



# Language Center Design

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Felix A. Kronenberg, Editor

Ute S. Lahaie, Associate Editor

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction <i>Felix A. Kronenberg</i>	page v
Checklist of Questions to Answer in all Designs/Redesigns of Language Centers <i>Mikle D. Ledgerwood</i>	page 1
I. How to Determine and Decide the Needs of a New Center or a Newly Redesigned One <i>Mikle D. Ledgerwood</i>	page 3
II. From Lab to Center: A Vision for Transforming a Language Learning Resource into a Language Learning Community <i>Lance R. Askildson</i>	page 11
III. The Bird's-eye View: Space-planning and Design in a K-12 Language Lab <i>Ted Sadtler</i>	page 23
IV. From Language Lab to Language Center <i>Amàlia Llombart</i>	page 35
V. From Lab to Center: A Case Study of the Transformation of a Language Learning Resource into a Language Learning Community <i>Lance R. Askildson</i>	page 55
VI. The Language Learning Center: Blending Traditional and Virtual Spaces <i>Betty Rose Facer</i>	page 75
VII. Language Centers at Small Institutions <i>Felix A. Kronenberg</i>	page 83
VIII. Special Needs and Usages to be Considered in Designing a New Center <i>Barbara Sawhill and Ryan Brazell</i>	page 95
Final Remarks by the Editor: "What to do next?" <i>Felix A. Kronenberg</i>	page 109



## Introduction

Felix A. Kronenberg

*Rhodes College*

It is my great pleasure to introduce Language Center Design (LCD), a publication that follows in the footsteps of the Language Center Design Kit (LCDK) by the International Association for Language Learning and Technology (IALLT). It has been 7 years now since the last edition of the LCDK, 7 years of technological, pedagogical, curricular, and institutional developments. This publication not only reflects these new developments, but is also a product of a changed publishing landscape. The new LCD has also adopted new formats for publications. The ring binder format of its predecessor was replaced by a printed book and an e-book format, complemented by a companion website. Not only does this make ordering easier and processing times faster, it results in lower shipping and printing costs. A new feature is also the companion web site, which allows the authors to offer more multimedia materials, such as images, videos, data, or blueprints of their language centers.

Every language center is different. The authors of this publication showcase different scenarios of language center design and redesign. The first chapter deals with essential questions and an overview of the center planning process. It is a reworked chapter from the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the LCDK, and it is preceded by a useful check list. Chapter II explores the general theme of the rest of the chapters in this volume: a shift from the more traditional language lab into a more open and less confined language center. The third chapter includes a discussion of language centers in a K-12 setting as well as the advantages of purchasing a “turn-key” system. Chapters four and five contain two case studies describing the transformation of a traditional language lab into a language center. The sixth chapter then takes on the challenges of designing and building a language center during times of rapidly changing technologies and finding a balance for virtual and physical spaces. The editor shares his own experiences after designing two new language centers at two different small liberal arts colleges in chapter 7. The final chapter deals with special spaces - physical and virtual - that one should consider when designing or redesigning a language center. At the end of this volume, you will find some concluding remarks by this editor and some suggestions as what to do next – from attending workshops, contacting a consultant, or visiting other language centers.

Please visit our book companion web site at <http://www.iallt.org/lcd> for more images, links, and further resources that were not suitable for a print format or that were added after publication (may not be immediately available). We at IALLT hope that you find this book to be a useful guide to your

language center (re)design project. The following chapters are meant to be an inspiration and a starting point. As you will see as you read through or browse this book, there is not one good way or one standard situation for designing a new language center, but there are some common threads. We wish you an enjoyable read and a successful new language center!

All the best,  
Felix Kronenberg

## **Checklist of Questions to Answer in all Designs/Redesigns of Language Centers**

Mikle D. Ledgerwood  
*Samford University*

1. Have you created a small working committee (with you as head of it) to do the work involved?
2. Have you done a thorough needs analysis along the lines discussed in Chapter 1 (below)?
3. Have you included students as well as teachers and administrators in your consultation?
4. Do you know what funds/budget you will have for the design?
5. Are those funds flexible?
6. Do you have purchasing power? If not, can you work well with those who do?
7. Have you investigated turnkey labs and digital labs thoroughly?
8. Have you visited enough facilities similar to the one you are considering?
9. Have you read this volume thoroughly?
10. Have you explored your space carefully? What about load-bearing columns if you're planning on moving walls?
11. Do you know your electrical needs?
12. Have you thought about cabling and conduits well enough?
13. Have you planned for adequate sound insulation, and are you knowledgeable about your Heating Ventilation Air Conditioning (HVAC) needs?
14. Have you picked an appropriate layout for the usages you envision? For each space?
15. Have you remembered to address Disabilities Act issues in your layout?
16. Have you remembered local fire code and building code issues?
17. Have you designed a space your staff/promised staff can administer effectually as well as work in efficiently (is there adequate space for current/future staff)?
18. Have you purchased adequate hardware for the technology you wish to have?
19. Do you have adequate storage space (especially if you are a resource center)? Most directors find they never have enough storage space!
20. Do you have adequate backup equipment and space to put it?
21. Have you thought about studios, lounges, and other special areas carefully?
22. Have you created a flexible design, a design that can adapt to new technology, new hardware, and new pedagogies?
23. Is wireless technology part of your design? Have you considered potential problems with that?

24. Have you sweated the small details such as headphone jack placement and durable headphones and microphones for your machines? How about “modesty” panels for your carrels, carts for any equipment you’ll be moving around, screens for video projection, and whiteboards if you aren’t using smartboards?
25. Have you presented your plan to (at least) one of your largest group of users and gotten their “go-ahead”?
26. Have you planned for adequate materials to make your center usable? Software, office supplies, media of all kinds, instructional materials of all kinds?
27. Do you have a backup plan if any component of the construction is delayed?
28. Do you have a backup plan if equipment deliveries, etc. are delayed?
29. Do you have the telephone numbers handy of your important administrators and at least one lab director colleague for emergency advice? Have you given them a copy of your plan for appraisal?
30. Finally, have you planned the opening of your new facility gala?

I want to wish all of you tackling the very difficult project of a lab/center new design or redesign, the very best! This is an enormous task, but a rewarding task. Having a facility you can be proud of and want to work in raises the quality of your work life significantly. As the old adages say, “if it is worth doing, it is worth doing well” and “if you want it done right, do it yourself!”

## Chapter I

### **How to Determine and Decide the Needs of a New Center or a Newly Redesigned One**

Mikle D. Ledgerwood  
*Samford University*

Nothing is more disturbing than creating a beautiful new Center and then seeing it never, never, fill up with users. Unlike in Kevin Costner's Hollywood film, it is quite possible to build a Center and have nobody come to it. I, personally, have seen Centers that reflected state-of-the-art technology and were beautiful to look at but were barely used. How can this happen, all of us who have seen such Centers wonder?

There are several possible answers to this question of what makes a lab/center unsuccessful. These answers normally have to do with poor management, ineffective staffing, inadequate materials, poor coordination with instructional staff and students, and, the answer relevant to this volume—poor design. Poor design originates from one crucial mistake. When a Center or Lab is designed/redesigned, the director and instructors associated with this Center must plan out its creation together.

It is absolutely crucial for all who will be using the new/refurbished facility to work together to decide not only what it should look like and how to manage it, but how it will be used. In short, this facility must answer the pressing needs of its users. It must respond to both the pedagogical needs of its faculty and the implied learning needs of all its users. It must be flexible enough in design and layout to respond to changing needs and changing expectations. It really must be all things to all people. Perhaps this seems an impossible goal to attain. Still, this is THE goal that must be fulfilled--as well as possible.

#### **Step One: Who's on First?**

The most difficult decision to make is how to decide who will decide. It is easy to say that everybody has to have a voice in the creation of a center and must participate in decisions about its design. However, the more people involved in the process, the more difficult the process. Yes, it is still very important to get everyone involved, to SOME extent, in this process. However there are ways of keeping the process moving efficiently by allowing differing AMOUNTS of involvement. In bigger institutions there will have to be different groups involved in different aspects of the planning and the needs analysis. In smaller institutions there may be fewer groups and fewer "players".

Here are some basic suggestions on what groups to create for this process. Please note that the Center Director (or whoever is REALLY in charge of this facility) has to be a part of ALL groups. Please note as well that the first two groups will begin the process of needs analysis. When their work is completed the third group will take over.

### **A) The Facilities Designers**

This is the group dealing with the nuts and bolts issues. It will include (if you have them) the architect, the construction manager, the network designer, the electrical facilities head, the interior designer, at least one end user such as a lead teacher/instructor, and the Center Director. This group's tasks are structural and design-oriented only. They carry out the wishes of the next group.

### **B) The Curriculum Specialists**

This is the group who needs to think very, very, hard about what kinds of technology are appropriate for a particular center, based upon curricular and pedagogical notions. This group should have almost nothing to do with the first group, although there should be at least two overlapping members belonging to both groups (the Center Director, the lead teacher/instructor, and the head of Facilities for example). This group's task is to figure out what is really needed in the way of technology to enhance the language teaching and language learning experience. This group should include the lead teacher/instructor of ALL of the groups who will be using the Center. Members might include the person in charge of first and second-year language X, Y, or Z. Members might include the teacher/professor who does film studies or works on media creation projects. Members should all be people who are very interested in the Center and want to use it well. Members must include the Director or person in charge of the new Center, and the supervising person from the facilities group. First meetings should take place without the facilities person. Last meetings must take place with that person to avoid any last minute problems. This person is also crucial in backing up the Director (or whoever is in charge of the new Center), when there are disputes about what is really possible in facilities design and creation. If the size of this group becomes overwhelming, a core group can be formed which represents all constituencies for specific planning purposes. However, the whole group, including the head of Facilities, must meet to approve the final plans.

### **C) The Overseeing Group**

Once the first and second groups have completed their work and have decided both what kind of facility is possible and what kinds of needs it should meet, the overseeing group, which will contain no more than eight members (five is optimal, ten is a bit too large), begins to meet. This group will consider and revisit the final decisions about the design, layout, equipment, staffing, and materials acquisition process. It should contain the people who emerge as key players in both the first and

second group AND especially those members who appear to want the Center to succeed the most. Most importantly, this group will exist to oversee the construction and completion of the new/redesigned space after it completes its task of working with the first two groups to finish the plans for the new Center.

### **Step Two: What's on Second?**

Once the first two groups are constituted, it is essential to start them off with appropriate foundations and tasks. To establish a good foundation for both groups, THIS is the time to consider bringing in outside visitors/vendors to talk about possible facilities and set-ups and the time to make visits to other institutions and facilities. Both groups need help from the outside. The facilities group needs to actually visit at least one other facility that will be similar to the one being created. This can save an enormous amount of time for everyone involved. Here, a picture is worth more than a thousand words. Seeing, touching, and being inside a good facility will save thousands of dollars in the creation of a new facility if the appropriate members of the facilities group can do this. The same is also true of the curriculum committee. If even a couple of the members of this group can visit other Centers/labs and bring back their findings (and videos) to the rest of the committee, a great deal of time can be saved by giving everyone some idea of where to start discussions.

This is also the time to go to any relevant meeting or conference, such as IALLT, the regional groups of IALLT, CALICO, or pedagogy and language conferences. Anyone attending this kind of meeting should be prepared to ask questions of presenters in a formal manner, but also be prepared to buttonhole colleagues and get other questions answered informally.

For the facilities group, once the foundation is laid, here are the tasks/questions that must be asked and answered:

1. What space exists/will exist/can be identified for the new Center?
2. How many people will be using the new Center?
3. How many types of languages/curricula will be using the Center?
4. What is the basic purpose of the Center: Laboratory, Resource Center, Teaching Center, Classroom Center, Design Center, or some combination?
5. Who will be working on the creation of a new Center in this space?
6. What is the budget for this space?
7. How flexible is the budget for construction and design implementation?
8. Are there provisions for overrun in the budget?
9. What timeframes and deadlines are realistic?
10. What further expertise is needed that is not in this group?

11. Is such expertise available in the institution or has to come from outside?
12. Who is the real head of this group and how flexible is that person?
13. When will this group have finished their work?

The second group, the curriculum group, will have these questions to answer:

1. Who all will use the new facility and what kinds of curricula are being supported (with numbers of users and numbers of different curricula users, too if at all possible)?
2. What kinds of spaces/rooms need to be created: classrooms, teaching labs, drop-in labs, studio/development areas, storage space, materials and resource space, office space, staff space, checkout space?
3. What kinds of pedagogies and teaching styles are in vogue here?
4. What kinds of technology are really appropriate for this institution now?
5. What about older technology such as audiotape and videotape?
6. What about newer technology such as smartboards, mobile technology such as iPhones and iPads, and wireless?
7. Do the faculty and/or textbooks support these technologies?
8. What percentage of faculty and students will, likely, actually use the facilities?
9. What kind of budget exists for training faculty and students?
10. What kind of budget exists for materials and hardware?
11. How flexible is this anticipated area for future needs?
12. Is there any need for expertise not found in the committee?
13. Can this expertise be found from within the institution or must be found from outside?

Finally the third group will have the hardest task. They will have to take the answers gleaned from the first two groups and then actually combine the curricular needs with the facilities needs and then present their plans to the first two groups for debate. Upon receiving the go-ahead this group will then have to oversee the completion of the whole project. This group's work is, usually, extremely difficult. The first problem they will face is the difficulty in trying to mesh the idealistic hopes and desires of the curriculum group with the realities of the facilities group. Since there is almost always a clash between hopes and realities, the third group has to have the ability to compromise faithfully and effectually. They have to be able to satisfy both groups to the best of the institution's ability. This group has to establish the basic plan for the new or redesigned facility and the power to make that compromise take effect.

Once this group makes final decisions about the new facility, their final task is to make sure that the facility is finished within the scope of their plans. The Director/head of the facility will not have to make this group meet often, once they make a decision on the basic plan. However, s/he will need to have the group to help out if there are problems with the implementation process.

One final thought about the Overseeing Group is that this group, or part of this group, should become the core of a new Center's Advisory Council once the new facility is opened. In IALLT's *Management Manual* in its module on public relations, I discussed the great importance of having at least one center or lab advisory group. It makes enormous sense to have the group with the largest stake in the creation of a new facility become the core of the advisory group dedicated to ensuring the continuing success of such a facility. My own suggestion would be to drop the facilities people from the Advisory Council and keep the core curricular people. However, it is important NOT to forget about the facilities people entirely. Seek them out from time to time, even after the completion of a facility. They often have insider knowledge in a variety of areas that can be useful, including knowledge of plans about new buildings and rehabilitation of your current building. Finally, don't forget that no design/redesign is ever the last one. You will likely be calling on the facilities people again in the future.

### **Step Three: What I Do Know is on Third**

In planning out the needs analysis do not forget to review "the thirty questions that must be answered" which are just before this chapter. Please also look through the following chapters thoroughly more than once. You might also find that previous editions of the *Language Center Design Kit* could also be helpful to you.

The very last stage of the center creation process is probably the most difficult of all. This is the time when people in charge of planning new facilities start to have nightmares and wake up in a panic at 5:00 in the morning. The person in charge (you?) now has to sweat all the minor details. This is the time when it is crucial to have a colleague you can call up and ask short, pointed, questions. This is also the time to bring in one more consultant, if the budget will allow. An institution can save thousands of dollars (again!) by having an experienced director come in at this point and look over the final specifications for the plans of the new Center. An experienced director will find problems and point out details an inexperienced director may forget. In addition even an experienced director will now usually be jaded by the design process at this point and may forget/overlook a crucial detail. Having to correct those omissions after the facility is created is usually a great deal more expensive (if even possible!) than rectifying them before building starts.

Let me give two examples of details that I forgot in a center design. In my previous position at SUNY Stony Brook, I was not allowed to bring in a consultant at the last minute so I made two errors that had to be rectified expensively after construction was completed. My most egregious error was not looking at the final blueprint of my Center's design carefully enough and thinking it must resemble earlier blueprints. Although I had produced pages and pages of text describing my Center and what each room was supposed to include, and although I had given these details at length orally to everyone involved in the design process, the architect decided to set up one of my multimedia classrooms as a room with NO electrical outlets. He wrote (in tiny print) that this room was for future use only on the final blueprint (only)! Now, the ridiculousness of such a mistake is

hard to fathom. However, even though he made the mistake, I had to rectify it by getting electrical service in this room after construction was finished and find the money to have the work done. Even though every blueprint up to the last blueprint had electrical service in this room and even though this last minute change was not (really) my fault, it became my fault.

A second error that is much less dramatic was the headphones for my VCRs (this could also apply now to computers). At my institution we had to write detailed specifications for all equipment and materials and then put this out to bid as a package due to our (arcane) state laws governing state institutional purchasing. One detail I did not specify precisely enough was the size of the jack on the TVs and VCRs. As a result I received fifty headphones which fit no hole in my audio/video lab. I had to get adapters for the headphones and force the company providing the TVs and VCRs (after some difficulty) to admit that they gave us incompatible items and pay for the adapters. While they did send us adapters, the adapters were so clumsy and difficult to use that the Center had to buy other headphones to use instead with the TVs and VCRs.

An experienced consultant (preferably a director who has been involved in a redesign/creation of a new facility recently) would likely have caught the electrical error. S/He might also have said something about the headphone error. What is even more important, though, is that they might have had final wisdom to give about more important aspects of the plan. They would have worried about the flexibility of the design and whether the materials and resources envisioned would be adequate for its needs as expressed in the needs analysis. They also would have gone beyond an analysis of the plans to worry about the operation, staffing, and management of the new Center, once opened.

### **Further thoughts**

To close this module, let me now give some additional advice and warning taken from the second edition of the *LCDK*. Trisha Dvorak, one of IALLT's first presidents, did a wonderful needs analysis section. Here is some of her advice, adapted, some of which will repeat things I have already said. (However, sometimes reading important advice twice, in slightly different language, is worth every second doing it!):

1. Talk to people. The quickest, most efficient way to proceed is to contact national and/or regional language lab/center groups and find out who is knowledgeable about the services you want to provide. Talk to these people about the kinds of equipment that you need, as well as issues of space and design. It is always helpful to talk to vendors, but they should never be your first source of information.
2. Visit places. After you have identified the people who are doing things similar to what you will do, visit as many labs as possible to see how they have used their space and are arranging for staffing needs.

3. Read as much as possible and attend conferences. Both national and regional language technology conferences will give you valuable information about equipping, staffing and managing your facility. Probably more important than the information gained at conferences is developing a network of peers. Look at organizations that are not language-oriented as well as those that are. Some of the big media lab groups have excellent resources available for facility design.
4. Don't forget to talk to the facilities staff at your own institution. All universities and colleges have individuals who know about space renovation and construction. They can help you to decide how many square feet you need for certain kinds of functions, to estimate costs, and to construct time lines for the project.
5. Collect catalogs of all types and begin to learn what exists to meet your individual needs.

For further reading (and yes, these are extremely dated. It seems that the IALLT Language Center Design Kit is one of the few publications available for language center design in North America):

Davies, G. (Ed.). (2008) *Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ict4lt.org>

Kennedy, A. (Ed.). (1990). *Designing the Learning Center of the Future*. IALLT.

Larson, J. (Ed.). (1986). *Planning and Using Language Learning Centers*. Volume 1, CALICO Monograph Series. Provo, UT: CALICO.



## Chapter II

### **From Lab to Center: A Vision for Transforming a Language Learning Resource into a Language Learning Community**

Lance R. Askildson  
*University of Notre Dame*

What are the implications for the transition from a Language Lab to a Language Center? This initial chapter will answer this question holistically and, in order to provide illustrative examples, via a case-study of precisely such a transition at the University of Notre Dame in the chapter that follows. In particular, the fundamental paradigm shift from a Language Lab largely dedicated to solitary study and practice—informed first by behaviorist and then cognitivist accounts of language learning—will be explored in conjunction with contemporary models of the Language Center and the interactionist approach to SLA upon which it is predicated. The process of developing a Language Center community through targeted design of space, interactive programming and innovative technology will be delineated. The roles of Language Center administrators and faculty will also be discussed as they relate to the development of a language learning community and a culture of internationalism within the Center.

#### **I. Introduction**

As our understanding of the language acquisition process has developed in recent years, so too has our approach to the teaching and learning of foreign languages. From emphases on classical grammar translation, to behaviorist audio-lingual methodology, cognitivist self-teaching and constructivist interactionism, the field of second language acquisition has changed dramatically. And while classroom pedagogy is often the focus of much of our professional literature and the chronicle of such change, foreign language centers have and will continue to play a prominent role in the development of foreign language and culture competences at all levels. Indeed, language centers provide an essential link for 1) students and their learning outside of the classroom; 2) teachers and their pedagogy at all points of instruction; and 3) institutions and their curricular goals for greater foreign language proficiency specifically, and greater internationalism generally. Language centers are, by their very nature, an ideal coordinating and support mechanism for the oftentimes competing interests of disparate language programs—and particularly in large post-secondary institutions where departmental balkanization confounds progress in these areas. More importantly though, language centers have the potential to *lead* their institutional efforts in foreign language and cultural development by providing an intellectual home and articulated vision for substantive second language acquisition and by serving as respected, impartial brokers for

language learning efforts across programmatic and even disciplinary boundaries. It is the entirety of these foci that form the foundation for an institutional community of language administrators, teachers and learners; and it is the role of the language center to mold and shape that community into a vehicle for greater efficacy in the advancement of foreign language communicative competence.

The present chapter is intended to explicate the role of the modern language center by examining the conceptual transition from an archetypical language *lab*—serving largely as a resource for behaviorist and cognitivist approaches to language acquisition—and the development of a language *center*, informed by contemporary models of language learning and serving as an institutional leader for foreign language education. While the strict division between the designations of language ‘lab’ and language ‘center’ in this chapter is perhaps artificial, these competing labels are a helpful index for both distinguishing between these two varieties while also illustrating the distinct semantic roles implied by each. Thus, for the purposes of this discussion, *language lab* will be used to indicate an iteration of language support largely limited to individual audio-visual practice by students and audio-visual support and training for faculty. This is, of course, descriptive of the role played by language laboratories at their inception in the 1960s and one closely tied to the audio-lingual instructional method that they were intended to support. And although such labs have certainly not remained static in terms of their technologies and varieties of support, many remain closely tied to a role of serving as ‘a language learning resource. A role that is necessarily ancillary to the contemporary focus on communicative language learning and one which ignores the potential for language labs to play a significantly more prominent and substantive role within their institutions in the form of language *centers* and the ‘language learning community’ that such a designation connotes.

