

Foreign Languages in Elementary Schools

By JIM PAINE ARTMAN

THE TEACHING of foreign languages in the elementary school systems of the United States has been a reality now for many years. But this fact may well be unknown to many, for only recently has the added impetus being given to the movement to increase foreign language training at the elementary level begun to attract the attention of the American people. It is indeed a pleasure to report that this movement is gaining enthusiastic support at every turn. That the time is rapidly approaching when foreign languages will occupy a permanent position of prominence in the curricula of our elementary schools is becoming increasingly apparent. In view of the world situation today and of the hopes that we hold for tomorrow, this fact appears assured. Never before have we been made so aware of the enormous importance foreign language training holds for the future in a world that continues to grow increasingly smaller around us. We can only envision for tomorrow an even smaller world in which all peoples will of necessity be more conscious of their neighbors and of the need for promoting closer harmony and understanding among one another.

To achieve such an atmosphere of goodwill and co-operation, which has been the desire of most men since the beginning of time, it is essential that we possess the key that will permit us to understand our fellow man better, and to appreciate his culture instead of merely tolerating it. The knowledge of another people's language provides us with that key. As close neighbors we will find that the exchange of ideas and the expression of our beliefs and our feelings with utmost clarity will be both desirable and necessary. To do this it will be imperative that we know much more than we do at present of the languages of these other peoples with whom we are to co-exist. The fact may be quite simply stated. If we and the other peoples of the world are to live in closer contact than ever before in the past, we must make far greater preparation for that future. We must produce citizens who will be more deeply

cognizant of our mutual stake in the affairs of the world, and who will be better equipped to understand and to seek to solve the many problems that we and our neighbors must face. The present world situation has already begun to make our nation more language-conscious, and the movement to step up foreign language training at all levels is definitely a result of the realization that we must make greater preparations for the future.

Events of the past, as well as of the present, indicate very clearly that we as a nation are not providing sufficient foreign language training to the persons who are to actively operate in the distant areas of the world into which our many activities have extended. We are simply not producing enough linguistically-qualified men and women to achieve success in the multiple tasks that we are today required to undertake. Recently, men of the international stature of Warren Austin, Bernard Baruch, Ralph Bunche, and John Foster Dulles, to name but a few, have voiced their unanimous opinion regarding the crying need for linguistically-trained personnel in all fields of our overseas operations. Persons of importance in the business world have joined with leaders in other fields in insisting that foreign languages be given a greater role in our educational programs, pointing out that the need for a knowledge of foreign languages is becoming much more acute, and that the benefits to be derived from such a knowledge are becoming more numerous.

There are those who place little faith in the value of foreign language training in bringing about closer understanding between people, but fortunately this group is decidedly in the minority. Many of them have obviously never experienced the intense pleasure of hearing a foreigner express his views in his own language, nor have they had the opportunity to sense the feeling of friendliness and closeness that the foreigner exhibits upon realizing that his listener is interested enough in him and in his problems to have undertaken to learn his language. To the foreigner, a desire to

be able to communicate with him in his own language invariably denotes a sincere interest in him. It is in this respect that language training can provide the key to better understanding and greater mutual respect. We cannot, in fact, acquire the language skills of other peoples without at the same time learning a great deal about their culture, how they think and react to problems, and in what particular features our points of view differ. More and more people are becoming aware of this fact, and every effort is at present being made to bring it to the attention of our nation. This realization of the importance that foreign language study holds for tomorrow, combined with the fact that more people each year have the opportunity to travel and to see for themselves the desirability of knowing a foreign language, has caused an awakening to the immense values, both practical and cultural, to be derived from the knowledge of another tongue.

