DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 138 039 FL 007 726

TITLE Bilingualism Review. April 1976
INSTITUTION Ontario Dept. of State, Ottawa. Information Services.
PUB DATE Apr 76
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Bilingualism; Conference Reports; *French; Language Attitudes; Language Enrollment; *Language Instruction; Language Planning; Language Teachers; *Second Language Learning; Sociolinguistics; Standard Spoken Usage; Student Attitudes; Teacher Associations; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Louisiana; Louisiana (New Orleans); Louisiana French

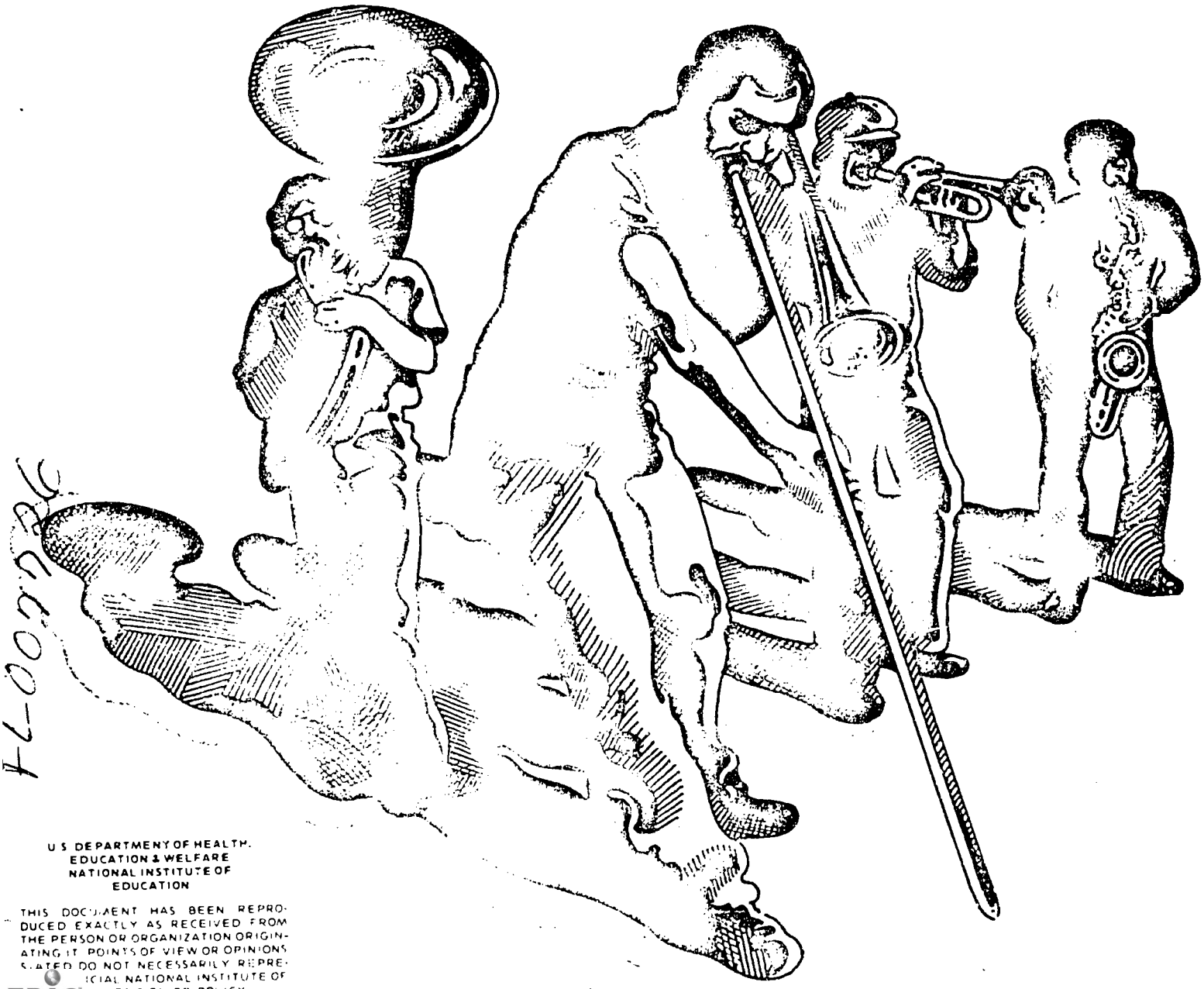
ABSTRACT

This issue deals with the problems of reviving the study of French in general, and the use of French in Louisiana in particular. "Rebirth of French in New Orleans" describes a conference on French language teaching held in New Orleans on December 26-30, 1975, and organized jointly by the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF), the Federation internationale des professeurs de francais (FIPF), and the Societe des professeurs de francais en Amerique (SPFA). Discussion centered around such topics as cultural education, curriculum, the use of literature, and standard French usage. "French, Anyone?" outlines the French language situation in the U.S. Although less than a decade ago French language instruction flourished, it has decreased in the wake of the freedom of subject selection brought about in the public school system. The AATF, in an effort to stimulate motivation for the learning of French, sponsors a competition open to students of member teachers. In "We Can't Do it Alone" Lucette Chambard, president of the International Federation of Teachers of French, answers questions regarding French teachers' concerns and motivation, teaching methods, English as a threat to French, and student attitudes toward language learning. "The Great Louisiana Adventure" describes a two-year pilot project sponsored by the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) to bring Quebec college students to Louisiana to teach French to children of French-speaking background and to Black children. (AM)

Secretary of State | Secrétariat d'État

BILINGUALISM REVIEW

APRIL 1976



REBIRTH OF FRENCH IN NEW ORLEANS

The rebirth of French in New Orleans — at least for a short period — occurred with the first international conference on French-language teaching ever held in the United States of America. More than 400 delegates representing over 25 countries were told of the monumental work needed to revitalize all efforts toward a "French Renaissance" throughout the world.

The conference took place on December 26 to 30, 1975 in New Orleans — a fitting locale for such a precedent setting event, as this city is the former French colony of Louisiana, the land of the banished Acadian people. For many participants from eastern Canada and the north-eastern United States, the chance to escape to the moderate climate provided welcome relief from the severe snowstorms of December 26 that, in some cases, delayed arrivals as much as 24 hours.