## **II. The Language Lab as a Resource**

In his expansive review of the role of technology in language learning and teaching, Salaberry (2001) identifies two primary factors responsible for the establishment of the first language laboratories in the 1960s and the creation of the language lab genre in educational institutions thereafter: 1) The emergence of new theories of second language acquisition and resultant pedagogy, on the one hand; and, on the other, 2) the existence of strong [Cold War era] legislative support for language learning, formalized via a glut of funding for discrete technological facilities like language labs in the National Defense Education Act in 1958. These contemporaneously new pedagogies, and the monies that funded them, were almost uniquely dominated by the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM): A pedagogical regimen developed by Charles Fries and informed by B.F. Skinner’s paradigm of learning through behavioral conditioning. ALM relied on the need to model accurate linguistic behaviors and condition language learners to respond in kind—and primarily with an emphasis on oral production. Thus, the use of emerging technologies allowing for

inexpensive recording and playback in the 1960's set the stage for the establishment of dedicated facilities where students could practice this repetitive drill-based form of linguistic conditioning. In this capacity, language labs were resource spaces where students came to work individually – practicing linguistic drills at banks of carrels containing tape recorders and headsets—and language lab directors were largely limited to a technological support role. In some cases, these early language labs also incorporated instructional spaces with similar technologies to facilitate language drills during class time as well as offering technical support to language faculty in the selection of materials

This unique emphasis on individual, solitary study in the language lab was closely tied with ALM, but such a 'resource model' for language labs continued to hold sway even as Chomsky eroded the relevance of behaviorism for language learning with his 1959 critique of Skinner's (1957) *Verbal Behavior* and Philip Smith's (1968) *Pennsylvania Research Project* undermined the efficacy of the audio-lingual method drills in the language lab specifically. Indeed, as behaviorist principles of language learning and teaching gave way to Chomsky's structuralism and Krashen's monitor model emphasizing cognitivist principles of innate knowledge and individual hypothesis testing in the 1970s, language labs continued to play the role of a resource facility for individual practice and exposure that was largely ancillary to language coursework and often divorced from curricula. Correspondingly, language lab directors continued to play a rather peripheral role in their institutions with only limited input and an oftentimes passive service role to language departments. The introduction of computer-assisted language learning in the 1980s, and the explosion of web-based language learning applications in the late 1990s, have provided a new variety of technologies upon which language labs can draw for increasingly customized language student support; nonetheless, many language labs have remained facilities that are uniquely focused on technology support and with extraordinarily minimal involvement with either language departments or faculty teaching. Moreover, and perhaps more concerning, many of these same language labs have maintained a uniquely cognitivist approach to language learning – emphasizing individual exposure and practice – rather than adapting to a contemporary model of the second language acquisition process that indicates the need for highly contextualized and meaningful interaction. This latter model, which is ripe for fruitful adoption by language labs, is particularly important in light of the larger class sizes and minimal opportunities for both practice and feedback that plague most if not all present day language classes.

### III. The Language Center as A Community

*Learning to speak another's language means taking one's place in the human community. It means reaching out to others across cultural and linguistic boundaries. Language is far more than a system to be explained. It is our most important link to the world around us. Language is culture in motion. It is people interacting with people.*

-Sandra Savignon (1983)

At least since Long's (1981) *Interaction Hypothesis*, and arguably since Western consumption of Vygotsky's work in socioconstructive learning and the resultant development of sociocultural theory, the role of meaningful interaction, culturally authentic context and negotiation of meaning have been recognized as vital components of the second language learning process. Fortunately, the importance of such structured and unstructured opportunities for interaction during the initial process of linguistic and cultural acquisition—as well as the subsequent psycholinguistic processes of developing automaticity and fluidity of production and comprehension later in development – presents a unique opportunity for traditional language labs to significantly strengthen the efficacy of foreign language learning and their institutional impact by adapting services and programming to include direct support for interactive language practice where it is feasible to do so. The preponderance of the second language research clearly indicates that language learners cannot reach advanced levels of proficiency through their class time and coursework alone (Lightbown, 2000). In fact, teachers have neither the time nor the resources with which to provide sufficient opportunities for input or interaction to their dozens of students who meet for a mere 3-5 hours per week. Students who do achieve even superficial levels of foreign language fluency often do so as a result of their own dedication and fortitude seeking out opportunities for practice and feedback on their own. Study abroad immersion is often touted as the solution for this state of affairs, but, in addition to major limits on feasibility, the research indicates that it is neither a panacea nor even a reliable route to greater proficiency. Thus, the language lab is ideally situated to provide these vital opportunities for language development in a systematic manner and on an institutional scale.

Such interaction can come in the canonical forms of conversation partnerships, tandem programs, peer tutoring, et cetera; additionally, and perhaps better suited to the traditional technological emphasis of language labs, interaction can also be offered in the form of a wide variety of both synchronous computer mediated communication (text/audio chat rooms, videoconferencing, etc) and asynchronous CMC (discussion boards, voice boards, blogs, etc). Such interaction, when appropriately structured and administered outside of class by the language lab/center, offer extremely substantive opportunities for language and cultural learning –

particularly when they make good use of local or remote native speakers. Moreover, these sorts of activities are extremely important for student affect and motivation. By providing a home, a *center*, for language use (in addition to individual language study), the language lab is able to engage students and create a space and a community within which foreign language use is acceptable and normal. Thus, by adopting a contemporary understanding of second language acquisition and coordinating language lab services and programming directly with the communicative language teaching that should be occurring in classrooms, language labs can make themselves more relevant while also cultivating a community for language learning.

While updating the theoretical perspective of the language lab is an important step in the direction towards the language *center*, there are a number of other potential characteristics that separate a language lab from a language center and its cultivation of a substantive language learning community. While these characteristics are not intended to imply exclusivity – nor are they all feasible/practical at every institution—they do encompass the breadth and scope of language center potential. Drawing upon Nina Garrett's (2001) examination of the role of language centers, a number of key functions emerge. Garrett's own list is extensive and includes fifteen varieties of language center roles and responsibilities within a largely post-secondary context. For the purposes of the present chapter, a distillation of these fifteen varieties is provided within a broader context below and in the form of six essential roles as articulated by the present author:

### **The Six Potential Roles of a Modern Language Center**

*1. To provide validation, advocacy and an intellectual home for contemporary approaches to language teaching and learning grounded upon sound principles of second language acquisition.*

For a variety of disciplinary and logistical reasons, language centers often serve as the home for specialists in second language acquisition and/or foreign language pedagogy. While many language programs or departments may emphasize language learning as simply a means to a particular practical or aesthetic end, language centers should serve as an important advocate for substantive language learning that recognizes and reinforces the value and importance of the language learning process in and of itself as well as the unique pedagogy required to move students towards a targeted outcome of holistic communicative competence. Indeed, many language programs overlook the value of basic language instruction in particular and some can even be dismissive of the pedagogical expertise that foreign language instructors bring to their teaching. In light of this, the language center is uniquely positioned to validate the work of foreign language instructional faculty while also advocating on their behalf. Providing opportunities to engage in respectful dialogue with language faculty and administrators about the validity of contemporary pedagogical principles—and the second language acquisition research which

advances these practices—is an essential role for the language center. Moreover, cultivating a community of foreign language professionals and pedagogues who regularly engage in intellectual discussion about their own approaches to language learning is similarly vital. Practically, these goals can be accomplished in a variety of ways: From invited speaker series to roundtable discussions, regular foreign language pedagogy workshops and the like. Importantly though, the comprehensive nature of these issues—one that transcends disciplinary and language program/departmental boundaries—is uniquely suited to a language center; a facility dedicated to serving and advancing the interests of all foreign language constituents.

*2. To directly support student foreign language and culture learning both within and outside of the Center via targeted services, resources and programming.*

Of course, the principle role of any language center (or lab, for that matter) is direct support of student language learning. As Lightbown (2000) emphasized in her own review of the state of second language acquisition classroom research, students simply cannot reach superior levels of foreign language proficiency within 3-5 hours of language class per week even through tertiary levels in their education; rather, students need significantly more opportunity for exposure and structured practice above and beyond the instructional classroom in order to achieve such target levels of proficiency. The language center is thus ideally suited to this complimentary role and must offer services, resources and programming that help students advance in their language learning through targeted self-study and structured practice/interaction outside of class. As outlined in the section above, language centers also need to take an informed approach to these language support mechanisms in order to reflect a contemporary understanding of language acquisition. Thus, language centers are not only places for solitary self-study using reference books, textbook ancillaries and software; they should also be places where students go to work with a peer tutor, practice oral fluency with native speaking conversation partners, attend language discussion tables, etc. Additionally, language centers should serve as a proponent for activities and programs outside of the physical space of the center—representing the larger role of the language center as a community rather than just a physical space. By orchestrating, sponsoring or co-sponsoring foreign language cultural events, discussion panels, language learning strategy workshops, etc. that occur outside of the physical space of the language center, a more expansive role can be achieved alongside greater impact. Furthermore, such impact, whether inside or outside of the center, should be closely coordinated with classroom curricula whenever possible. The services, resources and programming of the center should offer a coordinated extension to the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom whenever possible. Thus, even within the context of pedagogically sound language support, language centers must ensure systematic

communication and coordination with instructional faculty in order to maximize acquisitional efficacy and institutional relevancy.

*3. To support the integration of technology into language learning and teaching within and outside of both the Center and individual language courses.*

Largely as a result of the historical antecedents and pedagogical emphases that led to the establishment of the first language labs, technology remains an important part of the modern language center. In today's language center, integrating general purpose technologies like blogs, chat, videoconferencing and virtual worlds into language learning and teaching is as important as providing more traditional forms of language focused technology and software (e.g. Rosetta Stone, Tell Me More, etc). Indeed, the ubiquity of web-based communication tools has created a context in which such communicative technologies are not only a means to facilitate language learning by adaptation to pedagogical principles, but also a wholly authentic mode of communication for most students and therefore more relevant and engaging. This movement away from technologies and software specifically designed to support language learning and teaching – often developed with an eye towards teacher accessibility and easy coordination with foreign language curricula – has increased the relevancy and importance of language centers as interpreters of these technologies for both students and faculty. Thus, the role of language centers in the training of faculty and student use of [specifically] emerging technologies for language learning and practice – according to principles of second language acquisition – has become exceedingly important.

*4. To support or administer informed models of foreign language assessment for all language programs.*

Meaningful and effective language assessment is fundamental to any substantive language curriculum and the resources necessary to develop and maintain such an assessment culture across all languages is beyond the scope and mandate of any single program or department. In this critical capacity then, it is the role of the language center to promote informed approaches to assessment that draw upon a sophisticated understanding of the second language acquisition process. Such assessment can take the form of identifying language proficiency for placement purposes, exit benchmarking and, perhaps most importantly, overall institutional effectiveness for both program/departmental-level evaluation and accreditation. In light of the extensive training and technological tools often associated with summative assessment via ACTFL OPI and WPT varieties (among many others), as well as process-based student self-assessment via oral/written portfolio approaches, the need for a central coordinating unit among all languages is obvious. The role of the language center as a leader in language assessment initiatives provides unique

opportunities to inform departmental curricula and institutional foci via validated instruments and articulated learning goals that draw upon the same principles of second language acquisition that form the central mission of the language center itself.

*5. To substantively support the professional development of all foreign language faculty via facilitative programming, instructional resources and pedagogical training.*

Promoting a culture and community of informed excellence among foreign language instructional faculty is a principle role of any contemporary language center. While some opportunities for pedagogical innovation and professional development may be available within individual programs/departments and other institutional units, the unique placement of the language center as a comprehensive resource and coordinating mechanism for all language programs provides a more holistic and informed environment for foreign language faculty development. More importantly, however, the opportunity to harmonize language center support initiatives with faculty teaching practices, as well as develop best practices across all language programs, is an overriding rationale for including faculty professional development as a key language center responsibility. By providing a forum for faculty to share their own best practices as they learn about emerging models of language teaching, the language center can create community and leadership for substantive language learning throughout the institution.

*6. To provide coordination and strategic vision for all language programs/departments in order to meet institutional outcomes for foreign languages specifically and internationalism generally.*

Perhaps most importantly, language centers should serve as coordinating units and leaders for language programs/departments in order to help craft strategic vision for foreign language study within larger institutional goals for undergraduate education outcomes and internationalism. Given the comprehensive nature of language center support – facilitating multilayered goals at the student/learning level, the faculty/teaching level and the departmental/administration level for all foreign language programs – there is significant potential for language centers to contribute to strategic planning and institutional initiatives in a uniquely holistic way. Indeed, in light of the often disparate intellectual traditions and educational approaches within and across even small foreign language programs, language centers have the distinct advantage of serving as a collective broker of best practices while also providing meta-coordination across all these instructional, scholarly and administrative units. Although institutional administrative offices may have as much knowledge concerning the totality of a particular institution's language programs, they lack the disciplinary specific knowledge of second language acquisition that distinguishes the language center from its institutional peers. In this sense, language centers have an important role in institutional strategic

planning for foreign languages as well as international language-focused initiatives like study abroad.

The sum of these six essential roles of a contemporary and idealized language center is an almost unrecognizable transformation from the traditional language lab. While the language lab emphasizes solitary, individualized learning and supplementary teaching via traditional technologies, the present vision for the modern language center promotes a dynamic language learning community emphasizing interactive programming and emerging technologies that bridge the gap between the center and the foreign language classroom. While the language lab serves as a resource for faculty to receive technological training and support, the language center fosters a community of best practices and an intellectual home for informed approaches to instructional technology and foreign language pedagogy. While the language lab plays a largely ancillary role in the development of language curricula and assessment practices, the language center provides informed leadership and coordination among a community of language and educational administrators to facilitate greater programmatic and institutional efficacy. In this manner, the transformation from lab to center is indeed the transformation from a language learning *resource* to a language learning *community*.

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## Chapter III

### **The Bird's-eye View: Space-planning and Design in a K-12 Language Lab**

Ted Sadtler

*The Westminster Schools*

The Westminster Schools is a preK-12 co-educational independent day school in Atlanta, Georgia. It serves a diverse mix of approximately 1,700 students from the Greater Atlanta. The language lab described in this chapter, The Goizueta Language Learning Center, primarily serves foreign language students of the Junior High and High School, grades 6-12. Our current language offerings are Chinese, French, Latin, and Spanish. In the fall of 2000, the Department of Modern and Classical Languages replaced its Sony analog lab with an all-digital language lab suite from ASC Direct, Inc. With this transition came a multitude of questions, both big and small. The conversations that began two years prior to the installation date brought about a fundamental change in the role that the language lab plays in the day-to-day practice of foreign language instruction and how the study of foreign language figures into the overall educational framework of the Westminster graduate.

The previous analog tape lab, which the department had installed in 1989, provided students the opportunity to reinforce their listening and speaking skills during class time and during free periods. Teachers often assigned listening and speaking activities for students to complete for homework on their own time. As a result, the language lab bustled from morning until late afternoon with whole classes and individual students loading tapes, listening, recording, redacting, and re-recording. With few exceptions, this was the extent to the usefulness of the lab.

Since the installation of Westminster's first all-digital lab, the school has seen a shift in how students and teachers use the lab and in how the lab figures into the school's "digital footprint." In this chapter we will examine the process by which teachers and administrators collaborated to determine departmental needs, to design the space, and to incorporate the Goizueta Language Learning Center (LLC) into the "big picture" of student-centered information technology on campus. There are many ways to approach the Herculean task of implementing a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) environment, and by no means does this narrative suggest that ours is the only or best method. However, after nine years and two distinct language lab platforms, the teachers at Westminster believe that the decisions made at the seminal level derived from thoughtful, open-ended discourse between teachers, administrators, and technology professionals

that would spell success no matter where they are implemented. First, however, let's look back at the various roles of the LLC.

### **Assessing teacher and student needs**

Digital language learning software made L2 practice a much more versatile enterprise. Audio exercises quickly became multimedia presentations with the integration of the Microsoft Office Suite and the World Wide Web. And the moment that the first web page was accessed in the language lab, the long-aspired-to goal of transcending the four walls of the classroom was achieved. However, before the department began the transition, faculty members weighed in on what they envision for their 21<sup>st</sup> century LLC.

One decision that did not require much thought was whether or not the school would compose its own ad hoc digital language learning environment or invest in a turn-key lab. A turn-key lab provides all-in-one coordination of listening, speaking, recording and grouping modules. If you so choose, a service contract with the vendor or licensor alleviates the need to have an employee on staff to handle technical issues.

### **Access**

The previous language lab was tucked away on the top floor of a wing of the main administration building. A clandestine staircase or elevator was the only entrance available. Faculty and students not involved in foreign languages barely knew of its existence. Faculty and administration wanted the language lab to be a visible component of school life, and they wanted it to be located in a handicapped-accessible part of the building.

### **Interactivity**

As usually happens, pioneers in an industry often pave the way for common practices. Innovative faculty envisioned using LLC resources in conjunction with the audio-visual, video editing, and instructional technology resources also available at the school. As a result of this request, it was decided that the new language lab be situated adjacent to these resources. The end product is a "technology corridor" located on the primary hallway of the keystone building on the Westminster campus. The message: technology is a part of the bedrock of the education of the Westminster student.

### **Flexibility**

In the process of installing the lab, two "spaces" dominate the landscape; the physical space with its efficacy measured in square footage and physical barriers, and the educational space largely determined by the limits of the technology contained therein and the innovation of the teachers

charged with creating meaningful experiences for their students. The design of the physical space is addressed in a forward section.

The flexibility of the educational space is a factor of who is using it and what is it used for. The LLC was installed to serve the needs of teachers and students of French, German, Latin, Spanish, and Japanese. In recent years, we have added a curriculum in Chinese, as well as a self-paced language learning program, adding Arabic and Kiswahili to our list of offerings. Within this diverse mix of languages exist numerous age groups and pedagogical needs. Ten year old students entering into the 6<sup>th</sup> grade utilize the same space that accommodates the needs of graduating seniors. Additionally, students from Westminster's elementary school visit the lab a few times per year to engage in digital storytelling activities. In order to accommodate the needs of such a varied constituency, it is critical that the technology installed in the lab does not dictate the types of activities conducted in the lab.

The analog labs of yore limited the usefulness of the educational space. The appropriateness of the content was determined by the resource (tape, teacher-delivered content, etc.) that is used. With the advent of VoIP technology and software-driven CALL environments, language labs driven by networked computers enjoy almost limitless flexibility. Technology is an integral part of the lives of children and adults of all ages. Finding a platform that suits the needs of the student group you serve is integral. The interface used by elementary or middle school aged children should not be overly complex, yet 17-year old should not feel like he or she is using a child's toy when preparing for the AP exams. Finally, always assume that once those in your school see the "shiny new toy" down the hall, they will want to use it. So, bring in to the discussion those at your institution who might also have occasion to use it. Creating an educational space appropriate for will avoid buyer's remorse, and perhaps even costly retrofitting.

### **Relevance**

When Westminster's first reel-to-reel lab was installed in 1962, its relevance was guaranteed by the glacial creep of language learning technology at that time. In 2009 a school's language lab may be rendered obsolete with the installation of one single software upgrade. In order to ensure that our language lab remains pertinent to students' needs, we decided to ensure the following:

1. Software must remain relevant to the academic ambitions of the Westminster community.
2. Technology, although important, cannot dictate the needs of teachers and students. Rather, teacher and student needs must dictate what technology we put into place.

### **Stewardship**

The acquisition of a language lab is not an insignificant expense. Such an investment must be safeguarded by ensuring that it can be maintained and upgraded to meet teacher and student needs. The best way to achieve this goal is to appoint a Language Lab Director. Westminster's

language faculty decided that this faculty member should be a language teacher, or at the least possess and pursue a vigorous interest in the learning of foreign languages. The director maintains the lab use (scheduling) and lab infrastructure (hardware, software, furniture), takes the lead role in researching and developing CALL best practices, works with teachers to implement such practices, and communicates the mission of the department faculty through intra-departmental and inter-departmental discourse.

### **Designing the space**

Once student and faculty needs are addressed, it is time to plan out the physical space within the lab. Since technology has become an ever more increasing component in L2 acquisition, the department wanted the capability for at least two classes to run concurrently. With an average class size of 15, Westminster needed a minimum of 30 student stations split evenly among two teacher workstations. The space chosen to house the new lab allowed for 36 student stations divided into two sections of 18 workstations. The decision to add just six extra workstations has allowed us to conduct three classes (usually upper-level classes with fewer students) independently and simultaneously.

If form follows function, then the layout of the lab depends largely upon the types of activities conducted in the space. Only time would tell what activities were to become *repertoire* of the foreign language curriculum, but the faculty was certain that the activities conducted in the LLC would consist of a mix of teacher-centered and student-centered activities. Visits to various high schools in the southeast reveal a trend toward labs that resemble traditional classroom design – which is to say, stations situated in rows facing the teacher station – suggesting a teacher-centered environment. However, universities commonly orient computer labs (not necessarily language labs) in formation of several independent pods, consisting of six to 10 stations arranged in circular fashion, denoting emphasis on individual, student-centered work. Since universities invest heavily in independent study and distance learning platforms (much more so than secondary schools), the pod configuration makes a great deal of sense. Careful consideration of student need and probable pedagogy resulted in Westminster's LLC adopting a hybrid configuration.

As illustrated in Figure 1, Side A features the teacher-centered configuration while Side B suggests student-centered activities. The Language Lab Director manages scheduling for the LLC, providing teachers the opportunity to sign up for slot A, B, or C. Slots A and B refer to the two sides of the lab. Slot C allows for a third teacher to assign her students to any seats unused by teachers occupying Slots A and B. Finally, students who wish to work independently during their free period may use any unused spaces. It is not uncommon in the course of the day for Westminster's LLC to host three classes and a few independent workers simultaneously.

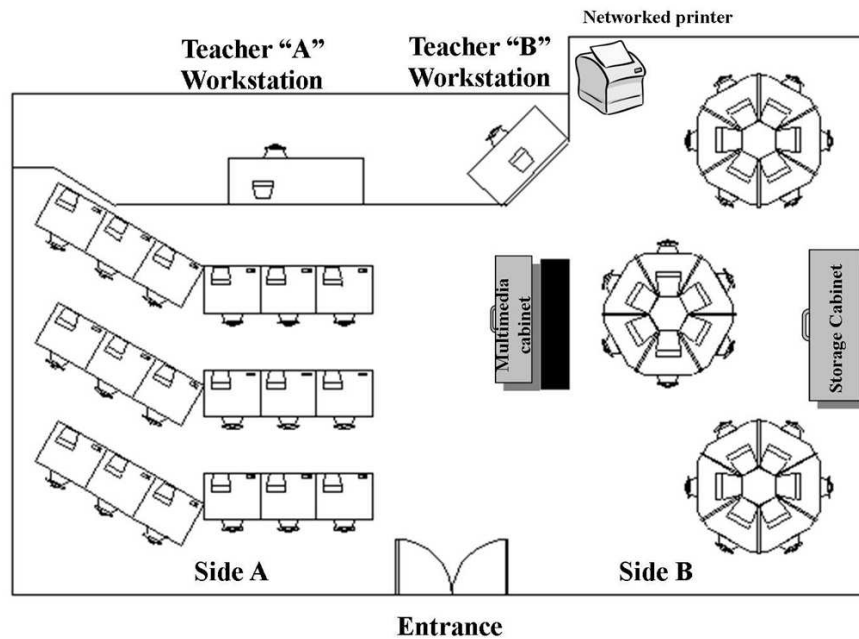


Figure 1

Westminster's dual-design Language Learning Center configuration

The choice of dual-design was perhaps the most prescient of all decisions made regarding space planning. When a teacher intends on running the activity from the teacher console, he or she schedules time on Side A. Teachers who plan on letting students work individually select Side B. Since on Side A all students face the teacher, student attention is obviously directed toward the front of the lab. The astute observer, when sitting in on a class conducted on Side B, might notice that when the teacher gives instructions to students through the headphones, the students' first instinct is not to look at the teacher, rather their computer screen or their classmates in the same pod. The two configurations elicit a preternatural reaction from students to focus their attention differently, without the need for explicit instruction.

