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PROBLEMS AND PROGRESS ON THE LATIN FRONT.

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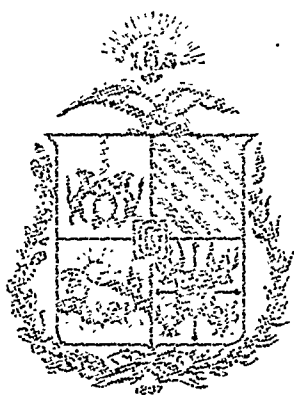
The efforts being made to deal with the problem of decreased enrollment in Latin are considered in this paper. Current attempts to improve the training of Latin teachers and to update teaching methods are discussed, and difficulties encountered with administrators and counselors are identified. Stressed is the need for support from administrators, counselors, parents, and students who are all crucial in the effort to increase enrollment in the study of Latin. (SS)

PROCEEDINGS

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GONZAGA UNIVERSITY

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PROBLEMS AND PROGRESS.. ON THE LATIN FRONT

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The one problem that bothers us all is the decrease in enrollment in Latin in the schools, and the only real progress we will admit is a reversal of the trend both in the number of students enrolled in in the number of schools giving Latin. I cannot promise any substantial reversal at this moment, nor can I see an immediate prospect of such a reversal. Nonetheless, efforts are being made and will continue to be made to deal with our problem in such a way as to make the reversal more likely. Let us then consider some of the elements in the problem and our efforts to deal with them.

The Teacher. In 1932 I made a study of teacher preparation in the State of Washington, which showed that more than fifty per cent of the teachers of Latin had themselves taken two years or less of high school Latin and lo Latin of college level. This is evidence of the persistence of Latin in the American educational tradition at that time and evidence also of the degradation of that tradition, and of the blindness of administrators who made such assignments of teaching load.

If the situation has greatly improved today, it is probably because Latin is not now given in most of the schools which once had completely unprepared teachers, although I know of some cases -- even in strong city schools -- where assignments have not been wisely made. Certainly the University was not able in 1932 to flood the state with an adequate supply of good Latin teachers, and even today we are not able to provide a well-prepared teacher for every good job that we hear about.

One of our problems, then, is to supply an adequate number of well-trained teachers.

The report of the Airlie conference (Planning Conference to Examine the Role of Classical Studies in American Education and to Make Recommendations for Needed Research and Development, John Francis Latimer, Project Director, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 27, sets up the ideal requirements for the Latin teacher and then adds: "Perhaps the best way to establish a minimum standard would be to set a National Examination which would test competency in the various phases of the subject and then grant certification in subject matter on the basis of achievement. Personal and emotional fitness would have to be determined by other means."

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This proposal would be much more attractive if together with the certificate of competency there went a guarantee of a satisfactory job. The schools themselves would have to raise their standards far above what they now have, and there would have to be keen competition for available jobs, before the certificate would be especially valuable.

A more sensible way to approach the matter is being tried at Indiana University, Southern Illinois University, and the University of Oregon, where a two-year sequence leading to a master's degree for the high school teacher who has never taught is being offered with governmental support. In the same category belong the training institute for new teachers of Latin in the 7th grade, given at the University of Minnesota in the summer of 1966, and the Institute of Trainers of Latin Teachers, planned for summer 1967 at the same university. The latter Institute should be particularly helpful to those who are lucky enough to get to attend it.

Surely those of us at other institutions who are involved in teacher training are trying to improve our own approach to the subject and to recruit and train those who will accept our suggestions.

While these efforts are being made, Professor John F. Latimer, Executive Secretary of the American Classical League, is trying to assemble statistical information which will indicate how bad the shortage of Latin teachers really is.

We may safely say, then, that there is an improvement in the preparation of Latin teachers, and that the market and demand for the teacher of Latin is being assessed.

The Method. There is little need to define here what we mean by the traditional method -- you have all had experience with it. The structural method we now realize is not really a method but rather a system of analysis. The audio-lingual method has several degrees, as shown by such texts as Lingua Latina (Burns, Medicus, Sherburne, Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin), Lingua Latina Viva (Towey et al., McGraw-Hill Book Company, Webster Division, Manchester, Missouri), and the new programmed text by Waldo Sweet, Artes Latinae (Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation, Chicago, Illinois).

Without labeling one of these texts as superior to the others, I can at least say that we are trying to do something about our method of presenting the Latin. My own feeling is that all three texts will make for easier work for the teacher who is competent in Latin and will bring the young student along with much more satisfaction to him. Our younger teachers are generally willing to give one of the new texts a try.