Delegates represented diversified career fields such as linguistics, research, writing, teaching, administration, membership in international organizations (including the United Nations) and government.

Three associations, the *Fédération internationale des professeurs de français* (FIPF), the 48th congress of the American Association of the Teachers of French (AATF) and the *Société des professeurs de français en Amérique*, (SPFA) were given the task of organizing the conference. Speeches at the opening ceremonies outlined the current situation regarding the teaching of French in the United States. Douglas Alden and Micheline Herz, presidents of AATF and SPFA respectively, agreed with other speakers who voiced their disappointment over the decreasing enrolment of American students in French courses at the secondary and university levels. Both expressed hopes for teacher-retraining in France and for continuing bursary possibilities for their students, enabling them to study in Quebec or France.

James Domengeaux, president of the Council for the Development of French in

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Louisiana (CODOFIL) was met with warm applause and a standing ovation following his speech on the French-language situation in Louisiana. Mr. Domengeaux also spoke on behalf of Senator Edwin Edwards, a well-known Acadian recognized along with Mr. Domengeaux as a key figure in the movement for the development of French culture and French language education in Louisiana—a state in which one-third of the population speaks and understands French.

Mr. Domengeaux indicated that Louisiana had achieved a major sociological triumph. He recalled the time when Acadian children were forbidden to speak French within the schoolgrounds; now however, the teaching of that same language is developed with the complete cooperation of the Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the northern part of the state.

"This is the right time to develop ethnic languages," Mr. Domengeaux said, urging teachers to "create" students if necessary. He referred to the recent passing of Law 714 by the state legislature which requires that French be the second language taught from grades one to 12 in Louisiana schools by May, 1976. Teachers are drawn from abroad—152 have come from France, 54 from Quebec, and 32 from Belgium this year, the fourth year of the CODOFIL program. (The presence of Quebec has indeed been felt since the establishment of Quebec House in Lafayette, La. seven years ago, and some Quebeckers are now involved in the training of future French teachers from the state of Louisiana). Teaching resources also come from abroad.

The morning speeches completed, the delegates separated into workshops and study groups. These were devoted to such topics as multilingualism, methodology and literature, historical travel accounts in America, and linguistics, stylistics and cultural exchanges through literature.

