellent preparation for the study abroad experience, with all its cultural and psychosocial challenges, because the immersion program provides students language skills needed to make the most of the cultural challenges experiences on study abroad.

Other institutions also offer intensive summer programs in the United States. Dabars and Kagan (2002) describe eight intensive summer institutes devoted to, among other foci, enhancing the Russian language proficiency of Russian teachers from both K-12 and university levels, as well as graduate students. These institutes addressed a concern of many LCTL programs, the

reliance on native speaker instructors who lack training in language teaching methods or on non-native speakers who cannot speak the language at a Superior (or in some cases, Advanced) level.

For Debars and Kagan's study,

The goals of the Institutes were to (1) enhance the language skills and cultural knowledge of Russian teachers, (2) inform participants of the latest methodological insights and (3) assist teachers in adapting/developing supplementary teaching materials.

(Dabars and Kagan 2002)

Fluency was increased through the immersion experience; the Institutes were conducted in Russian. In addition, the Institutes included a strong focus on increasing grammatical and vocabulary accuracy, as well as cultural knowledge. It is important to note that cultural appropriateness is crucial at the ACTFL Superior and higher levels; therefore this approach was sensitive to the need for cultural as well as language skills.

Even shorter institutes can be helpful in expanding language proficiency. Byrnes (2002) discusses an institute that brought together 12 non-native, ACTFL Superior or Advanced level speakers of German (graduate students) for an intensive, eight-day immersion program to assist them in developing the skills and strategies to achieve higher level abilities in German. The institute included targeted activities to boost participants' fluency in professional-level reading, listening and speaking (e.g., formal presentations). Students kept qualitative journals and provided extensive analysis of "what worked" in this experience. From their responses, the students especially valued the opportunities to work with complex materials and the sense of satisfaction as learners they felt at the end. The institute also demonstrates that immersion experiences for non-native speakers can take place in the home country rather than in the target language country with beneficial results. Such institutes are particularly valuable for learners of

LCTLs, because an intensive institute creates an unusual opportunity of concentrated language experience with an instructor or instructors and other learners.

The Southeast Asian Studies Summer Institute (SEASSI) is a consortium of 15 institutions that hold eight to nine week intensive programs in Burmese, Hmong, Indonesian, Javanese, Khmer, Lao, Tagalog, Thai and Vietnamese. The summer sessions offer courses equivalent to the first through the third year of university level language study. Since 1983, this program has been the main venue through which students are prepared for advanced language training. Because SEASSI moved to different institutions every two years, language proficiency results have not yet been tracked. Since 2000, the institute has been held at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and it is expected that information about language proficiency will be more available in the future.

Extending curricular offerings. Many students and instructors are quick to point out that it is difficult to find upper-level (e.g., beyond the first two years) language courses that do not focus exclusively on literature. A number of successful high-level language classes have been developed in specific professional areas, such as business and aeronautics or classes based on film in languages such as Russian (Leaver and Shekhtman 2002; Rifkin 2000). In addition to attracting students who might prefer subject matter other than literature, such courses help learners develop skills at the higher levels, by giving them access to situations in which these skills can be practiced. Of course, instructors need special training to teach such classes, as indicated below.

Angelelli and Degueldre (2002) describe the successes and challenges in developing courses that allow students to develop skills in using language within professional contexts. From 1994-2000, they developed Spanish and French classes that allowed students to practice

their professional skills (interpreting and translating) in the target language. Most students in these classes had achieved a proficiency level of Advanced or beyond. Classes were conducted entirely in the target languages, and course activities included movie nights, field trips, library searching, high-level readings, crossword puzzles, dictation and formal presentations (Angelelli and Degueldre 2002, 88-89). Instructors and students alike found the courses enormously helpful for developing both language skills and professional expertise.

The Center for Applied Second Language Learning Studies in Oregon offers a second language internship and mentoring program. This program provides training for advanced-level speakers to become teachers; such professional opportunities also provide opportunities for speakers to use high-level language in professional contexts.

Overseas study. Overseas study is often essential in attaining even an Advanced level of proficiency in a foreign language. As discussed earlier, the number of possible classroom language instruction hours in an American university is insufficient to promote high levels of proficiency. In addition, the classroom context cannot replace the need to use the language regularly in the target culture. A good example of study abroad for LCTLs is given by Kubler (2002), who describes several successful approaches to study abroad in China.