Westminster's current language lab software, the Sony Virtuoso Major/Soloist Suite, features monitor/control capability. However, sometimes the teacher does not wish to interact with students remotely. In such a case, Side B is the preferred venue. Because of the "negative space" created in the pod configuration the teacher may walk around the pods with ease. Also, because of the orientation of one pod to another, teachers may monitor as many as four students at one time. As classes experiment with Web 2.0 technologies more and more, our teachers find themselves ambulatory more often than in the past. For these reasons, teachers whose students are experimenting with blogs, web pages, VoiceThreads, wikis, and other such Read/Write applications, typically reserve Side B. Teachers sign up for Side A when they wish to conduct traditional L/S activities with intermittent teacher instruction.

A common activity among advanced language courses (Level 4, Level 5, AP Language, and AP Literature) is the writing lab activity. Students work individually or collaboratively on a writing sample while the teacher, working from the teacher console, monitors student screens remotely. The advantage to conducting this activity in the lab is immediate, universal correction. The teacher may, while monitoring a student's screen, intercom with the student, point out the error, or highlight the error by taking control of the student's machine. If a teacher notices a common error among several students, the teacher may project a student's document on the SmartBoard and show the correction to the entire class simultaneously. Since student line-of-sight faces the same direction (toward the teacher station and SmartBoard), teachers conducting a writing lab will typically reserve Side A.

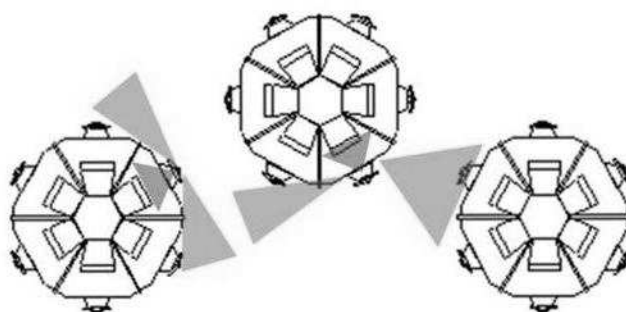


Figure 2

### Side B, or “pod” configuration

For activities where visual stimulus is encouraged or required, teachers reserve Side A workstations. In some cases line-of-sight has its drawbacks. Two decades ago, teachers simulated telephone conversations by handing two students in class a pair of broken handsets and asking them to talk to one another. The flaw in this activity lies in the fact that it doesn't in any way simulate a telephone conversation! Rather than relying solely on aural input, the listener interprets body language of his classmate sitting across the classroom barking into a disembodied telephone. In order to truly simulate a telephone conversation, one needs the help of technology: either a telephone or a computer program that simulates a telephone. Paired activities in which students must communicate orally without visual cues—simulated telephone conversations, for example—are best completed on Side B. The pod configuration of Side B creates acute or obtuse angles which limit a student's line of sight to as many as two and as few as zero classmates. As Figure 2 illustrates, the pod configuration creates natural fields of vision (indicated by green triangles) and unnatural or uncomfortable fields of vision (red triangles).

The pod configuration also suits the needs of independent study. The acute angles created by the pie-shaped pod, along with the 24-inch tall dividing panels that separate each workstation create an isolated workspace. Six such workspaces are equipped with the *Rosetta Stone* language

learning software. The pod situated closest to the entrance of the lab was chosen as the designated “independent study carrels” since traffic into and out of these workstations creates the least disturbance for classes working in the lab. Students, faculty, and staff take full advantage of the *Rosetta Stone* software, learning Spanish, French, Chinese, Arabic, and Swahili independently, and at their convenience.

### **Determining Storage Needs**

Westminster’s LLC does not exist for the sole purpose of computer-assisted language learning. The lab performs several services for the foreign language community and the school community-at-large. Throughout the year, the Lab Director administers standardized tests for the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, impact/concussion tests for the Athletic Training staff, student course evaluations that are conducted online, web-based surveys for the High School Guidance Department, and the AP Examinations for Spanish, French, German, and Music Theory students. Additionally, the LLC maintains inventory of audio-visual equipment and laptop computers, houses a small library of language textbooks, ancillary materials, textbook CD-ROMs, dictionaries, and typing *accoutrements*, to say nothing of the “nuts and bolts” inventory that must be maintained in order for the lab to run smoothly. What follows is an overview of lab resources and the storage needs required to maintain such resources.

The day-to-day storage requirements usually involve items to which students and teachers need regular access. Textbook CD-ROMs, dictionaries, textbooks and textbook resources must be accessible throughout the school day, without the need to contact the Lab Director. For that reason, open shelving or free-standing shelving units should be incorporated into any language lab design plan. While this may seem obvious, wall space is typically at a premium in computer labs since that is where electrical supply is most often located. Be sure to allocate sufficient wall space for your various storage needs.

We have found that the language lab serves the unforeseen purpose of repository for archived materials (textbooks, maps, realia, etc.) and items of current use (multimedia, A/V equipment) Some of these items, because of their cost, fragility, or confidential nature, must be kept under lock and key. Digital cameras, video cameras, laptop computers, and specialized recording equipment require inventory control. Standardized testing information must be kept secure before and after test administration. Student and teacher passwords must be kept out of public view to ensure network security. All these needs require access-only storage, which again, must be factored into the initial design plan of the language lab space.

“What,” “Who,” and “Where” are the three questions you should ask when considering storage needs. Remember that if you agree to house it, you must maintain it and you are responsible for it. So, what will the language lab store? Second, who needs to have access to it? Finally, where does it need to be kept? Are there temperature and/or humidity concerns? Build into

your space plan a section of wall 4'-8' long for the purposes of shelf or cabinet storage. If your lab experiences great swings in temperature or humidity, consider seeking out an alternative storage space away from the lab for electronics and archival paper products.

### **Lab Director's Office**

As segue to discussing the “big picture” of your space plan, consider a separate space for the Lab Director's office. As Lab Director, my mission is to steer teachers toward “ownership” of their language lab. They cannot become fully independent if I am constantly looking over their shoulder, or if my “office desk” is right next to their workstation. At Westminster, the Lab Director's office is located across the hall from the LLC. Both the lab and the lab office are constructed with a wall of windows, so about 70% of the lab space, including both teacher stations, is visible from the Lab Director's desk. Teachers enjoy the autonomy that the separate office space allows while appreciating the quick, visible access should a problem arise.

Additionally, Westminster's Lab Director's office is equipped with a desk for the Lab Director, a desk for teachers to use as independent work space (in case multiple teachers share a classroom), two video editing suites (one Mac and one PC), a recording station for foreign language satellite programming, and a table (dubbed “the Round Table”) to be used as a space for curricular planning or consultation with the Lab Director.

The planned spaces of the LLC and the Lab Director's office, whether constructed deliberately or organically, have come to express an *ethos* for the Department of Modern and Classical Languages. Within the “Big Picture” of the Westminster community, a smaller “Big Picture” has developed in the form of the Goizueta Language Learning Center, whose mission is to foster and facilitate the learning of languages, to encourage collaboration, and to administer programmatic and technical support for the students and adults of our community. The LLC's role in the bigger “Big Picture” speaks to how foreign language acquisition, cultural and digital literacy figure into the overall framework of the Westminster community, and the formation of the students in our care.

### **The Big Picture**

The Westminster Schools sits on 180 acres in a northwest suburb of Atlanta. Serving approximately 2,000 students in pre-K through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, Westminster is composed of two administration buildings, six academic buildings, and three athletic facilities. Language classes are conducted in the Elementary School, the Junior High School, and in two High School academic buildings. Given the distance covered between all three spaces, there was no one obvious location for the new lab.

In the site selection process in 1999 and 2000, teachers and administrator prioritized accessibility and interactivity above all other things. They wanted the site to be accessible to all and

easily integrated into other aspects to student life, particularly in regard to technology use. Since digital CALL platforms often perform the “double duty” of a traditional computer lab, this made all the more sense. In the renovation process, Westminster’s foreign language department wanted the language lab to be located somewhere convenient to all students and wanted the lab to serve the community as a whole, not just language students and faculty.

The process of updating and installing a new CALL environment was as much a process of determining how L2 instruction fits into the larger scheme of the Westminster community as it was locating a convenient and available space for language students and teachers. Throughout the last 15 years, the need for cultural exchange has grown in prominence within the Westminster community, and with it, the role that foreign language programs may play in such an exchange. Presently, Westminster conducts cultural exchange programs in Kenya, Guatemala, Argentina, The Netherlands, France, and China. Cultural exchange programs build a bridge between language curricula and the community-at-large. After all, when guests visit from abroad, it is not the Language Department that welcomes them, but the school as a whole. All these institutions, language courses, Service Learning, and cultural exchange and awareness programs share a common thread in the Goizueta Language Learning Center. Students visit the LLC when they need to learn Kiswahili in preparation for a trip to Kenya. They produce in-house public service announcements pertaining to their Service Learning initiative. Argentine exchange students hang out in the lab to email back home, to blog, and to share YouTube videos with their new best friends...their host students. The Language Learning Center accommodates these needs and more. But we cannot do it alone.

Pressly Hall, the central building on campus which houses high level administration offices, the cafeteria, chapel, and infirmary, also accommodates a “technology corridor” which served as the perfect place to situate the new language lab. Within close proximity to one another are the Language Learning Center, Digital Media Lab, Audio-Visual Department, and the office of the High School Instructional Technology Coordinator (see *Fig. 3*).

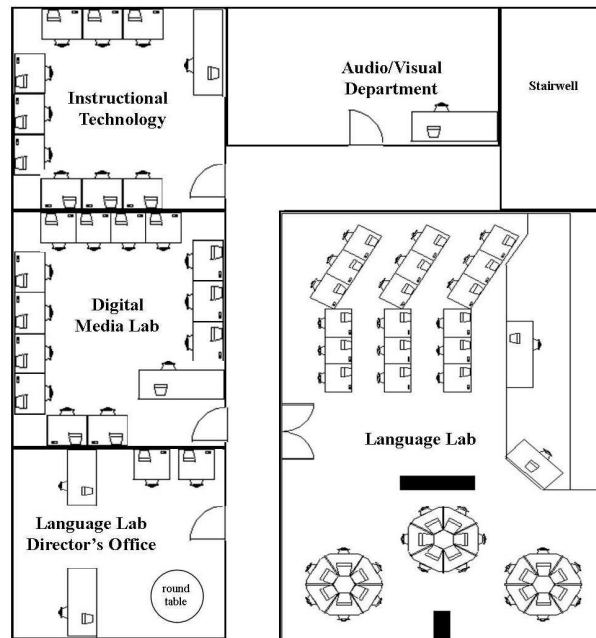
Even state-of-the-art language lab platforms have their limitations. Most turn-key labs today take advantage of Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology. Although VoIP allows for versatile, low cost CALL environments, the technology does not promise high fidelity. Nor do language lab software suites provide features such as advanced digital media editing and full-time, one-on-one support. These issues led Westminster to the decision that ultimately turned our “foreign language lab” into a Language Learning Center. When students need to record a podcast in high fidelity or edit a video project, they walk across the hall to the Digital Media Lab. If they wish to borrow audio-visual equipment or broadcast a project to the student body over the school’s web-based television broadcasting service, they head down the hall to the A/V department. And if they need specialized training on web editing or advanced PC applications, they pay a visit to the ITC.

By positioning the new LLC in the “technology corridor” in Pressly Hall, Westminster poses language students to collaborate on meaningful projects not only with their language teacher, but also with technology professionals who engage in direct and indirect support of student activities. Although the roles of the A/V Coordinator, Instructional Technology Coordinator, and Media Lab Director have shifted over the years, their principal roles have remained the same: to support students and teachers in their technology needs. And since this “technology corridor” is located in the central building on campus, the school tacitly expresses that linguistic, cultural, and technological literacy play a central role in the formation of the Westminster student.

### Outcomes of Design Decisions

Of all the decisions that have been made throughout the last 10 years regarding the relocation, redesign, and renovation of the Language Learning Center, a few stand out as being pivotal to the successful fulfillment of the Department of Modern and Classical Languages’ (and ultimately, the school’s) Mission Statement:

- The relocation of the LLC effects accessibility, interactivity, and versatility with regard to student use.
- The installation of a software-driven platform will allow the LLC to adapt to shifting technologies and L2 best practices with little effect on the “bricks and mortar.”
- The dual-design denotes the teacher-centered and student-centered aspects of language learning and language learning technologies.
- The availability and visibility of a part-time or full-time Language Lab Director allows internal support for students and teachers. It also gives an external voice to communicate the department’s commitment to language learning technology.



Hallway  
Figure 3

## **Next Steps**

As you begin to frame the conversation regarding the installation of a Language Learning Center, we suggest that you begin with the following questions:

### 1. Whom will the LLC serve?

- Will this determine where it is to be located?
- How can we make the LLC accessible and relevant to our constituency?

Once the location is selected, what opportunities or limitations does the physical space provide? Will the physical space (walls, doors, electrical and internet access, storage, image projection and lighting) affect the educational space (computer and projection equipment, station configuration, location of instructional materials)?

- If yes: How can we configure educational space to allow for maximum accessibility, flexibility, and interactivity.
- If no: Given our *carte blanche* status, how can we maximize the above? What does our ideal look like?

### 2. How will users utilize the space?

- We have found it best not to answer this question. It is likely that your answer to that question will be irrelevant within a few years...or less. Rather, create an environment best suited to adaptability. If you have capacity to move modules, for example in a laptop lab, this “floating blueprint” is the best way to provide flexibility. If you lack modular capability, which is often the case with a desktop lab with hard-wire connections, consider the hybrid configuration. Offering dual design not only allows teachers to tailor the space to their activity, but it also encourages creative thinking when designing activities for the lab.

### 3. Which company do we choose?

Much like buying a house, there is no such thing as the perfect lab, only the lab that best suits your needs. However, consider the following questions when shopping around:

- Does this product have the capacity to grow with your changing pedagogical needs?
- Does the licensor of this product have a record of customer-minded service? Does your institution have a technology department that can supplement your technical support needs?

Regardless of what pedagogical and technological trends may come, the purpose of Westminster’s (and any) Language Learning Center remains the same: to enable the integration of technology in the practice of second language acquisition on campus. There are countless subsections of this broad mission, and as times change, so will the details. To remain focused on the central ethos of the LLC while remaining open to the shifting sands of language pedagogy is critical to long-term sustainability and relevance.



## Chapter IV

### From Language Lab to Language Center

Amàlia Llombart

*California Polytechnic State University Pomona*

#### Introduction

For the past few years, language labs have faced two opposing directions: “going digital” or transforming into Language Resource Centers<sup>1</sup>. With the increasing offer of online language materials and course management systems, some labs have started “going digital” and becoming “virtual labs”, where the use of a physical space is not necessary or has been reduced to a minimum. The “going digital” approach is very attractive to university administrators, who are encouraging this approach in order to gain space for classrooms or offices. (In fact, many faculty members and department Chairs who would be happy with using exclusively digital solutions, refuse going exclusively virtual per fear of losing a physical space that “belongs” to the Language Department). Digital solutions are also very attractive to students and faculty. These online language materials and course management courses are accessible from any computer on campus, or even off-campus. The fact that these online materials can be password protected to limit its access to students and faculty makes this option more attractive. In addition, through Course Management Systems such as Blackboard or WebCT, as well as textbook-based ones such as those powered by Quia, instructors receive the students’ results from the comfort of their own home at any time of the day. With real and practical advantages like these, becoming completely digital without the physical space might be the natural next step, since it is very likely that the language lab began to become less populated once these online systems started being implemented and students started doing their workbook and lab manual materials from their dorms. On the other hand, some Departments have moved in the direction of transforming their traditional labs into “true” Language Resource Centers (LRCs). “It’s not a *lab*, it’s a *resource center*” is a common catch phrase that the directors of these centers repeat to the instructors and students. In this approach, the physical space receives the primary role, while technology receives a supporting role. The traditional carrels where students supposedly listened to the audio tapes that came with the textbook and then recorded their own voice are removed, leaving a precious space and multiple

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank all the faculty members of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Fairfield University (Connecticut) for their commitment to the Language Resource Center, which made my work as its director very pleasant. Thanks to that experience I was able to write this chapter. I want to give especial thanks to Nancy Rosado (Fairfield U.), who helped me with all the practical aspects that need to be considered when designing a public space. Of course, any errors in this chapter will be the result of misinterpretation on my part.

possibilities. Some instructors become very excited and see the resource center as the place to store all the language resources that overflow their offices: several Spanish magazines, a French scrabble, maps of different countries, boxes with transparencies and even desk copies of language textbooks that are not currently being used. LRC directors are sometimes forced to also remind instructors that “this is a resource center, not a storage place”. I have witnessed this process taken to the extreme of transforming the language lab into a “faculty lounge”, with only two computers, where instructors used the room to eat lunch, chat, and have their end of the year potluck. It is probably understandable that in situations as such the administrators might become wary and look at these places as great classrooms or offices for an increasing faculty.

In this chapter I want to advocate for the transformation of the traditional language lab into a language resource center, without reaching the extreme situation I just mentioned. Many of us might recognize that the increasing online offerings turn obsolete or superfluous a large amount of the materials and equipment found in traditional language labs. Some see in this an opportunity to widen the possibilities or to shift the focus of that space. This chapter explores these possibilities and the directions that this shift might take.

The rationale for the approach of transforming traditional language labs into language learning/resource centers revolves around this main idea: Language Centers should be conceived as centers designed to support and promote the study and instruction of foreign languages and cultures, in which technology has an *important role*, instead of positioning technology as the main source around which everything is built. The technology in FL learning is not only about the *materials* (which can be stored and accessed online), but about their *use*. The focus on the use rather than the materials should lead to:

### **1. A greater connection between the Language Department(s) and the Center.**

Traditionally (although this probably still takes place in some colleges), students attended the lab and recorded their presence for the certain number of minutes a week that was required (with a punching card, signing in and out...). Instructors were then informed of the minutes each student had spent at the lab, either with individual cards, a list sent by the lab, etc. There was no connection between the language instructors' work and the lab. The language lab was a place for students, and most instructors didn't know how or why they would use that place and what the students were really doing there.

The LRC must aim to strengthening the ties between what goes on in the “lab” and what goes on in the classroom and the entire language curriculum. Therefore, the design of the Center must be deeply rooted in the language program and its curriculum. The LRC is a Center for the instructors (both individually and as a community), a place where the Language Department can find the resources they need in their teaching.

## **2. A closer attention to the individual needs of instructors and students.**

LRCs aim to offer a more personal attention to all groups of people involved. In a way, a true Language Resource Center has a more humanized approach to technology and offers a personal touch in the relationships that are established at the Center. For technology to deliver its positive effects on language instruction, it is essential to create the impression of simplicity and easiness. The LRC director and staff must have a proactive control of all resources, including immediate trouble-shooting assistance in case of break down. However, it is also essential for the LRC to always be able to provide assistance to faculty and students in an enriching and relaxing atmosphere so that they also are able to have a proactive control of the resources.

## **3. A space for elements that are not necessarily technology.**

Without falling in the trap of becoming storage place for all types of language materials—used and unused—the LRC can allow a space for resources that are not technological. Deciding the criteria that will be used to decide what belongs in the LRC and what doesn't requires discussions among all the people involved, and different centers might set the line at different places depending on the characteristics of the institution. But one attractive solution is to consider the LRC as the Center for FL methodology, with an especial interest in exploring ways how technology helps improve FL teaching and learning.

Since many of the technology needs of instructors and students are fulfilled outside the LRC, in an individual fashion (online, at home), the need for this place is based on the need for a place where people require the physical presence of other people. The LRC is a place where things *happen*: activities, meetings, seminars, etc. not simply where things *are*.

## **4. I use it therefore I build it.**

Since use comes first in the mind of the Language Resource Center directors and designers, use should also come first in the process of its design. An important recommendation I would like to make here is to start using the Center in its current physical state, even when you don't have all the elements and materials you want. This will help identifying and delineating the needs, which will in turn help making the best decisions in design and purchases. Mike D. Ledgerwood in the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the IALLT Language Center Design Kit emphasizes the importance of having an expert director take a look at the blueprint and detect possible errors that will be harder and more expensive to repair later. Using the center in the current shape for a whole year while preparing the blueprint and the proposal can help you detect more of these little things you could oversee on paper. Annoying as it may be, I recommend you to move your wheel-less desks to the configuration you need to carry out an activity, and then move them into another one that best (or most closely) fits the needs of the next activity. This will certainly help you choose the right desks to buy for your wonderful, easy to use, multipurpose LRC. See if students seem comfortable using these chairs, or if their

folders fall from the current narrow desks. For a while, lend your own laptop to the people who give a presentation, or turn a desktop off the wall and connect it to the projector with a long cable, before you decide which kind of furniture to buy. Place your plasma TV on a desk and hold some séances before deciding what the best wall to mount it on is. Try having two types of activities at the same time to see if this is feasible or if they are too noisy to be carried out at once. This should help you decide how many spaces you need and might drive you to install a dividing wall. See how many people attend your workshops to help you decide if you need a wall that can be opened or simply make two rooms out of one.

A nice, modern space well-supplied with new stylish furniture, plasma TV on the wall, easy-to-move-and-stack desks, etc. might be very attractive, and also useful. But people (instructors and students) will enter a place because activities are taking place, not (only) because of its modern look.

Doing this might also increase your chances to receive the budget you request, or at least to write a more compelling proposal, since everything you include in it has a purpose and its need can be documented. You might also realize you need less. My approach is “do more with less”, an attractive approach in times with a tough economy, in which you will probably have to do more with less, anyway. Administrators will also be more compelled to give money to a Center that is widely used. In some cases, it might contribute to the administration’s decision to keep the LRC instead of turning it into offices.

