

Who is my neighbor?

Modern Languages: Vehicle for the Humanities

THE world is our home and mankind is our neighbor. Human beings have the same aspirations everywhere. To doubt the place of the humanistic studies in a student's education would be to apologize for his being human. It is the task of the humanistic studies to observe man as an individual, as he relates himself to his environment in what he has done, what he has dreamed and felt and thought. Human beings have always turned to literature, music, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture, to any form of art as a source of instruction, of inspiration, of delight and fulfillment.

It is sad, but true, that so often the humanities have become the badge of snobs, the conversation piece for the cocktail hour. If this be their purpose, it is well that we abandon them. The humanistic studies call for action. They are the integrating forces which unite and develop man's conduct with his intellect, with his sense of beauty and with his way of life in his society. The world of the future is asking man to produce cultures which do away with the bigoted concepts of class, creed, race and nation-

ality to seek to establish true dignity among men.

The command of a modern language and through it an intimate understanding of another culture and another people add another dimension to the liberal education of the student. We do our students harm by not exposing them to modern language study or by teaching it as if it were just another set of synonyms for the words of our own language. They will have a false idea of what it means to learn another language. They will have been denied the opportunity to gain a working knowledge of the structure and the process of a discipline which they will use more and more as they need to acquire other languages for the many situations in which the children and youth of today will find themselves tomorrow. It will be difficult for them in their later years to struggle to pronounce things in different sound units, different intonation, to use different constructions; different gestures and to grasp different units of meaning unless they realize exactly what is involved in learning a language.

Students should know that although human beings are the same everywhere in their need for the good life, because they *do live* in different geographical en-

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vironments they have evolved a variety of behaviors which might have one meaning for them and another for us. If these behaviors are not known to us we shall ceaselessly ascribe to them the intentions that the same behavior would imply for us. As the student compares the culture system of the foreign country with that of his own he stands a good chance of understanding the behavior of his own people much better. He acquires genuine habits of tolerance which will not crumble the minute his foreign friends behave in a manner incompatible with his.

Human beings are difficult to understand through mere observation from the outside without the guide of the linguistic symbolism which makes one's way of life intelligible to others. Language conditions our thinking. The world, as long as it is seen through the eyes of human beings, cannot be an objective world. Each individual's perception of the world is unconsciously built on the language habits determined by the culture in which he lives. We see, hear, feel and sense those aspects of the cosmos which our language habits predispose us to interpret. Language thus is not only a technique used in communication, it is a way of directing our responses to certain situations. For example, the existence of separate words for individual relatives in some languages poses the question whether there is a different behavior which must be expressed toward these relatives by the individual. The verbal symbol itself does not tell us what this behavior should be, but it has alerted us to observe both the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the individual in his relationship to these relatives. Such insights are a Copernican step in enlarging the experiences of the student in human understanding.

Practice and Immersion

What kind of teacher guides the student in acquiring these goals? A teacher who is at home in the foreign language, who understands, speaks, reads and writes it well. Such a teacher has the ability to contrast the linguistic as well as the cultural units of the foreign people with those of his own to show students where the crucial differences lie. He uses the technological media to enrich and help his students experience the language as deeply as they can—through tape and film.

Although not necessarily a specialist, such a teacher digresses into many fields such as geography, history, folklore, art, the dance, music, at least so far as these disciplines concern the culture about which he is teaching. In well-integrated schools, where teachers do not think of subjects as being sealed off into watertight compartments, colleagues in the other disciplines collaborate with him in enriching the student's experiences.

Having lived in or visited the specific country within recent years, the teacher has his administrators supply him with up-to-date books and periodicals. In this day and age the teacher cannot allow himself to present quaint, old-fashioned caricatures of the living present, and thus make his information misinformation by creating stereotypes which are no longer true of the country. Nor does he use out of date textbooks explaining the civilization of the foreign country as it was before the last war. He uses literature of value written within recent years. This he does to prepare the basic foundation for the more advanced stages of language learning when the great classics of the foreign country are read as they should be, with enjoyment, wonder and understanding and not through laborious trans-

lation. His classroom is a foreign embassy with a distinctive atmosphere heightened by the use of realia of all kinds. Above all, this teacher is himself a humanist who understands the minds and the hearts of his students. He knows that it is his job to keep their desire for knowledge alive, that without this his instruction is of no worth.

