

Parlons Français

*Team-teaching
in a foreign language
utilizes a mass medium:
television.*

EFFORTS to raise the quality of education by broadening and strengthening the curriculum and by making possible more nearly individual pupil progress are observable in many elementary and secondary schools. Such efforts, however, face constantly increasing numbers of pupils in our schools and increasing difficulty in finding competent teachers.

The teaching profession has not been unaware of the developing situation, as various experiments in staff utilization attest. Some of these, such as the Bay City, Michigan, plan of utilizing teacher aides, have sought to relieve the teacher of clerical and other nonprofessional duties in order to permit full-time attention to higher level activities. In the metropolitan Boston area, Lexington, Concord and Newton have been using part-time assistants to correct English compositions, thereby lightening the load of the English teacher where it weighed heaviest.

A promising plan at both elementary and secondary school levels is that of forming teacher teams in order to take advantage of the strengths of two or more individual teachers. The size of the group or class varies according to the arrangements worked out by the team. A demonstration or illustrated lecture by one teacher may benefit a class of 100; individual help or small group work may be directed by another teacher of the team.

Staff utilization studies are especially needed in the field of modern foreign languages. In this area a shortage of competent teachers is coinciding with a renewed interest in language study and with a general acceptance of objectives of listening and speaking proficiency, the achievement of which requires the investment of adequate student and teacher time.

Fortunately, we have some assets not available to earlier generations, assets which can help if well utilized. Electronic and mechanical language-learning

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equipment, when in competent hands, can be a blessing. But the competent hands and guiding spirit of the teacher must be there.

Varied Approaches

While the shortage of modern foreign language teachers exists at all levels, it is nowhere more serious than at the elementary school level. The discontinuance in the past few years of many promising FLES (Foreign Languages in the Elementary Schools) programs makes clear the need for adopting a variety of approaches and adapting newer media to the solution of personnel problems.

The fact is that team teaching has been tried in the foreign language field. The combination of a teacher, who was primarily a linguistic scientist and who would direct the teaching-learning process, and of a native informant who would serve as a model and as conductor of practice sessions, was tried in the Intensive Language program of the American Council of Learned Societies. This plan was followed to some degree by the various Armed Services, and by industrial concerns, such as oil companies, for the training of personnel for overseas assignments.

The institution of language laboratories has also brought about the cooperation of professor and laboratory assistant in the foreign language departments of many colleges in somewhat the same manner as in science departments. This type of teamwork has also been tried at the high school level. At Concord, Massachusetts, High School for the past two years French classes have spent half of each period with the regular teacher and the other half in the language laboratory with a laboratory assistant whose fluency in the foreign

language enabled her to correct and assist individual pupils.

Again in the field of foreign languages, but this time at the elementary school level, several mass medium experiments in teaching through TV have been attempted throughout the nation. Most of these are related to the FLES movement which, apart from rather isolated but successful work in places such as Cleveland as early as 1921 and Los Angeles and Washington beginning in the forties, belongs to this decade.¹

Its growth in a period of five or six years was so rapid that in 1957 Parker¹ observed that the FLES movement threatened to snowball. In view of the acute shortage of qualified classroom teachers, it was natural that a mass medium be tried. One of the earliest TV programs in Spanish for elementary schools was given in Buffalo by Professor Manuel Guerra, under the name, "Fun To Learn about Latin America." Among other such programs we may cite the efforts of Mrs. Marian Minturn Walter, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, who, since last year, has offered "Rendezvous en Français" three times a week over WUNC-TV. Another program is in Philadelphia, also in French, taught by Edith Kern since 1957. She gives daily 15-minute lessons to fourth and fifth graders.

The Modern Language Project is taking over from there. Observable on the one hand, were successful projects in team teaching, and on the other, the many attempts to teach a language through a mass medium. The project proposes to join the two together and thereby partially remedy an acute need for specialists in the foreign language

¹William Riley Parker. *The National Interest and Foreign Languages*. U.S. National Commission for UNESCO, Department of State. 1957.

field. The teacher team in this case consists of an expert native teacher and a classroom teacher who has had considerable, little, or no previous study in the foreign language. The mass medium, TV, will be used by the expert teacher twice a week to teach elementary school pupils. The instruction may be carried on at other times by the local classroom teacher.

In order to improve the effectiveness of this combination, the expert teacher will use TV once a week to give a special program intended to prepare the classroom teacher for the week's work and "area coordinators" will provide consultant service. Thus the project will train teachers. At the same time it will teach hundreds of children who, without the program, would have to wait three or more years to learn a foreign language.

