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ABSTRACT

A two-part experiment seeks to determine the practicability of independent foreign language study using programed materials as a mode of instruction for a limited number of secondary school students of high ability. Discussion of additional objectives, methods, materials, and student attitudes reveals that the process of programed learning combined with the process of self-evaluation provides sufficient motivation to merit the continuation of the program. Modified objectives for part two are discussed. (RL)

AN EXPERIMENT IN INDEPENDENT FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

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Townsend Junior High School in Tucson Public Schools District No. 1 is the setting of a thus far two-phased experiment in independent foreign language study using programmed materials.

In the absence of any foreign language program in the school, the first phase of the experiment was initiated on March 3, 1969. It involved seventeen eighth grade students who had been carefully selected by language aptitude battery scores¹, the recommendation of the principal, Clarence I. Logan, and evidence of high interest and motivation. The first phase terminated on May 23, 1969. It has since been evaluated in a report which can be made available, to the extent of supply of copies, upon request submitted on school stationery.²

In the First Phase, the following programmed materials with their correlated tapes were used: Active French Foundation Course, Book 1, Fernand Marty, by three students; Modern French, Eliane Burroughs, by one student; German A, Ernest E. Ellert, by three students; and A Programmed Course in Introductory Spanish, M. W. Sullivan, by the remaining ten students. Information concerning these programs may be found in "Foreign Language Programmed Materials: 1969," by A. I. Fiks. Number 7 of ERIC Focus Reports on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, MLA/ACTFL.



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The seventeen students, working either as individuals or as small teams, assumed full responsibility for the daily use of eight taperecorders, programmed textbooks and tapes during their independent study periods. Time for this was created by releasing students from their reading classes.

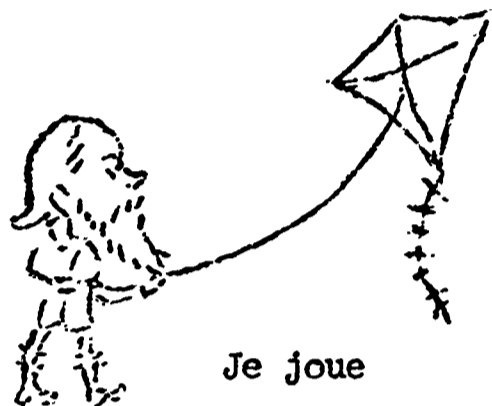
Participants pursued their independent study in the school cafeteria, the library, a counseling office, a classroom, and, in emergency, the bookroom and the assistant principal's office, depending on the period of the day and other variable factors.

The first phase had the sole objective of testing the practicability of independent study using programmed materials as a mode of instruction for a limited number of students of high language aptitude and above-average general ability. The specific questions to be answered were these: Will "good" students be so motivated by foreign language programmed materials that they will continue to work alone, conscientiously, without boredom and pressure over a fairly long period of time to achieve the objectives of programmed materials? Can the opportunity be provided economically and without causing inconvenience to the normal work-a-day functions of a school and its personnel?

¹ All Townsend Junior High School eighth grade students had been given the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1966) the previous year. The mean verbal aptitude stanine score of the experiment participants was 8.0; the mean auditory aptitude stanine score, 8.5.

² Evaluation of a Project: Independent Foreign Language Study by Selected Eighth Graders at Townsend Junior High School Using Programmed Materials..., by John F. Bockman, Tucson Public Schools, Tucson, Arizona. August 1969.

Purposes for the student were explicitly detailed and delimited for them and for their parents. The term explore, for example, rather than study, was employed to obviate unwarranted expectations. The project could, it was believed, permit interested and persevering individuals to develop a limited, but thorough, background of certain skills in the language pursued. There was to be, however, no periodic evaluation and no accountability. In effect, participants were promised nothing but what they themselves might wrest from their programs by their own efforts. The first phase of the project was declared not intended in any way as a substitute for any part of a regular year's work in a foreign language so far as high school credit or equivalence is concerned.



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Supervision of the project was conducted by the district's coordinator of foreign language instruction. At the beginning, thirteen of the participants took both the MLA Coop Listening and MLA Coop Reading Tests in the language they wished to explore. Since most students showed some measurement, whether or not they had ever seen or heard the language before, it was felt wise to discount the results. Attitudes toward foreign language study were measured on a scale similar to that employed in the so-called Pennsylvania Report.³ These measurements were judged to be not particularly revealing and were also discounted. Each participant was carefully interviewed and given a thorough indoctrination in the use of taperecorder and programmed materials. The entire first week was spent on the above-mentioned activities and in careful observation and correction of the initiation of each individual's work.