To attain the humanistic goals offered through modern language learning is a long-time process. To gain control of a language and to make it part of one's innermost being requires steady practice and immersion. This means using the language in the classroom from the very beginning. It means starting at earlier age levels with a four year or six year sequence of study. Many programs now start at the seventh grade level. A few carefully planned and articulated programs have been initiated successfully at the third and fourth grade levels. These longer sequences of study take into consideration the biological timetable which permits greater ease in learning the listening-speaking skills. A child at these early levels is an uninhibited creature with great imitative power who enters easily into role playing enabling him to immerse himself more readily in another culture. This is a process which adolescent and adult find more difficult than does the child.

At these early age levels children are group-minded, expansive, curious about and receptive to others. Language for them is a means to an end. It is the by-product of all the activities in which they engage and when they are acquiring another language they want to learn the foreign child's games, small talk, playlets and stories, his rhymes, his songs and dances, all the many activities which are as dear to the foreign child's heart as they are to theirs. If the magic power

of children's songs and rhymes were put into prose, our world would be left with ashes. They can never be forgotten. From the depths of the subconscious these rhymes and songs rise to the surface and come to the tongue in later years. All nations of the world possess such treasures. They have become a part of folk literature, the cornerstones which build empathy among peoples.

To Hear—To Speak

The initial stages of modern language learning, no matter at what level, are audio-lingual. Students hear and speak the strange sounds before they read and write any portion of them. Language is primarily communication—the give and take of utterances usable in one's daily life. It is exactly this small talk which takes place from day to day that is the backbone of all literature.

To enter a classroom just to hear a recitation or litany of objects or numbers from one to a hundred is *not communication* in the real sense of the word. It is not: "This is a pencil." "This is a window." It should be: "May I have a pencil, please?" "John, please open the window." Not: "The dress is red." Anyone not color blind can see the dress is red. It would be better to have the student say: "What a beautiful red dress, Mary!" or: "How do you like my new dress?" Such small talk or dialogue involves an immediate manipulation of language structures, the crucial point of all language learning.

Young people learn quickly when they experience the thrill of manipulating a language spoken by millions of human beings today. No modern language teacher can readily forget the joy of his classes when the eyes of the beginners light up with the pleasure of discovery

and pride as they utter the first phrases of Chinese or read a passage for the first time in the newly learned Russian script. Adolescent and youngster alike are filled with enthusiasm as they learn when and how, under what conditions even the simple phrases of the first lessons: "Guten Morgen!" "¿Cómo estás?" "Alors-" are used.

While this indispensable vocabulary is acquired and the necessary structures habituated, the student in simple foreign terms gets a bird's eye view of the physical and geographical features of the country which he will later get to know in intimate detail. Here the teacher makes generous use of film and slide. By means of teaching simple phrases and structures used in the commentary on the film and with the slide, detailed and systematic instruction is imparted about the culture. As their strength in the language grows the students are transported into the foreign environment completely and the subject matter is drawn entirely from the foreign country. The teacher takes the students inside the towns and cities of which they have been told, he makes them walk the streets, do the shopping, share the festivities, enter the houses and sit down as guests of their foreign friends. Little by little the intimate life of the country, its manners and customs are unfolded.

The sound filmstrips, a 120 reel series of five-minute soundfilms taken in France, a thirty-minute film depicting a German youngster's passion for gliding, a feature film relating the experiences of a group of boys attending a European secondary school soon allow the student an acquaintance and an understanding of his foreign friends on the screen as intimate as if they were his next door neighbors. The student is "cinemascope'd" into a larger world, bombarded by sight and

sound and the written word. Gradually he overcomes the increasing difficulty of a larger vocabulary and the more highly developed habits of thought although still dealing with external detail and concrete ideas. To watch students leave these classes unwittingly repeating huge hunks of the language they have absorbed is truly an "awesome thing." They find it difficult indeed to shake themselves out of the magic spell. A Wayne University student recently posted a note on the door to his room at a fraternity house: "Have gone to France. Will be back in an hour."

Mirror of Civilization

The moments now become precious in the modern language class as the literature of the country becomes intimately tied up with the language learning process itself. A beautiful poem, at first short and easy, capturing a mood, a thought, a dream, and which the teacher has brought his students to appreciate by showing that he himself has thought it enough of an emotional experience to commit to memory, is taught in class and the students quickly grasp its esthetic satisfaction. And so it continues from folk song to art song to operetta and opera. Popular songs of the day are not neglected for they also tell us of the temper of youth and have a wealth of current vocabulary and idiom. Journalistic articles, the petite conte, the Nouvelle, the remarkable short stories of the Soviet Union, much of this modern literature unavailable in translation, stands at the very core of the humanities. It comes to grips with the modern culture and brings us closer to the life and times of today's Germans, Frenchmen, Latin-Americans and the many peoples we contact daily.