Chinese is among the most difficult languages for native speakers of English, and Kubler states that he finds it difficult to believe that “a non-native can attain Superior-Distinguished level [proficiency]” without study abroad (ibid., 96). The characteristics shared by the programs successful in helping students attain high levels of proficiency include three primary features Kubler considers essential:

1. Emphasis on spoken Chinese. To improve spoken Chinese, students must be given opportunities to develop formal vocabulary and grammar, with careful attention to

register. Similar to the Byrnes (2002) study mentioned earlier, Kubler found that it was essential for students at this level to have opportunities for correction of their errors by native speakers. With access to radio and television programs, learners can hear large amounts of the target language, as well as develop cultural skills and knowledge of the kinds of topics, such as current events, that are discussed at the high levels of proficiency. They also learn a great deal about specific words and their synonyms and multiple meanings. At the high levels, learners must also understand non-standard language; one feature of the ILR 4 level is the ability to understand mutually intelligible dialects and not simply the standard form of the language. Students in overseas programs have access to speakers of different varieties of the language that may be unavailable in the U.S.

2. Written Chinese. Kubler points out that high-level learners must master and maintain the ability to read complex texts, including newspapers and magazines, as well as modern and classical Chinese literature (Kubler 2002, 112). Students in overseas programs have ample access to a variety of texts, as well as to cursive script. For many students, the handwritten notes of their Chinese professors are bewildering, because few students have the opportunity to interact with different kinds of handwriting. Students benefit from practice in writing compositions, doing translations and writing for specific purposes.
3. Curricular structure. Programs successful in helping students attain high levels of proficiency also include a variety of curricular activities, such as tutorials, content courses, a community activity, internships with Chinese organizations, a commitment

to speak only Chinese, roommate(s) who are native speakers of Chinese and instructors who can teach content (and not just language courses).

In examining the successes Kubler identifies in Chinese language programs, there are echoes of successes from other programs. For example, the emphasis on public speaking and error correction are similar to the studies by Byrnes (2002); the mention of Chinese-speaking (and not American roommates) reflects Rivers' (1998) work. In general, overseas programs successful in developing high-level speakers seek to immerse the student in the language and culture and to give the student an experience as close as possible to that of a native speaker.

Materials available for upper-level students. Because of a dearth of materials for students at higher levels, advanced language students are often at a disadvantage in accessing resource and reference material in the LCTLs. Duke University/UNC SEELRC has created compendia of materials (e.g., searchable reference grammars, grammatical dictionaries, language and culture materials for business negotiations) that are accessible through a web interface. Given the small market for such materials, electronic publication through the Internet is a much more promising medium for them than traditional print publication.

A number of national Language Resource Centers (LRCs) have created materials to address this need. For example, the National East Asian Languages Resource Center (Ohio State University) has created an interactive multimedia teaching tool based on a Japanese Noh play that will be available in CD-ROM format. Another product, a series of video training modules from a popular Chinese TV show, focuses on the varieties of Mandarin spoken in China. Advanced-level learners participate in a role play through contextualized video vignettes. The CD-ROMS are designed to develop advanced skills. The Language Acquisition Resource Center (San Diego State University) hosts a digital media archive. The instructional design of the

archive, by guiding access to authentic language materials, assists language learners in reading target language materials at the higher levels. Similarly, the Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (Pennsylvania State University) is working to improve the availability of Advanced-level foreign language teaching, learning and assessment materials. Projects include a discourse/pragmatic approach to Advanced Korean, corpus-based materials for Advanced Chinese proficiency, and speaking and reading at the Advanced level in Chinese. The University of Wisconsin-Madison's T⁴ ("Transforming Teaching through Technology") Foreign Languages Project has created computer-mediated tutorials to teach Advanced-level listening skills in Russian and plans to continue this work in Russian, as well as Japanese and Swahili. Finally, The National African Language Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin is creating learner reference grammars in eight African languages (Swahili, Pulaar, Bambara, Yoruba, Sesotho, Chichewa, Zulu, and Twi). Thus, a variety of resources are being developed that will help learners move to higher levels of proficiency in a number of LCTLs.