The AATF met concurrently with the workshop sessions, to study literary themes, the teaching of French at various levels in the United States, linguistics, bilingual teaching and curriculum textbooks. Similarly, small groups of the FIPF considered the need for teaching culture with language—a preoccupation of the delegates that surfaced in many workshop discussions.

Among the participants taking part in the multilingualism workshop that I attended, the general feeling was a willingness to continue discussions an extra day—had not the day been New Year's Eve, a day on which New Orleans was invaded by cheerleaders, football players and tens of thousands of football fans for the Sugar Bowl game!

In discussions on bilingualism and multilingualism, two of the Canadians present—Dr. William F. Mackey of Laval University and Dr. Henri Barik of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education—made major contributions. They aroused significant interest in experiments with French immersion programs in Canadian schools, especially among conference delegates from such countries as France, Belgium and Switzerland.

Whereas the teaching of French represented a topic generating zealous preoccupation for representatives from Europe and North America, those from North African and black African states had a different viewpoint: bilingualism and multilingualism were necessary evils which had to be discussed. These major spokesmen were from Morocco, Tunisia and Nigeria, and they cited the problems of schoolchildren who must switch from their mother-tongue to a different language in the classroom. Even Tunisia, where a program of "tunisification" since independence from France in 1956 has made Arabic its official language, is forced to continue certain courses in French because textbooks and course materials are not yet available in the Arabic language.

Professor Andrée Tabouret-Keller of the *Université Louis Pasteur* in Strasbourg chaired the workshop on multilingualism and contributed extensively from her own background in the field of child and adult language learning. She invited all participants to leave their names and addresses with her if they wished to become involved in research related to the workshop theme. This step should lead to further collaboration among the countries and various areas of specialization represented within the group. These were the major research areas of interest to the workshop:

- Should bilingual (or multilingual) persons learn more than one language at the same time, or should they first become proficient in their mother tongue?
- What kind of French should be taught? and is there one "standard" French language?
- What is the goal of teaching French in a bilingual environment — complete fluency as in the mother tongue? or a level of fluency deemed necessary for a second official language?
- What use do bilingual (or multilingual) persons have of their languages after they leave the classroom (both after school hours and during their later life)?

It was agreed that more study was needed on methodology, taking into account the way children learn their first language, and how such acquisition processes are related to the learning of a second language.

Since the remaining three workshop themes dealt with a number of topics related to literature and linguistics, many participants were able to change workshops to discuss topics of their choice. There was a noticeable Quebec participation. Six speakers from Laval University took part in workshops concerning the presence of the New World in francophone literature, Quebec literature and the relationships between literature, linguistics and stylistics. Author Hubert Aquin participated in these sessions along with Quebec representatives to CODOFIL. Other topic areas of these workshops included literary criticism, pedagogy, and American travel journals by francophone writers.

The conference ended with a summary of each workshop's activities and the election of Mrs. Lucette Chambard of France as the new president of the FIPF.

As part of the cultural events, arrangements were made for participants to travel to CODOFIL headquarters immediately following the conference, and for delegates and their spouses to take a one-day excursion into Louisiana. Films, music, and theatre of primarily Acadian themes comprised some of the evening cultural events.

During my free hours between sessions and after the conference, I wandered around the French Quarter of New Orleans where houses with "Spanish-laced" balconies lined streets with French names. However, I did not hear a word of French spoken in New Orleans, or in any of the smaller Acadian towns I briefly visited, although signs such as *"Ici on parle français. Faites votre demande en français."*, in shop windows attested to a certain French presence.

The Spanish-speaking population, on the other hand, was indeed visible and I was not at all surprised to learn that these people wanted to have their own Spanish version of CODOFIL. Given the enthusiasm and high interest expressed by the American conference delegates regarding the teaching of French in their country, and in view of the CODOFIL program for a rebirth of French, it will be fascinating to follow the development of the Spanish language and witness the influence of other language groups in the United States over the next few years.

There was a time when the debs and college joes of America considered French as "the" language to speak. Things have changed. Now it will take all the rhetoric and stylistic elegance of the language to reconquer American hearts.

FRENCH, ANYONE?

Sydney Teitelbaum, director of the French competition organized annually by the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF), and director-general of education for the East Meadow School Board, Long Island, N.Y. is one of the most brilliant exponents of the French language. He outlined for us the French-language situation in the United States.