Any civilization is best mirrored in its literary genre. Modern one act plays and radio drama bring much more meaning to each sentence than longer pieces of narrative literature do. In fact, plays can be used very early, though at first only in a simple way. Through the acting out of plays, starting with an easy version of a folk tale or a current event to the more sophisticated modern plays, language becomes active and real, its impressions remain in the memory and the language habits become immediate and strong. The play consolidates what the students have been trying to learn. If a performance is given, the research which must go into the authenticity of costume, staging and scenery enhances the understanding of the foreign culture.

Using the modern language substantially by mingling with the foreign people in the community and participating in their art, handicrafts and festivities, by listening to foreign speakers in the classroom and on tape, by participating in school to school exchange of correspondence, tapes, records with students of his own age and even exchanging visits brings its rewards. The student begins to speak more freely, reads the contemporary literature with greater ease, expresses his thoughts clearly and simply in writing thus enabling him, in his advanced years of a 6 or 9 year language sequence, to study other subject matter fields in the foreign language. He is now attaining the third dimension in language learning. He no longer *learns* the language but *uses* it to increase his powers of observation, perception and knowledge. Original source materials in the social sciences allow him to see how justice is administered, how education is carried on, how the particular social and cultural institutions prevailing in the country affect the life of the individ-

ual. He now seeks its past history to answer existing conditions.

He is able to appreciate the recordings of the classics and modern drama as performed by the great repertory theaters and raconteurs of the foreign lands. Prize-winning films of the classics and great pieces of literature such as Gustav Gruendgens' *Faust* allow him a deeper understanding and involvement than mere reading. He can grasp the individual and the collective psychology of a people from the human standpoint with a view to finding valuable information on a particular state of mind or on the significance of a particular political or social movement.

As new opportunities for using the language become possible in student exchanges, summer study abroad, foreign work camps, the high school junior year abroad, America's young people will bring to these experiences a wealth of know-how which will help them dig out that which is valuable, or jewels in the treasure chest of the world's human cultures.

Once trained to control a language and to use the techniques of inquiry in acquiring and comparing in this discipline, a student should not have to spend any more time on formal instruction in the classroom when he has need for mastering a second foreign language. With the government spending hundreds of thousands of dollars in developing materials for the uncommon languages, the student will be able to go to the library, choose the materials he needs and proceed to his learning cubicle. He will work with graded recordings and tapes. Visual aids such as filmstrips and short five minute films, pointing up the contrastive elements of the language and culture, will help him. Texts based on
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the work of our commission may be helpful to those who have the responsibility for coordination. We think of our major purpose as a commission of ASCD to be that of bringing together in understandable form a compilation of current curriculum developments and providing suggested guidelines by which to evaluate these projects.

Our commission met again in Chicago on September 29 and 30 to review the preliminary reports. Individual members of the commission had been hard at work in drafting their papers. We decided to move toward a publication for early spring 1963.

We are finding that educators are eager to discover ways of keeping up with new developments. A sectional meeting was held at the NEA 1962 convention and at least two state ASCD groups have used "Coordinating Educational Resources" as the theme of their state meetings, and have called upon individuals from our commission to participate in the programs. The ASCD 1963 conference in St. Louis in March will provide opportunities to learn about current curriculum developments and to discuss their implications for practice.

Margaret Mead has said that we must develop horizontal curriculum development techniques. By this I understand her to mean that we no longer can be content to await the slow process of new ideas being published in books which are in turn placed on library shelves as bibliographical references for prospective teachers and for teachers who return to the campus for study. Educators whose responsibility it is to provide curriculum opportunities for the boys and girls in the classroom must be knowledgeable about new ideas within months rather than years after the development occurs. Can and will ASCD be in the front ranks

of professional groups in discovering new approaches to making decisions and taking action concerning curriculum change? Our commission hopes to do its part in helping to attain this worthy goal.

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the tapes and films, graded programmed readings up to newspaper and magazine difficulty, workbooks and drill tapes, a reference grammar based on the linguistic approach and a student's dictionary glossed in the foreign language should give him the necessary tools to work with another people in another culture.

Behind these language programs must stand an army of humanists in our schools—a highly skilled and dedicated teacher, a wise administration and a school faculty enthusiastic and giving the programs full cooperation. Most of all, we need more than a mere paper and pencil test to evaluate such programs. Now that our students have been asked to increase their experiences in the world at large, international relationships of all kinds ask for people who have read and experienced widely in many languages. Good will rests not alone on economic exchange but on the mutual understanding of different cultures and different peoples. Our government grows hopeful for the day when more Americans will know the languages, the cultures, the literatures and the arts of our neighbors to cement the common bonds of the minds and the hearts of men. Let there be many languages, many races, but one people.

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