The content of this chapter is partly based on my experience as director of the Language Resource at Fairfield University (Connecticut).<sup>2</sup> This Center is located in one unique space, and here I describe some of the efforts put forward in order to accommodate one room to multiple purposes. Therefore, the “space considerations” and “configuration issues” to which I refer here would be more applicable to one space centers, than to centers that comprise several rooms. However, I believe that the sections on the organization of activities that should take place at the Center might be of interest to any LRC director. After reviewing the motivation for creating a LRC, in the next sections I will:

1. Propose steps to start developing a center: steps to shift the attention away from technology and materials and towards its use.
2. Suggest and describe activities that have a place at the LRC, with some space /design considerations for each.
3. Consider some configuration issues.
4. Offer some ideas about staff and distribution of tasks, since this chapter places interpersonal relations in a significant place.

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<sup>2</sup> I have also included things I have observed in other institutions where I have worked or that I visited.

### *What to do first*

Before proposing or envisioning any changes, it is important to know exactly what the current state of the Lab is. I divide this process into two sections: (A) the materials and (B) the activities and services.

## **A. ABOUT MATERIALS**

### **1. If there isn't one, make an inventory of all materials at the Lab.**

You might make these divisions:

Hardware and other media equipment	Software	Media	Print materials	Furniture
Computers Computer accessories Printers Scanners CD-players TVs Headsets Storage devices	Language-specific software	Original DVD movies / documentaries: (divided by language)	Books / manuals, magazines...	Desks
		Original VHS movies / documentaries (divided by language)		Chairs
	Other	Copies in DVD (divided by language)		Storage space
	Copies in VHS (divided by language)	...		

### *2. Find out what materials are being actually used*

It is very likely that many of the materials are obsolete, and have not being used in years. Someone who worked in the process of “modernizing” a Language Lab told me he had to get rid of 90% of all media material (video and audio). In general, accumulation of unused materials is a common problem that needs to be targeted before any attempt to do any changes. Clutter is an actual problem because:

It makes it difficult to give visibility to the equipment and materials that are really useful. It causes safety concerns. Dust accumulates on clutter and makes the air conditions unpleasant and even unhealthy. A box stored on top of a shelf might fall and cause an accident. It takes up space that could be destined to student use or storage. As I mentioned above, the LRC must strengthen the ties with the Language Department(s), since it is a place for instructors to find the resources they need for their teaching. Therefore it is important to get their involvement in all the stages of the Lab design:

- Meet with the coordinators of all languages, and, if appropriate, with instructors individually, to find out what materials are actually being used. The goal is to identify which materials must be kept and which materials can be disposed of.
- Beware of sentimental holdings. If you suspect that instructors are asking to keep obsolete materials that are not really being used, propose alternatives:
  - The instructor can keep the material in his/her office. Offer your help to find a container and take it to their office.
  - In the most stubborn cases, propose them to keep these materials in a storage container at the LRC and give them a deadline. If in x months the material has not been used, you will dispose of it.
  - If one material is stored in multiple media formats (such as a DVD and Laser Disc), keep only one version (DVD, CD) and get rid of the other (Laser Disc, VHS, audio tape).

Also, be brave: if it is not being used and we know it won't be, we really don't need to keep it, no matter for how long it has been there and how "strange" it might seem not to see it there. The first thing I removed from the LRC at my arrival were 8 carrels that were occupying the central area of the Center. The idea was to leave (for the time being) the carrels that were facing the wall, but occupy the central area of the room with desks I took from university storage so that we could have classes and meetings in that area. When I proposed to remove the 8 central carrels I was told: "make sure you do not put the carriage in front of the horses". Although I was sure that we didn't need those carrels, and I knew what I wanted to do in this space, I was secretly nervous about removing them, as if "something" was going to happen. Finally, it was removed and I was able to see that "nothing" had happened, at least nothing bad.

### **3. Get rid of unused materials.**

The decision about what to keep and what to get rid of must be yours and depending on your department needs. Here I list some of the items I got rid of (threw away, donated, redistributed, etc.):

- Laser Disc Players and a collection of "Destinos" in Laser Disc (as well as their copies in VHS)
- 10" TV monitors
- Everything that was not working
- Audio tapes
- Language textbooks and ancillaries
- Demo CD-ROMs
- Floppy disks

- Old language materials instructors have been piling at the Center (transparencies, exams, handouts, ...)
- 8 student workstations (carrels)
- One TV

Again, this depends on the department. I got rid of these particular items because I was sure they were not needed. For example:

- Laser Disc Players and a collection of “Destinos” in Laser Disc: Nobody was watching the “Destinos” Spanish instructional soap opera and had not done so for many years. There was no intention to incorporate it into the curriculum.
- 10” TV monitors: Some instructors were already streaming the movies that they assigned to the students, and I was assisting the others into doing the same. Therefore, students could watch the movies online (from home or at the LRC). I kept two monitors hooked to a VCR for the first semester, when I finally got rid of all of them.
- Language ancillaries (CD-ROMs with listening and video activities): Students used to go to the Lab to do their listening activities. Since we started using the textbook-based online materials, we didn’t need any of those... nor the dozens of samples that have been accumulating.

For me, getting rid of so much stuff is the “saddest” aspect of the process, not because of sentimental considerations but rather for ethical reasons. It is distressing to see how quickly materials get obsolete. I think it is also sad how much free stuff publishers give away without any consideration to the fact that we might not need it. We have different possibilities to get rid of the materials we don’t want:

- The University ITT, Computing and Network or Media services might reuse or recycle many materials.
- You can advertise the materials you don’t want among instructors. Some will take old textbooks, ancillaries, transparencies, tapes... (Just make them promise they will not bring them back).
- Donate to the university community. I left folders, CD cases, posters, storage bins in the hallway with a sign of “free” and they disappeared. Just be careful with textbooks, as they should not be given away to students.
- It might be possible to donate to the community: high-schools, public libraries, goodwill.
- Throw it away. Please, consider recycling principles for paper, hazardous materials, etc.

If you disliked the feeling of seeing so much waste, remember this feeling in the future and:

- Do not accept textbooks from publishers unless you are seriously considering adopting them.
- When possible, use electronic versions when you are considering textbooks for adoption.
- Return unused textbooks and ancillaries to publishers. This will reduce the amount of unused materials for which you need to find a place to store, but it also will reduce prices for students (eventually; at least it should).
- Choose your purchases wisely. Do not rush at the end of the fiscal year with mindless purchases so that your budget is not reduced next year. Buy things you really think you will use for a long time.
- Invest in good quality materials.

Although this part of the process doesn't seem as being very creative or enriching, it is essential. And, as an anecdote, I'll say that of all the things I did for the LRC at Fairfield U., the most appreciated was my "cleaning work".

#### **4. Discuss possible uses for some unused materials**

Sometimes there will be materials that were not used because instructors didn't even know they were there. Do not throw away a digital video camera just because no one uses it. It is important to make sure that all the instructors know what materials are there in the LRC: through the LRC's website and a printed or digital brochure sent to language coordinators or all instructors by email. Also, organize workshops showing the possibilities of some of the materials hosted at the LRC. (See section 2).

### **B. ABOUT SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES.**

The LRC must service instructors and students in their teaching and learning. It is essential to meet with everyone at the Language Department in order to have a response to these main questions:

- What do you want the LRC for?
- What would you like to do at the LRC?
- What would you like to see happen at the LRC?
- What would you like your students to do at the LRC?

#### **1. Talk with everyone:**

You need to talk with everyone, to get the maximum amount of information at different levels:

Chair of the department: You need to know from him/her what the next goals of the department are and what directions we are we pursuing as a department.

Language coordinators: What are their needs? What do they need from the LRC to develop the curriculum of the language they are teaching?

- What are the technological needs for their classes?
- What kinds of things are they doing that technology could help them do better?
- Do they need help with students' homework / with in-class use of technology?
- Do they have materials they would like to have online for students to access?
- (Audio? / video? / images?)
- What aspects of computer assisted language learning would they like to learn?
- What aspects of computer assisted language learning would they like for the instructors to learn?

The LRC can be of great assistance to language coordinators in this respect. Maybe the coordinator has great ideas for programs to implement in all the classes but not all instructors are ready for them. The director of the LRC must work very closely with the language coordinators to ensure that the Center provides all the support to the coordinator and the instructors needed for the success of the initiatives put forward by the coordinator.

Each instructor. Write a note to each instructor. Ask concrete questions and leave space for comments. Let them know you would be pleased to see them in person: some people will have ideas that they find too simple to write on paper, and they will be more comfortable suggesting them orally. Make sure you encourage them. Most of the questions asked to the coordinators can be applicable to each instructor. In addition, you could ask:

- What are their biggest concerns with respect to technology? (Lack of knowledge? Lack of support along the way? Distrust on its benefits?)
- How confident do they feel about technology?
- Would they like to create their own multimedia materials? (Audio? / video? / images?)
- What use would they make of the room? (Expect some non-technological uses: for example, some would like to be able to send students to do make-up tests or watch a movie; to meet with the students for some "collective" office hours or with colleagues).

Here you need to consider if the uses they want to make of the room would require:

- a) To reserve the room for the event and close it to the rest, or if they could take place without previous reservation while other people are present.
- b) For the instructors to be present, or if students could drop in any time without the instructor's presence.
- c) The staff's assistance, or if students / instructors could work on their own.

- What can they offer the “department community” through the LRC? Find out if they are “experts” in one aspect. Maybe they use blogs in their courses, or they use a CMS in a very productive way, or they know a useful website, or have some Power Points that would like to share... Although the LRC director can give workshops to the instructors, or invite external experts, it is good to involve language instructors also in the teaching of the workshops. Write down each instructor’s “expertise” or experience in technology and consider them candidates to teach workshops to the rest of the language department(s) throughout the year.
- Are they learning / interested to learn something? Do they have a project in mind? Maybe they are not “experts” in any aspects but they are interested in learning about something. One of the instructors at Fairfield U. wanted to learn about creating a blog for her French conversation classes. Instead of giving a workshop on the topic, I scheduled a few sessions only with her. At the end of the semester we both gave that workshop to the rest of the FL department: I gave the tutorial and she presented the particular use she made in her classes.

These discussions are very important. They will allow you to create a schedule that fits, and to envision the type of activities to organize, as well as the type of sub-spaces that will be needed. Most of all, it will help you design a LRC that responds to the needs.

## **2. Listen. Be their resource, not the textbook**

This is the time to take the back seat and take note of everything instructors have to say. It is important not only that the LRC addresses the instructors’ needs, but also that they know that you and the LRC are addressing their needs, that you don’t have your own “agenda”.

It is very important that you start with listening to what they have to say. Instructors can willingly or unwillingly “boycott” any great idea you have, so it is important to work *with them*, not *despite them*. They all have their own ideas about their classes and they want the best for them. Even those who are old-fashioned or resistant to learn anything new or “hate technology” enjoy thinking about their classes and like to come up with new ideas. In my experience it is better not to present yourself as the person who will “teach” them how to use technology and make their classes better, but rather as the person who can help them achieve this. Let their ideas be their ideas, and build up from those.

Instructors also need to enjoy what they are doing (because it is “fun” or creative, because they believe it is beneficial for the student, or because it makes their work easier). If they do not enjoy what you are proposing or if they don’t see any benefit of it, they won’t adopt it, or will stop using it, or will use it with negative results. At one institution I witnessed how the students of professors who didn’t like Blackboard complained about it in their evaluations, while the students of professors who were enthusiastic about it, wrote positive comments about that system. At another university,

professors who were uneasy about the technical problems that could arise with online homework received emails from students saying that their work “didn’t go through” or that they “could not access the site”. In my class, I only gave my students the website URL and the course code and told them it was very simple. They never complained about experiencing any technical difficulty.

### **3. Suggest ideas and solutions**

Although you should take a back sit and help them develop their ideas, it is also your responsibility to offer timely solutions. You might have great ideas or might feel you need to impress the department with your knowledge of great software. I think there is a time for everything and for everyone. A professor might have just started with the use of PowerPoint; help him/her with that. For this person it might not be the time to learn how to edit videos. Maybe tell him/her how to add custom animation or voice recordings. Give them solutions and ideas, but do not overwhelm them with new things, or it might backfire.

Some instructors might be resistant to use what you propose only because they are afraid. Just reassure instructors that you will be there along the way. Make sure you respond promptly. When we first implemented an online workbook at Fairfield University, I received many daily emails with questions from instructors (“Why are there 50 activities assigned for this week?”, “Why don’t I see their results?”, “Where do I grade manually?” “Where’s the calendar?”, “How do I change due dates?”). These problems can be very frustrating for a person who just started using a program, so it is important to respond promptly. Soon they will all master the program and questions will diminish or disappear. It really pays off to be very attentive at first, because if you are not, instructors might simply abandon, or show frustration to the students.

This dialog should happen early, but also it must be an ongoing process. An instructor who at first only wanted you use the LRC for make-up tests, will later ask if she can schedule a movie session for her students. And, who knows? Next time... blogs?

### **2. Activities, Events and Services**

Considering the FL department’s needs and also your own ideas, first you will need to decide the criteria to choose the type of activities and events that should take place at the LRC and the type of services that are appropriate for the LRC to offer. For example:

#### **A) The role of technology.**

From more restricted to less, you can choose the LRC offerings to be:

a) Only activities and events directly related to technology. Two examples of events organized by the LRC under this criterion could be a workshop on digital storytelling or a showcase on using blogs as a communication tool. An example of service could be digitizing movies.

b) Related to FL teaching methodology: The type of activities from (a) but also others such as a workshop on task-based language learning.

c) Anything the department needs. In addition to those activities mentioned above, the LRC would also be a place where instructors can drop their exams and the assistants will make their copies, or a place for students to take make-up tests.

Your choice depends a lot on the type of institution, the Department's dynamics, their customs and your preferences. Theoretically, (c) doesn't seem like the right direction for a LRC, and I would favor option (b). However, in a small institution, with many adjunct faculty that have no help from teaching assistants, and who have different (and hectic) schedules and almost never see each other, offering making their copies can be a way to attract instructors to the Center and to create a sense of community. If adjunct instructors start coming to the LRC to have their copies made, they might begin showing an interest on other things that go on there. For example, at Fairfield U. instructors can go to the Media Center and request the digitization of movies. Media Center then sends them to Computer and Network Services, who stream them. Then instructors can go online to request password-protected access to their students. All instructors have access to a website where they can look for the movie and make the request. However, only few instructors were doing this. Although the LRC was not involved in the process—since it was Media Services and Computing and Network Services who offered this service—we decided to offer as a service that instructors could drop their movies and we would take them to the Media Center. When they were available we went online and requested the access for that professor. Although this process doesn't require any specific knowledge, by offering this service, more instructors felt comfortable about having their movies streamed and that semester all students watched all the FL movies online.

### **B) Will the LRC offer regular classes?**

Another point to decide is if the LRC would offer regular language classes. Again, it is important to consider the specific needs and possibilities of the department. I saw an institution schedule regular language classes at the LRC just to ensure that the Administration would not take away that space from the department to... offer classes.

At Fairfield U. we only scheduled regular classes when a last minute change in the department made it too difficult to find an adequate classroom elsewhere. Therefore, the LRC only offered regular classes as a back-up plan. The disadvantage of doing that is that closing twice or three times a week for one and a half hour doesn't allow having students and instructors taking for granted that the Center will be open, and that might deter them from using it fully.

### C) Free services or fees for services?

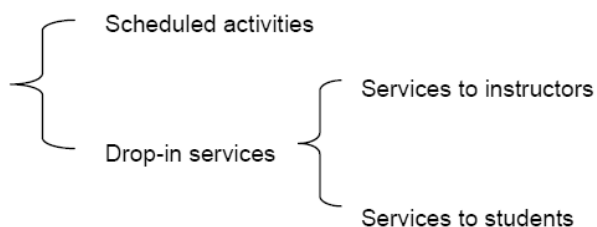
You also need to consider if you want the LRC to charge for the services offered to students and instructors. In a big university where you can have many requests everyday, charging a fee for the services might be the only way to sustain the Center.

However, charging for these services has some disadvantages. First, it is possible that students already have to pay a “Lab fee” when they enroll in a Foreign Language class, which would make charging them per service abusive. As for instructors, paying a small amount of money to have a movie digitized can be too complicated to make it worth: if only as a principle they will not pay for it from their own pocket, so they would need to charge it to the language department or pay and request a reimbursement from them, which is usually a bothersome process. One possibility is to work out an arrangement with the Language Department so that services to FL instructors are free.

### D) Type of assistance

Another factor to consider when deciding which types of services and activities to offer is the type of assistance you can count on. I talk more about staff in the last section, but here I just want to point at the fact that you need to consider the type of personnel who works at the Center when making decisions on the activities and services offered by the Center. For example, FL tutoring will only be possible if there are students in advanced FL courses working at the Center. Also, with some training, an undergraduate student can learn how to convert media materials from one format to another but might not be able to take upon more specialized projects, which would require a Media/ITT Specialist. Also a tech savvy undergraduate student working as an assistant might know how to edit a movie him/herself, but might not have the skills to assist other people on using it, let alone teach sessions to a large audience. If you—the director—are the only one capable of this, you might want to offer workshops to other faculty members or even offer one-on-one assistance to them, and also offer the Center for them to host special sessions with their students, but it would not be possible for the Center to offer those sessions to the students.

After having conversations with the Chair of the FL Department, Language coordinators and instructors, these are the activities and services we ended up offering, divided the following way:



**Scheduled activities:**

a) Classes: As I mentioned above, regular classes were scheduled at the LRC only as a last resource. Having a class at the LRC drove the need to include a movable dividing wall in the middle of the Center. When a class takes place the Center needs to be closed to the students and instructors who drop in, because this is the one activity that cannot take place with any other activity.

The first class that was taught at the LRC was an Italian culture class in which the professor showed many images to the students. At first he used an overhead projector, but the resolution of the images was too poor for the attention to detail that was required. An additional problem of using an overhead projector is that it requires a dark room. Experiencing these practical problems first-hand made us decide to buy a 52" high definition plasma TV, which was a great success.

b) Preparation for study abroad: Sessions on practical tips and basic cultural knowledge to go abroad for a semester. These sessions can take place in the evenings and during the weekends. On these sessions instructors and students who went abroad on a previous year can show pictures and videos of the country. Students are also guided through useful websites (the host university, tourism information, city and public transportation maps) with assistance on the language and culture.

c) Evening and weekend workshops and seminars: The LRC together with the FL department(s) can offer professional development for language teachers of the community's secondary school teachers. These workshops are usually scheduled as weekend courses.

d) Workshops for the Foreign Language Department(s) instructors on FL methodology and / or uses of technology to enhance language classes. For these workshops it is a good idea to work together with the University's computing and network center. They usually offer workshops to instructors; however, it is good to tailor these workshops to the needs of the area. Sometimes instructors attend these workshops and like what is being featured, but cannot see the applications it could have for their area. The LRC can be the connecting point from the purely technical aspects of a new computer program and the practical applications and uses in the FL area. It is also a good idea to include showcases from language classes in the presentation. In these workshops instructors can also present things they have learned at a conference on FL teaching or instructional technology.

The following are some examples of workshops that were presented at the LRC at Fairfield University:

*Workshops featuring showcases of the department's instructors:*

- Enhancing language courses with Blogs.
- Enhancing language courses with iTunesU.
- The use of online discussions in language courses.

*Reports / discussions on conferences we attended elsewhere.*

- Methodological Developments in Teaching Foreign Languages
- Dealing with Mixed-Ability Classes: Ideas for Effective Classroom Management

*Workshops on Foreign Language Teaching methodology and Technology:*

- Communicative Language Teaching
- Training on using the online components of the textbook.

e) Meetings between instructors and students. Meeting at the LRC allowed instructors not only to meet with several students at the same time (which was difficult to do in their own office) but also to access some of the equipment. For example, some students had difficulties with some of the activities online assigned for homework. One of the advantages of online homework is that students received immediate feedback and could know right away if the answer they provided was wrong. However, they could not always see what was wrong with it. Some instructors met with students to help them with their online homework: for example to make better use of the automatic hints given by the program, to make better use of the tutorials that the system offers, or to recognize which sections of the textbook corresponded to the different activities.

f) Tutoring: One of our projects was to conduct FL tutoring at the LRC. This service is often offered by a university-wide department that recruits tutors among selected students to help other students. However, I believe tutoring on a Foreign Language should take place under a closer surveillance and guidance from the department, and would include assistance with grammar as well as guidance with online work (as mentioned above). For this, tutors should be trained and receive timely assistance from professors in the FL department.

Since tutoring usually takes place in the evenings and weekends, it can take place after the drop-in hours have ended, and therefore take place using the whole space. If an evening class or meeting is scheduled it can take place in one of the two spaces that can be created with the dividing movable wall.

### **Drop in Services for instructors:**

1. Request digitization and streaming of movies to be made available online to their class.

This is a service usually carried out by the University's Media department. Although your LRC will probably not be able to perform such a job, it can act as the mediator. This would fit into the concept of the Language Lab as *the* resource center for the Foreign Language department, based on the idea that the LRC is the "place to go" for the language instructors, the entity that provides the assistance and resources that language instructors need to enhance their courses.

2. Conversion and/or editing of materials

Instructors usually have recordings they make in their own homes, from their TV or with a video camera. The LRC can convert these materials from one support to another (VHS to DVD, etc). Another service that the LRC can provide is editing these materials, as selecting clips from these recordings place them together.

3. Recordings

Instructors might like to be able to record some TV programs at the LRC, by simply asking the LRC's assistance to program a recording at a certain day and time.

4. Borrowing of materials for their classes: movies, video cameras, CD-players, portable DVD-players.

5. The LRC is also the place where instructors can go to create materials for their classes using the LRC's equipment and software. The type of personal assistance that can be provided to them depends on the human resources available. In general, I think it is a good investment to assist instructors in using the programs, both through scheduled workshops and through one-on-one assistance. When instructors become technology savvy, they not only become more enthusiastic in using the resources of the LRC to enhance their courses, but they also become more independent.

6. Receive assistance about online work (Quia, Blackboard, WebCT...). As said before, one of the goals of the LRC's director must be to give timely assistance to instructors with any initiative established by the Language Program Coordinators, such as using CMS to supplement the courses. This will ensure that instructors do not become frustrated and create a bad experience for students

7. Personal one-on-one assistance to individual instructors in all languages who are interested in other systems / programs that enhance language instruction with technology. Publishers of Spanish, French, Italian and German textbooks have a wider offering of textbook-based online

resources. Instructors of other languages will need to be more resourceful themselves if they want to incorporate online materials to their classes. The LRC is also a place for individual instructors to explore different possibilities with personal assistance. Specific examples of other programs in which we trained individual instructors are: iTunesU, QuiaWeb, Blogger, HotPotatoes and Eyejot.