Less than a decade ago, French was America's second language. Because of student riots at large universities like Berkeley and Columbia in the mid-sixties, policies regarding curricula and compulsory subjects changed radically in the United States. Decision-making, formerly autocratic in nature, became more democratic at all levels of schooling. Almost overnight, course selection was left up to the parents and, at higher levels, to the student. Only four subjects were made compulsory: English, history, science and mathematics; other subjects, including French, Italian and Spanish, were designated as optional.

The final setback, however, came when the American government allowed the various states to choose their own second languages. French then became a third language, usually after Spanish, except in New England and Louisiana where, for historical reasons, it continued to be the second.

The Good Old Days

Before events changed the status of the French language in the United States, things were going fairly well for second-language teachers — so well, in fact, that teaching methods were improving rapidly.

Mr. Teitelbaum, who taught French for twelve years (1952 to 1964), stated that instruction in primary and secondary schools amounted to 40 minutes per day, that it was compulsory, and that teachers already had high-quality language laboratories.

However, university authorities complained that students who wanted to major in French could not write the language. This was a result of teaching methods that were not book-based or grammar-oriented. Throughout all Mr. Teitelbaum's teaching years, French was taught by means of dialogues and pattern drills. "Notebook" and "grammar" were not part of the students' vocabulary.

Now, all schools offering French as an option are providing their students with appropriate textbooks. The decrease in the number of French-language students has been at least partially offset by the better quality of instruction made possible by improved technical facilities.

Victory by Default

The freedom of subject selection permitted by the American public school system seems to have created an atmosphere of indifference among students.

Mr. Teitelbaum is concerned with this continuous and rapid decline in the quality of spoken French. The AATF's competition, of which he is director, is open to all of the 40,000 or so Canadian and American students whose teachers are AATF members.

The first competition was held 41 years ago, and since then, hundreds of prizes have been awarded, including certificates of merit, scholarships and grants for travel in French-speaking areas of Europe.

The AATF is still offering these incentives, although it now seems that students lack the motivation to learn correct French, or else their social and educational surroundings are not conducive to it.

Sydney Teitelbaum, who was made a "*Chevalier de l'ordre des des palmes académiques*" by the French government, is greatly disturbed by the situation. He said the AATF should be giving only consolation prizes, even to the contest winners, if it were not for the fact that the competition still has the combined goal of rewarding effort and encouraging the learning of French!

WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE

The final session of the convention coincided with the last few hours of International Women's Year and, as fate would have it, Mrs. Lucette Chambard (France) succeeded Jacques Hardré (United States) as the president of the International Federation of Teachers of French.

Although she had only about 10 minutes to receive congratulations from IFTF members on her appointment, this grey-haired woman, looking somewhat austere in her delicate, black-framed glasses, agreed to answer a few questions on the Federation, whose members are teachers of French as a native language, second language, and foreign language.

Q. What are french teachers' main concerns?

A. At present, I believe that there are mainly two. The first is concern over the quality of the language, and it is shared by all teachers of French. The other directly affects those teaching French as a foreign language in a large number of countries: I am referring to the ground lost by French to the English language and culture.

We want to make sure that the quality of French is maintained, but at the same time we are trying to open students' minds to the wide-ranging cultural content of French literature and thought.

Q. Are present methods of teaching the french language and literature not better than past methods?

A. Having worked for some years at the International Centre for Pedagogical Studies and with France-Quebec programs I am fully qualified to say that they are. Certain governments are now providing the type of technical resources that French teachers did not have a few years ago. Also, Quebec and Mauritius are assisting France in the task of preserving French as a foreign language throughout the world, and their assistance is important. This is entirely in keeping with the activities of our federation which, far from being monolithic, encourages the various French-speaking countries to help one another.

Q. What are your views on the threat english continues to pose?

A. I shall not attempt to look into the future, as this always involves two divergent hypotheses.

I am certain this is a problem that concerns us all and one that adds to the teachers' difficulties. I am thinking not only of the language as such but of the technological dominance associated with the way of life and civilization of industrialized nations. We ought to have a slogan: Teachers of the world, unite!

Q. Does this mean that motivation among teachers is declining?

A. For the some unfathomable reason, teachers are always highly motivated. In my opinion, this has been truly evident during the three days of this convention. I never cease to be amazed when I see teachers from the African bush or from remote corners of France who are fully devoted to their jobs and are conscientiously looking for the best ways to achieve their objectives.

