



Memories of Language Camps

by Jan Letson, FLASCC

This year marks the 34th year the teachers of FLASCC have offered three-day immersion language camps. Today, approximately 80 to 100 students of Spanish and French leave the comfort of their native languages for a new experience of survival in the language they have “dabbled in” for 45 minutes to 90 minutes a day at school.

I was one of a group of teachers in 1973 who was inspired by the news of language camps in other areas and wanted to give it a try in Santa Clara County. We already knew that, due to our classroom limitations of time and curricula, we couldn’t “spread our creative wings” to allow our students to experience living “in” the language. We were also frustrated that so many cultural things unique to the societies of our beloved languages were impossible to re-create in the school setting. So when we found the county science camp site empty on weekends, we contracted to use it and set forth planning how to engage and inspire our students.

We had to create a template for both days and nights to keep all participants actively speaking and ourselves not too exhausted in the process. We had meals, schedules, dorm assignments and discipline as well as varied activities and rest periods to consider. We had students with differing levels of language to inspire. As we were responsible for the students 24/7, we had to assure a team of teachers was always available while others caught their breath. We had to chaperone the dorms and even monitor the bathrooms to keep “drop-outs” and—horrors!—English to a minimum. We allowed our students to create skits and projects of their own as well as follow directions for more authentic games and learning activities. We did create a schedule which allows for creativity for both teachers and students. and which has remained intact for over three decades.

After more than three decades of camps, we have a few guiding principles:

1) Allow our students the time to make the mental transfer from English to the second language. and engage them for as much of the weekend as possible—human endurance and homework demands considered. That meant Friday after dinner for the students until Sunday after lunch. That allows teachers to have everything set up before our campers arrive and to have a closing ceremony, farewells and time for clean up.

2) Our arrival process of going through customs in the country is quick and simple, using basic level I identity formula, yet firmly in the language, setting the tone for the weekend.

3) The opening ceremonies include an “ice-breaker,” some fun sketches by the teachers to show we are willing to risk something new, and—most importantly—an oral pledge on the part of ALL PRESENT to keep in the target language the whole weekend. We model how to solve language memory gaps and review how to ask how to say something without speaking paragraphs in English. AND WE ALL SIGN IT! (NOTE: consequences are also given for refusal to comply. It makes it much easier for student and parents if a recalcitrant student must be sent home.)

4) Place maps and directions and schedule EVERYWHERE so the lost may be found and confusion does not take over

5) Make Saturday NOT like school, full of physical activity and laughs as well as culturally authentic new things. Keep it moving, yet allow for several short pauses in activities for students and teachers to be quiet for a while.

6) Have a theme for each camp which can easily lead to ideas for games, learning, foods and decoration. We have used cities, regions, cultural events and

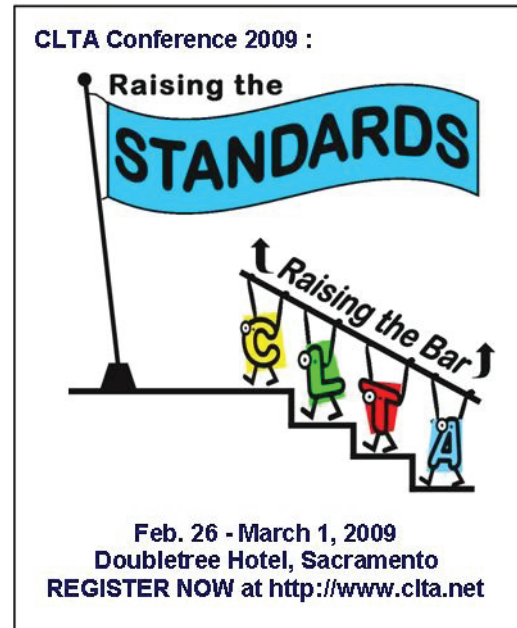
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even comics as themes. It keeps things new for the teachers and allows for students to return to camp for two or three (yes!) years.