Drop in Services for students:

1. Use of computers and other equipment.
2. Receive assistance about online workbook from assistants.
3. Tutoring
4. Borrowing of some materials.
5. Movie viewing on site.

Make sure all instructors know what is available. Although including all this information on a website is very important, instructors will probably respond better if you send them reminders by email at the beginning of the courses and a few days before a workshop takes place.

### **3. Physical configuration of the LRC**

For these activities to take place, a one space Center must be redesigned to serve as a multi-purpose space that easily enables the reconfiguration of the room into two or more sections to host multiple activities simultaneously. Instead of designing a complete new center, and hope to receive the funds for it, we decided to do small changes that adapted the room to its new uses. These are the 4 fundamental aspects of the redesign of the Center that have as a purpose accommodating the activities and services that an LRC must offer. Of course, designing a state-of-the-art Center involves many other details, which are not the scope of this chapter.

**Step 1:** The first step was to remove the “island”: the 8 workstations in the middle of the room. This freed up a lot of space in the room and allowed us to set desks for classes, meetings, or for students to use with their own laptop. For the time being, we simply used desks from university storage, before we could decide on the definite foldable and stackable desks to buy.

**Step 2:** Installing a moveable wall—accordion style—which allows subdividing the room for the duration of two simultaneous activities. A couple of aspects to keep in mind when considering installing a dividing moveable wall are:

- You will need to open a new door—if there was only one—so that the two sections of the room have their own exit door. This increases the price of this step.
- You need to factor in the space it takes when it is in a full open position. You need to consider this reduction of your total space when thinking about furniture. (See appendices A and B). The accordion style is the least cumbersome. Web resources pertaining to accordion models and other furniture mentioned in this chapter can be found on the LCD web site.

**Step 3:** Switching to laptops. In a multi-purpose flexible space in which desks get moved around, folded and stacked, keeping desktops would not be a practical decision. Two considerations to keep in mind before making the switch to laptops:

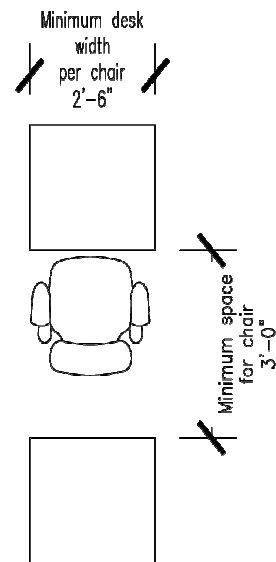
- Buy a laptop storage and recharging cart to keep the laptops stored and charging while not in use.
- Increase the security in the room.
- Make sure there are electrical outlets in the places where according to the different room configurations there might be desks, or include these in the proposal. In our case, since we have had student workstations in the middle of the room, it is not necessary to do big changes in this respect.

**Step 4:** Buying moveable furniture: these are basic pieces to consider:

- Movable, foldable and stackable desks
- Nesting chairs
- Table arm nesting chairs

A few important considerations to make when deciding how many desks and chairs to buy are:

- Furniture also takes space when folded and unused. See for example Appendix A: in this configuration, a class is taking place using only the desks and chairs without tablet arms. The chairs with tablet arms must be folded and stacked next to a wall. If we didn't consider the space these chairs would take, we might have wanted to buy three more desks, to allow a fourth row for the class, and then we would have run with a storage problem. In Appendix B we see how the stacked desks take up some space that needs to be free of other furniture. This space (or lack of) needs to be taken into consideration when deciding how many bookshelves and storage cabinets to buy.



Space per desk – chair

- In general, it is best to allocate a minimum of 30" of desk width per chair and a minimum of 36" of chair depth (or the distance of the desk to another desk or wall that is behind it). These are minimums, and if space allows more, 36" to 60" is more comfortable. As far as chair depth, 42" or more is ideal.
- Another furniture consideration is circulation space for students to move about freely when other students are seated. Aisle spaces should be at least 42" inches and for bigger rooms 48" - 60" is better. There may be local codes that dictate what the aisle space should be that are based on occupancy.

Just to give an example, we decided for the following number of pieces for a 24'9" x 25' room: 10 desks, 18 nesting chairs, and 14 tablet arm nesting chairs.

#### **4. Staff**

As I have mentioned above, the type of personnel you can count on for the LRC will be a significant factor when considering which types of services and activities can take place at the center.

Also, it is important not to underestimate the challenges that the organization of the staff supposes.

These are some main challenges to consider:

- Typically, the staff at a small center like this will be constituted (mainly) by undergraduate students working part-time. Therefore, there will be a great number of people working at the center, which will require investing some work organizing and coordinating their tasks.
- Usually undergraduate students lack experience and also initiative. In some cases, their work habits and ethics have not been totally developed. They might not realize the consequences of their showing up late or missing their shift. Some choose a work-study position only considering how much freedom they will have to do their own class work. And many will reject doing certain tasks such as light cleaning. Also, they might have trouble managing their time between classes, study time and work.
- These students working as lab assistants look like students, and often users of the LRC might not recognize them as assistants and feel they are not being helped appropriately at the Center. This gets worse when the assistants lack the initiative to show themselves as assistants. Sometimes, the users of the LRC might expect more from them than they really can offer at this stage of their life and professional experience.
- The following are some suggestions on how to deal with these challenges.
- Give them clear instructions in written. Read them with them, individually, not to the group.
- Do not assume anything. Make each rule and task description as specific as possible.
- Write down that the first thing they have to do when they start the shift is read the list of tasks.
- Schedule 2-3 people for each time slot. At any given time there should not be more than just one person assigned to work to avoid problems if one fails. On the other hand, if there are more than three people, two of them might not be working at all.
- Allow for transitions between shifts in the schedule, so that assistants are not scheduled to leave at the same exact time the next assistants arrive. Chances are someone will be late and the assistant working the previous shift will not wait.
- Check periodically that everyone is doing their shifts and following instructions.
- And maybe the most helpful of all: enlist the help of a Graduate assistant to mediate between you and the undergraduate assistants.



## Chapter V

### **From Lab to Center: A Case Study of the Transformation of a Language Learning Resource into a Language Learning Community**

Lance R. Askildson  
*University of Notre Dame*

What are the practical implications for the transition from a Language Lab to a Language Center? Drawing upon the analysis in chapter II of the theoretical dimensions of such a transition—and the six potential roles for a contemporary language center—the present chapter examines the praxis of this question via a case-study of precisely such a transition at the University of Notre Dame. In particular, the practical implications for a vision incorporating greater interaction and an expanded purview of responsibility will be explored. The review and decision-making process for space, design, furnishings and technology will be delineated alongside a discussion of one approach to greater integration and impact within the institution at large.



Notre Dame Language Lab (Circa 1996)



Notre Dame Language Center (2009)

#### **I. Introduction**

While the previous chapter examined the conceptual implications for a transition from language lab to language center, the present chapter seeks to explicate the practical dimensions of such a transition via case study attempting to apply such theory. This chapter will address the initial development of the language center proposal at the University of Notre Dame, the consideration of its location and physical design as well as the selection of relevant technology, furniture and materials. More importantly, the praxis of these component parts will be examined as they facilitate each of the six potential roles of the contemporary language center—as articulated in the previous chapter. The aim is to provide a detailed account of one institution's efforts to follow the paradigm shift from language learning resource to language learning community.

## II. Transitioning from Lab to Center: Preparation & Planning

The University of Notre Dame has a long tradition of foreign language excellence. Founded in 1842 by a French priest, the earliest institutional curricula emphasized a classical humanities education that mandated study of French, German, Spanish and Italian. Today, the University of Notre Dame offers fourteen robust foreign language programs and has made advanced foreign language proficiency a cornerstone of its liberal arts education. Like many institutions, Notre Dame has, since the 1980's, supported a language learning laboratory in order to remain on the cutting edge of foreign language acquisition. In the late 1990's however, a number of faculty and administrative concerns about the limits of the language lab model were raised. In order to maintain and advance the quality of its foreign language programs then, Notre Dame commissioned an internal study on the status of its own 'Language Lab' in 2000 and then again in 2003. These reviews, and their subsequent reports, highlighted a number of physical and structural deficiencies within the current lab space. Chief among these were:



Image 1.1: The Language Lab Teaching Space (circa 1996)



Image 1.2: The Language Lab Carrel Space (circa 1996)

1. The fixed and static physical design of the language lab's resource space—and the computer carrels in particular—prevented interaction in general and group work specifically (see image 1.2 above)
2. The instructional space was similarly static with little opportunity for pedagogical innovation beyond traditional lecture formats (see image 1.1 above)
3. The administrative design and workflow of the space emphasized a service model in which language lab staff simply managed a collection of self-study materials rather actively facilitating learning through expert consultation and advising

Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, these reports also highlighted a host of functional deficiencies in the lab. These included, but were certainly not limited to:

- 1) The lack of any substantive coordination between language lab resources/practice opportunities and foreign language classroom curricula
- 2) The passive nature of language lab resources, services and activities that revolved primarily around listening and reading practice drills
- 3) The limited role for emerging technologies and a lack of pedagogical training for faculty
- 4) The gap between language lab supported learning/practice and the state of the art in the field of second language acquisition and foreign language pedagogy—and particularly the need for more communicative language practice
- 5) The lack of any clear leadership role and mandate for the language lab and its faculty/staff—including a recognition of expertise in facilitating language learning and teaching

In concluding this report, the interdisciplinary committee of faculty authors (including the director of the language lab) recommended a dramatic reconceptualization of the language lab model in order to emphasize a contemporary approach to foreign language learning and teaching:

*The Center must be fully integrated into every level and every aspect of language learning, teaching and research: It must be a central clearinghouse of information, services, materials and expertise... The center must not be a place where only a discreet and limited number of activities take place, but rather serve as a catalyst and enabler for exploration, experimentation and innovation at all levels of language learning and use. It must make full use of all available media and technology, not as ends in themselves, but as tools in achieving our principle goal: The active creation of language... It must [also] assist faculty in devising, developing and implementing effective teaching strategies to meet that goal.*

*-Language Lab Review (2003)*

In 2008, after much discussion and institutional planning, the Center for the Study of Languages & Cultures (CSLC) was created and the task of transforming language lab to language center began in earnest. From the outset, the CSLC was conceived as a space, a community, for foreign language learners and teachers. For this reason, the location of the new language center was moved from the former language lab space, housed within a largely administrative building and rarely frequented by student drop-ins, to a new space situated in the center of a major classroom building where most of the university's foreign language classes are taught and where foreign language student and faculty traffic is the highest. The earliest articulations of the center imagined a place where one would encounter a cacophony of foreign languages being spoken at any hour of the day. Thus, the emphasis on communicative interaction for foreign language study was an essential characteristic and guiding principle of design from the outset. To provide greater focus to

the development of the center, as well as define the scope of activities the center would need to accommodate, a mission statement was drafted and a series of six over-arching goals were articulated:

*The CSLC is intended to advance foreign language & cultural learning by providing:*

- 1) Language-culture learning resources, content & facilities for students & faculty  
- *literature, references, film, software, videoconferencing, international info, etc.*
- 2) Collaborative & interactive activities & events for language-culture development  
- *language tables, tandem programs, international partnerships, L2 speakers*
- 3) Targeted individual language learning support outside of the classroom  
- *Professional tutoring programs, peer tutoring programs, private consultations*
- 4) Coordination & consultation with foreign language study-research abroad programs  
- *Advancing language components within international programs & partners*
- 5) Clear articulation between language-culture study & a humanities education  
- *Emphasizing the synergy of language-culture study within the humanities*
- 6) Cohesion to language department and program level initiatives across the college  
- *Centralizing cooperation on instructional, assessment & curricular initiatives*

*-CSLC Goals & Mission (2008)*

Additionally, in preparation for the development of the new language center design, site visits were conducted at the language centers of two institutional peers. These sites were selected because they provided approximate comparisons in their institutional scope and mandate, if not also in size. The objectives for both visits were articulated thusly:

- 1) Identify allocations of physical space and design that may be relevant to facilitating our goals
- 2) Identify the interactive dynamics unique to a language learning space in order to better facilitate this primary goal
- 3) Identify programmatic strengths in order to inform our own proposals for services, events and activities
- 4) Identify center usage and priorities among language students and faculty as they may be relevant to our offerings

*-Language Centers Review (2008)*

At the conclusion of these visits, a report was compiled noting both the approach and practical considerations for each language center site. Drawing upon the four objectives for these reviews, a number of summative recommendations were made as a result of these visits. A selection of these recommendations follow here:

- 1) The importance of providing a communal space for language practice and collaboration should also provide a semblance of privacy so that students (particularly novice students) don't feel too inhibited. Thus,
  - a. CSLC booths should be deeply inset and incorporate pinstriped dividers for added privacy from groups in adjacent booths
  - b. The proposed inclusion of glass doors and windows to give the CSLC a degree of transparency should incorporate pinstriping or other subtle camouflaging in order to slightly obscure yet not occlude views of other rooms and facilities within the CSLC—thereby providing awareness of other facilities/activities but removing some of the immediacy of language learning peers when privacy is sought
  - c. Background noise in the form of foreign language music could significantly address student anxiety about speaking/practicing their foreign language in a public space. Such foreign language background music both marks the space as a place for interaction (and not simply silent study) as it also provides psychological cover for students to speak and not feel as though everyone in the room can hear their imperfect pronunciation.
  - d. Retractable shades are needed to adjust the intimacy of lighting within the CSLC; In addition, another form of retractable shade/screen is needed for windows/glass to provide total privacy for classes being held in the multipurpose room, films being viewed in the small group room and the ability to see projection on walls and white boards.
  
- 2) The CSLC should focus on developing opportunities and dynamics for language student collaboration in lieu of individual study. Indeed, the conception of the CSLC rests largely on its promotion of learner interaction.
  - a. The individual desks conceived for the multipurpose classroom should be replaced with small 2-person tables on wheels and with wheeled chairs. This design allows for easy construction of pairs, triads, dyads or much larger groups for collaboration during classes or when the multipurpose area is being used by students during open hour periods
  - b. The communal area in the middle of the main room should be carefully placed far enough away from the reception desk in order to maintain a distance that allows

- students to feel comfortable enough to talk amongst each other. Additionally, it should face inward (like the booths) so that students are encouraged to work with each other
- c. The small group study room and group study booths should be promoted as open access areas and individual students should be encouraged to share these spaces with others whenever possible
  - d. Interaction, collaboration and language production can get noisy. So, in order to allow for some ambient noise without it becoming a significant distraction/annoyance, consideration of fabric paneling or other sound dulling techniques is recommended. Sound reduction 'clouds' hanging from the ceiling would be ideal.
- 3) The small group study room, multipurpose room and small group study booths should all make judicious use of available computer technology in order to maximize student collaboration and language center utility as a space for contemporary media-based learning
- a. The multipurpose room should make one laptop available on each of the 2-person tables for use by students throughout the day and when classes are not occurring within the space. The laptops will need to be secured to the tables in some fashion and students will not be allowed to bring food/drink into the multipurpose room area
  - b. Some or all of the group study booths should also incorporate a laptop on each table OR an integrated monitor and cpu. Again, security will be an issue for consideration alongside strict enforcement of a no food or drink policy at these tables.
  - c. Laptops should also be available for check-out within the CSLC and for use in the small group study room. A procedure that ensures the security of the laptop but that also allows students to check them out expeditiously will be required.
  - d. At least 1 fixed-station computer and 2-3 DVD-VHS video viewing stations (as pictured above) should be incorporated within the CSLC design. The current computer counter could be co-opted for this. The a fixed computer(s) will allow individual students who are not intending to install themselves in a booth or the multipurpose room, don't want to go through a laptop check-out process and/or have no other computer access available to them because of occupancy, to utilize online language learning or class materials with relative ease—and without leaving the CSLC.
  - e. Both electrical plugs and ethernet jacks should be distributed throughout the CSLC space. An overabundance of these fixed utilities is preferred and provides considerable flexibility if any part of the space is reallocated for other uses in the future

- 4) The resources, services and programmatic offerings of the CSLC should be clear to students from the moment they enter the CSLC or its website
  - a. Clear information points and signage should guide visitors throughout the CSLC. A central announcements board or [ideally] a flatscreen panel should advertise upcoming events, resources and services at the CSLC. All rooms, facilities and the reception/directors areas should be clearly marked for purpose and freedom of access. Foreign language television could also be played on a centrally visible screen in order to advertise its availability.
  - b. The CSLC website should include detailed information about all CSLC resources, services and programmatic offerings as well as links to a multitude of language-specific online & offline resources. An online matching system and online reservations mechanisms are vital.
  
- 5) The CSLC should work closely with language departments and carefully develop lines of communication and articulation for programmatic development
  - a. Language program coordinators (or another representative) from each language department should work closely with the CSLC in order to develop events/activities/services directly relevant to the needs of their students; ideally, these individuals would receive a course release or some other form of college/departmental support in order to facilitate this role. Obviously, this proposal would require significant discussion and further development.
  - b. The CSLC should implement a Professional Trends Committee with the language program representatives in order to advance interdisciplinary exchange and provide a collegial forum for professional development (This may be an area of overlap with Specialist in Foreign Language Pedagogy). In addition, the CSLC should implement a Steering Committee composed of senior faculty in each language department in order to shape the direction and evolution of the CSLC and its services to the needs of individual language department faculty and students.
  - c. A CSLC listserv should be developed in order to notify language departments and faculty of upcoming programming and events.
  - d. A CSLC newsletter should be published each semester in order to highlight the role of the center and maintain lines of communication with other departments across campus.

- 6) The CSLC should provide structured opportunities for students to practice language and interact with other language learners
- a. A tandem matching program for students wanting to study/practice together should be developed. In addition to the already proposed peer-tutoring program—or perhaps as a compliment/alternative to that program—students should be able to submit a request to be matched with a conversation partner or a small discussion group as a means of practicing the target language. Conversation partners and small group discussion leaders should, ideally, be native speakers of the target language. However, advanced language students (particularly those who have spent time abroad) will likely need to play a role in any such program as well. International students will need to be recruited. Payment or course assignment credit would likely serve as a significant aid to the success of such a program. In addition to the conversation partner and group discussion matches, language faculty should also be able to look to the CSLC to help them arrange class exchanges via keypal (i.e. email) projects or actual videoconferencing exchanges. Clearly, any of these programs will require significant logistical planning and significant collaboration with other departments.
  - b. In addition to the tandem programs, language departments should consider the idea of a ‘5<sup>th</sup> hour’ (i.e. language center hour) concept in order to involve students in the CSLC programming and integrate that programming with individual curricular goals. Students would gain much more from the CSLC if their involvement in CSLC programming was recognized by and integrated with their language coursework.
  - c. And, of course, in close collaboration with language department representatives, the CSLC should facilitate a wide array of language-cultural learning programming: from language roundtables, sociocultural/political discussions and cultural events/celebrations to film nights, foreign language book clubs and study abroad information sessions. These sorts of activities and events should drive much of the active student involvement in the center and would greatly benefit from a ‘5<sup>th</sup> hour’ type scheme as described in the item above.

*- Language Center Recommendations (2008)*

With these considerations in mind, a physical space for Notre Dame’s CSLC was developed that emphasized foreign language study through community and communication. Collaborative ‘language’ booths were installed to facilitate interaction.



*Image 2: Students using collaborative booths in the CSLC*



*Image 3.1: Collapsible tables & stackable chairs  
on wheels*



*Image 3.2: Collapsible tables & stackable chairs  
on wheels*

Flexible furniture, white boards and workspace—wheeled and collapsible for easy transition to break-out groups and foreign language activities—were selected in order to allow for a diversity of pair, group or class sized interactions. Such an ability to rapidly change interactional, instructional and functional formats for a given room was a priority for the Center.



*Image 4.1: Wheeled whiteboards in  
Multipurpose Classroom*



*Image 4.2: Wheeled whiteboard & collapsed  
wheeled tables*

Technology was integrated into this flexible design by eliminating the traditional computer stations and replacing them with dozens of floating laptops armed with foreign language support software. Computer projectors were installed for larger share points and a multimedia room was created to allow for videoconferencing and dedicated multimedia-intensive technology use. A small kitchen space was also added in order to facilitate the inclusion of foreign language food and even cooking within the context of foreign language activities, curricular programs and cultural events.



Image 5: Students using CSLC kitchen for a cultural event



Image 6: Computer projection during a faculty workshop

Windowed walls connected each room through design, yet allowed for separation at a moment's notice. An initial blueprint for the Center demonstrated this open yet componential nature of the space design:

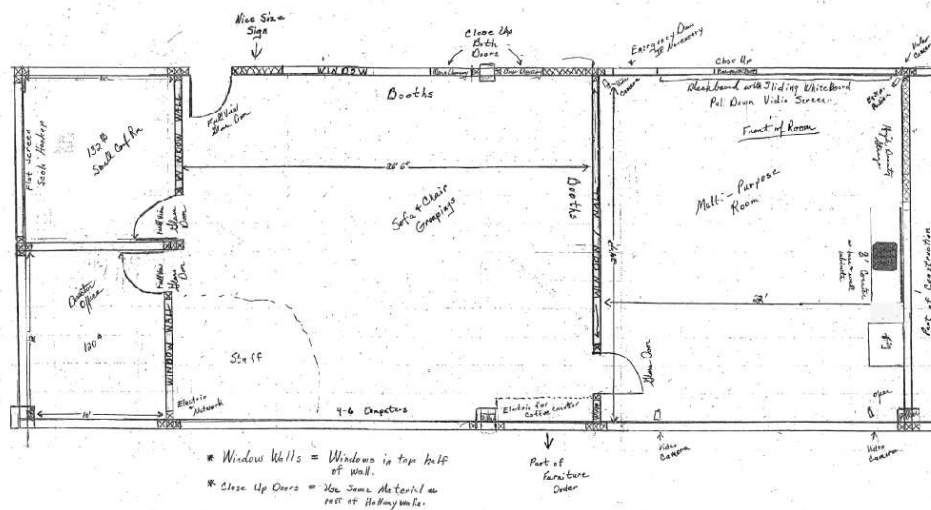


Figure 1: Early blueprint for the Center for the Study of Languages & Cultures (2008)

In sum, the center was divided into four parts:  
1) An informational desk and faculty/staff office;



*Image 7: CSLC main informational desk*



*Image 8: CSLC Director's Office*

2) A lounge area emphasizing interaction via collaborative language booths and collaborative study spaces;



*Image 9.1: CSLC Lounge area being used by students*



*Image 9.2: Student studying in CSLC Lounge area*

3) A multimedia and conference room dedicated to videoconferencing, small group study/instruction and fixed technologies like recording equipment; and



*Image 10: Student videoconferencing in Multimedia room*



*Image 11: Students using multimedia computers for video*

4) A multipurpose classroom incorporating flexible and collapsible furniture, a small kitchen area and a foreign language resource library.



