

The Foreign Language Dilemma

*Even in a favorable climate
adjustments are needed.*

THE struggle to retain foreign language instruction in the curriculum has been long and indecisive. Historically, the pendulum has swung from intensive concentration in foreign languages (the classical languages) in the Latin Grammar School to complete abandonment of foreign language education in thousands of high schools of the current era. Presently, the pendulum is swinging back to a position favorable to the inclusion of foreign language instruction, even in the elementary school.

Only grudgingly did Benjamin Franklin concede to add foreign language instruction to the curriculum of the academy. The elimination of foreign languages from the curriculum was considered a triumph of the early high schools, which finally succeeded in making English a respectable discipline. These historic developments were not without justification when it is realized that the classical languages were for decades the core of the curriculum and when we find foreign languages justified on their dubious ability to teach ("train") a person to think.

Between the two world wars many high schools dropped their offerings in for-

eign languages. Many colleges ceased to require foreign languages for admission and for their degree programs. However, the public attitude toward foreign languages today is the most favorable climate in years. We can date increased emphasis on foreign languages from the period of the Second World War. Nevertheless, from the end of the war up to 1957 language instruction dragged its feet. We can pinpoint the change in attitude toward foreign languages—along with increased emphasis on science and mathematics—to the Russian jump into the space age in the fall of 1957. Since that event foreign languages have been advocated increasingly as desirable features of both the elementary and secondary school curricula. In 1958 foreign language instruction became one of the "defense" measures of the National Defense Education Act.

Renewed Interest

There has been renewed emphasis on foreign language instruction at all levels. Colleges have "tightened up," reinstating language requirements for admission and degree programs. The foreign language institutes provided by National

Defense Education Act funds have injected new life into the language curriculum. Further bolstered by federal funds, public schools are rapidly purchasing and installing language laboratory equipment. Elementary schools have launched successful programs of instruction in modern foreign languages. The nation has become truly language conscious. This is a most salutary environment as far as the language teacher is concerned. For years the language teacher almost alone fought for the maintenance of languages in the curriculum. Today we see powerful professional groups giving serious consideration to the values and methods of foreign language instruction.

This favorable public sentiment is all to the good. Yet, there are aspects of the present situation which language teachers must ponder. The present environment is essentially a "scare" environment brought on by Russian scientific achievements. Such an environment could be a transitory thing. Public sentiment rises and falls. It is conceivable that once the international climate ameliorates the interest in foreign language instruction might again decline. As a curriculum worker in the area of foreign language education, the author would hope that this would not happen. Yet interest in a "crash" program—as language instruction is at present—can die out quickly. This could happen most easily in regard to foreign languages, the mastery of which may not be, perhaps, as dramatic as corresponding achievements in the areas of science and mathematics.

Some elementary school administrators are already expressing reluctance to

incorporate foreign language instruction in the elementary school on the grounds that it is a "fad." Without recognizing that the present public climate is—though favorable—tenuous, many foreign language teachers are still selling foreign languages on their disciplinary values rather than on their cultural values. Though audio-visual materials are plentiful for foreign language instruction, the adopted textbook dominates the curriculum. Though language laboratory equipment may be obtained (at a wide variety of prices), some teachers regard this electronic equipment almost with suspicion or contempt. Though the emphasis in methodology has shifted from the grammar-translation method to the aural-oral approach, particularly in the modern languages, many foreign language teachers are still emphasizing mastery of fine rules of grammar. At a recent meeting of a large county group of foreign language instructors, the teachers declared almost unanimously that English teachers were not teaching enough grammar. Presumably, they believed that the lack of training in grammar is handicapping students in the foreign language classes.

Needed Adjustments

As our curricula come under study and revision foreign language teachers will be re-examining their programs. They must seek justification of their programs on the highly worthwhile contributions foreign languages can make to international understanding. The author believes that the favorable environment toward foreign languages can be maintained if foreign language teachers make the following adjustments:

1. Encourage foreign language instruction on the elementary school level

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for all pupils; on the secondary school level, as an elective. Though this is common practice, there are language teachers who advocate that foreign language instruction be required of all high school graduates. Such a requirement, if taken seriously, would be completely unrealistic as well as poor curricular practice. Our student bodies are such that not all high school students need foreign language instruction. Nor can all high school students profit from foreign language instruction.