The Flagship Initiative. In an effort to address the critical need for language expertise for national security, the National Security Education Program (NSEP) is organizing a new initiative (funded through the Intelligence Authorization Act) to increase the numbers of university graduates, across disciplines, with high levels of proficiency in languages that are important for national security. The Flagship Language Initiative, as this project is known, expands existing university-based programs so that selected universities will have the capacity in a critical language to accept learners with Advanced level proficiency in that language and assist them to move to a Superior level (ILR 3). It is anticipated that these graduates will then apply their skills in federal agency positions. At present, National Flagship Programs have been funded in four pilot projects, one each in Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, and Persian. These programs

include a variety of coursework options and internships abroad in addition to intensive coursework in the U.S. A major focus is on curriculum development to address the needs of high-level learners. The National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland is overseeing the program. (NSEP has been making awards since 1994 for study abroad by undergraduate and graduate students in all disciplines, as well as grants for institution building.)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

Individuals seeking state certification to teach foreign languages at the elementary or secondary levels must take a series of courses and demonstrate foreign language proficiency as determined by each state's requirements. However, expectations and requirements differ from state to state. Therefore, language teachers have differing levels of preparation for teaching, as well as proficiency in the language or languages taught. As practicing teachers, a number of opportunities are available for them to continue receiving professional development.

This area is of primary concern to the LRCs, and much effort goes into making opportunities available especially to teachers of LCTLs. Several of them offer summer institutes for teachers. For example, the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center at Iowa State University has offered institutes of varying time frames (one day, two day, one week, two week) on subjects such as action research in the foreign language classroom, instructional strategies for K-8 teachers of LCTLs such as Arabic, Chinese and Hebrew, and preparation for certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC) in Washington, DC has offered one- and two-day institutes to update teachers on current theories of language learning, strategies used by language learners, classroom-based oral proficiency and technology and the language classroom. During June, 2002, the NCLRC also offered a ten-day institute for graduate students and teachers of Russian

and Arabic to learn about teaching methods. Participants were introduced to theory and research about teaching pronunciation, grammar, writing, and then had opportunities to apply what they had learned to their specific languages.

TECHNOLOGY

A number of different technologies, including distance learning courses, encourage and support the development and maintenance of high levels of proficiency, as well as approaches that rely on the World Wide Web for bringing authentic language and cultural experiences to students. For example, with the proliferation of the Web, students can read target-language newspapers on-line in real time, where once they waited days or weeks for the delivery of newspapers that were out-of-date. A previous section emphasized learners' needs to access authentic target-language audio and written materials; technology makes such access possible even outside of the target culture. As a result, students can gather up-to-date information for discussions of current events in the target-language culture by accessing such materials on the Web. They can also develop high levels of reading proficiency with more ease than in the pre-Internet age.

Technological resources can also improve students' listening proficiency. Listening to radio or television broadcasts, learners develop listening proficiency, not just of authentic native speakers in academic and professional domains, but also speakers of the language from different parts of the target country or countries, reflecting the regional and social variation in the language.

Technology alone cannot develop high-level speakers; instead, it must be part of a well-articulated curriculum. Technology use in the language classroom, or outside of the language classroom, must be strategic and as well-planned as other parts of the course. The Internet

provides opportunities for students at high levels of proficiency to interact with native speakers, to access culturally appropriate, high-level reading and listening texts, and to conduct research in their area of expertise. Throughout this paper, we have focused on the need for high-level learners to use language in a professional context; the Internet provides opportunities for high-level learners to research and analyze information in their field of specialty in the target language.

Distance learning courses can also help with language maintenance. This model of delivery of advanced language instruction in critical foreign languages relies on distance education, such as combining texts, videos, CD-ROMs, and synchronous and asynchronous use of the Internet. Based on this model, advanced online courses for Chinese, Japanese and Korean were developed through the National Foreign Language Resource Center at the University of Hawaii.

RESOURCES

Resources for the LCTLs have steadily increased in the last four decades. Most of the work has focused on developing textbooks, course materials, dictionaries and grammars. Although resources for advanced language levels remain hard to find, there are some positive changes that have taken place, one of which was the creation and establishment of 14 federally-funded Language Resource Centers to strengthen the capacity of the language education community for both teachers and learners. The LRCs contribute to the development of high levels of proficiency, specifically in LCTLs, through a variety of activities, some of which have been mentioned previously. For example, the University of Hawaii National Foreign Language Resource Center has developed a task-based language teaching program for Korean; this

approach is applied with students from both the University of Hawaii and the Defense Language Institute.

The Language Acquisition Resource Center (LARC) at the University of San Diego established the Center for the Advancement of Distinguished Language Proficiency (ADLP) in May 2002 to build national capacity in developing near-native foreign language proficiency. To achieve their goal, the ADLP Center has focused on five activities:

- Direct instruction (through onsite and online courses) taught by collaborating foreign universities
- Materials development (for use by teachers and students in the classroom and independently)
- Publications (such as the *ADLP Journal* and online occasional papers)
- Research projects (to discern how Level 4 is most efficiently and effectively learned and how best to teach learners at this level)
- Faculty development (to build a national cadre of teachers experienced at teaching Level 4)

(<http://adlpcenter.sdsu.edu/>, accessed 12/19/02)

Although the ADLP is new, it promises to advance our knowledge of strategies that work best in developing high-level speakers. LARC is also creating Superior-level foreign language websites, expanding the pool of relevant technological resources available for use by students.

