

Foreign language departments are more and more frequently being administered by persons whose specialty is in another field. It may be a language arts chairperson who has been asked to supervise the foreign language teachers. Or it may be a coordinator who directs several subject areas, such as English, history, and foreign language. It may even be a top administrator, the coordinator of secondary education, or the assistant superintendent in charge of curriculum, who has been handed this "temporary" task on top of all other duties. In Maryland, for example, 70 percent of the supervisors in charge of foreign language programs are generalists, according to Ann Beusch, Foreign Language Consultant for the Maryland State Department of Education. Are there no specialist supervisors of foreign language any more?

There are, of course, and good ones. You find them primarily in larger systems. In smaller systems, a look at their schedule will reveal that in addition to administering a department they teach two, three, and sometimes even four regular classes a day. Everyone is aware that the reason for this "stepchild" treatment of foreign languages is that enrollments in language decreased steadily and dramatically in the 1970s, leaving this area highly vulnerable to budget cuts.

Many of the problems of foreign language departments are shared by other departments. Even some of the national trends parallel each other. For example, interest in computer technology or the recent emphasis on interdisciplinary efforts cross departmental boundaries and are "hot items" to all. Career education, another common concern, is making students aware of the value of foreign languages as an ancillary skill in just about any given occupation.

What other trends are affecting the teaching of foreign language? Although not new, since it has been advocated since the 1960s, emphasis on

TRENDS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

The 1980s will see more emphasis on practical use of foreign languages and on teaching for international understanding.

conversation, the speaking skill, must take first place. Many teachers ignored—or were ignorant of—the efforts of the audiolinguists to give oral communication top priority. These teachers continued to place the emphasis in their language classes on grammar, pronunciation, and literature, turning many students off in the process and themselves contributing to the decline in enrollments, because the students, as well as budget-conscious school boards, saw nothing practical or useful in what they were learning. On the other hand, "many teachers, trained 'audiolingually,' got stuck in audiolingual drill, which can be as stultifying as grammar-translation of old," comments H. H. Stern of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. He points to the current "communicative" approaches, more reasonable approaches to the teaching of communicative competence. Recently, there has been interest in a "basic" or fundamental skills approach: oral language development reinforced by reading and writing.

An increased emphasis on the teaching of culture has to follow closely the emphasis on conversation in national trends. Besides the growing

realization that language can never be culture-free and that to try to omit it is folly, two other movements in education and in our society have supported the teaching of culture: global education and ethnic awareness. Talk about global education, referred to earlier as "international education," increased during the year that the President's Commission was holding public meetings and gathering material for its 1979 report. One commendable result of all the talk was the bringing together of social studies and foreign language teachers in interdisciplinary efforts. An especially strong emphasis is placed on culture in foreign language "exploratory" courses.

Exploratory language and culture courses proliferated during the second half of the past decade, but they remained highly controversial, because they varied greatly from system to system, required a great deal of teacher preparation and curriculum writing, and were highly vulnerable in times of tight budgets. Even though foreign language teachers have a potentially strong contribution to make to the multicultural education movement, they have a tendency to resist

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exploratory courses, whereas generalist supervisors, principals, and superintendents have been the strongest supporters of all. In the meantime, publishers shy away from investing in development of materials for exploratory language, and up to now there have been no basic texts available for such courses.

The opposite is true of such new courses as Business Spanish or Practical French. They have provided an alternative to students tired of studying grammar or not wishing to pursue the study of literature. They are also easy to defend on the basis of usefulness, and a wealth of materials and resources is available for them. Students can prepare in these courses for a job requiring use of Spanish, in particular, or for a study-abroad program involving travel to and direct contact in a country where the language of their choice is spoken. The creation of more and better-quality study-abroad programs is being demanded as a result. State departments of education and national organizations are setting higher standards for such programs.

Although they do not classify as "trends," because they often fail in their search for funding, one cannot neglect mentioning FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) programs and immersion programs. Where they exist, they are usually excellent, provided that they are well supervised and that articulation of the total language program has been achieved. A victory has been won in the recognition of their value. Both educators and parents concede that the best time to begin study of a foreign language is in the elementary school. In April 1979 the University of Michigan Survey Research Center conducted a telephone survey to discover the attitudes and experience of Americans with regard to the study of foreign languages. Peter A. Eddy, of the Center for Applied Linguistics, reports very encouraging results: "Another measure of the value attached to foreign language study is found in people's responses to the question, 'Are you encouraging your children to study a foreign language in school?' Of parents with children aged 16 or younger, 84 percent indicated that they encourage their children to study a foreign lan-

guage. Of this same group, 73 percent indicate that they expect their children some day to have the opportunity to use a foreign language outside the classroom. Slightly more than 75 percent of the respondents think that foreign language should be offered in the elementary schools in this country."