2. Emphasize the general educational values of foreign languages—intercultural, linguistic—as opposed to the “mental disciplinary” values and even utilitarian values (“export-import business”).

3. Shift from grammar-translation, textbook, reading and writing methods to aural-oral methods, use of newer devices and materials. The use of newer methods will take much of the drudgery out of foreign language instruction and serve as an excellent motivational technique. There is no real glory in the claim of many foreign language teachers that they have “covered the whole textbook.”

4. Drop the insistence that foreign languages can only be learned by the gifted child. With its high premium on “solving” language situations as if they were mathematical problems the older-type language program perpetuated the myth that only students with high IQs could learn a foreign language. This is patently false. Students of normal intelligence can learn foreign languages provided they are motivated to learn and provided they are taught in such way that they can learn. The popular myth has been circulated, however, often by language teachers themselves that foreign languages are “hard.” In reality,

foreign languages can be learned easily by most youngsters.

5. Become more intimately acquainted with the rest of the areas of the curriculum of their schools. Foreign language departments often operate in a kind of isolation from other departments of the curriculum. Operating in a medium not understood by other teachers or by administrators, foreign language teachers find their objectives poorly interpreted.

Conversely, foreign language teachers working in a specialized medium do not always understand the objectives of other subject fields. Nor do they understand the kinds of value judgments curriculum workers and administrators must make. Teachers of foreign languages should take every available opportunity to make their objectives known to their colleagues and to the public. They should seek ways of popularizing foreign languages among the faculty and student body and of cooperating with other teachers on joint educational projects which will be mutually beneficial. Foreign language teachers must also be patient with the public, with teachers of other subjects and with administrators who do not readily grasp the values of language instruction.

6. Unite on foreign language goals. Interfactual disputes (e.g., the classical languages *vs.* modern languages, Spanish *vs.* French, Romance languages *vs.* Slavic, Western languages *vs.* Eastern) weaken the whole cause of foreign language instruction. Disagreements among the specialists confuse students and public, demoralize the staff, and damage the present favorable climate toward the introduction of foreign languages. Over-all dedication to for-

foreign language education should supersede vested interests represented by the different language specialties.

7. Be cognizant of the struggle to keep foreign languages in the school curriculum. Only by looking at past errors can foreign language programs be adapted to the modern age.

The future of foreign language education in this country is bright. It is to be hoped that this future will not be dimmed by injudicious attitudes and archaic methods of instruction.

Work Experience Education

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sulting through the work experience education program.

Another outstanding strength of the program lies in its contribution to the dignifying of work. The cooperation of community and school leaders in the development of the program is providing students with assurance that education about work and experiences in work are considered important in the development of mature and effective citizenship. The granting of school credit for participation in the program is giving students further evidence that well-selected, well-planned, and well-supervised experiences in actual jobs are valued just as highly as the educational experiences that are carried on exclusively within classrooms of a high school. Furthermore, the initiation into the world of work is providing students with new insights regarding the nature of our economic system; and in many instances it is adding to their sense of being an important part of their community with both the opportunity and

responsibility for making their own best contributions to society whether it be on the professional level or the level of unskilled labor.

In summary, several findings have been arrived at through the evaluative study of the work experience education program carried on in the high school districts of Santa Barbara County. These findings clearly indicate that such a program is of much value to high school students and to the communities served by the high schools. The program has apparently contributed a great deal to the "status" of work in the minds of students, whose general enthusiasm for the program strongly reflects their "healthy" attitudes toward vocational aspects of life. Moreover, the program has afforded effective and greatly needed means of providing vocational education and guidance for the college-preparatory and the non-college-preparatory student; it serves this purpose for the dull, the normal, and the gifted student without reducing their participation in either academic or nonacademic subjects of the high school curriculum.

In light of the evident values of a well-planned, well-supervised, and carefully evaluated work experience education program at the high school level and in light of the strong public and professional support given such a program, it would seem that the present trend toward establishing the program in the comprehensive high schools of the country should be encouraged and accelerated.

A study of the evaluative report on work experience education in the five high school districts of Santa Barbara County might well serve as an initial step in the planning of these programs for other high schools.

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