The U.S. Department of Education's International Research and Studies Section has been the main supporter of the development of textbooks, course materials, dictionaries and grammars for the LCTLs. Over 1,200 projects have been funded, most providing the core materials that many departments and centers are now using to focus on developing advanced language skills.

Other federally-funded initiatives have contributed resources to this purpose as well. Although not necessarily always focused on advanced language skills, the Department of Defense has funded many projects in materials as well as technologically-oriented courseware.

Language for specific purposes at the advanced language skill level is an area that continues to be a real need. There are a few courses that have been developed, but on the whole, this part of language training is neglected. The federally-funded Centers for International Business Education (CIBERS) do not track the levels of language study courses. Most language training through the CIBERS is in the commonly taught languages, but they also offer training in a few LCTLs, including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Portuguese, Arabic, Wolof, and Thai.

It is now possible to find where LCTLs are being taught, both at the post-secondary and the secondary levels, and it is also possible to find information about textbooks and courseware. The LCTL project at the Center for Advanced Research in Language Acquisition (CARLA) maintains a database of LCTL course offerings by postsecondary institutions as well as K-12 and summer courses. This project also has a number of electronic mailing lists for teachers and students of specific languages. The Language Materials Project (LMP) site at the University of California, Los Angeles is the main repository for information on materials in the LCTLs and, in collaboration with the Center for Applied Linguistics, is collecting this information. At present, the LMP is conducting a survey to update and expand the national picture of resources used in foreign language teaching, information that will aid all levels of LCTL instruction in both the public and private sectors. In addition, the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics has a database of foreign language immersion and two-way immersion schools.

A web-based resource in development is LangNet, an effort led by the National Foreign Language Center (in conjunction with the Defense Language Institute, the Foreign Service Institute, and a number of national language teacher associations). LangNet is intended to be a comprehensive resource for teachers and learners of language, with the capacity to provide diagnostic assessments, develop learning plans for individuals based on their learner profiles, and provide access to texts, exercises, and a variety of learning activities and assessments in a number of languages.

ASSESSMENTS

To work toward the goal of developing high levels of proficiency in learners, we must also find ways to determine when learners have reached this high level. Of particular concern is the availability of tests of *all* the skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in the less commonly taught languages. Almost no LCTLs have tests available in all four skills, and most tests do not assess beyond the ACTFL Superior level. In the current technological climate, on-line tests (available through proctors or on-demand) are of great interest.

Currently, ACTFL, Brigham Young University, the Center for Applied Linguistics, the Defense Language Institute and San Diego State University have established a consortium to develop an on-line screening tool for oral proficiency. This test will not replace the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) or other such instruments, but will instead make available on-line oral proficiency testing to many students and instructors. Currently, the Center for Applied Linguistics is working to develop a web-delivered test of listening and reading proficiency in Arabic and Russian. Scores on these tests will range from the Novice through Superior levels. Although these tests do not assess beyond the Superior level and do not focus on only the

Advanced and Superior levels, they represent new strategies and approaches that may be important for future developments in language testing.

Some assessments test high levels of proficiency, but they are not widely available. The U.S. government's oral proficiency test reaches beyond ACTFL Superior to ILR levels 4 and 5; however, training for this test is only available to specific employees of agencies that require such tests. Similarly, a number of U.S. government agencies test listening and reading beyond the ACTFL Superior level; however, such tests are not released for reasons of national security and cannot be administered to university students. In addition, there are fewer trained OPI testers in the LCTLs than in the commonly taught languages, and fewer still individuals who are qualified to train new testers.

A CASE STUDY: WHAT WORKS IN RUSSIAN

Russian is an LCTL in which some students have achieved success in attaining high levels of proficiency. The following sequence of courses and educational opportunities has proved successful in Russian:

- A solid foundation in Russian grammar, syntax and pronunciation taught within a proficiency-oriented course progression at the beginning and intermediate levels;
- Summer immersion experiences within the United States;
- Established study abroad programs in Russian-speaking countries;
- Fourth-year courses (offered on campus) in Russian not necessarily limited to literary discussions;
- Extended residency in Russia after graduation (although no formal programs for this kind of residency exist, individuals find ways to live and work in Russia for at least one or two years after graduation to achieve Superior level proficiency).