*Image 12: Foreign language class in the Multipurpose Classroom*



*Image 13: German art exhibition in Multipurpose Classroom*



*Image 14: CSCL Resource Library*



*Image 15: CSCL Periodicals Library*

The latter space was intended as much for faculty use as student use. Created primarily as a space to experiment with new pedagogical techniques and technologies, as well as a space to model and evaluate such teaching, the multipurpose classroom was designed to be a home for foreign language pedagogical innovation and faculty professional development. The result was an innovative space that engaged students and reinvigorated faculty.



*Image 15: Sign in front of CSCL*



*Image 16: Entrance to CSCL*



*Image 17: Student language event*

## **II. Transitioning from Lab to Center: Implementation & Operation**

Initially, this vision for a collaborative and interactive community learning space served as the primary focus for the development of the CSCL. Soon, however, the need to situate the CSCL within the larger ecosystem of the foreign language programs/departments, the college and the university at large pushed the Center into a greater scope and mandate that sought to facilitate foreign language learning, cross-cultural competence and internationalism on a much grander scale. Indeed, the Center's unique mission and placement within the university quickly

demonstrated its potential to serve as a fruitful facilitator and collaborator in a wide variety of programmatic, departmental and institutional initiatives involving foreign languages. This awareness thus led to a remolding of the multifaceted roles of the Notre Dame language center and the development of the six essential roles of a modern language center as outlined in the previous chapter. For the sake of continuity and clarity, this rubric of six roles will be used to explicate the approach taken by the CSLC in its own transition from lab to center:

*1. To Provide validation, advocacy and an intellectual home for contemporary approaches to language teaching and learning grounded upon sound principles of second language acquisition.*

While the former Notre Dame language lab offered individual faculty consultations and a number of local events to raise awareness of emerging trends in second language acquisition research and pedagogy, the lab lacked the resources and institutional support necessary to make any widespread institutional impact. By contrast, the new language center has been provided with both the resources and the support to develop a strong intellectual home for informed second language acquisition pedagogy. The Center, in conjunction with the affiliated college ‘Specialist in Foreign Language Pedagogy’ and in close consultation with foreign language department chairs and faculty committees, has launched a series of foreign language pedagogy events. Leveraging its collective expertise in foreign language technology and pedagogy, alongside the goodwill it garners through consistent support for foreign language faculty, the CSLC has been able to offer pedagogical workshops; faculty discussion panels; language pedagogy conference funding and post-conference roundtables; a new invited speaker series featuring prominent foreign language pedagogues from around the country; and even the development of proposals to host several large foreign language technology conferences—and perhaps, in the future, the creation of a small regional conference as well. These new initiatives, coordinated with stakeholders at all levels and across all language programs, have brought considerable visibility and legitimacy to second language pedagogy and the faculty devoted to such best practices. A new program of foreign language liaisons between the CSLC and individual language programs has also helped to disseminate these initiatives and maintain clear lines of communication among these various stakeholders.



*Image 18.1: A CSLC sponsored faculty workshop*

*2. To directly support student foreign language and culture learning both within and outside of the Center via targeted services, resources and programming.*

The former language lab was largely limited to facilitating self-study and individual practice via its lines of computer station carrels. Although there was an early recognition of the need to move language lab support away from such behaviorist and cognitivist dynamics, the physical limitations of the lab space and the fixed placement of the computer carrels



*Image 18.2: A CSLC technology workshop*

stifled even the best of these intentions. The new center, however, features an innovative and highly flexible space alongside services, activities and programs intended to support language learning according to contemporary principles of second language acquisition. A notable offering via the new center is the CSLC Peer Tutoring program. This program hires faculty nominated advanced language students who receive extensive and regular training in second language acquisition feedback and who meet with students in need of targeted feedback or practice. The program works closely with faculty liaisons within each language program in order to customize the tutoring parameters to their respective curricular needs. Thus, while the Chinese program requires all of their first year students to spend 30 minutes each week practicing and receiving feedback on their tones in small groups of 3-5, the Italian program asks its second year students to see a tutor and receive individual feedback on the first draft of their papers. Still others use tutors for remediation—sending students work with tutors on areas of deficiency after a failed assignment or test. This customized and curricularly integrated approach for peer tutoring—a genre of foreign language support whose value lies in its low-anxiety peer construct and the ability for a type and degree of individualized feedback unfeasible in the classroom—is a purposeful theme among all CSLC programs. Indeed, meeting the respective support needs of individual language programs by coordinating CSLC offerings with program curricula is precisely the facilitative and integrative approach that the center aims to provide in all its student language learning initiatives.

In addition to peer tutoring, the center offers a plethora of other services, activities and programs intended to directly support student learning. For example, the CSLC currently offers: Tandem programs that match highly motivated foreign language students to organize regular weekly/monthly meetings to focus on developing greater conversation fluency (e.g. weekly readings of Arabic news editorials and discussion), facility in a particular professional domain (e.g. Chinese for business) or supplement cultural content in the foreign language (German politics or

Japanese animation); weekly foreign language conversation tables led by advanced students and/or faculty and often incorporating readings or assignments from class; conversation partnerships that match foreign language students with native speaking international students for weekly language exchanges; foreign language film events including a faculty led pre- and post-film discussion often coordinated with classroom assignments; foreign language fieldtrips (e.g. visiting local/regional cultural exhibitions or events) coordinated with foreign language student clubs; language learning strategy seminars that teach students how to maximize their language learning in class, during self-study and while studying abroad; cultural immersion events ranging from Arabic cooking lessons to Spanish salsa dancing and French theatrical performances where the foreign language serves as the medium of communication; as well as many more small and individualized activities intended to support individual language programs and classes (e.g. videoconferencing exchanges, foreign language book clubs and game nights, etc.). All of these programs are carefully situated to provide students with structured opportunities for new learning, controlled reinforcement and feedback as well as meaningful interaction and practice.



Image 19: Japanese students' Origami event



Image 20: CSLC peer tutoring session

*3. To support the integration of technology into language learning and teaching within and outside of both the Center and individual language courses.*

While Notre Dame's former language lab did an admirable job of supporting student learning via a variety of fixed recording-playback technologies and dedicated computer software, the advent of web-based language learning technologies has offered a variety of new tools that extend the reach and impact of the new language center's support while also aligning function with contemporary principles of language teaching and learning. The CSLC supports student and faculty technology use in a variety of ways, and certainly via targeted language software and and/or web-based ancillaries. Additionally, and in close consultation with departments, the CSLC has worked to promote and train students and faculty in the use of tools that bridge the instructional environment.

WIMBA, one of several popular voice board technologies, offers a good example of this. The CSLC has been working closely with departments to train faculty to use WIMBA as a means of substantive oral language practice and individual feedback outside of class. It is important to note that WIMBA is not, on its own, a language learning technology per se. Rather, it is the informed pedagogy of individual faculty (developing meaningful and linguistically explicative prompts, providing appropriate forms and frequencies of corrective feedback, etc) that drives this technological intervention and makes it effective. The CSLC was able to serve as an effective mediator for this technology and thus advance a role of technological expertise in language learning that was not visible in the previous language lab model. Similarly, the CSLC's initiatives to promote blogs and wikis for both individual language programs and individual language classes is built upon principles of second language acquisition that use these generic technologies as a medium for substantive language learning assignments. In this manner, the CSLC is bridging the gap between technology and language pedagogy by providing teachers with both the tools and the pedagogy necessary to maximize learning.



*Image 21: CSLC Video board & computer stations*

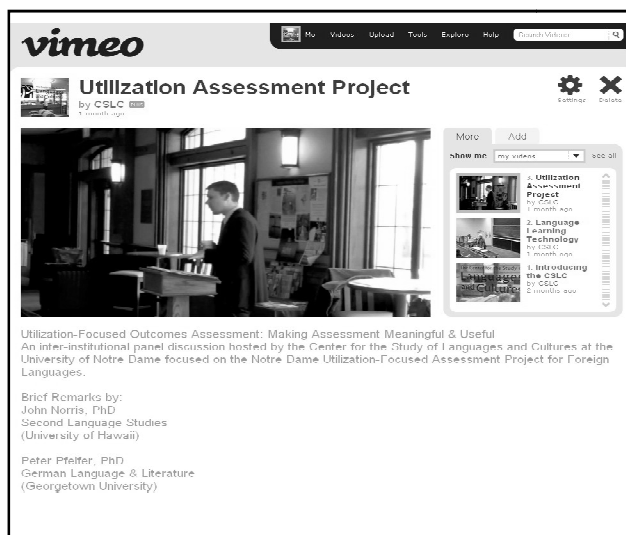


*Image 22: CSLC webpage with Arabic course blog*

4. To support or administer informed models of foreign language assessment for all language programs.

While the previous language lab lacked the infrastructure to initiate dialogue on comprehensive and coordinated indices of assessment across foreign language programs and departments, the new

language center has both the infrastructure and the mandate to help develop and coordinate a coherent assessment structure for all language stakeholders. Working closely with departments, the CSLC has initiated a number of pilot programs for exit benchmark testing using ACTFL OPI and WPT instruments alongside a systematic review of both placement and proficiency evaluations as well as faculty assessment workshops. The CSLC has helped to form faculty and administrative committee structures to examine foreign language assessment needs and to coordinate departmental efforts with college initiatives. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the CSLC has begun working closely with a collection of foreign language and humanities departments to develop bottom-up learning goals at the program/department level in order to implement substantive process-based models of facilitative assessment within courses and curricula. Throughout all of these initiatives, the CSLC is able to disseminate informed models of language assessment that meet the coordinated needs of students, faculty and administrators. This approach has significantly raised the Center's profile within the institution while also providing an important opportunity for greater foreign language curricular efficacy.



*Image 23: Video still of CSLC assessment project panel discussion*

*5. To substantively support the professional development of all foreign language faculty via facilitative programming, instructional resources and pedagogical training.*

The Notre Dame language lab was able to offer only minimal, ad hoc and largely technical training and instructional support to faculty. Conversely, the Notre Dame language center offers a comprehensive array of informed foreign language pedagogy workshops, foreign language teaching speaker series, conferencing funds and roundtable discussions, technology training sessions, and a host of remedial to advanced student support programs customized to course curricula and faculty teaching needs. While such programming, funding and infrastructure is extremely important, close consultation with and inclusion of faculty in these events is fundamental to their success. By soliciting faculty needs and then creating and customizing professional development or instructional support initiatives according to these needs, the CSLC is able to

cultivate community and increase the relevance and impact of CSLC programming. Such faculty investment is critical to the success of any professional development or instructional support role.



Image 24: Faculty-led pedagogy workshop in the CSLC



Image 25: Invited CSLC lecture on language technology

*6. To provide coordination and strategic vision for all language programs/departments in order to meet institutional outcomes for foreign languages specifically and internationalism generally.*

While the language lab operated in a largely ancillary and passive service role to language programs and departments, the new CSLC works in close collaboration with language departments, the College Dean and the Provost's Office to lead institutional language initiatives. Working within a committee structure chaired by the CSLC and composed of all foreign language department chairs as well as associate deans, the language center plays an important role in the development of strategic language initiatives at local and institutional levels. Through this committee, all of the other five essential roles of the language center can be effectively addressed while simultaneously coordinating these efforts with programmatic/departmental curricula and college/institutional priorities. Through the language center's leadership, an informed approach to second language acquisition can be effectively and harmoniously integrated with the needs and priorities of other foreign language stakeholders across the institution. Similarly, working with the this latter committee, the Office of International Studies, the Provost's Office, and various international institutes and centers, the CSLC launched a carefully coordinated language study summer abroad program which incorporates the best practices for language acquisition in study abroad immersion. This initiative alone has greatly improved the articulation of language learning and study abroad across the university and to great and visible effect.

### III. Reflection & Conclusions

The University of Notre Dame's transition from traditional language lab to contemporary language center was a recursive process of systematic consultation and deliberate development driven by a need to improve foreign language teaching and learning as well as pursue the significant potential of the Center for the Study of Languages & Cultures within that endeavor. While the nuanced and detailed decisions of location, design, furnishings and program development have been carefully delineated above, there are a number of other equally important factors that must also be considered in the development of such a language center. Indeed, within the present case-study, from the outset, this process sought to carefully consider the theoretical intentions of the project with an eye towards the practical implications for the university ecosystem as a whole. More concretely, this transition has found significant success not simply because it started from informed theory and vision – though this was a critical component – but rather, more than any other single factor, the new language center has achieved considerable impact because it has consistently solicited the advice, feedback and consultation of all potential stakeholders across the institution. Though such an approach has proved slow and non-linear in the present case, it has also allowed for much of the language center's substantive work – the work which directly impacts learning – to be accomplished. Thus, in order to achieve the greatest impact within each of the six potential roles of the contemporary language center above (and in the preceding chapter), it is vital that such a center has the active support of not only the direct users (i.e. students and faculty) but all stakeholders across the university. Only through a strategic, interdisciplinary approach of collaborative support can the modern language center reach its full potential.

### IV. Dedication to Ursula Williams' Vision

It is with profound admiration that I dedicate this chapter to the late Ursula Williams. Ursula was the longtime and much beloved director of the University of Notre Dame's Language Resource Center and the principle force behind the early transition from language lab to language center. The success of the Center for the Study of Languages & Cultures is her legacy.

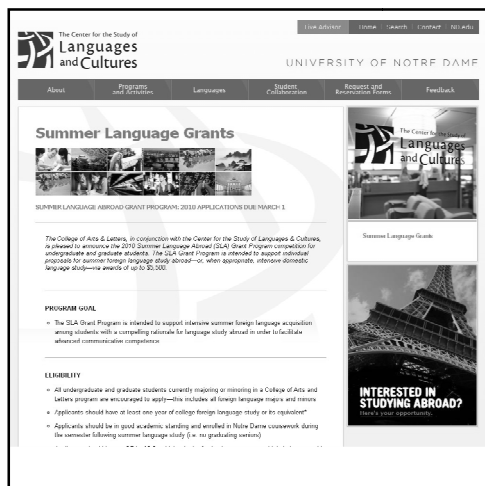


Image 26: CSLC Summer language abroad grant program description

## Chapter VI

### **The Language Learning Center: Blending Traditional and Virtual Spaces**

Betty Rose Facer  
*Old Dominion University*

#### **1. Introduction**

Language Learning Centers take on an array of shapes, sizes, and technologies that clearly reflect the goals and initiatives of its faculty and students. Some Centers are fortunate to have multiple rooms with the additional space for various activities. That said; of course cost certainly plays a significant part. Any new Center or renovations to an existing Center will face the harsh realities of cost effectiveness in a fiscally challenged time. In addition, administrators, Facilities Management, and Campus Computing Services will always look for the easiest and most cost effective alternatives. Their best intentions may not always coincide with the proven technologies, equipment, or furniture for language learning. Moreover, attention must be paid to the design of a Center that addresses the needs of the physical space as well as the virtual space. What does this mean? Although the past decade saw the change from analog to digital technologies or the creation of the “Virtual” space, a balance or blending of the two environments remains essential.

It is always a challenge to create a space for learning with ubiquitous technologies that are continually changing. One must anticipate and respond to faculty and student needs. This forward thinking is crucial when designing, renovating, or maintaining a Center with traditional and virtual spaces in mind. And although the focus was never about foreseeing the future, a versatile and well designed Center can easily adapt to changing faculty, students, technologies, and foreign language teaching styles.

#### **2. Background**

The Language Learning Center at Old Dominion University has seen a sharp drop in student and faculty activity due to a number of innovative online initiatives. The advent of digital audio and video online creates a popular Virtual Online Language Center that is certainly more convenient. On the other hand, it opens up more space in the physical Center for additional language learning activities, initiatives, and research to take place. Moreover, this becomes a golden opportunity to showcase to the campus community just what the Center has to offer and how it supports language learning with technology.

Even with innovative projects and online resources and materials, the physical space is necessary for students and faculty to use as a specific learning community dedicated to language education. To prove this point, we began to survey students on the use of the Language Learning Center and the Virtual Online learning environment. Students are asked to (1) rate their satisfaction with the: LLC, Virtual online environment, staff, LLC website, (2) indicate what they used, what could be added to serve them best, how often they used the Center, and (3) make suggestions for improvement. Responses will continue to be gathered throughout the fall 2009 and spring 2010 semesters (see 5.0 Appendix). Not surprisingly, the initial survey responses indicate the value of both learning environments for students. Student survey responses included: longer hours, more reading and resource materials, more foreign language software options, and more classes held in the Center. Furthermore, Old Dominion University students still appreciate the ability to access online materials with the use of a fast Internet connection that is free of problems. The survey continues to provide insight on how students see the Center and how they would like to see it progress.

### **3. Main Focus**

The new or renovated Language Center strives to support and blend both the traditional physical space and the virtual space for students and faculty. The Language Learning Center at Old Dominion University has undergone two major renovations that reflect the changing needs of students and faculty toward the best learning community environment. The original space of the Center was designed to accommodate the greatest number of students using the materials in the Center and classes practicing drills with the Sony LLC-9000 Turn-Key Console. This spatial efficiency allowed for rows of 38 student carrels to dominate the room. Such a configuration served its purpose during the early 1990's for some fifteen years (See figures 1-4). This was a time of increased cassette, recording, and video (VHS) use. This also served the essential purpose of serving students in greater volumes. Lab manual activities were only available in the Center for students to complete assignments.



*Figure 1: The SONY LLC-9000 Turn-Key Console*

Instructors benefited from the technology offered by the Sony LLC -9000 Turn-Key Console to enhance a variety of student interactivities. Language drills and recordings were easy to create and evaluate. Students enjoyed the “game” of paired activities to determine or guess who their partner was using the target language. In addition, the teacher-student communication functionality made assessing pronunciation effortless. Area high schools utilized the console and carrels for their annual standardized language testing.



*Figure 2: The SONY LLC-9000 Turn-Key Console*

The Sony LLC-9000 Console was truly the state-of-the-art technology for our faculty and students. The continuation of the turn-key lab was a major consideration for our renovations, but the cost was a major obstacle. Instead, the Center opted for the Sanako solution on only fifteen student stations of the teaching center. In this sense, we have a combined use of both the Turn-Key option and the open lab.



*Figure 3: Rows of Carrels in the Language Learning Center*



*Figure 4: The Sony LLC-9000 Console and Rows of Carrels in the Language Learning Center*

### **3.1 Former Center Disadvantages and Limitations**

#### Learning Community Space

The downside of the carrels and Sony Console arrangement was the lack of any true space dedicated to the community of learning. A long waiting line of students entering the Center was not uncommon. But, the shift to accommodate the virtual online environment was inevitable. With the advent of online materials available to students 24/7, the LLC usage by students became increasingly less of a necessity for what instructors term the “busy work” or audio/video activities of the lab manual to accompany the textbook. In addition, students routinely complained that the space was limiting and was more reminiscent of their high schools years rather than a college atmosphere.

#### Security/Monitoring

Another disadvantage to the row of carrels was the issue of security and monitoring student assignments during class time. The tight configuration meant that an instructor could not easily move around the Center to oversee student progress. Student workers from the Center were recruited for this monitoring task. This resulted in an inefficient use of time. In addition, the inappropriate use of internet and electronic communications system was difficult to supervise.

#### Training and Fear of Technology

Instructors were, often times, fearful of the technology associated with using the Sony LLC-9000 for class. Recalling the proper functionality for certain activities became an obstacle to the lessons. Even with continual training and workshops for instructors and student workers, use of the LLC-9000 Console declined. The recent renovations to the College of Arts and Letters have made every classroom mediated and, therefore, less intimidating for instructors to apply similar techniques to the mediated Center.

#### Support

A major consideration to any Turn-Key Center is the issue of technical support from the vendor. Increasingly, this became a hassle as our technical support service was located 476 miles away from the University. The console was prohibitively expensive to maintain after the warranty expired. Instructors and students alike had little patience for malfunctioning equipment. Although this is less of an issue today with convenient webinars and online training on the use of newer technologies, it certainly played a large part in our decision to continue with a complete Turn-Key lab when planning for renovations.

### 3.2 Renovations, Advantages, and Lessons Learned

Over the years, our Language Learning Center has maintained a faithful following of students eager to benefit from the unique and dedicated space for foreign language learning. This learning environment continues to offer specialized software, online audio and video materials, web-based course access, SCOLA VideoStream Service, a highly trained student work staff able to answer questions and assist students (most with native speaking abilities in the languages taught in our department), extensive tutoring services, and support on special projects such as podcasting. In addition, students insist that the Center offers them the ability to access online materials and courses with a faster internet connection than that found in

other labs, the library, or home. Old Dominion University's "non-traditional" student enrollment, or students over the age of twenty-eight, is still grateful for the computer access and competent staff to address any questions and/or concerns they may have. They too understand that technology can enhance their class work, but should not inhibit their ability to complete tasks.

The renovations to our Center in 2006 centered more on the learning community with a blending of traditional and virtual environments. To accomplish this, we divided the same room space as before into (1) a resource center and (2) a teaching center (See figure 5). The carrels and rows still exist, but to a lesser degree and seven student stations were removed to make room for a conference table and comfortable chairs in the center of the room to designate teaching space from resource center. This is now a popular space for student collaboration and tutoring.

In addition, the open space of the newly renovated Center easily lends itself to monitoring student work. Instructors and student workers move effortlessly about the room. The resource center established eleven carrels: five against one wall and six against the opposite wall with two student stations in the middle.

The mediated teaching section can accommodate three rows or fifteen student stations (See figures 6 and 7). The larger class size can overflow into the resource Center. Old Dominion

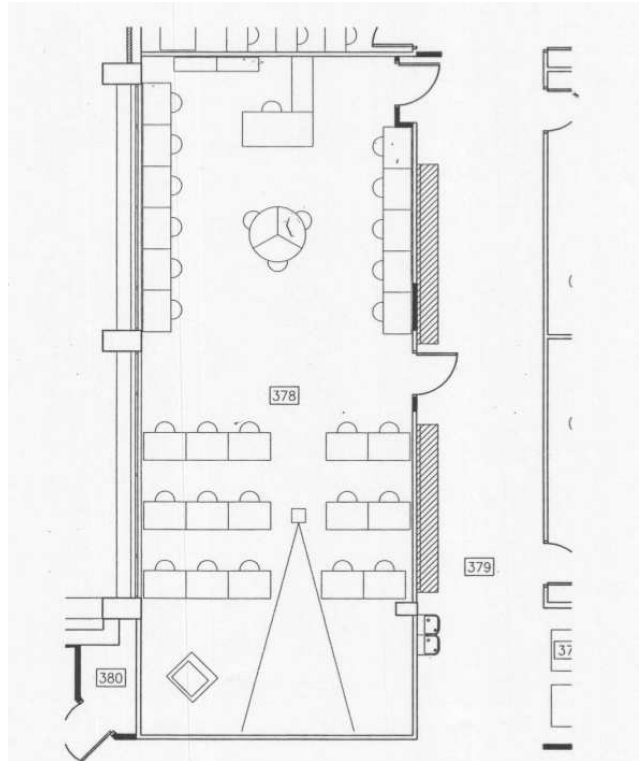


Figure 5: The Renovated Design Plan for the Center

University's Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures has a class cutoff size of 25 students. In addition, this smaller teaching area is well suited for student/faculty workshops, student tutoring services, language club meetings, and film screenings.