While the above mentioned experiments and projects went on in the nation, Massachusetts was not unaware of what was happening. Many public school systems experimented with foreign language in the elementary schools as far back as 1952 and 1953. Their programs were so successful that they have grown and expanded and serve now as models for beginning FLES programs. Among them, Lexington and Medford are certainly two outstanding school systems. In Lexington, pupils who begin the study of French in the third grade can have a continuous program of instruction. This year, ninth graders, some of whom started in the third grade are enjoying their seventh year of the study of French. Medford experimented extensively in the training of classroom teachers who at first taught French to all children in the third grade. Now, selected fifth and sixth grade pupils are taught by specialists. At the seventh and eighth grade

levels FLES pupils are continuing to acquire proficiency.

A Regional Program

More recently, one of the significant educational activities of PTA's in the many Massachusetts communities during the past few years has been to study the possibilities of introducing a foreign language program in elementary schools. Parents in some of these communities have been so keenly aware of the advantages of beginning foreign language study early that, where feasible, they have organized after-school classes for their children supported by a small fee. This movement among our PTA's has helped a great deal in promoting the idea of elementary school language programs in Massachusetts and it has resulted in further spreading a general awareness of the benefits of such programs and in awakening interest in many more communities during the past two years.

When the Massachusetts Council for Public Schools began to be interested in FLES programs in the state, it realized the need for making information on the subject available. It published a booklet written by prominent members of its committee on FLES. It offered its services for advice, placement of teachers and talks to groups. It was not long before the FLES Committee realized that the scarcity of qualified teachers was the greatest difficulty met by any interested school system.

At the same time, a group of laymen and professional educators in Boston was organizing in-school programs on television which were given over WGBH, Channel 2. These series, including science, music, social sciences, etc., for either elementary or secondary levels, were already popular. One measure of

their appeal is the fact that from the original 40 school systems that planned to take part in this in-school program the number has now risen to over 120. The program is now known to all as the "21-Inch Classroom."

The group which was responsible for its creation then came in contact with the Massachusetts Council for Public Schools. Talks began on the possibility of adding a French course to the curriculum. It was suggested that a televised course in French would make available to interested schools the benefit of an excellent teacher, who would give the best possible example of French speech and pronunciation and thus help less well-trained teachers in their classroom work.

Through the members of its FLES Committee, the Massachusetts Council's attention was brought to a very successful program of French teaching through television which had already won national recognition. This program, "Fun with French," was given in the Schenectady public schools over WRGB by Mrs. Anne Slack. By 1958 it already had 110 FLES classes. It was planned to extend the program, which started in the third grade, to the sixth grade by the fall of 1959. The program boasts of being the oldest continuous foreign language program by television in the country, and has been the subject of articles in *Life*, *Parade*, *Parents' Magazine* and the *Christian Science Monitor*, as well as domestic and foreign educational journals. The problem then was to attract Mrs. Slack to Boston.

The FLES Committee worked out a proposal covering the children's programs, which was submitted to the Fund for the Advancement of Education, and a second proposal covering all phases of the teacher training program, which

went under Title VII of the National Defense Education Act. "Parlons Français," more than a year after its conception, was finally endorsed and given financial support by both the Ford Foundation and Title VII of the National Defense Education Act, with additional support coming from school systems (through the Eastern Massachusetts Council for School Television) and from the Massachusetts Council for Public Schools. The total budget of the Modern Language Project, a division of the Massachusetts Council for Public Schools, the organization responsible for "Parlons Français," amounts to approximately \$156,000.

TV Teaching

To carry out the work entailed in such a program, the Modern Language Project staff is composed of a director and his assistant, a TV Teacher and her associate, two full-time and two part-time coordinators, and two secretaries. The role of the area coordinators is seen as a very important one of public relations and advising on administrative as well as linguistic problems, which may be raised by individual school systems. They will be helped in their work both by a comprehensive Teachers' Guide and by monthly regional conferences which will give them further opportunities for direct contact with the teachers involved.

The programs will be given over WGBH-TV, Channel 2. Mrs. Anne Slack, a native French teacher of elementary school French, will give two 15-minute lessons for children each week, on Tuesday and Thursday mornings at 9:15, repeated at 10:45. The unique medium of television offers tremendous advantages in that the TV teacher can make use of elaborate audio and visual aids in her

presentations. Some scenes filmed in France are planned in order to bring French civilization into the classroom and teach children about a country where people do not live or dress exactly as we do.