The Most Promising Solution

But if we have not in the past been able to produce a sufficient number of persons capable of working in positions requiring linguistic ability, what are the changes that might be made to improve this situation? Many suggestions have been forthcoming, but the most promising solution, as well as the most logical, appears to be to start foreign language training at a much earlier age, at a time when the student is best prepared to undertake foreign language study and to profit by such instruction to the fullest. This would mean the introduction of foreign language study into the earlier grades of the elementary school. Language teachers have, for many years now, pointed out the desirability of starting language study at a much earlier stage in the child's development. It seems only natural that we undertake to teach the child new skills at the moment when he is most receptive to them. This is the procedure we follow in the teaching of music and dancing, as well as in many of the other arts. Language is no different. Just as in these other fields, the student cannot hope to master a foreign language in the two or possibly three years

which he at present has at his disposal for the study of that language. He most certainly learns very little about his own language in that length of time. Unfortunately, the opinions of the language teacher and of the professional researchers in the language field were in the past set aside as being far too biased to warrant serious consideration. Only recently have their opinions and ideas begun to receive the attention which has long been due them.

Let us take a brief look at the history of the teaching of foreign languages in the elementary schools. Until recently, the idea of introducing the study of foreign languages into the curricula of our elementary schools was looked upon as a complete innovation. We were then reminded, however, that the teaching of foreign languages at this level, among them English, is anything but new, having been successfully tried in Europe for generations. Furthermore, the bilingual capabilities of the majority of the people of Europe are most certainly one of the fruits of such a system.

In the United States the history of elementary school language study also holds some surprises. Facts and figures available from the U. S. Department of Education reveal that the teaching of foreign languages to elementary grade pupils in the United States is definitely not a recent development. As early as the middle of the nineteenth century, German was being taught in many of the elementary schools in cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Denver, and Milwaukee. French was taught during the same period, although to a more limited extent, in various elementary schools in New York, San Francisco, and parts of New England. In rural New Mexico and Arizona, Spanish was taught at the elementary level during the latter part of the nineteenth century. During the first part of the present century, the movement to increase foreign language instruction in the public elementary schools was renewed with added vigor. In 1921 the study of French was introduced into the elementary schools of Cleveland, Ohio, and, significantly, this program has been continuously in operation since that time. Other such programs, either in Spanish or French, were started soon after in Louisiana and in other areas of Ohio.

The 1930's saw a further increase in the number of elementary school language programs. Since that time, every decade has witnessed the inauguration of new foreign language programs in the various public elementary school systems of the United States, until at the present time there are over 150 communities in 34 states in which one or more foreign languages are being taught at the elementary level. Outstand-

ing language programs now in progress include those in such cities as Los Angeles and San Diego, California; Emporia and Lawrence, Kansas; Baton Rouge, Louisiana; El Paso and Corpus Christi, Texas; St. Louis, Missouri; Richmond, Virginia; and Seattle, Washington. These cities have been chosen at random from among those in which elementary grade language instruction is being carried on, for the purpose of making clear just how widespread the movement has become. That this movement is continuing to spread out rapidly is witnessed by the fact that in the past year over 53 new foreign language programs at the elementary school level were inaugurated. This means that now, in the United States, over 145,000 elementary grade pupils are actively engaged in the learning of a foreign language. In order to prepare for an even greater number of students in the year ahead, for many more programs are being planned for the fall of 1954, this summer saw the scheduling of over 25 college "workshops" or special conferences designed to better prepare the teachers who are to assume new roles as foreign language instructors in elementary schools.

The Problems of Change

However, the introduction of foreign language study into the elementary schools presents several problems. For example, at what stage in a child's development is it most desirable and most profitable to begin language training? Should all elementary grade pupils be encouraged to undertake foreign language study or should such training perhaps be limited to those children showing greater readiness and ability? For how long should the study of the foreign language be continued in order for the student to derive the maximum benefits from such study? What are the most effective methods that may be employed in the presentation of foreign languages at the elementary level? These and many related problems are receiving the attention of our most competent language researchers,

neurologists, and psychiatrists, who are continuing to make intensive studies of every phase of the elementary language program. Moreover, many experimental language centers have been established for the purpose of observing the effectiveness of new methods and of putting into practice many of the ideas and procedures that have been developed during years of research in the field of foreign language instruction. The teaching of foreign languages at the elementary school level is far past the theory stage, even though continuous efforts are being made to improve upon our materials and our procedures. However, the methods and materials now being employed in the presentation of foreign languages to the elementary grade pupils are based on the findings of scientific research and on evidence obtained through experimental programs now in progress in cities such as Los Angeles, El Paso, and Cleveland.

