

- How and why foreign languages should be taught.
This article supplements Andre Maurois' article at
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LANGUAGE – THE KEY TO BETTER INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The great up-surge in the training of the men and women of our country in the fields of mathematics and science has meant increased success in the race for aggressive and defensive power in the world of growing unrest and conflict; yet little has been accomplished in the development of better international relations and understanding, largely because Americans generally are unable to communicate in the same language with people of other nationalities and do not know what is really in the minds of the people with whom they come in contact.

Although the daily news, periodicals, and research studies are constantly pointing to the great need for language instruction, some communities call such programs "fads" or "frill" or "impractical" inclusions.

Educators and community leaders must dispel this fallacy with a well-planned language program and carefully developed publicity through lay curriculum planners, Parent-Teacher Associations, civic organizations, and the press.

What is a well-planned language program? First, the most important of all, there must be a well-planned program for our own language and culture, which will extend from the first through the twelfth grade. It must include not only the tools of speaking, writing, and reading, but also the literature, the history and geography of the country, and a study of our beliefs and our ideals as stated in the three great charters of freedom – the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution. All students should

know the real meaning of our type of government and have information and experience which will develop in their minds and hearts such devotion and loyalty to the American way of life that "brain washing" of our citizens and defection to another type of life under pressure will no longer be possible.

Because millions of Americans are either residents or travelers in other lands, and our people have dealings in all parts of the languages besides our own is particularly important. Most schools today are offering too few languages and too little of any one language, and it is important that this situation be studied and improved. There must be a program which will assure some degree of mastery if any value is to be gained from the study of another language.

This means that the study of "foreign" language will begin early in the school system and continue without a break through the high school. There is little of value in a conversational course of any language in the ele-

mentary schools unless there is a follow-up in the secondary schools.

Just what languages will be studied and in what grade the study will begin will depend upon such important factors as time, school facilities, and qualified teachers. Some schools which are properly equipped begin with 15-minute daily sessions in the third grade. Others prefer to start in the fourth or fifth grade when the student has learned to speak, read, and write his own language reasonably well. If conditions are favorable, it seems best to begin in one of these elementary grades because here the child is uninhibited and imitative and will readily catch on to the sound and meaning of the strange language.

Language study in the elementary grades should be oral with no emphasis on rules of grammar. It will include conversation, folk songs and folk games, playlets and the like, and, in the fifth and sixth grades, reading which shows something of the habits and customs of the people whose language is being studied.

In the secondary schools the same language should be continued with increased emphasis upon the structure of the language and the study of the culture and literature of the country in its own language. Students must continue talking, listening, and reading, for it is through what people say and write down that one learns the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual life of a nation. These things people need to know if they are to live in harmony in our increasingly smaller world.

Many administrators are not yet convinced, however, that there is need for more language study in the public schools. They give as their reasons the lack of class time for the regular subjects, the questionable use of another language, and the shortage of well-qualified teachers.

While these are valid reasons in many instances, it is possible that the whole school program needs a re-evaluation. There may be too much time-consuming repetition from grade to grade in the subjects now being taught. Considerable time might be saved through closer

coordination of the several branches of one subject and of related subjects or a reduction of one area of study to one period daily instead of two or three, which is the case in some so-called popular subjects,

The need for other languages is so obvious that argument seems unnecessary. Diplomats, statesmen, military personnel, business men, laborers, stenographers, technical experts in many fields, exchange teachers and students, and thousands of travelers are in every part of the world today. Their lack of ability to communicate with the people of these countries is a constant stumbling block in their efforts to convey to these people our motives, our intent, our way of life and to understand what they are thinking and what they believe and want. Knowledge of their language and culture could save our people embarrassment and loss of prestige the world over. There is every reason to believe that intensive language program planning should begin at once.

The lack of adequately trained language teachers is

the real problem. No program at all is better than one poorly taught. No longer is the grammar-translation type of language instruction sufficient. Teachers must be able to speak the language fluently, know the people and the country well, and be skilled in the best methods of instruction. New laboratory methods have been developed and training in these modern teaching processes is available to teachers in almost any of the leading colleges and universities of the country.

When teachers and funds are available, the language department will need laboratory equipment consisting of tape and disc recordings, phonographs, tape recorders, and sound-proof booths with head sets through which students listen to tape or disc recordings. The cost of this equipment is not exorbitant as compared with science labo-

ratory equipment, and it is essential in developing correct pronunciation and in enabling students to understand normal speech in another tongue. These aids provide means for students to engage actively in learning the language during the entire class period, relieve teachers of much oral drill, save class time, and help to compensate for the shortage of teachers.

More and more of the students now in school will be living and working all over the world, and it is the duty of the schools to prepare them adequately to live harmoniously in these other countries. Training in language is no less important than training in science and technology, and it is chiefly through the schools that this training may be obtained. —
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