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## FRENCH IN THE HIGH SCHOOLS OF VIRGINIA

IN THE reorganization of the curricula of secondary schools, modern language courses are undergoing many investigations and changes. These courses offer many problems to those educators who are trying to make modern languages conform to the general spirit of the modern curricula. What are some of the problems which have been met? Among them are "What specific objectives can be set up in foreign language work which will be adapted to the pupils who pursue the subject for general training; how shall these differ from the groups who intend to pursue further some linguistic study, or how far will foreign language study contribute to the large objectives outlined for secondary education of the present day?"<sup>1</sup>

Questions arise in the mind of the teacher in regard to the best methods to be used and also just when a modern language should be first presented to the pupil in order to reap the best results. Clement quotes a writer of a recent magazine article: "The changes now actually taking place in the high school curriculum are of wide-reaching significance; among them the future of modern language assumes great importance."<sup>2</sup>

It is the purpose of this paper to give, as a result of a research of sixty-seven high schools in Virginia, the opinions of the French teachers of those schools, basing the conclusions upon information received through answers to questionnaires which were sent to them. A general study has

been made of the preparation of the teachers, the courses of study offered, the specific aims of the teachers apart from the general aims of all high school subjects, the methods of teaching, and the library facilities and the illustrative material for making these methods more effective.

One of the great handicaps to successful results in teaching French in the past five years has been poor preparation of French teachers. This ill-preparedness is due to the recency of the widespread introduction of French into the high schools of the country. As is well known, German dropped out of many secondary schools entirely during the war, and French and other modern languages were substituted. Previous to the middle of the nineteenth century French had been introduced into only a limited number of public secondary schools. The time given to French has increased rapidly the last two decades. In Virginia now two hundred seventy-two of the three hundred fifty-nine, or seventy-three per cent of the accredited high schools, and seven of the twenty-five, or twenty-eight per cent of the accredited junior high schools, offer courses in French.

TABLE I

Preparation of the Teachers of French in the Secondary Schools of Virginia	
Number of years studied	Number of teachers
2 and 2½ years	12
3 and 3½ years	14
4 and 4½ years	14
5 years	7
6 years	9
7 years	4
8 years	3
9 years	1
10 years	1
Have spoken French all their life	2
Total	67
Median	4 and 4½ years
Arithmetic mean	4.38
Range	2 to 10 years

<sup>1</sup>Clement, John A., *Curriculum Making in Secondary Schools*, p. 416.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid*, p. 216.

Among the group of teachers questioned there is one who is a native of France, one who has spoken French all of his life, six who have studied in the universities of France, and a few who have traveled in France. It may be concluded from Table I that too great a percentage have studied only two or three years to teach two years of high school work. A large number of the best universities and colleges of the eastern part of the United States and a few universities in France have had a share in preparing these teachers.

In making out the French curriculum, it is important to remember that high school pupils are a cosmopolitan group. Imagine a foreign language department with courses offered which could meet the needs of each individual who desires to take it, just as there are in almost every department except the languages, and with teachers of the highest type of genius.<sup>3</sup> Teachers have very rarely seen the possibilities of such a course, but the idea can at least be thought of, which is one of the steps to having such a course. In only seven of the sixty-seven schools is there a course offered for those who would probably not go to college, while two think the pupils get all the necessary training in the courses offered to cover the college entrance requirements. The majority of schools, fifty-two of the sixty-seven, offer two-year courses. Only the largest schools such as Danville, Petersburg, Alexandria, and the larger military academies offer a four-year course, six of the sixty-seven. Seven offer a three-year course and two a one-year course. One of these last two schools mentioned will not give French next year; the other will give two years next year to take the place of Spanish.

The high school curriculum is always influenced by college entrance requirements. To graduate from an accredited high school, credits in a foreign language are required; to meet college entrance requirements, two

credits at the least of some foreign language are necessary. Although the specific aims of the teacher should not be exclusively to prepare students for college, it is sometimes the big aim back of all the other aims he or she may have in respect to foreign languages. Although only a small percentage of them ever go to college, their needs are provided for and the larger percentage of them are forced to take some foreign language whether it will ever be of any use to them or not.