During her six years of experience in the Schenectady public schools, Mrs. Slack experienced many touching examples of the closeness felt by her little viewers with their TV Teacher. Each child literally believes, she says, that she is addressing him in person. When they see her in the street or a store, or when she visits the school, the word passes around quickly and little boys and girls crowd around her and call her by her name, greeting her in French and asking for her autograph. Several years ago she was told of a little girl who happened to be sick one Monday morning and watched the French program at home. The little girl's parents were puzzled to find that she began to be taken ill regularly every Monday morning, but got well again by noon, until they discovered that their daughter had adopted this means of staying home and watching the program. As a result of their interest and enthusiasm, the program was ultimately established in her school.

Stressing quality rather than quantity, the lesson content for children will include no more than 200 words for the first half-year and possibly about 300 for the second half. Mrs. Slack will use as little English as possible for her presentation. Questions asked by her in French and answered by the whole class, activities shared with children who sometimes appear with her on the screen, songs rehearsed and sung with the TV Teacher establish a close relationship between the TV Teacher and her some 60,000 pupils in over 2,000 classrooms, from 5 different states. In preparing her

script for television, Mrs. Slack will follow closely the lesson content of the Teachers' Guide.

To help classroom teachers in their task and give them appropriate directions for using the Teachers' Guide with maximum results, Mrs. Slack will conduct half-hour in-service TV programs for teachers on Monday afternoons at 3:30. These will familiarize the teachers with the materials used during the week for the children's lessons, and serve as a refresher course for those who need it. Use of additional materials for the week's work will also be explained. The lesson content, and suggestions about how to make the most effective use of it in the individual classroom will also be found in the Teachers' Guide.

The in-service program will be complemented by the work of the area coordinators previously mentioned, whose main task will be as described, that of itinerant consultants and also that of reporters to the project. Mrs. Slack will rely heavily on their reports on classroom reactions on the part of children as well as of teachers to guide herself in the writing of future scripts and in the revising of the entire program by the end of the year, when it is planned to put it on film. The area coordinators will therefore be in close contact with school administrators and teachers and will be ready to help wherever asked. These area coordinators have been carefully chosen for their proficiency in French, their knowledge of the American school system and their aptitude for public relations work. Finally, regional conferences will bring together teachers of each of the four areas and give opportunities for exchange of views, discussion of problems, and suggestions.

The above features will enter into each

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one of three years of televised courses for teachers and children which are ultimately to be filmed in a final form after appropriate revisions of program content and presentation. This work is a very exciting prospect for all involved in the project, for the programs will thus be available on a national basis. It is planned to have a whole package for a year's course of films, guides and recordings. We are also hoping that material filmed in France will add authenticity not otherwise attainable.

In conclusion, a word about the research which will be made on the program. Since this project is experimenting in somewhat new fields, the federal government, in considering the original research proposal entailing funds under Title VII of the National Defense Education Act, requested that the research design be made even more thorough and extensive. Forty-eight fourth grade

classes have been selected from ten suburban school systems in the Boston metropolitan area in communities which are not bilingual and with teachers selected on the basis of experience and interest in the project. The research design proposes to compare the effectiveness of several combinations of televised teacher-training and direct instruction in oral French upon the achievement in listening and speaking skills of fourth grade children. Tests are being administered to teachers at the beginning and the end of the school year, while the children will be tested only after the programs are over, on the assumption that a minimum percentage of children are already bilingual. In view of the critical need for teachers of foreign languages at the elementary level, the results of this research should provide some definite information on in-service teacher training and on the success of the combination of expert TV teacher and elementary classroom teacher.

Mathematics Teaching

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in the branches of mathematics called 'set theory' and 'foundations'. We use them because they enable students to see more readily the connections between manipulative procedures such as equation-solving and graphing and the structure of the number system. But, whether an abstraction is a twentieth-century one or one known to the Pythagoreans, our working rule is that students need to de-

velop an awareness of it, symbolize it, and then invent mechanical procedures for manipulating the symbol.

In ending this discussion I must point out that our attempt to get students to see that mathematics is an intellectual subject should not be misconstrued as an attempt to have students deal only with ideas and to eliminate manipulative drill. Drill is absolutely essential in developing skills, and students must be skillful computers in order to work effectively with ideas.

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