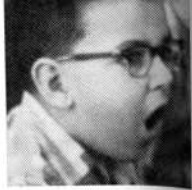




# Prononcez

# FLES



## NEW INTEREST



## IN OLD TEACHING METHODS

The backers of FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary Schools) are quick to point out that FLES is pronounced like *stress*. Often their enthusiasm for teaching foreign languages in elementary schools reaches such heights of sacrifice in terms of money and time that one suspects them of being more hypnotized by the sound-like than by the word itself.

Good example is the faculty of O.U.'s modern language department. Teaching Norman gradeschool classes this year—on their own time and without any remuneration except for what satisfaction an excited gradeschooler can inspire—are Instructor Karl J. Reinhardt, Assistant Professor Dr. James H. Abbott, and Chairman of the Department Dr. Lowell Dunham.

Their devotion to the idea of FLES is comprehensible only in terms of the fascination today's language teachers have for the fantastic ability of young children to learn a foreign language. Not only one foreign language, but several—at the same time.

The mechanics of the young child's facility with languages is explained by O. U. German professor Dr. W. A. Willibrand, who, with his wife, Rosa (language supervisor at University School) is the most active and well-known advocate of FLES in the University's community:

"You hear a language long before you utter a sound," says Dr. Willibrand, "and by using the language in connection with children's interests and the objects around them they pick up the language by ear. There is a period in our lives when we can learn languages more rapidly than at any other time, and this period occurs when we are just starting to school. Our ability and eagerness to learn fades as we learn to reason, strangely enough. And we are not self-conscious when we are very young, and our brazen imitations help us pronounce a language more accurately than if we started our training later."

Anthony and Rosa Willibrand are doing a great deal to see that the youngsters within their reach do not have to wait until later to begin their foreign language drills. In the past their reach extended quite far . . .

Dr. Willibrand taught German to a class of youngsters on WNAD radio. The success of that program inspired Channel 13's German class of last year.

Guten-Taging his way through a year of Saturday mornings with a TV classroom of 26 young student-performers and a retired German opera soprano to help him, Dr. Willibrand got a lot of kinders out of der garten und into der haus to sprechen mit him via TV.

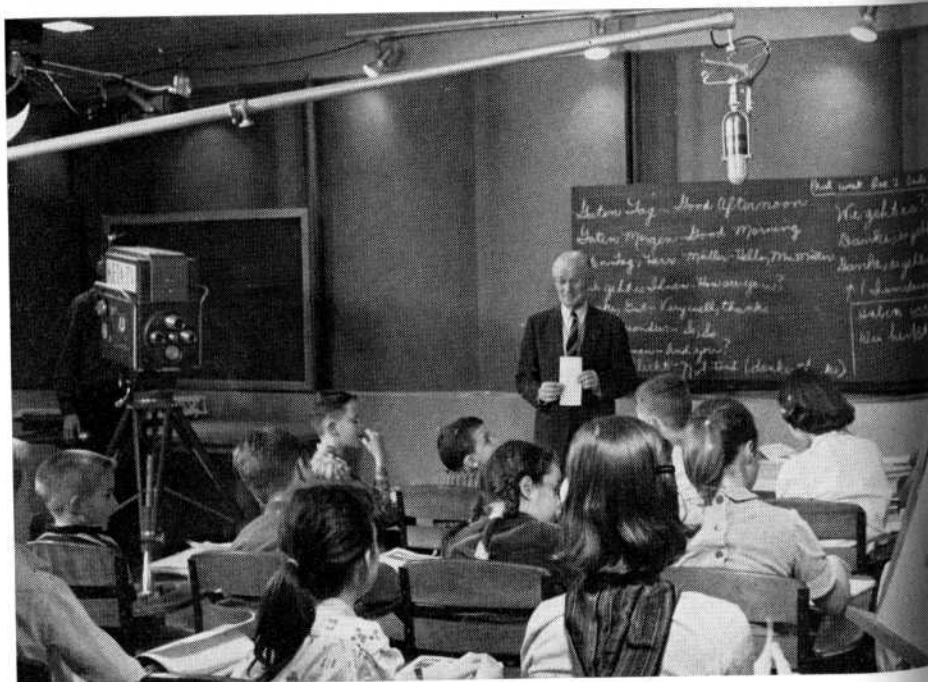
This year, Dr. Willibrand is more-or-less a victim of his own ambition. The University had increased enrolment in its German courses and couldn't spare Dr. Willibrand for the TV performances.

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Mrs. Willibrand, however, accomplished something this year which is a satisfaction for them both. In 1954 she persuaded the fourth grade teacher at the University School to let her spend 15 minutes with her charges three times a week. She taught them French during those sessions, and the children learned so rapidly and enjoyed the instruction so much that this year for the first time French is taught in every University School class from kindergarten through the seventh grade.

"Their accents are better than those of students in high school," Mrs. Willibrand states. "They can count with more ease than the high school students and they understand the spoken word better."

"We know just by comparing them with the high school students that their early



Dr. Willibrand and his TV German class.



Unabashed imitators, children can learn languages without an accent. At the right, O. U. Spanish instructor Karl Reinhardt gives aid to Norman boy.

start increases their facility and their understanding."

Dr. Willibrand's convictions as to the wonders of FLES go back to the days when there was no FLES, but the harness of the Missouri gradeschool where he was tutored. He recalls that approximately 95 per cent of the people in the community of German settlers in which he was reared were trilingual. English and standard German were taught in the schools, and Low German was spoken at home.

Willibrand recalled a two-year-old boy who toddled daily across the village street to visit a Low German couple. That English speaking child was bilingual before the age of three. Given similar opportunities to speak French, Spanish, Norwegian, or any other foreign languages, he would have been multilingual at a very early age.

Willibrand also cites children of British officials in India who learn about four languages just by talking to house servants—while the officialdom study laboriously under a teacher, just to learn the most rudimentary Hindustani.

Dr. Willibrand's advice to parents who would like to see their own children learning foreign languages at a time when the children are most able to learn, is to approach their school officials through P.-T. A.'s and to ask if teachers can be hired for the job—or, at least, if a teacher can be hired to travel between several gradeschools, giving one class in each.

He also mentions that in each community someone can usually be found who can act as a teacher's aid two or three times a week for a foreign language drill. But in that such assistants probably could not meet certification requirements they could not be paid out of State funds.

"Leave it up to the parents and to the P.-T. A.," says Dr. Willibrand, confident that soon everyone will be stressing FLES. "Funds will be found somehow."