Although the above-mentioned Russian course sequence is available at a few institutions, the full sequence is not offered at most. In addition, the critical fourth-year, post-study abroad course is often not available; this leaves students without a viable language course after the study abroad experience. Even though Russian language education is relatively successful, American institutions routinely graduate students with only Intermediate level oral proficiency. Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg (1993) report that fewer than 40% of students with Intermediate level of language prior to study abroad achieve an Advanced level of proficiency after a study abroad experience. The experience in Russian, along with other accumulated evidence, strongly suggests that the only path to Superior level proficiency for a non-heritage speaker is an extended learning sequence in that language. Technology can and does support this extended learning sequence but cannot replace it.

CHALLENGES

Although foreign language education, specifically in LCTLs, has improved significantly over the past ten years in technologies, materials and assessments to develop high-level speakers, numerous challenges remain. Among them are (1) feasibility of many pedagogical approaches, (2) background and skills of the instructors, (3) availability of resources, (4) development of new technological applications, (5) availability of appropriate assessments and (6) the need for incentives.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES

In order to facilitate high levels of proficiency in the many languages important to this country, we need programs such as those described above in *each* language. Unfortunately, with current resources, the availability, affordability and feasibility of pedagogical approaches such as

intensive language programs in the U.S. and abroad for many students make them difficult to find. For example, early language programs are not available to many students, and school districts do not receive sufficient support to sponsor such early language learning opportunities. To further complicate the early learning sequence, it is difficult to find certified language teachers in the LCTLs; therefore, sponsoring early language learning programs in the LCTLs is daunting for many school districts.

In addition to a scarcity of programs, intensive summer institutes and study abroad are financially difficult for many students. The cost of study abroad is high for students who work to support their education. American students cannot generally work abroad, therefore limiting the availability of this experience for students receiving financial aid or whose families cannot support part or all of their college education. The fact that participating in study abroad may delay their ultimate graduation date also presents financial obstacles to some students by extending the time of enrollment. Similarly, specific high-level institutes, such as summer immersion programs, are costly. Further, students participating in intensive institutes may not be able to work during the summer to cover the cost not only of the summer immersion program but also their expenses during the coming academic year in their home institution. Scholarships to attend such programs are not sufficient, because, although students may be granted tuition benefits, they cannot replace the income they would have received from working during the summer. Therefore, many students lack the financial resources to devote to becoming high-level language learners.

In addition, not all students who study abroad do so in a target language country or in a language-focused program. That is, many students who participate in study abroad go to Anglophone countries such as Australia or Great Britain or participate in English-language

programs in non-Anglophone countries, such as the programs at European University in Budapest.

INSTRUCTORS

There are insufficient numbers of instructors with adequate training in language teaching in general, let alone adequate training for teaching at the Advanced and Superior levels. Moreover, the numbers of instructors who themselves have achieved high levels of proficiency are limited. This is a natural consequence of our failure to provide a system of language education and language learning opportunities that can generate a sufficient pool of speakers with high levels of proficiency. This paper has highlighted the need for developing high levels of proficiency, not only for students but also for language instructors. In the LCTLs, specifically, we often face a conundrum: certified language teachers lack Superior (or sometimes even Advanced) proficiency, while native speakers lack the background and preparation necessary to teach. To further complicate the situation, high-level learners need to participate in classes that allow them to use the language to pursue professional research or objectives. Given the limited pool available, it is difficult to find instructors qualified to teach such courses. The challenges have an impact not only on higher education. School districts, too, lack certified teachers with high levels of proficiency in a wide variety of languages. The cycle is difficult to break.

Although most states require specific courses on methods and minimum levels of language proficiency for certified teachers in elementary and secondary education, individuals pursuing a graduate degree to teach at the university level do not have such requirements. In fact, many foreign language doctoral programs have no language competency exams or required courses in methodology. Doctoral students take all examinations in the linguistic or literary traditions of the languages and cultures they are studying and write doctoral dissertations. Few of

the dissertations in foreign languages, however, address issues in foreign language education or applied linguistics. Consequently, non-native speakers of many languages who receive advanced degrees do not possess Superior level language skills nor are they knowledgeable about how to teach a language.