Following the first week, the coordinator appeared at irregular intervals, observed, answered questions, and continued to attempt to show the strongest possible personal interest in each student's progress and use of the program. There was no effort whatsoever, however, to teach or to supplement the published program.

At the end of the first phase of the project, the coordinator again administered listening and reading tests. There seemed to be evidence of both great growth and great loss in a pattern so cryptic that this evaluator tends to discount the significance of the test results. In the pre-test, the mean score was 14 in both listening and reading. In the post-test, the mean score was 14.9 in listening and 14.7 in reading. The difference is obviously insignificant.

Each student was also given a questionnaire designed to measure his current reaction to the process of independent study, and specifically to the experiences which had just been completed. Suggestions for possible modifications in future phases of the project were solicited from each student individually, in pairs, or in groups.

The first phase terminated in taped personal interviews in which participants were encouraged to express themselves freely. A complete transcription of these interviews forms Appendix C, and the most interesting part, of the evaluation of the project (see footnote 2).

³ Smith, Philip D. and Berger, Emanuel, An Assessment of Three Foreign Language Teaching Strategies....ERIC - ED 021 512. Appendix F.

In the opinion of this evaluator, if participant response may be taken at face value, the objective of the first phase was achieved beyond the most optimistic hopes. Students enjoyed this independent study experience and considered it significant. They appreciated the opportunity to set their own study-pace; they were not bored with the solitary use of programmed materials day after day. This researcher bears in mind, of course, that there were no pressures, no evaluations, a highly flexible, relaxed atmosphere, and probably a degree of prestige for the participants. An anticipated follow-up study may bring any discrepancies into proper focus.

Two findings to date most helpful while students frankly feel as they work with programmed human agent, not to teach them in the foreign language, average; and, for the most work in physical isolation, wise prefer to study entirely



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to the project are these: no need for a teacher per se materials, they do want a them, but to interact with perhaps once a week on the part, they would rather not even though they might other-alone.

The Second Phase of the project began on September 30, 1969. It will be a nine-month replication of the first phase with thirty students from the eighth grade, chosen by the same criteria used in phase one.⁴ The mean verbal language aptitude stanine score of the new group is 7.03; the mean auditory language aptitude stanine score, 7.20.

Languages offered in the second phase and the number of students who have elected them are: French, 13; German, 5; Latin, 1; Russian, 2; and Spanish, 9.

The previously mentioned programmed materials are being used in the second phase, with the addition of Artes Latinae, by Waldo E. Sweet and Judith B. Moore, for Latin; and LAP's (Learning Activity Packages), prepared by John F. Bockman, for Russian. The beginnings of the latter materials were employed in the University of Illinois, EPDA Russian Teachers Institute, Summer, 1969.

The purposes of the project and most conditions remain substantially the same. No participant is required to work in physical isolation except by preference, and even then he retains the option of moving to a populated location, if isolation becomes or adds to a learning problem.

The objective of the project, however, has been greatly modified because of the extended time permitted the second phase, and accommodations made after receiving the suggestions of the first-phase participants. The objective of the second phase is to test whether independent foreign language study with occasional consultant-student interaction is acceptable foundation for the second-year high school course in the same language.

⁴ There is now a seventh grade Spanish program at Townsend Junior High School totalling 65 students. There will be a regular eighth grade Spanish program in 1970-71.

The new objective has seemed to require the addition of two new variables: 1) consultants, who will be certified teachers of the languages, who will interact with students within the framework of the programmed materials on the average of once a week. (The term teacher is avoided in all literature given to students. A new function appears to call, in this instance, for a new term.)

2) Students will regularly evaluate their own progress according to a detailed system, and, when ready, will submit copies of their evaluations to their consultants. A self-evaluation system has been set up in the school and is immediately accessible to the students. A file of completed tests and a log of consultant-student interaction will be maintained for each participant.

In the first phase of the project, it was discovered that the process of programmed learning is attracting and motivating in itself. It is now hypothesized that in the second phase of the project the process of self-evaluation will be found an incentive.



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A detailed report of the second phase of the project will be disseminated upon termination of the project, and recommendations will be made concerning the future role, if any, of independent foreign language study in Tucson Public Schools.

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