Principals, also, are frequently interested in new methods. I recently pointed out the virtues of Lingua Latina and Lingua Latina Viva to a principal in whose school Latin is no longer given. He was quite favorably impressed but expressed the opinion that his former Latin teacher -- now teaching other subjects, and trained in the traditional method -- would be unwilling to change. He could, of course, try to get a Latin teacher with modern ideas when he is in the market for another teacher, but we can hardly expect such men to go out of their way to serve our needs.

The answer to the problem of method, however, is not a simple one, as John G. Boucher has shown in a recent article (Foreign Language News and Views in New Hampshire, XII, No. 1, Fall, 1966, quoted in Newsletter M.F.L.T.A., XI, No. 3, April 1967, College of Great Falls, Montana). There he quotes Dr. Irving Saltzman thus: "No one, not the experienced language teacher, not the erudite linguists, not the experimental psychologist, not the professor of education, no one today knows the best way to teach foreign languages. The data upon which decisions about procedural rules could be based have not been collected, or they are inconclusive."

Boucher's own conclusion is that "each teacher must find his own methodology, one that works for him and will produce the results he wants. He needs to work out his own objectives, and as he strives to attain these goals, so refine his technique from year to year that, for him, teaching ceases to be an unthinking application of methods worked out by someone else, and slowly but surely becomes an art. Van Gogh and Renoir were born great artists though their methods and techniques were quite different. They did have one thing in common, however, a driving dedication to the search for the ideal."

This art cannot, of course, be developed in a vacuum -- unless the art be as natural to the teacher as music was to Mozart. The path to such development generally requires participation in conferences and summer institutes, attendance at lectures and seminars, membership in professional organizations, and reading the professional journals. Unfortunately there are still a vast number of language teachers who limit their professional responsibility to the classroom and the marking of papers, and to whatever other minimum standards the school may require.

Whatever the final answer may be about method, we may be quite sure that method alone will not be our salvation and bring the students back into our classes. We may be equally sure, however, that only the teacher who is constantly concerned about method will, under favorable circumstances, see the enrollment in his classes increase.

Administrators and Counselors. It seems quite certain that many principals and counselors have no sympathy for languages in general and for Latin in particular. Frequently such people are quite vociferous and dogmatic, and manage to institute programs which are not to the best interest of the teachers of foreign languages, and of the children who should have a full opportunity to learn languages.

At the moment administrative action in our Northshore District calls for discontinuance of 7th grade language classes. The district has never had a real FLES program and even the small amount currently present is to be eliminated. Foreign languages may then be started in the 9th or some later grade, but Latin will not be available until the 10th grade, and then only if 20 or more students enroll. In many cases the language will probably be started in the 11th grade, on the basis of a complete misinterpretation of the intention of our University language requirement. The language teachers in the district are not unified enough and strong enough to resist successfully this administrative action.

In the Bellevue district the language teachers are facing a similar situation. The administration proposed to limit the FLES program to Spanish and to permit no other language to be started until the 9th grade. The intention was to phase out -- administrators seem to love this term -- the starting of a language in high school and to pressure every student to take a four-year sequence of the language started in the 9th grade. The proposal has some merits, but the teachers -- with the help of some principals -- have blocked for the present some of the worst parts of it. Languages will continue to be started in the 7th grade and in high school as well as in the 9th grade, but the FLES program will be limited to Spanish.

In both districts such decisions are made without consulting the teachers first, although they are permitted individually or in groups to object and to make alternative suggestions.

Administrators of adjacent districts regularly discuss their plans with each other, but teachers have no way of knowing what is going to happen and no arrangement for joint action when ruthless discrimination is instituted. Perhaps the Foreign Language Division of our State Department of Education could serve as a clearing house to keep teachers informed as to what is going on; but even then we may generally be too late and in the position of defending a lost cause.

This spring, as part of the Washington Foreign Language Program, Dr. Paul McRill arranged for four meetings with administrators and counselors, at strategic points in the state. Those who came to the conference that I attended were generally not unfriendly to languages and one or two seemed very friendly to Latin. However, a number of those who were invited did not show up at all, and some were there only briefly. Only those who attended all sessions of the conference got the full effect of what Dr. McRill was trying to do, namely, make clear the philosophy of our planning for foreign language both in the schools and at the University.

In his report on the conferences, issued March 15, Dr. McRill expresses an admiration for counselors, which he admits is based on "only a relative handful from a large professional group, but I hope that the others average out about the same." This may well be about the same thing as forming an opinion about Latin teachers on the basis of the ones who attend one of the Conferences for Latin Teachers which our department sponsors twice a year. Hopes in both cases are not likely to be realized. But Dr. McRill does make a very excellent suggestion: "I most earnestly recommend that teachers and counselors, building by building, district by district, organization by organization, arrange to talk to each other -- and not about schedules and grade points."

