Your Voice in Print:
We Need Your Ideas, Suggestions, Photos, and Articles for The Language Educator

By Sandy Cutshall

Hopefully each time you receive the latest copy of The Language Educator in your mailbox, you have a positive reaction because you are getting something that is truly valuable to you as a professional and individual. All of the people responsible for putting the magazine together strive to serve educators of all languages at all levels as a single, comprehensive resource for current and relevant news and information. In fact, it is our aim to be the source for coverage of important trends and developments in foreign language education, with lively and interesting feature articles on unique topics, as well as trusted regular sections offering helpful tips and ideas, online resources, and updates concerning ACTFL and the rest of the language education profession.

Since its launch in January 2006, The Language Educator magazine has been sent to our organization’s members six times each year (January, February, April, August, October, and November) as a benefit of ACTFL membership. We have also regularly sent complimentary issues to non-members as an incentive to join ACTFL. Membership in ACTFL has risen significantly in the past five years and ACTFL Executive Director Bret Lovejoy credits much of this rise to the increase in useful, relevant member services offered by ACTFL, including the introduction of The Language Educator.

Over the past five years, we have been gratified to receive very positive feedback in the form of letters to the editor, posts in the ACTFL Online Community and on Facebook, e-mail messages, and in-person comments. We always encourage anyone who wishes to share their thoughts about the magazine overall or specific articles to please contact us and let us know what you are thinking.

Some recent comments have been particularly encouraging.

“The Language Educator is a great resource for the profession!” notes Instructional Technology Specialist Cindy Kendall at Ingham Intermediate School District in Mason, MI. “I read every issue cover to cover. You all are doing great work,” says French Professor Laura Franklin from Northern Virginia Community College. “Such great articles!” adds Toni Theisen, French teacher in Loveland, CO, and 2009 ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year.

“I like very much the variety of it all: currency of topics, subjects of articles, length of articles, and the points of view of the authors. I also find it visually appealing both with photos and graphics,” says Kathleen Riordan, retired director of foreign languages for the Springfield (MA) Public Schools and past ACTFL president. She notes that what she likes to see most is a “blend of articles written by language educators as well as other writers” and that it is best “when the profession makes the publication its own by contributing to its quality articles.”

That contribution—that’s where YOU come in!

We Need Your Voice

The Language Educator relies on a small cadre of professional writers and editors to put together a quality product, as well as extensive input from ACTFL senior staff who carefully consider every item that is published in the magazine. However, the quality and relevance of the magazine relies not only on the guidance and management of ACTFL and the work of our professional staff, but also on the active participation of those working in the language classroom and the administrative office. We need you to be part of this process.

Have you ever thought about something specific you wanted to read about in the magazine? Does your school or institution have an exciting, innovative program that you want to share? Are you an expert on a topic that your colleagues would benefit from learning about—or do you know someone else who is? We urge you to bring it to our attention so we can consider it for the magazine.

Some people may be saying to themselves, “I have a great idea, but I’m not a writer,” or “I’d like to see an article on this topic, but I don’t have the time or inclination to put it together.” We know that sometimes people have a really great idea but just aren’t ready to write it themselves. We still want to hear your suggestion! If it sounds like it would appeal to our audience of language educators, we can have a TLE staff writer work on the article.

Perhaps you know a colleague who is an expert and you could encourage this person to write an article on the area of their expertise. If that person is uninterested or too busy, go ahead and make the suggestion and let us follow up with an interview. If you attend a great session at the ACTFL Convention or...
How to Submit Something Great AND Get Your Article Published!

When working on an article to submit to the magazine, we suggest that you ask yourself the following questions:

- **Is this subject of interest to educators who teach a different language, beyond my specific level, or outside any other small sub-group of which I am a part?** When writing for The Language Educator, bear in mind that it is a purposefully broad publication, meant to appeal to everyone in the language education profession, and we try to include articles that any of our readers would find interesting. This means that even if an article focuses on a German or Spanish postsecondary program, for example, the writer should be thinking if what they are saying could be applicable in some ways to a K–12 teacher of French or Chinese, etc., and to clearly make those connections.

- **Have I written this in a way that is consistent with other things I read in The Language Educator?** The magazine style that we use in TLE is different from what you may see in some other language education publications. It is neither as formal or prescribed as an academic journal, nor as casual and folksy as a newsletter might be. We try to hit the right note of clarity and accessibility for our audience, who are of course highly educated and knowledgeable about this topic, but also enjoy reading articles that include interesting details and direct quotes. Occasionally, it does work to write something in the first-person from the “I” point of view, but in general we suggest that you stay away from writing your article in this manner. Try to think more broadly, beyond what you know or have done, to how others might use or benefit from this information.

- **Have I said something that is new or different in some way?** Even the best-written article won’t make it into the magazine if what it says is so well-established that a reader could take one glance, say “Everyone already knows this!” and toss it aside. Think about bringing a new twist to a traditional idea, such as incorporating new technology with a tried-and-true classroom staple. Try to picture your reader—a colleague in the language profession—and think about what that person can gain from spending the time reading your piece. Or actually ask some colleagues (ideally in different languages and levels) to review it for you before submission and ask them if they would read this article in the magazine, if they learned anything new from it, and what else they would want to know.