When we started these camps in the pre-Proposition 13 era, we had school busses to transport students and schools willing to finance supplies and a county willing to allow county teachers and students to use the camp site at very low rates. Today, we face mounting charges, no busses and increased competition for our students' time. In the 70's we offered two weekend camps of each language with over 200 students per language; today we offer one weekend each for Spanish and French, with 70-100 students. But the results are still the same; students return to class jabbering easily in the target language and bring glowing reports of the friends they made and the experiences they had, making lots of other students envious and making all believers in the merits of language immersion. It is why we teach, right? Why else would we keep it up?

If you have any questions, please contact me. I can advise you and guide you to the current chairs of our language camps for 2009. (janletson@yahoo.com)



Shining the Light on Conference 2009

By Carol Eberhart & Tanya Zaccone, FLAGS Conference Co-Chairs

Afraid of the dark?

We know times are dark—with budget woes on all levels from world and national to state and local, maybe including your school site. We also understand you must protect your own pocketbook in times of uncertainty. So, of course, you are quite choosy, wisely so, about how you spend your money. FLAGS (Foreign Language Association of Greater Sacramento) and CLTA invite you to consider why this is a prime year to join us in Sacramento for Conference 2009: Raising the Standards, Raising the Bar.

First, note the inspiration and information from outstanding speakers: Senator Gloria Romero will speak at the Friday evening banquet; Toni Thiesen, our new ACTFL Teacher of the Year will speak at the Saturday Plenary; and Eileen Glisan, newly-elected ACTFL President, will speak at the Sunday Brunch.

Also, it is finally time to see the results of the last several years of your CLTA and affiliate Advocacy work on the Standards front. If all goes according to plan, California will adopt Foreign Language Standards by March, and this

Conference is where, for the first time, you will hear about Standards and how to apply them in your classroom. You will also have an opportunity to meet those brave souls who have been working for an entire year, our brand-new Futures Team, full of young and enthusiastic professionals who will be leading us into the 21st century.

As always, you want to be a part of the invaluable workshops and interest sessions. Take advantage of dining and entertainment within walking distance of the hotel, and savor opportunities to view products to enhance your teaching. Remember the value of networking, sharing, and heart-warming recognition of your friends and colleagues. Plus, you have a chance to win a free trip to Europe provided by ACIS.

Still afraid of the dark? Don't be.
We'll leave the light on for you.

Challenges and Opportunities: Community-based Language Schools

By Norman Léonard, Director of Outreach LARC

We hear unendingly of globalization of the economy and that our children must be multilingual to cope in a globalized economy, but little thought is given to why this might be important step in social progress and how we will realize this capacity. This article seeks to explore some of the challenges and opportunities that community-based language schools face. I have some experience working with a number of such schools in San Diego and in Arizona, in Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Kurdish, Mixtec, Turkish and Vietnamese. The chief challenges confronted by communities are insufficient money, affordable classroom space, quality curriculum, age-appropriate and well-designed textbooks, access to credit or high school equivalency, and professional staffing. But where infrastructure does not currently exist for offering programs in public schools, community based schools offer our youth opportunities to learn from speakers of critical languages, to interact with speakers born in other lands and to see the culture through the eyes of their instructors and through interactions with children who were perhaps born in other nations. Such experience possibly could help them to rise above stereotypes that even teachers of foreign languages sometimes unwittingly pass along, especially in languages such as Spanish and Arabic that are spoken in very diverse cultures. What then are the challenges faced by community-based schools?