The desirability of beginning foreign language training as early as possible appears quite obvious. There is some difference of opinion as to the exact age at which such instruction should be started, but then the optimum age would tend to vary to a certain degree in different groups of children. However, it has been shown that the younger the child the easier his acquisition of a new language, for at this early age he more closely notices accents, intonations, and differences in pronunciation than later. At an early age, also, the child feels free to imitate what he hears, without much of the self-consciousness that so seriously handicaps him at a later stage in his development. Some language instructors, such as Carlos Rivera, of the El Paso Public School System, feel that the first grade, or even kindergarten, is none too early to begin to introduce elements of a second language.

There have been many reports of excellent results at this age level. The learning of any language is largely an imitative

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process, and we are well aware of the unlimited capacity of the five or six year-old for imitating sounds, new words, and phrases which appeal to him. He derives an obvious pleasure from the imitation of such sounds, and the number of them which he will succeed in retaining for long periods of time is amazing. Although hesitant to set a definite age as the ideal time for beginning foreign language study, authorities generally feel that somewhere between the ages of 5 and 10 is when the child is best prepared to begin to learn the elements of a second language.

There is no doubt as to the ability of the child to learn another language readily at this age. Many of us have witnessed instances in which a child, when placed in a foreign environment, makes the necessary language adjustments with apparently little or no effort, while for the parents the learning of the language of that country may be a very difficult task. In many instances of this nature, small children learn the language of their new country with such rapidity that in only a short time they are serving as interpreters for their parents. No, none of us underestimates the resourcefulness of the child, nor should we sell short his ability to acquire quickly the necessary language skills of another people for the purpose of making his ideas and his wants known. For the child, language represents simply a means of expressing himself, and he is not in the least interested, at this early age, in breaking that language down for purposes of analysis or comparison.

The question of selectivity presents another problem. Should all students in a given grade at the elementary school level be required to study a foreign language? Some educators feel that only those students showing superior ability should undertake to study a foreign language at this early age. The most experienced men in this field do not feel that all students should indiscriminately be required to undertake the study of a foreign language, for there will be cases in which added study of this type might possibly overburden the pupil who is already experiencing difficulty in his work. However, every child should be given the opportunity to study a foreign language and such training should be made available to all students in a given grade. There should be no attempt to restrict foreign language study to only the superior pupils, without giving any thought to the child who tends to learn a bit more slowly. Frequently the slow-learning pupil, upon finding that he has little or no difficulty in acquiring the skills of a second language, receives the much-needed encouragement and confidence that

is soon revealed in a general improvement in his other work.

The learning of a foreign language must be made as natural and easy a process as that involved in the learning of one's own language. To do this the child must be introduced to the foreign language just as he was introduced to his own, by being allowed to learn its sounds and intonations first, long before any attempt is made to teach him the written symbols of the language. The phonetic potentialities of the average child are seemingly without limit. But it has been shown that this ability to absorb new sounds decreases as the child becomes older. This fact serves to strengthen the belief that elements of a foreign language should be introduced to the child at an age when the sound patterns of that language can most easily and naturally be acquired. The basic system to be employed in the presentation of the second language varies little from that used in the learning of his own language, in that a completely oral approach to the language would be

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Does the Eagle know what is in the pit,
Or wilt thou go ask the Mole?
Can Wisdom be put in a silver rod?
Or Love in a golden bowl?

William Blake, *The Book of Thel*, 1789.