Bilingual programs are closely related to FLES and immersion programs and have succeeded in capturing the necessary funding whereas the latter have often failed to do so. Certainly, bilingual programs go beyond the classification of "trend"; they are a rapidly-expanding part of the educational system. Even though still highly controversial, they are here to stay.

The difficulties lie in administering a program which must no longer be designed just for Spanish-speaking children, but for other ethnic minorities, for refugees, and for English-speaking students as well. "ESEA Title VII allows up to 40 percent of the enrollment in a bilingual program to be 'anglo.' Not enough administrators take advantage of this!" says John Darcey, Chairman of Foreign Languages and ESL, West Hartford (Connecticut) Public Schools. ESL teachers may face the challenge of teaching English to students who are illiterate in their own language. This situation is forcing the invention of fresh teaching techniques, as well as the creation of new instruments to test basic skills in a nondiscriminatory way.

In summary, the strongest trends pushing into the 1980s are: emphasis on the ability to speak the foreign language and put it to practical use, emphasis on the teaching of culture aimed at increasing international understanding, interdisciplinary efforts, involvement of more and more students in some kind of language study, and the search for better teaching techniques and more authentic materials. This represents a

tremendous challenge to the language teacher. No more ivory towers. No more stale courses of study. Which brings us to one of the administrator's chief concerns: How does one recognize a good language teacher for the purposes of hiring and evaluation?

First of all, in hiring a language teacher, it is absolutely essential that someone who speaks the language(s) the candidate would be expected to teach be present at the interview. Too many personnel directors and other administrators ignore this vital factor, relying heavily on transcripts, resumes, and recommendations, assisted by a little "gut" feeling. Regarding transcripts, whether examined for grades, courses, or credit hours, anyone experienced in personnel knows that they are not reliable in evaluating qualifications, especially where ability to use the foreign language in teaching is concerned.

In an unfortunate number of teacher colleges and other schools of higher education, foreign language courses are often taught in English or, if taught in the foreign language, consist of lectures throughout which the student has no opportunity to speak the language in a significant way. Furthermore, course content in colleges and universities often deals with literature, and literature that is far above the level needed for teaching in secondary school. If methodology is taught at all, which it often is not, it is limited to one semester course, which may or may not be aimed at the future public school teacher.

It cannot be emphasized too much that the first qualification to look for in hiring a language teacher is the ability to speak the language. A caveat is in order, however. Some administrators think that they have solved this problem when they hire a native or bilingual speaker. Unless that native speaker has been trained in American methodology and studied American educational theory, he or she may be a greater risk than the less

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fluent native American. Such a person, sometimes out of over-confidence and a feeling of superiority, may be impatient, intolerant, and inept at handling American teenagers. Natives are most valuable in FLES and immersion programs, where pupils especially need perfect models of pronunciation, and where class control and motivation are less of a challenge, although *still* very important.

The second most important qualification to look for in candidates for language positions is experience abroad. This does not mean travel abroad, nor necessarily teaching abroad, but time spent living in the foreign country, immersed in the culture and language. Just having taken courses at a foreign university does not really count. Did the candidate live in a dorm or in a home with a family? How much contact with natives was experienced? No candidate should be hired who has never had *any* experience abroad, because this person has not only neglected an important part of his or her training, but could not even teach language and culture as they should be taught. Real cultural and linguistic understanding can only come from revelatory personal experience. The possible exceptions to this would be an American bilingual or someone with exceptionally fine training in an immersion situation over a period of time such as is available at the Middlebury Language Schools.

Beyond these two essential qualifications, fluency and overseas experience, the interviewer can rely on the usual indicators of good teaching potential and degree of professionalism. One additional question that might be asked is whether the candidate, if hired, would be willing to organize, prepare, and chaperone a group of students in a study-abroad or exchange program. This willingness should not be an absolute requirement, because not all teachers can or should take on such a challenging and highly responsible task, but it may help in the choice between equally well-qualified candidates.