Finally, to create a relaxing atmosphere of culture and learning for students, a local artist from Williamsburg now displays her artwork in the Center. This idea was the inspiration from Dick Kuettner in the Tucker Multimedia Center at Washington and Lee University.



Figure 6: The Renovated Center for Teaching

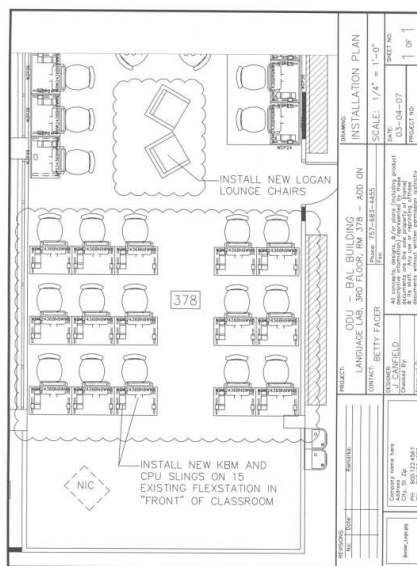


Figure 7: Design Plan for the Teaching Center

### 3.3 Outside-In-Approach

Once our Center was (re)established, it was necessary to co-locate and collaborate on Language Learning Center resources across campus and in the community. This allowed us to draw on shared resources while gaining funding support in the process. In effect, this translates to outreach, committee membership, marketing and advertisement, and a focus on the strengths of our individual Center and Foreign Language Department.

In an effort to dispel the common misconceptions that Virtual Centers online were able to replace the traditional physical space of The Language Learning Center, Old Dominion University embarked on an all out LLC campaign to regain, maintain, and develop the virtual and physical space as significant learning environments with a variety of language learning options. This was commonly referred to as the “Outside-in Approach.” In other words, as Director, I worked endlessly to broaden the scope of the LLC, including pace and users. This meant working with other disciplines, departments, colleges, and the Hampton Roads Community (the Norfolk, Virginia

Beach, Chesapeake, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Hampton, and Newport News metropolitan area). I spend more time outside the LLC than I do inside it! This approach gets the word out about our Center, brings in more faculty and students, and brings in much needed support and funding. This approach has put the Language Learning Center in the unique position to assist and, at times, support the initiatives across campus. As a leader in foreign language acquisition and technology, faculty outside the department routinely consult with our Center on specific projects and grants. Such collaborations continue to foster student learning, faculty projects, innovative technology and networking across campus.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Whether design plans are for a new Language Learning Center or renovations to an existing, yet outdated one, the unique learning community that is created within the Center ultimately becomes a special space for students, faculty, the campus, and the community. As such, the learning community space is a major consideration where the balance and blending of traditional and virtual environments is essential. Options for turn-key lab and/or the more open space must be carefully weighed. Faculty will determine the best use of their space and how they envision their courses being enhanced by the technology of the future. Students will continue to seek out this space devoted to collaborative language learning with their classmates and the assistance of a knowledgeable Center staff.

Once the decisions on space are made and the newly designed Center is complete, collaboration and outreach beyond the Department is indispensable. This will highlight your efforts to the campus community and establish the Center as a leader in the field of language learning/acquisition and technology.



## Chapter VII

### Language Centers at Small Institutions

Felix A. Kronenberg  
*Rhodes College*

The recent renaissance of smaller language centers merits its own chapter as their design and functions may greatly differ from larger ones. One general rule for language center design is that no center is alike and that each needs to be adapted to fit the particular situation. Questions we often ask are: what are the students like, is it a public or private institution, is it a K-12 institution or a graduate school, and so forth. In this chapter I would like to add a fundamental, often neglected criterion here to the discussion: is it a language center at a small or a large institution? Small language centers are very different from those at large institutions, and thus merit their own chapter in this publication.

While there are no clear-cut boundaries, small language centers often serve a limited student body, are often located in liberal arts colleges, smaller universities, and K-12 institutions. Common are the limitations of space and staff that force language center design teams at small institutions to not only evaluate the anticipated functions, usage and scope of the language center, but also to make certain concessions and create areas of emphasis. In this chapter I will discuss not only the unique parameters that come with the design or redesign of small language centers, but also provide recent experiences and solutions from the design of two spaces at small liberal arts colleges (Pomona College and Rhodes College).

#### **The Basics**

Establishing a design team or task force is an essential first step. Ideally it is a mixed group including at least the director of the center, language faculty, and a student. The team should conduct a needs analysis (see below) and conduct research about recently built centers at peer institutions. Visits to some of those centers who share the institution's and department's views are worth the travel cost. Hiring an experienced language center director or designer as a consultant is not uncommon and will provide the more neutral view of an outsider. IALLT (and its regional affiliates), which also publishes this volume and offers the language center design workshop at its biannual conference, can help establish such contacts. The group should also provide an overview of current technologies, pedagogical trends and models.

### **One Center - Many Functions**

It is necessary to view a language center not as a single unit because it encompasses a variety of often separate and even contradictory functions. These can be divided into separate sections and rooms when enough space and staff are available. For example, larger centers have classrooms, a social area, production and recording rooms, group and individual study spaces, a videoconferencing room, etc. When such square footage and staffing resources are not available, however, several functions need to be combined into a single space.

The theoretical functional units include, but are not limited to:

- teaching space
- drop-in lab
- social space
- resource center
- training space
- (video) conferencing venue
- storage space

In large language centers, we can often find each of these functions in separate rooms or sections. Small centers, however, often only consist of one or two rooms, creating the need to consolidate functions within one room and to decide on priorities.

But such limitations can also be advantageous, forcing the design team to do a thorough needs analysis and have the difficult discussions before the building or remodeling process. Making use of every square foot is essential in small language centers. Questions that should be answered before meeting with the architects or building planners in addition to those outlined in previous chapters include:

- Which services will students and faculty utilize in the center that they cannot be performed elsewhere?
- What sets it apart from other campus or virtual spaces?
- Who will use this center? Only language faculty and students?
- Will you use the space for teaching purposes, or is it mainly a drop-in lab for students?
- Will this be a regular classroom, or only one for "special" sessions? Will it be limited to language courses?
- What happens in the small space when a class is in session and drop-in students wish to work quietly in the center?

- Is the center adequately staffed? Is there a director? Are student workers present at all times, or is the center open when it is not staffed?
- Are there security issues?
- Do the language faculty agree on a common purpose of the language center? Do some yearn for a center with the functions of a traditional (audio-lingual) lab? Are they well informed about current technologies (even if they haven't used them yet)?
- Are there existing software and hardware needs?

The first question is essential. Too often language centers are underutilized, lacking a specific mission or purpose. If other places on campus can assume its functions, the difficult task is to assess why a language center is needed in the first place. Articulating the essential functions is the first step. The design team has to then decide to abandon functions that could be fulfilled by other spaces on campus (e.g. a sound-proof recording booth) or through online tools (audio recording), or that have become less important or obsolete (e.g. making audio tapes available for check-out). The MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages asserts the importance to “[t]hrough a language center or other structure, develop a forum for the exchange of ideas and expertise among language instructors from all departments. Such structures prove invaluable in boosting the morale of teachers and improving the quality of professional and intellectual life” (2007, p. 10). Focusing on the core tasks of the language center, the functions that make it unique and indispensable, should be the driving forces of the new design or redesign plans. This needs analysis has to be completed before even thinking about spaces, walls, or the number of computer stations.

### **Two Examples**

These two newly built spaces (Pomona College: 2007; Rhodes College 2010) meet the parameters of a small language center: around 1,000 sqft., limited staff, and a small student body (under 2000 in both cases). Both institutions already provide a large number of services elsewhere on campus: modern computer labs, recording booths, multimedia equipment, course management systems, smart classrooms, etc.



*Entrance area is always open. Sliding doors can be closed to create a closed space in the back*

Early on the decisions were made that only certain class sizes could be supported due to space limitations. One compromise was that for most work, students could and possibly even should be able to share computers. Other computer labs on campus would have to be used for larger classes in which students would each need a computer. At Rhodes College, we started with only 12 computers in the teaching section with room to expand. What has become apparent in both instances is that while in-class computer access would be valued by the faculty, other features such as interactivity, a blended environment, collaborative features, and mobility were more important than a room filled up by computers. Another compromise was that specialized features should not be replicated: a soundproof recording booth, a dedicated videoconferencing room, and a cinema-style projection arrangement were available elsewhere on campus. It also became apparent that not all software and supportive requests could be fulfilled due to the limited staff and budget of a smaller center. Focus technologies and activities were identified and equipment streamlined and standardized to be able to support the greatest number of people. For instance, it may be necessary to decide on one operating system and take into account that some software may not run due to that decision. Another example would be to support only one software for a certain function, e.g. digital storytelling or video conferencing, even though other program may offer different options and possibilities.



*Large screens foster collaborative work*

The problem of accommodating a drop-in section, a classroom section and a resources space, features deemed essential after the needs analysis, led to flexible partitioning decisions. At Pomona, the space was semi-divided into three distinct sections, with a mix of solid (with frosted glass) and mobile dividers on casters, which could also function as whiteboards or magnetic exhibition spaces. Teaching could take place in the section furthest from the entrance, allowing individual patrons to access the first two sections during class sessions. At Rhodes, the different layout of the space led to sliding doors with writable surfaces on the classroom side. The idea of separating the space when needed by a class or meeting is the same in both spaces, maximizing a small space. At times when nothing is scheduled in the classroom portion, it would be open to the public.

The teaching space is more than merely a classroom with computers. The setup of allows for various configurations, including u-shapes and v-shapes, tables facing each other or the wall, and lines. There is enough space to allow for flow and movement, so that the instructor can always pull up a chair to interact with individuals or groups of students. Students can write on moving whiteboards or the walls, and several can work on one computer as the screens are large and able to swivel. The table setup makes it possible to use non-technical materials and interaction at one time while allowing access to the computers as needed. This blended use reflects modern communication in real life and is thus ideal for interactive language courses. Not having the technology in the way is key to the Rhodes center, and an instructor can teach a class completely without any computer use better than in a regular classroom. The technology may, however, always be integrated should the need arise. Thus the need for a 'special lab day' or 'technology session' becomes irrelevant. The artificial discussion of teaching with or without technology becomes obsolete in such a blended space and reflect the users' communicative reality.

Other considerations in these two examples, which include dual projection possibilities, smartboards, a signage system, plenty of storage, message boards, and a constantly changing display area have been discussed in previous chapters and are therefore not repeated here.

### **Needs Analysis**

The examples above show that it is crucial to determine the needs of the different constituents: what are the essential and unique functions of the center? What does the center allow faculty to do that cannot be accomplished in other classrooms, computer labs, the library or social spaces on campus? Why should students come to the center if so much is available online, from audio files to drilling activities? What should a new space accomplish that the old language center (if there is one) cannot?



*Workshop in the Rhodes College Language Center.  
The flexible design fosters Collaboration and  
accomodates larger groups*

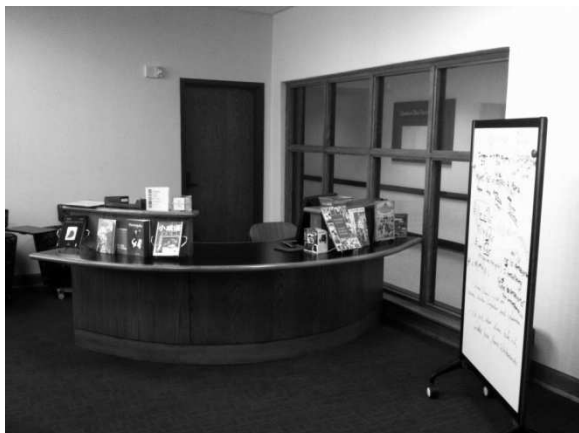
These questions must be answered before sitting down with the architects and space planners, who are often not familiar with the specific needs of a language center and who often will think of the space as another computer lab or media commons. The new space needs to have a clear mission, which will undoubtedly need to be adapted over time as new pedagogical trends, findings in second language acquisition, and technologies emerge in the years and decades to come. It is important to keep in mind that a language center with the latest equipment may remain unvisited by students and faculty if there is no inherent purpose in its construction.



*Department meeting in a different configuration. Different types of blinds ensure optimal lighting*

#### **Adaptability and Other Advantages of Small Centers**

While there are certainly space, budgetary, and staffing limitations, smaller centers can benefit from several advantages. Day-to-day operations require less oversight and work flows can be minimal, freeing up time for the director, who may be able to interact more with individual faculty members or students, and be able to teach language courses to test new technologies and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the center on a continuous basis. Individual attention and nimble adaptation to specific needs are the important advantages of the smaller centers.



*Entrance area with displays of new acquisitions and resources*



*Outlets in the floor allow increase ubiquitous power and connections for mobile equipment*

Flexibility and mobility have to be key characteristics because of the many functions and changing needs of a smaller space. It is advisable to build the space around particular technologies as they are bound to be outdated in the future. A flexible setup will allow a for variety of technology solutions in the years and decades to come. Make sure that furniture is not bolted down, that it is as movable as possible, and that functions can be reassigned. For example, in our new center at Rhodes College, even the massive front desk is on hidden wheels, and after a few weeks it was decided to change its position based on our experiences with the flow of patrons. The classroom portion changes on a daily basis, accommodating different learning and teaching styles. The situation dictates the layout, not the blueprint. A larger cinema class demands a different layout than a smaller discussion or project course session. During drop-in hours, students and student groups make the space their own.



*Front desk on wheels at the Rhodes Center*



*Row configuration*



*Standart configuration*



*Angled configuration*

It is certainly more difficult to come up with truly flexible design. ITS, planning committees and architects alike prefer immobile solutions for maintenance, visual and financial reasons. It is important to communicate a need for adaptability because when the planners leave, the department will not have another chance for a major update for many years, if not decades. Providing more electrical and ethernet outlets than initially needed will make future changes possible, as rewiring would be often prohibitively expensive. While plenty of wall outlets are important, true flexibility will be achieved by flush outlets in the floor, allowing for different table set-ups in the center of the space. Making the language center as future-proof as possible is key. Do consider a sustainable set-up: will you be able to maintain the space in the future?

Can the number of computers be kept up-to-date? Getting initial funding for a building project or an upgrade is generally easier than obtaining additional operating funds; one reason is that a new space is more appealing and visual to donors and administrators compared to better day-to-day operations. If you anticipate that a large number of high-end laptops cannot be replaced easily in the years to come, you might have to make some compromises and settle for a more sustainable set-up.

For example, at the Rhodes center we decided to have fewer computers but better, more flexible furniture, and that a set-up of mini towers with larger screens (in contrast to laptops) allows us to refresh machines less often and continue to use the high-end monitors for at least another refresh. Feedback on the larger screens has been very positive, and the movable computer tables allow for collaborative work and different center configurations. The need to make such concessions before the center is built may lead to a more thoughtful layout of the new language center.



*Pod chairs feature an attached table and space for bags*



*Students can write on movable whiteboards, on walls, and are able to move around with ease*

Other feedback from the needs analysis at Rhodes College led to many non-technology needs that are crucial to the center's success. Writable walls throughout the space allow faculty to shift the center of the room or create a decentralized learning environment. The same surface was applied to the dividing doors. The movable walls' multiple functions include extra writing surfaces, exhibition spaces, and room dividers. Different lighting options are another characteristic of an adaptable space. Can different types of activities be accomplished during different lighting situations? Can the space be dark in order to watch a movie during broad daylight? Will there be glare on the computer screens caused either by the artificial or natural light?

Location, Location, Location. This real estate rule is a factor that is often not in the hands of the language center planners. If you have any say in this decision, take this very seriously. Many centers have decayed because they were located in basements or in faraway places on campus. Both faculty and students will make considerably more use of all functions of the space if it is easy to reach. The space may also become more of an incidental and casual meeting place. If accessibility is limited, patrons will only frequent the place if absolutely needed. And if the reasons for using the center aren't well articulated and presented, the center will be an empty one.

But even if location is not a choice, several factors can make the center more accessible. Windows, glass walls, and doors allow for a more open and inviting presentation. Make sure it is easy to look and to get into the space. Consider an informational space elsewhere on campus, for example via an electronic signage system, or online, for example via social networking tools.



*Outside of the Rhodes College Language Center.  
Visibility and easy access encourage  
frequent use of the language center*



*A spontaneous session of a French  
Gameshow PS3 game for up to  
8 students and professors.*

## Outreach and Promotion

The role of the language laboratory was well-defined: to provide a space that allows students to listen to audio recordings, to be able to repeat and record one's own voice, and possibly to be paired to other students in the lab. Even though the *raison d'être* of language centers has changed, many faculty and staff members in the larger campus community still view their main role as that of a space where students come to listen, record, and do drills. It is important to articulate the language center's role before starting with the new or upgraded design, and to continue to update its mission as the center grows and adapts. Communicating this will also force the planning team to critically think about what the new space is needed for.

Planning a big opening event, being in touch with the communications office, producing sustainable and up-to-date online spaces, such as web sites, social media, etc., and being present on campus beyond the confines of the center are crucial elements that will help communicate that the new space is so much more than a traditional language lab. Promote the language center as a concept that blends the virtual with the physical space: neither can work without the other. Functions that can be fulfilled online, such as delivery of audio and other multimedia files, voice recording, drills, assignments, and grammar activities, should be made available online. Focus on the reasons why a physical space is needed: social interaction, face-to-face instruction, tutoring and mentoring, technical and pedagogical support, physical technology (for camcorders, voice recorders, microphones, etc.) and media repository, and professional development. These functions are at the heart of many small language centers,



*Poster wall and view into the language center from the hallway*



*Entrance area and language lab exhibit in the Pomona Foreign Language Resource Center*

and that's where the focus of the development process needs to be.

In the Pomona center we implemented a language lab history section, displaying old media and lab equipment to emphasize the changing role of the language center. In both centers, a lot of attention was paid to a constantly changing and up-to-date media, resource, and holdings display. A poster series in the Rhodes center shows visitors and patrons the many functions and possibilities the center offers that may not be directly visible. For example, illustrated instructions show how to play foreign language video games on computers or PS3s, how to create a foreign language karaoke event, and how to set up large flatscreens for collaborative work. Items in storage are made visible through the displays, and another section of the poster series shows teaching tools and technologies.

### **Conclusion**

Bearing in mind that each situation is unique, over the years several general trends and experiences have emerged. One hard question that has to be asked is: Do we need a language center anymore? The answer is 'yes, but for different reasons than in the past.' Many tasks are getting easier, and they can increasingly be done online. Bickford and Wright (2006) explain this shifted reality: "With more powerful communication outside the classroom, space planning will ask how best to serve community needs as opposed to delivery needs" (p.50). We cannot take any function for granted but need to be able to adapt to new realities. A primary function of the language center is to keep abreast of new developments and communicate these to the campus community - faculty, students, and staff. Sorting through ever larger amounts of information, trends, technologies, and tools will certainly continue to be a crucial role of the language center, where new initiatives and changes will be spearheaded. The social aspect certainly is one that needs to be emphasized as more and more tasks go online. Speaking and interacting with each other is often a hallmark of smaller liberal arts colleges and schools. Hybrid models may also find support in the language center, as groups and consortia of smaller institutions collaborate to pool their resources. Support is a function which increasingly may be provided virtually or in a blended way to faculty and students, so it is important to emphasize the strengths of the individualized and nimble attention that the center can provide.

The current overall trend is that a revival is happening at small liberal arts colleges, seen in the many new centers or redesigned ones. This happened despite warnings of physical language center spaces becoming obsolete. This can be attributed to the fact that recent innovations in technology have brought many possibilities, from new synchronous and asynchronous communicative tools to social software, from participatory applications to ever cheaper, smaller, and easier to use recording and production devices, from ubiquitous computing to virtual worlds. Smaller and more mobile devices and new web 2.0 services also level the playing field for centers

that are not backed by programmers and a larger staff. The smaller, more flexible footprint means being well prepared for future changes and developments.

But one aspect in smaller colleges is crucial - the human element. Students choose to come to small institutions for the individual interaction and attention, and completely virtual language centers cannot provide that. Keeping these strengths and advantages in mind will make the needs analysis easier and necessary compromises more apparent.

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## Chapter VIII

### **Special Needs and Usages to be Considered in Designing a New Center**

Barbara Sawhill, *Oberlin College* and Ryan Brazell, *UCSF*

One of the more daunting tasks that can confront a school during the creation of a language center is the work involved in making sure that this space will meet *all* of the needs of its users between the time when the lab is shiny and new until the next budgeted equipment upgrade or replacement. The language center is more than carrels, audiotape recorders, and headphones. In addition to a place where students use existing media and technology, there need to be spaces available for faculty and students to evaluate, create, tinker, and experiment with the language as well as technology in order to create materials for language learning. Quite often it is the language center (Language Resource Center, etc.) that is expected to provide such spaces for the realization of these dreams.

This chapter will discuss some of the “special” places that you may wish to include in the blueprints for your space. These suggestions come from lab directors who have witnessed patterns of usage by faculty over the years. Some of these ideas may not seem applicable to all institutions; however, if a language lab is to meet *all* of the needs of its constituents both now as well as in the future, then these suggestions should be given full consideration.

This chapter will mention resources that you should consider in order to make sure that your center not only meets all of the possible needs of its constituents, but that it is also *accessible* to them, especially for people with physical disabilities. (Please look at the preceding module for discussion and resource URLs giving disabilities information.)

The language center should not only be a place that provides access to current language learning technology, but should also strive to encourage creation of new materials using technology. It should be a place that is prepared to adapt to upcoming trends. For that to happen, there has to be ample outfitted physical space that can adapt to the waves (and maybe even torrents!) of your users’ experiments with technology. Without this flexibility your center may be able to meet the needs of this year’s technology, but may not be able to accommodate the newest trends lurking right around the corner. What is more, the more attractive and accessible the center and related spaces and equipment are, the greater the likelihood that they will be used and promoted in the years to come. Attracting and maintaining faculty interest is essential; as Ruth Trometer, formerly of MIT, so aptly puts it: “Keeping faculty closely involved is essential to the success of any lab.”(1) What individual institutions and the people they support will need, want, and

be able to afford varies from place to place. How do we know what to install for our teachers and our students?