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maintained. No attempt should be made to write the second language until well after the child has begun to read and to write his own language.

A Program Has Been Outlined

The program outlined by Dr. Theodore Andersson of Yale, although representing the ideal in elementary language programs, appears well organized and very flexible. Dr. Andersson would have the pupil pass through four stages of language instruction. From kindergarten or the first grade on through the third grade the student would attend short but frequent class periods in which only the more basic elements of vocabulary would be orally presented to him. The presentation of the second language would begin with the simplest words and phrases, centering around those things closest to the child at this age, namely, his family, his pets, his school, and the community.

As the child progresses, new elements of vocabulary will be introduced. The oral approach would be maintained exclusively throughout this first stage and continued on into the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades, although by this time the pupil will show an interest in learning to read and write the second language to a limited extent. By the end of the 6th year, the basic points of

grammar will have become automatic through constant practice, yet with no formal study of grammatical principles. From the 7th grade through the 9th the oral approach would still be maintained, but the mastery of the structure of the language might well be the goal for this period, and more intensive practice in reading and writing the language could be undertaken. With the 10th grade the pupil would begin to enjoy some of the rewards of his years of language study, and the 11th and 12th grades should see the student capable of reading, for his own enjoyment, works of a more advanced nature that would be of a general educational value.

One of the greatest advantages of such a system as that advocated by Dr. Andersson is the element of continuity which is so essential if the pupil is really to master the skills of the second language. There are no time lapses during which the student is not actively engaged in learning the language. We are all aware of what happens when the student begins a foreign language and then delays several years before continuing his study of that language. If we are to achieve the results that we may well expect from such a language program, we must see to it that this element of continuity is assured. Although this program outlined by Dr. Andersson, as already pointed out, represents the ideal, many variations on this type of program are actively functioning at the present time.

The acute shortage of elementary teachers qualified to teach foreign languages presents another serious problem. However, many cities, desirous of getting their elementary school language programs under way, have solved this problem, at least for the present time, by making use of classroom teachers with varying degrees of foreign language training. Often elementary teachers with minors in foreign languages can effectively undertake such instruction while at the same time reviewing their own language training and improving their methods of presentation. Such a teacher combines the teaching of the foreign language with instruction in other subjects. Some schools are fortunate in having teachers who have, in their earlier preparation for teaching, specialized in one or more foreign languages. In such instances, this teacher may well be employed as a full-time language teacher.

Where the budget permits, foreign language teachers have been hired for the purpose of giving language instruction to all of the children in a school system, making the rounds of the various elementary schools and teaching only the classes in foreign languages. In order to initiate a foreign language program in a smaller

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tinuous development of our legal system; to foster any change which will strengthen our system of jurisprudence and help make it what we want it to be: a process for determining truth and justice in each case. Moreover, we have the responsibility of honest and honorable dealings. We should never, even in jest, do or say anything which might indicate that we would tolerate or sanction anything other than a strict adherence to the standards of legal ethics. Further, we must do our best to expose the workings of legal machinery to public view so that there will be no room for fear of it, thereby engendering and inspiring confidence in our legal system.

Sixth, as citizens of a great democracy, founded upon the premise that people can and will adequately govern themselves, we must do all that we can to see that it works. We must be active and aggressive to insure that the best men are elected to our state and national offices. Today, more than ever, people look to the college graduate, especially to the young lawyer, for leadership in public affairs. Too many times, however, good people who should take part in government are so discouraged by the quality of some few they see in public office that they, through their lethargy and apathy, let those same men continue in office by default.

In Oklahoma, we must continue to encourage industrial expansion and development. We must possess, and engender in others, a feeling of pride in our State and in what Oklahomans have done and what they can do if they work together.

Lastly, we must each of us fulfill our responsibility to our God as we see fit.

We know that we go into a trying world. We know that the hurdles are high, yet surmountable. Each of us will have his own way to solve the difficulties he meets. But we must all know that whatever

means we use, the important thing is truth in character and living, and an awareness of our duties to others.