Once language teachers have been hired and are part of the staff, their supervisor, whether or not he or she speaks any foreign languages, can feel more confident about being able to evaluate their performance. It is

not necessary to understand *what* is being said in the foreign language class (unless one is really paranoid and suspects a conspiracy!). The important thing is that *what* is being said is *in* the foreign language and not in English. It is equally important to observe *who* is doing the speaking. Students should be talking just as much as the teacher, if not more. The level of conversation or drill should be such that the students express themselves fairly easily and rapidly. As in any good class, all students should be involved. If there are bench-warmers, check out the coach.

There are times when English may, and probably should, be spoken in a language class. These are: for orientation purposes, for clarification and discussion of cultural points, and to allow students to ask questions during the last few minutes of the period. It should be remembered that this depends on the level; in upper-level classes, even culture can be discussed in the "target" language.

So much for admonitions. An encouraging word should be said about the "joys" of supervising a foreign language department! It is a joy to taste all those exotic foreign dishes and desserts at department meetings and international parties. It is a joy to see students and teachers interacting enthusiastically in class. Language classes can be a lot of fun. Songs, dances, games, contests, and projects are all part of the scene. Cranky critics dismiss such activities as unprofitable "fun and games." The wise disagree. Some games are a foolish waste of time, of course, but many games are highly educational. Any activity carried out in the language teaches that language, and even better if it is enjoyable. Students may forget grammar rules, but they will never forget a song they like. Later on, that song may have real social value, whereas it's hard to imagine making a friend by reciting a grammar rule.

If generalizations can be forgiven, language teachers tend to be creative, lively, enthusiastic, and innovative. They are accustomed to varying their techniques and may be among the first to try a new approach, such as individualized instruction or interdisciplinary planning. Their bulletin boards are usually colorful, and cus-

todians have a difficult time persuading them to keep their posters, maps, flags, and other realia off windows, doors, and other sacred surfaces. In other words, a language class is a pleasant, interesting place—a joy, again—for the supervisor to visit.

At this point, the reader is no doubt asking: "If there is so much enjoyment in language classes, why aren't our students flocking to them?" There are good reasons. Perhaps not enough language classes are actually as described above. Perhaps students have discovered that behind all the fun lies a lot of real work requiring practice, memory, homework, and effort in class. Some students do not expect an "elective" to be an academic discipline. Perhaps there is simply too much competition for students' time, too many conflicts in their schedules.

Concern about declining enrollments and the future of language study in the United States prompted the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages to do a nationwide study of successful programs, in the hope that they might serve as models. ACTFL's Successful Programs Survey was supported by a grant from the Department of Education (Sims and Hammond, 1981). Of interest to us here are the "most outstanding general characteristics of success" observed by the researchers in the 50 programs finally selected as most successful. In other words, what are the *common factors* in superior foreign language programs? ACTFL's list includes the following:

- an articulated curriculum
- extensive co- and extracurricular activities that integrate language study into the fabric of school life
- provision for central organizing authority, such as a coordinator
- a high incidence of target language use
- special motivational techniques to promote such usage
- good administrative support
- an exploratory language course
- unusually long course sequences
- effective use of community resources
- accommodation of a broad spectrum of students through a wide array of options for language study
- study and travel abroad options, exchange programs

—an especially strong, dynamic staff

—provision for good inservice training

—strong public relations efforts

—special recruiting techniques

—a resolve to connect language study with the practical and concrete.

Several of the above factors have already been implied or described in this article; space does not permit elaboration on all of them. Departments wishing to compare themselves might use the list as the basis for a self-evaluation form or for a series of discussions. These in turn could lead to needed inservice programs.

Will these success factors change as we move through the 80s? What issues in elementary and secondary foreign language education are still to be resolved? One question often asked by administrators is: *Which* languages should we be teaching today? Essentially, it does not matter. The study of *any* second language opens the door to better comprehension of one's native tongue and facilitates the study of other languages in the future. Students need to learn *how* to learn, in this case, other languages, as they are needed.

The United States is almost a bilingual country, and Spanish, at least, should be introduced to all students. Latin has its appeal. There are good arguments for French, German, Russian, Arabic, Japanese, and Chinese. If the community and the student body express a desire to have certain languages taught, this interest should be respected and capitalized upon. What is important, for Americans of all ages in a time and a world of increasing global interdependence, is that they increase their understanding of culture and their ability to communicate effectively by studying as many languages as possible for as long as possible, ideally, all their lives. ■

Reference

- Sims, William D., and Hammond, Sandra B. *Award Winning Foreign Language Programs: Prescription for Success*. Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Company in conjunction with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1981.

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