Foreign language faculty, both native and non-native speakers, may or may not have any methodological preparation and rarely have training to teach courses at the Advanced or Superior levels. Many foreign language faculty, especially in the LCTLs, lack the support they need to attend pursue professional development once they have a teaching position. Typically, LCTL faculty teach in large public institutions with limited resources to support professional development and travel to conferences. Therefore, these faculty, when forced to choose, will attend conferences in the area of their research (linguistics or literature) rather than conferences or workshops dedicated to foreign language learning and teaching (such as ACTFL or the Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO)). Few institutions offer support for LCTL faculty or graduate students to attend oral proficiency interview workshops and LCTL teachers' associations, for example. The lack of such training is also related to the lack of instructional materials for the LCTLs; there are not enough authors qualified to develop these materials. The academic rewards system is also responsible for this vicious circle (Rifkin 1992), because faculty generally have very little incentive (promotion, tenure) to work on issues related to teaching.

In addition to the challenges faced by instructors in higher education, the training and certification of K-12 teachers can be problematic. As we have previously indicated, states have requirements for coursework and proficiency for foreign language teachers; however these

requirements differ from state to state. Additionally, because of the paucity of assessments available in LCTLs, it is often difficult to obtain a reliable proficiency rating for LCTL teachers.

RESOURCES AND RESEARCH

As discussed in earlier sections, diverse resources have been and are being developed by groups such as the LRCs (who also work to distribute such resources). However, adequate resources in many languages for the full course sequence remain unavailable. That is, if we are to develop high-level learners, we cannot do so without materials and supporting resources for learners at these levels in all languages. Such materials are lacking, and qualified authors to develop such materials are similarly lacking in all languages. Therefore, materials and resources, must be developed on a much broader scale than currently exists, as well as training for potential authors.

In addition, evidence-based research on how to best develop high-level learners is scarce. Some research-based results have been reported in this paper, but additional research and longitudinal studies are needed. It is hoped that the ADLP will shed some light on this issue through research on how to develop high-level learners, but many issues need to be addressed.

TECHNOLOGY

Although technology can improve the efficiency of language learning and can increase the numbers of listening and reading texts to which students are exposed, the university and research community rewards curriculum development less than what are considered “serious” academic publications (i.e., reports of research in peer-reviewed journals, for example). Some of the more prestigious scholarly journals will not consider publishing articles in the area of foreign language education. This makes it extremely difficult for university-based language educators in particular to undertake course and materials development in general, beyond the immediate

needs of their own classes. In addition, many faculty lack the programming capabilities to develop good software to supplement classroom or in-class programs and lack the support that would allow them to develop technology-based courseware. Therefore, there is little incentive for them to develop instructional software to enhance high-level learning.

ASSESSMENT

There are few languages for which assessments are available to test high levels of language proficiency. If the success of various pedagogical approaches is to be determined, then assessments must be available for measuring the outcomes of such programs and the achievements of the learners in them. There is a particular lack of tests in all languages in the listening, reading and writing skills, and of examiners qualified to rate such tests. Although efforts are underway to develop Internet-delivered tests in a variety of languages, the need is still great.

Assessing speaking is similarly a difficult issue. Although the ACTFL OPI can measure proficiency up to the Superior level, many instructors, particularly of LCTLs, are not trained in administering the OPI. More training for language teachers on how to conduct the ACTFL OPI is a serious need. A difficulty of training teachers of LCTLs to conduct ACTFL OPIs, however, is that language-specific guidelines do not exist for all languages, and it can be challenging to learn to apply the ACTFL Guidelines to LCTLs (some of which have no certified testers). In addition, assessments such as ACTFL OPIs are relatively expensive since they must be administered individually.

INCENTIVES FOR STUDENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

Currently, there are few, if any incentives for students to study LCTLs or to pursue high levels of proficiency. LCTLs are infrequently offered at the high school level, and most students

prefer to continue studying a language from high school than to begin a new one at the college level. In fact, there are incentives for students to continue to study the language they studied in high school in order to move through the college requirements as efficiently as possible.

Similarly, there are few incentives for school districts, already burdened by large class sizes, accountability demands, and budget shortfalls to offer LCTLs in the K-12 sequence or to offer an early language learning sequence in any language. Many states are currently facing a budget crisis estimated by some groups as collectively as high as \$60-\$80 billion (Gross 2003). Therefore, it seems likely that education will be negatively impacted by state and local budget difficulties, and languages with low enrollments are often first candidates for budget cuts.