Q. Have the attitudes of pupils toward learning french changed radically in recent years?

A. That's a difficult question to answer. As a teacher of French as a native language, I have noticed that young people today have more reading problems and are sometimes turned off by books — a situation largely attributable to the predominant role played by the electronic media. I believe that we are fully aware of the situation and — as was pointed out at the convention — must face it realistically if we are to overcome this obstacle and create the desire to read.

Q. Do you believe there are ways — other than academic — of stimulating interest in language learning?

A. I don't think that policies, even clearly stated and enforced ones, can solve problems. However, positive action by the government, such as granting sufficient funds and enacting appropriate legislation (as is now the case in some bilingual countries), can provide almost indispensable basic assistance. Of course, such action also affects the quality of teaching. Schools do not exist by themselves, but in an interdependent relationship with society. We can't do it alone. With help, there's a chance we'll accomplish something!

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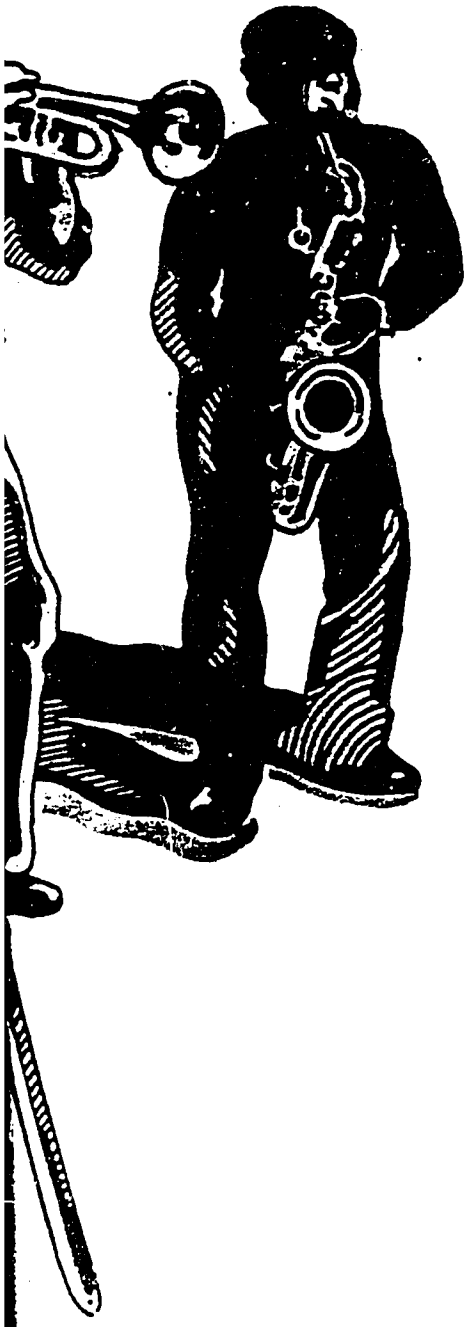

Every Canadian who attended school long enough to recall some historical facts knows that Louisiana was a French colony ceded by Napoleon I to the United States in 1803.

Families of French origin are still living along the shores of the Gulf of Mexico, in places with French-sounding names like *Lafayette, Bâton Rouge, St Martinville* and *Nouvelle-Orléans — pardon!* — New Orleans, as it has since become.

Louisiana has long been known as the most French of the American states. Recognizing this, the Quebec government established a Quebec House there, similar to the ones in Paris and Brussels.

The Quebec presence in Louisiana dates back seven years and is represented by Léo Leblanc, who is of Acadian descent.

Mr. Leblanc and James Domengeaux, a Louisianion who presides over CODOFIL (a state organization formed in 1968 for the development of French in Louisiana), promoted the idea of bringing college students from Quebec to this land of oil, cotton and sugar cane, to revive French language and culture in Louisiana. At that time French was still seen as a folk language and culture, the baggage of the under-privileged.

In 1971, 15 elementary school teachers from Quebec arrived in Louisiana to begin a two-year pilot project aimed at reviving the French language.

In 1974, the pilot project continued with 85 young people from Quebec, and the current school year will see about 60 elementary and secondary school teacher-monitors.

These young Quebeckers are not the only ones imbued with the spirit of adventure. Young people from France and Belgium are similarly caught up in the revival of French language and culture in the land of the Cajuns.