**Common Pitfalls**

While we welcome all submissions, you are much more likely to have your article accepted if you have targeted our publication specifically. Take a look at previous issues and get a sense of the style of writing that we present. We also suggest that you take steps to avoid several common pitfalls:

**The Academic Research Study**

The Language Educator is not meant to be an academic journal, although we are proud to feature well-written, well-researched magazine articles. If you have done a research study and have written up the results in a specific format, with an abstract, literature review, study/methodology, data (tables, charts, figures), results, recommendations, list of references, and so on, we encourage you to consider submitting to Foreign Language Annals—ACTFL’s highly regarded official journal. [For information about submission to FLA, please go to www.actfl.org and click on “Publications.”]

**The “Here’s What I Think” Piece**

You no doubt have some great ideas for the classroom—but for an article in the magazine, you will want to consider finding outside sources to help back them up. If you have come up with something great, try running the idea or draft article by some colleagues, getting their input, and even using their comments as quotes in the article. We also encourage you to incorporate relevant research from experts in the field, but beware of simply listing a bunch of academic studies with no context.

**The “Nothing New Under the Sun” Article**

When suggesting a lesson plan or teaching method that is very well-established, you’ll want to add something new, unique, or innovative. Try to think about what makes this particular program, trend, method, or advice different.

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**JOIN US AT THE CONVENTION SESSION TO LEARN MORE ABOUT**

**The Language Educator**

**Are you curious how each issue of The Language Educator gets put together?** Would you like to submit an article or photo, provide information we can use, or learn about other ways to get involved? Since our first issue in January 2006, TLE has been providing valuable resources to the language education profession as well as an avenue for you to share what is happening in your classroom or program.

This year at the ACTFL Annual Convention in Boston, MA, we are offering the first ever session focused on our magazine, featuring ACTFL Director of Education Marty Abbott, as well as TLE Editor Sandy Cutshall and Creative Director Pauline Goulah.

Learn how to target your submission to see your words and images in print! Find out what an article should say about excellent practices in language learning and get tips for good magazine writing. Get advice about taking great photographs that we can use in the publication—maybe even on the cover!

**Friday, November 19, 2010 – 1:15-2:15 p.m. at the Sheraton Hotel, Gardner Room**

Presenters: Sandy Cutshall, Editor, and Pauline Goulah, Creative Director, The Language Educator; Marty Abbott, Director of Education, ACTFL
another conference—why not take the time to speak to the presenter and let them know you think it would make a great TLE article? Encourage them to submit something—or simply to let us know about the idea or topic.

There are so many ways for you to get involved in making the magazine the best it can be:

- E-mail an article idea so that we can follow up on it. Please include suggested contact information for interviews (names, titles, e-mail/phone), if you can.
- Answer a “So you Say” question. You can find the latest questions on the ACTFL website (www.actfl.org) and we are always interested in receiving a wide variety of responses to these language education-related questions.
- Submit a favorite website for “Web Watch” or suggest a great new software program for “Tech Talk.” It only takes a few minutes to send an e-mail with your suggestion!
- Share your tips or short stories about travel/study abroad for “The Savvy Traveler.”
- Suggest a well-known, prominent individual for a Q&A interview about language education. (It’s best if you already have some contact with the person and can help introduce us to him or her via e-mail.)
- Write up a submission for “In the Classroom” based on an action research project, broadly applicable lesson idea, or other classroom-related topic.
- If you are feeling more ambitious, submit a feature article about a larger topic that will be of interest to educators of all languages and at all levels. [See sidebar on previous page for suggestions on how to write for TLE.]

We do strive for the right blend of information in every issue, but the only way to reach it is for the readers of the magazine—language educators and administrators, from Pre-K–12 through postsecondary—to take the time to submit ideas and articles. It need not be difficult or a major commitment—some of the best article ideas and most interesting interviews have come from ACTFL members simply making a suggestion.

Looking for Great Photos and Artwork

Many people have remarked that one of the things they like best about The Language Educator is its clean, inviting look. This is due in large part to the excellent work of our graphic design firm, Goulah Design Group, who work as an integral part of the ACTFL team putting together the attractive layouts that complement the articles and information.

Often, what makes a certain issue really pop out are the images that are used. Whether it’s a striking cover shot, or quality photos illustrating a feature article, the right images can really help “show the story” and add a lot both to any individual piece and to the overall product. We encourage anyone who may be submitting an article to the magazine to consider how they may have that could enhance their submission. If you don’t have any, ask someone you know with some photography skills to take some pictures for you. (Please note: It is important that you get written permission for publication from those pictured, and parental permission is required for students under age 18.) If you decide to send a submission but do not have any photos to accompany it, that is not a problem. Our designers can also use other artwork and more general photographs to illustrate an article.

Finally, if you have a great photo that illustrates language learning, but it does not necessarily go with a specific article—we want that, too! We are very interested in receiving great photos that we might consider for our front cover, whether or not they are connected to a particular article.

All photos should be of high quality and clarity, clean and uncluttered, and at least 300 dpi. We can give you information how to either upload or send photos to us once your article has been accepted. Please do not e-mail a large number of unsolicited photos without first contacting us about them.

If you have further questions about the production of the magazine, or you wish to speak with the magazine editor, creative director, or the ACTFL director of education, please join us on Friday, November 19, 1:15–2:15 p.m. in the Sheraton Hotel, Gardner Room, at the ACTFL Convention and World Languages Expo for our session: “The Language Educator Magazine from ACTFL: Your Voice in Print.”

Sandy Cutshall is editor of The Language Educator. She is based in Mountain View, California, where she also teaches English as a second language and citizenship preparation to adults.