If such conversations could make counselors and administrators as friendly to us as they once were, and if they were sending students into Latin in droves, we are not ready for them. And indeed we are not really asking for that. What we want -- at least as I see it -- is for the competent teacher to receive fair support and for the principal to be ready to hire and to use the competent Latin teacher, even if this means reintroducing the subject into the school. We must all admit, however, that not every teacher who thinks he is competent is so in.

fact, and that there are some who hang grimly on to the subject they love until they kill it. The principal is not always wrong.

Probably the basic trouble with principals and counselors is that they have too much confidence in the "vocational" theory of education. They can see languages only in terms of preparation to make a living -- in the narrow sense. They belong in the same category with Trimalchio and would probably see nothing wrong with his attitude toward education. This attitude, of course, is shared by a large number of parents, and perhaps even by the Latin teacher who shirks all professional responsibilities and uses his knowledge as a vocational tool only.

There can be little doubt that principals and counselors can and do make or break us. We may have the best teachers in the world and the best methods, but unless administrators can be induced to support us and counselors can be induced to send students into our classes, we are ruined. No teacher by himself can build and maintain a Latin department in a high school. He must have some sort of support.

If we are making any progress at all with administrators and counselors, it is surely on a completely individual and haphazard basis. Perhaps Dr. Latimer's office could formulate a program and a plan of action which would be effective. Certainly the Latin teacher has been forced to cope with this problem by himself for far too long.

Parents. The best friends we have are those parents who are themselves educated persons and who urge their children to take Latin. Without their help we would be in a far worse position than we now are. We should do everything in our power to make sure that the children now in our classes will, when they become parents, want their children in turn to have the same opportunity that they had.

It is true that parental pressure sometimes means that the child will rebel completely and refuse to do anything, but more often he conforms and learns to like the subject -- if he is in the hands of a good teacher. Generally the rebellious ones will blame the parent and not the teacher. But of course there are poor teachers who tend to make even the good student rebellious. It is possible that many of those who are hostile to Latin got that way as the result of contact with such a teacher, just as many of us who are enthusiastic about it got that way because of a good teacher.

Parents who are themselves uneducated sometimes look upon Latin as a status symbol and are therefore friendly to the subject when their own children take it. We should never belittle their help and should try to build up their active support.

The great majority of parents, however, probably ask: "What job will Latin prepare a person for?" These people need to understand the difference between "education" and "job training." They will not easily learn this from the schools themselves which begin the emphasis on vocational choice even in the elementary grades.

Perhaps it is in this area more than anywhere else that Dr. Latimer's office could make a contribution. What is needed is a planned publicity campaign which would keep Latin in the public eye -- on the pages of newspapers, in magazines, on TV and radio -- with emphasis on the contributions made and the honors won by students of Latin. It is not a matter of testimonials -- we have plenty of them -- but of news stories which will reach the people we want to reach.

Possibly a national Committee to Promote Latin in the Schools could be set up, which would encourage the formation of state committees under the aegis of the state Classical association. Publicity about such a committee and an open invitation to interested citizens to join and actively support its efforts might produce striking results. Our real salvation may lie in reaching the parents who can put the necessary pressure on administrators and counselors. This was, in effect, what Dr. Forbes Bottomly, Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools, recommended to us at our Latin Teachers Conference of March 11, 1967.

That such committees can be effective is shown by the success of the North Cascades Conservation Council, under the leadership of Pat Goldsworthy, who is always ready to talk and show films to any group which will listen.

I suggest a national committee because we want to save Latin in the entire United States, not just in one state alone or in one at a time. I hope that Dr. Latimer, and the Council of the American Classical League, will give serious thought to this suggestion.

Students. Students as well as parents may be a source of help to us. Certainly the Junior Classical League is already doing a great job of publicizing Latin. One specific thing that a JCL member can do is recruit students for next year's beginning class. I suggested this to the JCL meeting at Bremerton, Washington, last fall, in the familiar phraseology, "Each one reach one", and I have had reports that the suggestion is being followed out with gratifying results in some cases. Perhaps a JCL button with the motto on it, to be worn during registration week, might produce results. Of course, this approach need not be limited to JCL activity. Every teacher should encourage his students to help him get a class for the following year.

Summary. I have tried to show that the attitudes of administrators, counselors, parents, and students are crucial to our welfare and that our energies should be concentrated where they can do the most good. This is the way to real progress, this is the way to a rising enrollment in Latin.

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