Just what aims does the teacher have in teaching French to high school students? Some educators think it essential for general culture, mental discipline, and the worthy use of leisure. Others think French need not be included in the curriculum at public expense, if there are no important mistakes or shortcomings that result from the failure to master a foreign language. Professor Bobbitt<sup>4</sup> asks this question, "What are the deficiencies in one's performance of the labors of his calling that result from the lack of knowledge of foreign languages?" There seems to be little justification for requiring everyone to take a foreign language, when viewed from the point of occupational efficiency. Courses must be offered, however, to meet the needs of those it will benefit. But cannot a French course be made as beneficial as other high school courses in preparing a boy or girl for life? Is not there something to be reaped from it although there is no direct use for it in post-school days? "Students have the right to ask, at the end of the year of work in any subject, that they carry away something that is of real importance to their intellectual development."<sup>5</sup> French teachers should make an effort to give them some real, intellectual training in even so short a time as one year. "Service to the pupil determines the aim of instruction. Work must at all times be of value both to those who

<sup>3</sup>Clement, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>4</sup>Bobbitt, *The Curriculum*, pp. 255-81.

<sup>5</sup>Judd, *Psychology of High School Subjects*, p. 216.

are to leave the classroom and to those who will continue."<sup>6</sup> Efforts are being made to do this with what objectives in mind?

The group of French teachers in giving their aims in teaching French to high school students give them in this order:

1. The acquisition of an easy reading knowledge (65)
2. An introduction to the life and literature of France (61)
3. The acquisition of credits for college entrance (49)
4. The acquisition of a conversational ability (41)
5. The foundation of an accomplishment that may become useful in business and travel (41)
6. Formal discipline of the mind (38)
7. Preparation for intellectual pursuits that require the ability to read French for information (34)
8. Personal enjoyment and growth.

After the French teacher has her aims clearly in mind, the next problem is to know just what methods to use to make her presentation of the subject matter meet these aims. Amid so many different methods and different ideas about how French should be taught to high school pupils, the best thing to do is to make a thorough study of the members of the class and use the methods which, it is believed, will bring about the best results.

In teaching pronunciation, of the sixty-seven teachers four use the imitation method, eighteen the phonetic method, and twenty-two a combination of the two methods. Some think phonetics are a waste of time in both high school and college work, while others think this method the most effective. One teacher states, "J'ai enseigné les phonétiques une fois mais j'ai trouvé qu'en le faisant on gaspille beaucoup de temps. L'imitation est la meilleure méthode que l'on pourrait employer. La soi-disante 'Science de lire' est une méthode dont les

charlatans, qui ne sachent rien de la langue française, se servent." The reason for the disuse of phonetics may be the fact that teachers have not had the opportunity of studying this method and do not feel capable of putting it across to the pupils in an interesting way. Others, because they have a good pronunciation themselves feel they will be more successful in teaching by the imitation method. The value of the phonetic method is being rapidly recognized, as is concluded from the fact that seventeen per cent of the sixty-seven teachers use it exclusively, while thirty-five per cent of them use it together with the imitation method. Again this question arises, Can an American teach French pronunciation as well as a Frenchman? Is the requisite for teaching French pronunciation a good pronunciation? In other countries the teaching of English is intrusted to natives of those countries. French is taught by Germans, Englishmen, and others with excellent results. A writer for the *School Review*<sup>7</sup> makes this statement: "In Paris the teaching of English is intrusted to Frenchmen. In visiting eight of the largest French lycées I met but one native English teacher, and she was permitted to teach permanently only because she had been naturalized . . . . Pronunciation is not contagious; a little knowledge of the science of phonetics easily turns the balance against the native teacher. Then, too, the native teacher is generally entirely lacking in any scientific preparation for this work." One of the special difficulties in teaching American children French pronunciation is the fact that French involves forms of reaction not present in the vernacular. "People who have in their vernacular a highly inflected and complex language can learn a simple language very much more readily than one who has as his native tongue such a simple language as English."<sup>8</sup> This is another strong argument

<sup>6</sup>Bahlsen, Leopold, *The Teaching of Modern Languages*.

<sup>7</sup>A. B. Bovee, *School Review*, June, 1914 (XXII, 6), p. 416.

<sup>8</sup>Judd, *op. cit.*, p. 236.

for phonetics—the most effective teaching of new sounds to adults. Imitation is recognized as the best for children. A little book called *A Handbook of French Phonetics* by William A. Nitze and Ernest H. Wilkins is an especially good one, presenting a course in phonetics which takes into consideration the needs of the different teachers.

Another great problem of the teacher of French is the selection of the grammar to be used. In this selection the teacher must have in mind her purpose for teaching French, the proper method to be used for satisfactory results, and subject-matter in accordance with the comprehension of high school pupils. In the Virginia schools the method of teaching the fundamentals of grammar is determined largely by the texts recommended in the state course of study, namely, Frasier and Squair's *New Complete French Grammar* and Fougeray's *Mastery of French*, Book I. Only three out of sixty-four teachers make use of the direct method. This small number is probably due to the lack of illustrative material used in Realien. School authorities consider it justifiable to spend money for science equipment, but unnecessary for modern language instruction. Twenty-five schools use the grammar method; twenty-one the modified direct method; twelve a combination of the grammar and modified direct method; and three a combination of the direct and grammar methods. It is interesting to note that the grammar method and the modified direct method are equally popular.