As a careful lawyer makes his court record, we must go from here with the determination to make a record of life, to which nothing can be added or subtracted. We must live each moment as it should be lived because there is no second opportunity, for, as has been said, "We are traveling upon the level of time to that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns."

In closing, I have these specific remarks:

To Dr. Cross and the administration of the University: We offer on behalf of the graduating class our congratulations on the growth and increasing influence of a great university to whose prosperity you have so zealously devoted your efforts.

To Dean Sneed and the members of the law faculty: We no longer will sit at your feet as students. We have learned to honor you, not for your authority or position, but because, knowing you all personally, we have recognized your ability and learning and have found you to be sterling men.

To the wives, parents, other relatives and friends of the graduating class: We have already expressed our feelings to you privately and personally. We know that for you this is not so much a commencement as it is a culmination, a fulfillment. Publicly we offer to you our sincere gratitude.

Fellow classmates: This is the last time we shall stand together as a class. At last the time has come, and it is not a little sad. Our group has been a very close one. We have had three great years together, and they are now over. In the coming years most of us will be seeing each other from time to time, but we have lost a relationship, that of classmates. I think we should try to keep alive that feeling of unity and friendship. But we know that, even with

the re-unions that we have planned, we can never recapture the memories of the old college days, for when such memories return, they will come "sad-eyed with folded annals of our youth."

Thus, never again will we stand in the same relationship to our school or to each other. An episode in our lives is finished—is closed.

And now, how can we best express our wish for each other, our feeling for each other? Should we hope for unmarred success and immunity from sorrow? We could, but it would be a vain and foolish wish. We must live in a world among men, and we know that inevitably the shadow of setbacks, of defeat, and of sorrow, will fall across our paths. But what does it matter? We cannot change that, nor can we change the record of these last few years, for they are gone forever and are now only pleasant memories.

We must look to the future. The future, for honor or for shame, depends not on accident or circumstance, but upon each of us. The person who has high ideals and firm purpose knows no defeat.

Therefore, I can wish nothing more for us than that, through our lives, in sunshine and shadow, a consciousness of duty well-performed, of suffering nobly endured, of a life faithfully and fully lived shall remain with us.

With the hope of such a future, and with many fine memories of our fellowship together, I bid each of you farewell.

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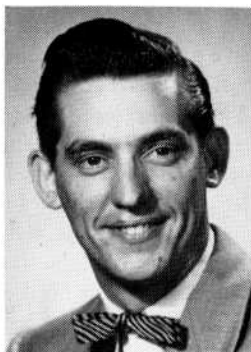
school system, instructors from near-by colleges and universities have often volunteered their services in a desire to see the language program put into operation. It is apparent, then, that the problem of finding qualified teachers for a beginning language program can be solved in a variety of ways. The many language programs being initiated every year in the United States are making use of all of these methods of obtaining competent teachers. Even though a certain amount of improvisation may be necessary at the start, efforts to improve the quality of foreign language instruction may be made as the program continues to progress.

How a Program Can Be Started

The question is often asked, how can a foreign language program be started in the elementary school system of a city in which no such program has ever been in existence? First of all, the parents of the pupils in that school system, as well as the teachers and the members of the school administra-