Without incentives, studying LCTLs is not as attractive to most students as studying the more commonly taught languages (if language study is considered at all). Unlike fields such as engineering, where part or all of a student's education may be paid for by a future employer, there are few scholarships available to study languages, specifically LCTLs, at the university level. The National Security Education Program has made important efforts in this direction, by offering scholarships and fellowships for study abroad to students in diverse fields of study, but these efforts are necessarily limited by available funding. Overall, there are few incentives for schools and institutions of higher education to offer LCTLs or for individual students to study them. Needless to say, this lack of interest in basic language learning makes it unlikely that many students will move on to attain high levels of proficiency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Language education has made progress toward increasing student proficiency in many languages, through research, technological advances, materials preparation, professional

development, and the establishment of national language resource centers, as noted throughout the paper. Although more progress is still needed for all languages to increase the number of students who reach high levels of proficiency, it is important at this time to focus on LCTLs in order to address our national interests. To increase the pool of students who complete language programs with high levels of proficiency, we must have a pool of learners from which we can draw. Currently, we need to increase the size of that pool of learners. We must also improve the opportunities and resources that make it possible for learners to achieve high-level proficiency.

To accomplish these goals, we need to make significant progress in a number of areas. These are briefly discussed in this section.

CLARIFY AND DISSEMINATE DEFINITIONS OF HIGH LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY

Although definitions for high levels of proficiency exist, we still need to clarify the definitions of what constitutes a high level of proficiency (ACTFL Superior and above) and make them more widely recognized as possible goals of language study. To do so, the definitions must be explained in clear language and made accessible to students and teachers alike. Many students are unaware of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking*; if language students pursued the ACTFL Superior (or even Advanced) level with the same enthusiasm often reserved for tests like the SAT or GRE, then achieving such high levels would become more attractive and attainable. To make these definitions widely accessible, we must present at national and regional conferences for LCTLs and provide scholarships for instructors of LCTLs to participate in professional development opportunities, such as ACTFL-sponsored OPI workshops.

SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT AND USE OF MORE TESTS THAT MEASURE HIGH LEVELS OF
LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

We have pointed to the paucity of tests to measure high levels of proficiency; there is a need to develop valid, reliable tests, especially in listening, reading and writing in many more languages. After tests are developed, raters must be trained, and incentives must be provided for students to want to take the tests. Obviously, if the definitions of high levels were more widely disseminated, then students would better appreciate the value of higher certain scores on such tests. Additionally, institutions need incentives to both require the tests and report the scores on a national basis.

One difficulty with the ACTFL OPI and other such tests is the lack of incentives for instructors to learn to conduct such interviews or administer such tests; if incentives were offered related to tenure and promotion for instructors to develop or use proficiency tests, then testing (and therefore accountability) would become more widespread. In addition, learning to use proficiency tests, such as learning to conduct ACTFL OPIs, is an invaluable professional development opportunity for teachers. Making such tests available over the Internet would also increase their use.

PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO K-12 SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO DEVELOP WELL-ARTICULATED,
SUSTAINED LEARNING SEQUENCES BEGINNING AT THE LOWER GRADES

Early language learning is a successful approach to attaining high levels of language proficiency. The United States would develop more high-level speakers by encouraging well-articulated learning sequences in the elementary and secondary curricula, so that students could graduate from high school with a high level of proficiency in English and at least one other language (preferably more). The articulation is crucial. Students must be able to continue the

language through elementary, middle, and high school and then into college. To develop high-level skills, students need to learn through content. Therefore, students should have access to programs where they learn content through languages other than English (usually in some form of immersion program).

SUPPORT HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNING

Heritage language learners are a largely untapped resource for increasing our nation's pool of individuals with high levels of proficiency in diverse languages. To help such learners develop the cognitive and academic skills in their heritage language necessary to achieve proficiency for academic and professional uses, we must provide well-articulated learning sequences for heritage learners. To do so, we must support ongoing learning through coursework and materials to enable heritage learners to maintain their languages when formal support is not available as well as formal programs whenever possible. In doing so, we will also encourage diversity in foreign language study, since many heritage language learners are members of under-represented groups.

PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR STUDENTS TO ATTAIN HIGH LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY

In the "Challenges" section, we discussed the financial obstacles to establishing high levels of proficiency through study abroad or intensive summer institutes. Incentives include helping students financially with study abroad, summer immersion, offering language-needed positions for students, helping students find jobs using the language after graduation, and supporting study of languages through fellowships/scholarships (especially for students studying critical languages). In addition, providing more financial incentives to students who participate in an intensive summer institute or study abroad experience is crucial; perhaps students would work

as research or teaching assistants, thus further developing their language skills as well as supplying needed financial support.

There is also a need to provide work-abroad opportunities. This would include post-graduation experience in the target-language country and culture, rather like a two-year post-college internship. For students with large debt levels, it would be helpful to defer student loan payments until the two-year internship is complete, much the way it is done for Peace Corps Volunteers.