The process of asking your constituents to articulate what their special usage areas might be can prove to be a daunting task. As stated in the first module, a survey of teachers/instructors is a good first step. The diversity of needs may be great: the recently-minted Ph.D.s have had exposure to educational technology and have come to expect it in their classrooms while professors who are coming close to retirement may have become comfortable with comparatively rudimentary but nonetheless functional tools. In these surveys you will want to target the questions carefully. Questions such as “Do you ever have a need to record students?”, or “Do you need quiet area for listening to student recordings?” might lead you to create a studio and playback area if you receive a lot of affirmative answers. Questions such as “Do you encourage your students to do multimedia projects ?” might lead you to create a small group work area with the appropriate technologies that could be used for other needs as well. Your discussions with your users will help you be able to target the questions precisely so that you find out what percentage of users are interested in which new special use area.

Another way to anticipate your users' future needs would be to sit in on classes, review syllabi, and familiarize yourself with departmental goals. Your knowledge and experience, as well as an outsider's perspective, might glean new ideas for ways as to how the language center could meet curricular goals.

### **Virtual Spaces**

Just because you build it, doesn't mean people will automatically come. Creating a virtual space (i.e. a center website) well in advance of your new center's official opening, even perhaps as early as the center's development stage, can help you consult and engage faculty, students, staff, and teaching assistants. At the very least, providing photos of the creation process as it occurs can help keep your community informed and excited about the progress that is being made. After the center opens, let people know about the unique services and spaces offered by frequently updating your site with pertinent information. Consider using software with a web-based administration panel, which allows multiple people to quickly and easily update the site from any workstation, without knowledge of HTML. (This is especially useful if you have part-time students who staff a desk.) Also, look for software that will allow your site to be easily accessible to visitors regardless of whether they are on a laptop, desktop, mobile device, or using assistive software.

Examples of information your center's virtual space could provide include:

- hours of operation
- contact information
- pictures or avatars of current full-time and student staff

- number of workstations with details (operating system, applications installed, peripherals)
- list or database of items available for circulation
- an updated calendar with important dates (placement exams, registration periods, midterm and final exam schedules)
- links to important campus resources (email, CMS/LMS, library catalogues)
- information on the various departments supported by the center

Your center's website could also be used to distribute instructions that are useful for all language students; instead of having individual faculty members printing handouts which describe how to install language keyboards, for example, use a screen-capturing program to create a narrated video walkthrough that can be distributed via your website and viewed anytime, anywhere. If you have support staff that are skilled at programming, consider collecting and displaying real-time availability information for workstations, circulation equipment, group study areas, and other resources managed by your center.

### **“Smart” (Multimedia) Classrooms for Language Teaching**

Never forget that the lab itself can be used for teaching purposes, but that teaching space should not be limited just to the lab. The center should include, or be involved in the administration and support of “smart classrooms” or multimedia classrooms for language teaching. If it is not, these teaching spaces will often not be sufficient for language faculty. All kinds of specific teaching needs applicable to languages need to be addressed in the creation of these spaces. Examples of equipment that language faculty often need include:

- high-quality data projector, preferably one that displays a sharp image clearly in a sunlit room
- high-quality audio system (such as surround-sound)
- interactive electronic whiteboard system
- region-free DVD player
- multi-standard VCR
- document camera
- chalkboard or non-electronic, magnetic whiteboard
- multiple lighting control boxes (e.g. near the door but also near where a presenter would stand)
- podium with built-in microphone (for lecturers)
- ethernet jack for wired internet access (for the presenter)
- wireless internet coverage (for presenters and/or students)

The projector in a smart classroom should be able to accept a variety of inputs, including laptops, handheld devices with video-out capabilities, and less-frequently used items such as slide projectors and laserdisc players. Smart classrooms do not need to have the appropriate cable for every possible personally-owned device, but the center should at the very least have Macintosh display adapters available (even if your campus does not support Macintosh computers). Many institutions do not automatically provide these adapters to faculty members, and students or other invited guests often do not realize they need one. These adapters, along with a small collection of other frequently-requested cables, should either be made available for checkout through the center, or should be securely and permanently attached in the smart classroom itself.

Given the increasing frequency of laptops on today's campuses, it is common for smart rooms to have only a connector for a laptop. If you opt not to include a stand-alone computer in the smart classroom, consider keeping a small number of low-end "presentation laptops" for loan to those faculty members who either do not have a laptop, or who prefer to bring to class only the necessary materials on a small flash drive or other external storage device. These need not be high-powered machines, as they are intended only for use during an individual class period; central IT support staff often have last-generation but still good-condition laptops that can be reused for this purpose. Also consider the benefits of having multiple instances of the above items. For example, Joseph Kautz from Stanford University writes, "by pairing smartboards (smart technology interactive whiteboards), instructors can present different types of content simultaneously, e.g. video on one screen and notes / listening activity on the other / collaborative mark up, writing, etc."(2)

Your center's staff may be expected to provide faculty training on how to use the above equipment, a task which may seem burdensome for a limited staff. However the benefits of such an arrangement far outweigh the hassle of scheduling training sessions. Because of this training, faculty will use a classroom with newer technology because they know that they will receive the support needed to ensure a positive teaching experience. The more positive a teaching experience, the greater likelihood that more faculty will want to experiment with, create, and use the technology for their classes, and the more popular your center will become. Be careful to ensure that all of your staff, including part-time assistants who may be the first to interact with a panicking faculty member, are trained in troubleshooting the most common smart classroom problems.

A classroom such as this is also an excellent space for guest lecturers and candidates who need to do presentations as part of the interview process. It can also be used for faculty workshops and tech fairs/showcases. Certainly, it can be a showplace. Consider using this classroom space to host committee meetings. This should remind you as well that this type of space (or any showplace space) can easily be used for "outreach" (and public relations efforts) to other groups/faculties/departments who may not (yet) have such a space.

## **Equipment Depot**

Sue Breeyear from Saint Michaels College writes, "I'd include an equipment depot where students and/or faculty could borrow digital cameras, flip cameras, microphones, webcams, CD players, MP3 players, etc. for short-term use in language projects. The equipment should be planned into the original budget and assessed for replacement every three to four years as technologies change. The depot would include mandatory training sessions (preferably by student workers) on how to use the various items before they were signed out. Our depot is one of the most popular places in the lab!"(3) This depot could also included a small number of older devices that are called for occasionally -- for example, overhead or slide projectors, laserdisc players, etc -- but which do not need to be permanently located in the classrooms faculty use.

Your depot could be located in a separate room, if you have one available, but equipment for loan could also be stored in (lockable!) cabinets and drawers behind or adjacent to the main desk in the center. Having a variety of cabinet and drawer sizes will help ensure that larger items (like camera tripods) fit and that smaller items (like batteries, digital media, and cables) don't get lost. Also keep in mind that you will need a small-to-medium work surface for demonstrating how to assemble and use small handheld equipment, as well as some open space for small group equipment demonstrations.

Consider acquiring a number of four-wheeled carts that can be used to transport large (or larger amounts of) equipment; these will come in extremely handy when you are called upon to provide a demo that requires you to transport equipment to another floor or building, or when a faculty member needs to use an overhead projector.

## **Faculty Multimedia Workrooms**

As faculty begin to explore technology in the classroom or become dissatisfied with "out of the box" materials, they will need a place away from their offices and their students to experiment with existing applications, or to author materials on their own. A semi-private space containing at least one faculty workstation needs to be included in your plans. Please also look back at the previous modules for advice on how to configure the equipment for this kind of space. As a warning, remember to encourage faculty desiring to produce materials for commercial sale (or even for sharing outside the confines of their classroom) to verify their projects adhere to copyright laws; Stanford University maintains a comprehensive guide to copyright and Fair Use guidelines at <http://fairuse.stanford.edu/>. This room needs to be equipped for the following tasks:

- flatbed, slide, and large-format scanning
- digitizing, editing, and dubbing existing audiovisual materials
- converting existing materials for distribution on CD, DVD, or the web
- authoring new materials using a variety of software applications (*iMovie*, *Photoshop*, *Premier*, *Director*, etc.)

It is wise to have good quality machines that represent all of the most popular operating systems (e.g. Mac OS X, Windows 7) and internet browsers (e.g. Safari, Firefox, Internet Explorer, Chrome) so that the faculty can preview how their materials will look and behave once distributed. Also, faculty may receive software that requires the use of an operating system they do not have access to on their own institutionally-provided computer. The faculty workroom needs to provide this type of support as well, even if it means having machines with two or more operating systems, including older versions of the machine's normal operating system (e.g. Mac OS 10.5 and 10.6; Windows XP and 7).

Remember, this is a space where faculty need to be able to think clearly, undistracted by other activity. The Faculty Workroom should be available by reservation, with drop-ins permitted if no reservations have been booked for a specific time. Staff need not always be present during a reservation period, but a staff availability schedule should be posted in the workroom itself, as well as alongside any other materials which advertise the workroom. Staff who have been trained in using the Faculty Workroom should also be made available by advance appointment to assist faculty when they have questions or need guidance.

Faculty working on projects that span days, weeks, or months should be encouraged to use an external hard drive to backup or store materials on a periodic basis. Some applications, like iMovie '09, allow projects to be edited directly off an external hard drive; rather than having to use a particular workstation which may be subject to limited availability, this would allow a faculty member to access and work on their project from any computer with the proper software installed. The center should consider making a small number of high-capacity external storage drives available for short-term loans through the aforementioned equipment depot, and also to facilitate faculty in transferring their project files to another computer when finished.

### **Student Multimedia Workstations**

Similarly, students frequently need to perform work which may not be possible in the main center space. For example, a student may need to edit video in multiple sittings and so should have access to a workstation which will not delete their files when they log out. These student multimedia workstations need not be located in a separate room -- having them along one side of the center is usually sufficient, and helps ensure that the workstations can be used by individuals or by small groups. These workstations need to be equipped with the following:

- high-quality, widescreen monitor
- flatbed and slide scanners
- large amounts of file storage, either internal or external (or both)
- several easily-accessible headphone and USB ports
- audio, video, and photo editing software

Please also look back at the previous modules for advice on how to configure the equipment for this kind of space.

### **Audio/Video Recording Studios**

No matter how modest, a center should consider creating a dedicated recording "studio", as some faculty will need a quiet space to make audio recordings for their students' use. (If your Faculty Workroom has only a single workstation, it could also serve in this capacity.) Choose the location of this room carefully; as Joseph Kautz from Stanford University points out, "The importance of sound dampening in new construction as well as careful consideration of [HVAC] vent placement cannot be emphasized enough. Blowing air can make a space almost unusable for language teaching" (4) or for the recording of high-quality audio. It is recommended that you acquire a high quality microphone, or headset with microphone, for this purpose, as well as software that can be used to both record and edit audio (e.g. Audacity, GarageBand). If analog audio files will later be incorporated, also include the proper hardware (a USB cassette deck, an audio patch cable, etc) in the faculty workstation area.

Language students, guest lecturers, or even teaching assistants may also need a place to record skits or presentations. While checking out a video camera and a tripod to film elsewhere is often a sufficient solution, projects will often be more polished (and will encounter fewer environmental variables) if a well-established space is used for the final recording. If it is not possible to provide this space within your center, see if it can exist elsewhere on campus (the A/V department, library, or student union?), make sure the location and the hours of this space are well-publicized, and see if you can be involved in the set-up and use policies. You need to be sure that your instructors feel welcomed and can find both appropriate hardware and software in any area not under your direct control.

### **Small and Medium Multipurpose Rooms (4 - 15 people)**

Judi Franz from UC-Irvine explains: "I am currently adding a small teleconference facility to my lab space. My room will be comfortable for individual use (we've had requests for virtual dissertation defenses, job interviews for grad students, one student here taking a class from a sister campus in a language not offered at UCI, etc.), and for small classes who want to bring in a virtual guest speaker or meet with classes at institutions in countries where the target language is spoken. When not being used for teleconferencing, the space will be available for use by groups for project work, meetings, etc." (5)

These multipurpose rooms should be able to accommodate anywhere from 4 to 15 people as well as a variety of equipment (which may be permanently installed in the room, or for greater flexibility, stored elsewhere and brought in as needed). If you have the space for more than one multipurpose room, try to create rooms of differing sizes to accommodate a range of activities.

Important factors to consider include the room's acoustics, insulation (sound on one side of the walls should not bother those on the other), and easy access throughout the room to ethernet jacks, wifi coverage, a cable or satellite TV connection, and electrical outlets.

Other uses for this room:

- video, television, or DVD viewing
- small group tutorials, conversation, or study
- video project or skit recording
- presentation practice
- oral exams
- quiet study

Equipment for this space could be relatively simple; outfitting the space with conference tables, a whiteboard, and a data project allows Norval Bard from North Central College to "use this space for Department meetings, which I find invaluable in terms of getting our faculty into the LRC," and also notes that "the legs of the conference tables can be folded so we can collapse them and use the space for viewing or reception events." (6) On the other hand, equipment in this space could mirror that of a smart classroom; James C. Chan from IU-Bloomington says that "a Multipurpose Smart Distance Learning Classroom equipped with a high-end Tandberg, LiveSize, or Polycom videoconferencing system, a ceiling mounted document camera, a PC interface for connecting computers to the camera, a laptop, a DVD/VCR player, a large flat panel TV, and onsite technical support" has enabled his campus to offer "Akan Twi, Bamana, Indonesian, Mongolian, Pashto, Uzbek, and Wolof while providing faculty and students all the original functions when the facilities are not used for distance classes." (7)

### **Large Group Video/Film Viewing Rooms (20 - 35 people)**

Some centers are fortunate enough to have mini movie theatres (complete with sloping floors and comfy seats) for large group film viewing, or for lectures that might include feature length films. If your institution has a film studies course, this might be an attractive space for that discipline as well. A smart classroom might easily serve as a film viewing room when not being used for a class, but keep in mind that but any "movie theatre" ambiance might limit classroom activities. In addition to the equipment mentioned previously for multimedia classrooms, this room might include a wide-screen flat panel TV, and flexible overhead lighting, preferably on dimmer switches, to allow for illumination of important items (e.g. the speaker) while allowing other areas of the room (e.g. around the screen) to be dark.

### **Discipline-Specific Spaces**

If your institution has a simultaneous interpretation program, a phonetics program, or other programs/disciplines that will specific technology needs allied to what your facility can offer, then you may wish to confer with the faculty who teach in those areas to see what equipment and space they might use in your center in order to accomplish their goals (assuming, as always, that you have determined that it is a good idea to support these programs in your area). It could be that the individualized student stations or the small group rooms described in this module will meet their needs. It could also be that there is specific equipment for those disciplines that needs to be moved in and out of these common spaces from the Storage Space (description below) for their use. It also could be that (worst case scenario) neither of these ideas will work and they need a specific room for their needs. Still, if you have determined that it is to your center's advantage to support these instructors and their disciplines, you can help them in acquiring such a space.

### **A Room of One's Own – And a Separate Room for the Support Staff**

The center director will need dedicated office space with room for personal items as well as storage. If the director has a dedicated facility, they will also need meeting space for small groups. As a warning, if a director is not given their own office in a design/redesign, that director may wish to start looking for new positions. Image often does reflect reality and reality is often reflected in image. A director without an office is a staff person with no clout and is likely to have little support from the institution. Beware!

Additional staff (if any), including other full-time employees and part-time students, will need their own space as well. Support staff are usually located near the main desk / circulation desk / equipment depot, and need to have room for paperwork and studying, as well as for secure storage of their personal belongings. If there is a separate staff room, this room can be used as a lounge, for staff gatherings, or as a limited social space, and for working with paper and non-computer media.

The staff space can also be where the creation and editing of materials to be distributed through the center occurs. (Beware of mixing food and frangible materials!) This space should be separate from either the Faculty Workroom or Student Multimedia Workstations, and although it may closely resemble the Student Multimedia Workstations in terms of equipment and configuration, should be reserved solely for staff who are actively working on projects for the center itself.

### **Storage Space (Never Enough Space!)**

Even though "going digital" can make our lives less dependent upon paper, you *will* still need closets and drawer and cabinets and SPACE to store materials of all kinds and equipment. Every center does this differently, but rest assured you can never have enough storage space for the

materials your faculty will use, create, or have on reserve for students in their classes. However, please design/redesign your center with more storage space than you think you will need.

Materials archiving becomes an important topic here. To take some of the pressure off in your never ending quest for space, you will want to recycle materials and throw out unused materials. Of course, just when you have decided that it is time to dump those cassettes from 1968, someone will want access to them. For directors of centers with extensive archives of materials, these are real challenges. Space for archiving is a necessity. An archiving management tip: Some directors who need to dispose of unused materials will identify such materials and then send out a list to all faculty who may have an interest in those materials. If no one requests saving those materials, they send out a second note which states that the materials will be disposed of. Some directors have even been known to have the relevant faculty initial this note! If Prof. J. comes in the following year and asks what happened to those 1968 cassettes, the director has a written record of the process on file.

Still, for anyone considering archiving materials, it is crucial to remember that the shelf life of media can be unexpectedly and disastrously quite short, especially if you are storing these items in a basement or in a place without climate control. The storage space should not have sudden changes in heat or humidity as this significantly shortens the life span of the archived materials. Even in optimal conditions, materials will degrade. It is important to be very knowledgeable about material degradation and have plans for renewing crucial items, whether using the same technology (e.g. having an archive of textbook ancillary CDs that do not circulate) or newer technology (e.g. digitizing the audio from out-of-print albums or cassettes to uncompressed WAV files).

Finally, do not forget to plan for both actual and future equipment storage needs. If your faculty use DVD-players, audio CD players, etc on a regular basis, you will need a place to house this equipment safely. A media equipment storage room that can be secured is an important facet of the center set-up.

### **The Server Has its Needs, Too**

Should your center decide to embark upon streaming of video and audio, or require a dedicated server for the distribution and storage of media, you may be required to house a server. Servers can be very picky and usually require a windowless, climate-controlled location in which they can happily do their work. The size of this space depends upon the size of your server. Refer to the second module for further discussion of servers and their needs.

### **Don't Forget to Design for Flexibility in All Special Spaces**

Ruth Trometer of MIT is again correct when she states "Architects never seem to understand that language centers are not static. Things change, frequently." (8) If you can have the flexibility of

including open cable runways or a raised floor, where wires are easily accessible under a tile instead of being hidden in walls or ductwork, do it. If you anticipate that you will need thirty workstations, understand that you may have more in the future. Build in open workspaces where those with laptops or non-digital paperwork can work with elbow room.

Get as many electrical outlets as you can, even if it seems excessive, and make those outlets easily accessible throughout the space. Be sure you have enough Ethernet jacks and wifi coverage as well. If you can avoid having your furniture bolted to the floor, do it. As the usage patterns grow and shift over the first few years, you may benefit from having movable walls, movable carrels, re-configurable spaces. Deanne Cobb-Zygodlo from Kutztown University envisions that "in our next redesign (maybe 10 years when a new building comes?), we will likely be looking at fewer desktop systems or a greater use of laptops/netbooks, etc. Our emphasis will be on a greater number of network drops and easier to access power outlets. I am also considering whether there is a way to use a similar set up but with laptops or netbooks as opposed to the desktop models (because in 10 years, who knows where virtual computers will be)." (9)

Derek Roff from the University of New Mexico wishes all his spaces were laid out like the campus Sign Language Lab, which has "computers along the walls, with open space or a few tables in the middle. Students can face away from the room's center, and toward their computers, and do focused individual tasks. Then they can face the center and interact as a large group, or move their chairs and form a number of small groups. There is plenty of space for small group presentations to the larger group." (10) Also look back at the previous module for details about center flexibility in general.

### **Wireless Access Points, Laptops, and Mobile Devices**

If your center is not fully covered by your campus' wifi coverage, you may wish to consider purchasing and maintaining your own wireless access point(s) to fill in the gaps. Be sure to check with your central IT department first, however; they may have specific instructions for how you must set up the access point, or may offer to install additional access points to prevent you from having to do so. Ensure all of your center's workstations, especially the multimedia workstations, have wired internet connections, and reserve the wifi for visitors with laptops or mobile devices.

You may also wish to consider providing easy access to power for those visitors who want to use or charge their laptops and mobile devices in your space; this can be easily accomplished by placing a surge protector with several well-spaced outlets in between each group of 3-4 workstations.

### **Accessibility for All**

Your center should comply with the American with Disabilities Act and become a place that is accessible to all students. One might consult the Lab Management section of the IALL Journal,

Volume 29, No 1 for an article by Linda Jones of the University of Arkansas about furniture considerations for the disabled. There is a collaborative project involving U.S. universities called DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology) based at the University of Washington. They are a valuable resource for information regarding ADA requirements and the needs of people with disabilities. (11)

In addition, the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) has information about Universal Design for Learning, a "a framework for designing curricula that enable all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning" regardless of ability or disability, available on their website at <http://www.cast.org/>. Again, review the previous module for more details about this issue.

### **The Lounge and/or Social Space**

There might be a lounge or social space for staff as mentioned above, but it important to decide if you also want a public social space (for club meetings, tutoring sessions, etc) in your center. This is a tough question and one that needs to be addressed by faculty and students over a long period of time. Some institutions deal well with this kind of space; others do not. This space can enhance a Center or detract from the center's work; be sure to look at your own staffing and visitors very carefully when considering this kind of space.

### **Conclusion**

Meeting all of the needs of your center's constituents at times may seem like an overwhelming and costly endeavor. Technology, and the way language teachers use it, is always changing. Rather than striving for the most cutting-edge space on campus, create a center that best fits the needs of your public at the moment, and yet will be flexible enough to grow and change over the course of many years. Including some of the "special" places mentioned here is a start towards that goal.

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## Final Remarks by the Editor

### **“What to do next?”**

Felix A. Kronenberg

*Rhodes College*

This volume is an excellent resource for all those wishing to design or redesign a language center. I hope that you find the authors' chapters useful and inspiring. So what can you do now that you have finished reading this book? Here are 5 concrete steps that you can take:

1. Go to the companion web site at <http://www.iallt.org/lcd> and find additional materials and resources that the authors contributed. Please note that this resource may not be immediately available.
2. Consider joining a professional organization, such as IALLT or one of its regional groups. This will put you in touch with colleagues who are experienced in the field of language learning and technology and language center design.
3. Attend a conference. IALLT always offers at least one dedicated workshop on language center design. This is also a terrific networking opportunity, putting you in touch with colleagues who are in a similar situation as you may be. There are also numerous presentations and panels on issues of language center design and management. The regional conferences are also a great way to connect with institutions and professionals nearby.
4. Go visit other language centers! Contact directors from nearby and/or recently built language centers. See as many centers as you can, and note what you like and don't like.
5. Hire a consultant. Language center directors who have experience in language design are an excellent investment, and will help you avoid costly mistakes and give you ideas that you have not previously considered. It also helps to have an outsiders view.

One last word: please consider contributing to the next edition of this book. I am always looking for contributions from those who are in the process of building a new center, or who have recently completed such a project. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to submit a chapter proposal, or if you have any further questions or comments about language center design.

Felix Kronenberg