As a means of assisting the pupils to build up a French vocabulary, classroom conversation is in great favor. Vocabulary drills are used by seventy-six per cent of the schools. A great many have contests and have the pupils make lists of words from their reading. A very few use games. Other ways mentioned by the teachers are project work, dictated English composition to be written in French, memorization, and

participation in plays, and *résumé* on reading.

Only two of the sixty-seven schools do not make use of classroom conversation. Translation alone is used in these schools to develop the pupils' ability to understand French. All but eleven schools give dictation. The amount of time given to it varies from five minutes a week to one hour a week, the average time being about twenty minutes once a week. Dramatizing, writing French, having fluent speakers visit the class, and reading aloud French stories are other methods used to train the pupils in the comprehension of French. Pupils of sixteen of the schools correspond with high school pupils of France. Almost all the teachers attempt to show the relation of the French language to the English. Some stress this, but others do not.

TABLE II

Library Equipment of the French Departments of Sixty-Seven High Schools of Virginia

Types of books	Number of schools having books	Number of books
Dictionaries	46	51
Novels	25	267
Histories	24	91
Short stories	2	10
Plays	2	20
Miscellaneous	10	240
No equipment	20	
Total number of schools		67
Total number of books		679

The French departments are sadly in need of equipment to aid in successful teaching. Table II gives the number of books in the libraries of sixty-seven schools. Half of the libraries contain no French books or only one French dictionary. One fourth of them have a collection of novels and histories; a very few have one hundred books or more. Illustrative material is very scarce. Forty-two of the schools have maps of France, twenty-five song books, eighteen wall pictures of French scenery, architecture, etc., twenty-three French games, two souvenirs of France, three cross-word puzzles and six books of illustrated topics. Fourteen teachers have no way to get in touch with any such material. Only nine of these schools

have victrola records for pronunciation. Two of these nine think they are invaluable in teaching high school pupils. Thirty of the teachers subscribe to some French periodical, *Le Petit Journal*, *Lectures Pour Tous*, *La Presse*, *Modern Language Journal*, or *L'Illustration*.

The French teachers of the state, besides teaching French, have many duties. One of these is the sponsoring of French clubs. Very few, however, have the pleasure of doing this—only fourteen of the sixty-seven. Among the names given to these clubs are *La Bonne Heure*, *Le Cercle Français*, *Songs and Recitations*, *Modern Language Club*, *La Société Française*, and *The French Circle*. The majority of the teachers devote only two periods of the day to French, and therefore they must teach other subjects. The fact that seventy-four per cent of these other subjects are languages, either English, Latin or Spanish, is very interesting. The other twenty-six per cent have the teaching of French correlated with the teaching of almost every other high school subject.

Although Virginia schools are handicapped in the French departments, her schools, as all other secondary schools, are making progress in solving the many problems in regard to the modern language curriculum. Virginia, as all other states are doing, is watching the work of the committee meetings which represent the Modern Language Association of America and is awaiting and striving to find a satisfactory solution to the curriculum problems.

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B. FRANCES SELLERS

## TEACHING ELECTRICITY AND MAGNETISM THROUGH THE RADIO

IN THIS age most children have come in contact with radio and are more or less interested in it. Every good teacher wishes to present her subject through the medium of everyday experiences. Radio offers such a medium for the study of electricity and magnetism (a different topic to present in textbook fashion).

It is a simple matter through a class discussion of radio sets to get from the pupils a suggestion that they be allowed to make one. At this time the teacher should point out the difficulty of the problem and suggest that the pupils decide what principles of electricity and magnetism are necessary for understanding and constructing a radio set. This, of course, will be only a preliminary organization of material and will be gained by discussion as the children leaf through their physics books.

The teacher now puts concretely before the pupils the whole problem. In addition to building the radio, the teacher will offer other related problems for further work and credit.

The applications of the principles set up by the children to the building of the radio are constantly kept before them. This brings unification and organization of all the material.

This plan should not be considered final, but should be changed and modified to suit conditions arising in individual class rooms.

#### I. *What the pupils do*

- A. The class determines to make a three-tube radio set.
  1. They make a collection of books and magazine articles dealing with radio, for class use.

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This preliminary plan for a unit in electricity and magnetism was a committee report in Ed. 410 for the spring quarter, 1926.