Finally, institutions could require Advanced level of proficiency for graduation with a major/minor in a language, or suggest different levels of proficiency as graduation requirements, based on the difficulty of the language. For example, the Advanced level might be an appropriate requirement for Spanish and German, with Intermediate-Mid more appropriate for Russian and Japanese. If a screening test were available via the Internet, then students could have their proficiency tested frequently (e.g., yearly or bi-annually) to regularly measure their progress toward the goal, giving them the incentive to keep studying and a sense of how close the goal is. It might also be helpful to establish a language learning scholarship for students to pursue targeted LCTLs at the post-secondary level. Students with a good record of language learning in French, German or Spanish might apply for such a scholarship in LCTLs such as Arabic, Indonesian or Russian. The program could be structured so that continued funding would be contingent upon further enrollment and satisfactory progress in the target language. If the scholarship were to cover a significant part of university costs, as well as a summer immersion and or study abroad experience, the program would immediately attract more students to LCTLs. Ultimately, such a program would yield high-level learners in LCTLs.

PROVIDE SUPPORT TO INSTITUTIONS THAT OFFER LCTLs

Many institutions find it challenging to regularly offer LCTLs, because of lack of faculty and sufficient funding, especially for likely small class size. To encourage such offerings, it would be helpful to provide regular, reliable funding to K-12 schools and institutions of higher education to develop such offerings and maintain them with supplemental financial support. If the federal government supported the creation and regular updating of a database to track offerings in the LCTLs at the K-12 and higher education levels (such as that maintained by the LRC at the University of Minnesota), that would enable the field to evaluate progress and extent of availability of programs. The federal government could also offer financial support for pedagogy experts in LCTLs to support language teaching in these critical languages.

SUPPORT TEACHER QUALITY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING (K-12 AND UNIVERSITY FACULTY) ACROSS ALL LANGUAGES

Without qualified teachers with high levels of proficiency, students will not effectively learn. All language teachers should participate in at least one good methods course to help learn how to best present the target language in a way that encourages the development of proficiency. However, pre-service training is necessary, but not sufficient. We must provide ongoing professional development (in-service opportunities) to language teachers in pedagogy and assessment. For example, participation in the four-day ACTFL-OPI or two-day Modified OPI workshop is an invaluable learning experience for teachers.

For languages with few language teachers, support must be provided for the attainment and maintenance of credentials. Similarly, for teachers with credentials, we must support the attainment and maintenance of high proficiency levels. Such support may include participation in intensive summer courses or summer study abroad opportunities.

SUPPORT EFFECTIVE AND ESSENTIAL APPROACHES TO DEVELOPING HIGH LEVELS OF
LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

As we have stated before, study abroad and summer immersion opportunities help students develop high levels of proficiency. However, those experiences are out-of-reach for many students, for financial and other reasons. Similarly, the K-12 and university offerings must include well-articulated sequences of language learning. Such sequences should include content classes in the target language. Institutions need to be encouraged to develop and improve these programs, through incentives and other support. Support for institutions that offer these programs can help keep costs down, but more important is support for individual students. Such support is needed to defray the costs of the program and to replace the funds that might otherwise have been earned by the students during that time.

RESEARCH “WHAT WORKS” IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

We must support and encourage longitudinal, evidence-based studies (with appropriate research designs) on the effects of various approaches to the attainment of language proficiency. Currently, the Department of Education is supporting a research study involving students from Georgetown University, Rice University, the University of Minnesota and Dickinson College on the effects of study abroad on language attainment and cultural sensitivity. This study, the first of its kind, investigates the language and cultural gains made by students studying for a summer, semester or year abroad via the Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview and the Intercultural Development Index. Student gains will be compared to control groups at the home institutions. When studies of this kind are completed, the research must be published and disseminated to a wide audience so that it will influence future practice and policies.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the successes and challenges in the adequacy and availability of foreign language training resources for helping students to reach high levels of proficiency, with an emphasis on the LCTLs. The recommendations offered could have significant impact on the shape of foreign language education, especially in the LCTLs, and on the number of students who achieve high-level proficiency when studying those languages. Ongoing federal support for research, materials development and new resources has helped a number of programs offer the opportunity to students to reach high levels of proficiency in diverse languages. Continued well-planned and sustained support will increase the number of such programs. The need for proficient foreign language speakers is clear in the context of national interests and security. The cost of ignoring this area has already been felt, and the situation will become even more urgent if sufficient planning and funds are not allocated to develop a language-proficient society that includes individuals with high levels of proficiency in particular languages.

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