Lucie is 20 and one of those who left family, friends and home behind in 1974. She spoke to us of her experiences, and those of her friend Jacinthe — experiences not unlike those had by most of the college students who go to Louisiana to teach French.

In the spring of 1974, Lucie and Jacinthe graduated from college with diplomas in recreation technology. They answered a Quebec government advertisement for young people to teach French in Louisiana.

The salary was a little over $4,000 per year and the teaching program was eight periods of instruction a day. One-way travel expenses were paid by the employer, and successful candidates could take university courses while teaching. No previous teaching experience, certificate or special qualifications were required.

Thrilled by the thought of seeing far away places and exotic things, Lucie and Jacinthe — and Hélène and dozens of other college students — signed up and left for Baton Rouge, the capital of Louisiana. After a week's briefing on what "awaited" them in Louisiana, as Lucie aptly described it, they headed for Lafayette.

The Offensive

Armed only with their courage and a great deal of initiative, they met their pupils — 300 Louisiana children who had been brought up in English but were French at heart.

The first problem was to find out how much French the children had learned in the three years before Lucie and Jacinthe arrived. There were no reports for 1971 through 1974, and no teaching programs had been developed by the Languages Department of Louisiana's Department of Education or by the school board which had hired them.

Their teaching material consisted of the *Frère Jacques* method used in all Louisiana schools, and they were given $25 each to purchase other teaching aids.

They were pleased to find that they could rely on the moral support of the parents who wanted their children to learn enough French to converse with the grandparents; on the other hand, they had to cope with the scepticism of a school principal who had had difficulties with previous French teachers.

They also noticed that French was not commonly used in the streets of Lafayette, and that school was the only place where children could become accustomed to hearing and speaking the language.

Since French was taught by audio-lingual methods only, Lucie and Jacinthe enriched the figurines and pattern drills of the *Frère Jacques* method with songs, games and music, putting their training in animation to good use, sometimes at their own expense.

They have fond memories of Lafayette and of the 30 minutes of enjoyment they brought to the children each day. Their hope is that even if French does not become a common language in Louisiana's urban centres, the French course will be remembered by many as a pleasurable classroom experience.

New Orleans

This year Lucie and Jacinthe are teaching in one of New Orleans' poorer neighborhoods. They live on *Rue de Chartres*, in the French Quarter, with Marie, who is from France, and Hélène.

This second and final year in Louisiana is more difficult than the first.

Whereas their Lafayette pupils had already learned a few French words and expressions, the black children of New Orleans were as indifferent to French as they were to the problems of the great physicists.

The parents of these children have no use for French, their main concerns being much more closely related to survival than to education. The youngsters themselves are more attuned to the scraps of Spanish they hear in the playgrounds, alleys and streets of New Orleans, a city which is now home to more than 60,000 Spanish-speaking immigrants from Central and South America. In the past, Spaniards won Louisiana by force of arms, and lost it; now they seem to be reconquering a part of it with their language and culture.

Bewildered but Happy

Lucie and Jacinthe will be back in Quebec in a few weeks, happy to have worked for the Louisiana government, but concerned over what lies in store for French in this southern state. In their view, many citizens of Louisiana would like French to be more commonly used, but the government does not seem to be doing all it can to bring this about.

In Louisiana, they point out, education is reserved for certain classes, and people of French-origin are usually illiterate. Others, like the black children of New Orleans, are even worse off. How can they learn something as simple as the days of the week when they do not even know them in their own language? The girls knew there is a government organization for the promotion of French called CODOFIL. The only tangible indication they have had of its existence is the annual distribution of 20-odd dictionaries. They wonder why CODOFIL makes no effort to get school boards more involved in French teaching, first of all by using licensed specialists to teach the subject rather than monitors with animation and recreation backgrounds.

If the first step toward developing French in Louisiana is any indication, specialization would seem to be the only solution. The efforts made since 1907 by France, Belgium and Quebec should normally lead to the training of Louisianans as teachers and specialists in French language and civilization.

If this happens, Lucie and Jacinthe will definitely feel that they have played a part in reinstating French culture in Lousiana

If one day they learn that French has become a commonly used language in Louisiana, they will probably not hesitate to return and live in the beautiful country of the Cajuns—as the descendants of the exiled Acadians are called—where people are friendly and life is beautiful.