Challenge: Lack of money may be a problem in some communities that have not attained prosperity. Schools may rely entirely on tuition that some families cannot afford. Parents are already tapped out holding fund-raisers for their children's school activities, religious institution and charities. In some communities this challenge is sometimes alleviated by a benefactor from the community. **Opportunities: Apply for after-school funds to offer language programs just as already exist for sports, art and crafts, music and health programs. In California community-based schools may collaborate with school districts to gain access to these funds that can cover, at least in part, classrooms, janitorial services, instructional materials, textbooks and some salaries.**

Challenge: Affordable classroom space is also a challenge. Many community groups don't have an educational wing associated with the organization or religious institution. If they have, there may not be enough classrooms for the ages and varying abilities of students. Some schools make

arrangements with local universities or public schools, but often the fees are higher than the program's tuition collected. Businesses are not often disposed to lending spaces to such programs due to security issues. **Opportunities: Work with the local school district to apply for special funding for after school programs such as exists in California. Such funds can provide use of public school facilities and related fees, textbooks, teacher salaries, instructional supplies and snacks.**

Challenge: In addition, some local communities have no one who can write a curriculum that is age appropriate. These programs are often textbook driven and do not develop the communicative skills that are the main purpose of language learning. Fulfilling University of California A-G requirements is essential for all college-bound students. **Opportunities: Work with a local university-based language expert to write a curriculum that meets district equivalency standards and apply to the districts of schools the students attend to have their language study at the community-based school noted on student transcripts. We have done this in San Diego in Arabic, Persian and Turkish.**

Challenge: Textbooks, in some languages, tend to not be written in an attractive and age-appropriate fashion. Some may exist in paperback and are produced in the mother country. These books are not aligned to California's Framework for Foreign Languages and the National Standards. Some exceptions happily exist, but not for most of the languages with which I deal. Publishers here in the United States cannot afford to publish textbooks without a large volume of sales. **Opportunities: Collaborate with the California Foreign Language Project that offers nationally recognized professional development guiding teachers in creating standards-based curriculum and lesson plans and in developing instructional strategies. Community-based language schools and teachers can have access to these programs.**

Challenge: Students frequently face scheduling conflicts. If the school meets during the week after school, students must find time to complete the homework assigned during the regular school day, participate in extracurricular activities and attend the language classes. It is rarely better on weekends when students may have athletic, drama practice, and volunteer activities. When combined with the need to be competitive, many students choose to

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study Spanish since, in some districts and schools, that is often the only language for which they may earn AP credits. **Opportunities: Work with the public schools to determine an optimal time for their classes to meet that will not cause conflicts for students.**

Challenge: Staffing is also a problem. Few communities have members who are language teachers by profession. Most of the schools with which I deal rely on unpaid or poorly paid teachers. Also most universities have no programs for teacher preparation in less commonly taught languages. **Opportunities: As stated above, the California Foreign Language Project offers recognized professional development that will guide teachers in creating standards-based curriculum and lesson plans and in developing their instructional strategies.**

Yet hope springs eternal for honoring the many languages and cultures that form one beloved nation, America. Through the National Security Language Initiative many students are receiving free intensive instruction in languages that the government deems "critical". Their teachers may also benefit from intensive teacher training. This initiative is also sending some students and teachers abroad for extended language studies. This is a par-

tial Opportunities to the funding of language programs. Through these STARTalk programs, students of a number of languages, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Persian and Urdu can complete hours to be counted towards their high school equivalency if the district agrees. We accomplished this in San Diego with the assistance of the Office of Language Acquisition in San Diego City Schools. Some university professors have voluntarily written curricula that are age-appropriate and have offered teacher training without remuneration. Some public schools are providing classrooms for after school language programs particularly in the case of Arabic and Chinese.

Your friends may want to begin a community-based language school, too. One resource we developed at the Language Acquisition Resource Center is a Manual for the Development of Community-based Language Schools. You may wish to consult this, but please be sure to develop a network of collaborators in the community and schools and to check current governmental requirements. You can find this manual at: <http://larcnet.sdsu.edu/k16.php?page=afterschool>

The logo for CLTA News features the text "CLTA News" in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. The text is set against a dark purple background. To the left of the text is a vertical orange bar. To the right of the text are three small squares: an orange one at the top, a green one in the middle, and a yellow one at the bottom.

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