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tion, must become aware of the desirability of initiating a foreign language program. They must be convinced of the importance of language training and of the many benefits that their children may derive from it. Often the school principal or the superintendent can take the initiative in bringing the advisability of establishing such a program to the attention of the parents in the community. Parent-Teacher Organizations are often instrumental in the initiation of foreign language study in the elementary grades where everything favors its introduction. Efforts should be made to ascertain just how much interest exists among the parents, teachers, and school officials in the introduction of the study of the foreign languages into the school curricula. Many of the programs now under way began by sending out questionnaires to all of the parents of elementary grade pupils in that community, in an effort to learn their attitude toward such a proposed program. The number of parents favoring such a program of language study, when approached through questionnaires and forum discussions, represents a surprising majority in the cases where this type of contact has been made. Once the language program is under serious consideration, every effort should be made to bring it to the attention of the entire community. The complete and enthusiastic support of the parents, teachers, and the school administrators is a "must". A language program, like any other program of its type, succeeds only if it is undertaken voluntarily and with the whole-hearted support of the community. To gain this support, the many values to be derived from foreign language study must be pointed out and clearly emphasized. Once the active support of the community is gained, the officials in charge can proceed to schedule the foreign language chosen for instruction as part of the curriculum for the period in which it is to be introduced, and the necessary arrangements for its introduction can be completed.

Many of the values to be derived from the study of foreign languages, like those gained from the study of history or literature, cannot be accurately measured. It is quite evident that the benefits to be derived from language study are in direct proportion to the amount of time and effort spent in the study. We are aware that the study of a second language contributes to the general learning process of the child, although the impossibility of determining the exact amount of this contribution is apparent. Language study does provide a new experience and the child quickly gains confidence in himself through his sense of accomplishment in acquiring the language

skills of another people. He acquires a new and much keener interest in other peoples, in their history and their customs, and he is quick to detect the various ways in which our cultures differ. In this sense the study of a foreign language serves to widen the child's horizon; and having thus become acquainted with the language and the customs of other peoples, he ceases to consider them strange and entirely different from himself. This is the first step in the use of language as the key to better international understanding: becoming closer to our world neighbors and actually getting to know them. This growing interest in other peoples which is gained through language study reveals itself in a desire to learn more about them, and generally leads to an increased interest in related fields such as the history of that country, its geography and the social conditions that prevail there.

Foreign language study instills in the elementary grade pupil a new respect for foreign children and for children of other national backgrounds who live in his own community. He learns to appreciate these children through the study of their language and to accept them as equal members of his community. On the other hand, the children of foreign descent, upon studying the language of their parents, acquire a new pride in their background and in their native tongue. The feeling of mutual respect that is achieved leaves little room for the discriminatory attitudes so prevalent in many of the bilingual areas of the United States.

Other values to be derived from foreign language study become more apparent at a later stage in the child's development. The study of a foreign language, in offering the child another medium of self-expression and communication, aids in the enlargement and the enrichment of his vocabulary. It is also generally conceded that the study of a foreign language aids in the learning of one's own language, resulting in a greater appreciation of the expressive power and the beauty of one's own tongue. However, these benefits will become more and more apparent as the child progresses through elementary school and on into more advanced areas of learning.

The main purpose here has been to present some of the facts concerning foreign language training in the elementary schools as it now exists, as well as to point out many of the values that have been derived from the introduction of foreign language study at this stage. That the study of foreign languages in the elementary grades is a realized possibility is apparent. It has succeeded wherever it has been undertaken with careful planning and a sincere belief in its potentialities. Our task is to make each

community aware of the promise that such programs hold for the future, and of the unlimited benefits to be derived from language study. Once this is achieved, the teaching of foreign languages in our public elementary schools will take its place alongside the instruction in other fields of learning that we consider indispensable to a well-rounded education.

Minimizing Production Loss . . .

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is without weaknesses—there is no perfect substitute for the work-stoppage. In any given situation the plan might give relative advantage to one party or the other, just as the stoppage strike does for that matter, but it is believed possible to devise a formula under which, while one party might gain a relative advantage in one case or another, neither employer nor employees would gain such advantage in all cases. All things considered, proponents of the plan deem its weaknesses minimal in light of the hope it promises.

Voluntary Organizations . . .

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On the contrary, the existence of the Hillel Foundation and of the other organizations today and everyday all over the United States is a complete denial of Marx's beliefs and a re-affirmation of the American ideal that men can improve their surroundings by voluntary association instead of by coercion, revolution, and bloodshed.

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