

TRAINING THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER FOR INDIVIDUALIZATION¹

by Howard B. Altman, University of Washington

In much of the literature which has appeared in FL journals on the subject of individualization, it is obvious that the role and functions of the foreign language teacher in an individualized classroom require a new look at the processes of FL teacher preparation.

Two observations may be made at once. (1) The success of an individualized foreign language program seems intimately linked not only to *what* the teacher does, but more importantly to *how* he does it. (2) *What* the teacher does in an individualized program, and *how* he does it, are frequently quite at odds with what conventional FL teacher education programs have trained him to do.

I do not wish to convey the impression that the various components of FL teacher preparation, on which we as a profession have insisted so vigorously, are now obsolete, ineffectual, superfluous. Quite the contrary! Perhaps more today than ever before, the foreign language teacher needs genuine language proficiency, needs an overseas experience, needs "methods" training, exposure to the insights of linguistics, psychology, and cultural anthropology, and, above all, opportunities for meaningful contact with the "real world" of the foreign language classroom in the schools.

But the *whole* of the successful foreign language teacher in both individualized and "traditional" classrooms, has always been equal to *more* than the sum of these *parts*. Such universally accepted components of our teacher preparation programs may have *trained* teachers, but they have rarely *educated* them to view students as unique learners possessing distinct needs, abilities, and interests in foreign language study. Where in the literature on FL teacher training does one read of attempts to guide prospective teachers in understanding and implementing the philosophy of compensatory instruction, as Jakobovits has defined the term?² In which "methods" courses do prospective

¹Adapted from an address presented at the Seminar on Teacher Preparation of the Modern Language Association, Chicago, December, 1971.

²Leon A. Jakobovits, *Foreign Language Learning: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of the Issues*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, 1970.

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FL teachers get an opportunity to deal with what some theorists consider to be the essential factors in determining success in FL study: aptitude for second-language learning and its implications for the curriculum; student, parent, and teacher attitudes toward the target language and culture; motivational orientations toward second-language learning and the curricular strategies which best address them; the dynamics of teacher-student interpersonal relations and the effects of such interactions on student perseverance and achievement in the foreign language classroom.³

In summary, although we have equipped our prospective foreign language teacher with tools that they need to face a classroom filled with uniformly "good" students of similar intellectual capacities and inclinations, we have failed to sensitize teachers to understand and deal with the *real* situation which inevitably faces them on their first day in class: the presence of a body of heterogeneous individuals who learn in different ways, for different reasons, at different times, with different intensities, at different speeds, by different means. It is the recognition of this fact of individual differences in learning styles, and our desire to adapt and develop curricula to meet *any* learner where he is and bring him forward, that have resulted in today's much-discussed concern for individualizing foreign language instruction.

The conception of the foreign language teacher as an "educational broadcaster," to use Steiner's words, has a powerful tradition in American education.⁴ The FL classroom teacher has always been the source of all "right answers." Decisions concerning what is worth learning, how it is to be learned, and when and under what conditions learning may take place, have always been the province of the teacher alone in most classrooms. Thus, the flow of "knowledge" emanated from the teacher's mouth and emptied into the students' collective ear. In view of the widely held belief that teachers tend to teach as they themselves were taught, how can we educate tomorrow's teachers to function as "facilitators of learning," as "managers of the learning process," as "counselors," "guides," "diagnosticians," and in other roles which one sees identified in the literature on individualization?

³See for example, Robert J. Nelson and Leon A. Jakobovits, eds., "Motivation in Foreign-Language Learning," in Joseph A. Tursi, ed., *Foreign Languages and the 'New Student'*. Reports of the working Committees, Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, N. Y.: MLA-ACTFL Materials Center, 1970, pp. 32-194.

⁴Florence Steiner, "Individualizing Instruction," *The Modern Language Journal* 55:6 (1971), 361-74.

What follows is a proposed "unit" on individualization which might occupy perhaps three weeks of a conventional (i.e., three contact hours per week) FL "methods" course for prospective teachers at the high school level. This "unit" is not conceived as "ideal preparation" for individualizing instruction, but is suggested as a realistic compromise with the amount of time, materials, and expertise on individualization which, in such a "methods" course, might maximally be devoted to this topic.

This "unit" is offered in addition to, not in place of, the standard components of FL teacher preparation programs referred to above.

Components of the "Unit" on Individualization

a) First of all, since the ability to individualize and personalize instruction presupposes an awareness of affective factors in language learning (e.g., motivation, boredom, frustration), the prospective foreign language teacher ought to have at least minimal exposure to learning a foreign language in an individualized format. Members of the university language departments could prepare a brief lesson — one which the "average" student might master in perhaps a half-hour — in Spanish, French, German, and any other languages for which prospective teachers are being trained. The "lesson" should be based upon a series of behavioral objectives (learning steps) which will guide the learner and inform him what he must do, how well he must do it, how he must demonstrate having done it, and, possibly, by what deadline. Materials for the "lesson" might include both taped and visual aids, learning activity packages (LAPs), practice tests for self-evaluation, a formal test, opportunities for group as well as individual work, provisions for oral skills development, and whatever else can be created in miniature. Prospective French teachers might be given the German lesson, Spanish teachers a Russian lesson, etc. Through such brief exposure to a "shock language" in individualized format, it is hoped that the prospective teacher will be somewhat sensitized to the demands upon a language-learner in such programs. One hour of the "methods" course might be employed for this language-learning experiment, with prospective teachers of different languages working separately under the direction of representatives of the various language departments.

b) In conjunction with the above, prospective FL teachers should participate in a thorough discussion of the philosophy of individualization and its historical basis in the foreign language classroom. Articles on "individualizing foreign language instruction" appeared in the professional journals in the first decades of this century. What is different about the practice of individualization today? What accounts for the intervening decades of "mass instruction"? Possibly two

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contact hours might be spent on this topic. Included could be attempts to arrive at a practical rationale for individualizing and personalizing instruction, and a discussion of the significance of affective factors in the learning process.

c) Where feasible, visits to individualized programs in neighboring schools should be scheduled for our out-of-class time. In the absence of such visits, slides and other visuals of on-going programs could be shown and discussed in one or two class hours. Increasingly, individualized foreign language instruction is being implemented throughout the country, and in the near future most "methods" students should have easy access to at least one individualized high school FL classroom.

d) At least one class hour needs to be spent in a discussion of the role of the teacher in an individualized foreign language classroom. This might logically follow visits to such programs. The literature on this topic in the FL journals is growing steadily. Two aspects of the role of the teacher need to be made quite clear: the teacher as a foreign language specialist who serves to facilitate student learning, and the teacher as an individual human being who wishes to interact with other individual human beings.

e) At least two class hours — preferably in one double-session — would be profitably spent in an examination and critique of existing curriculum materials for individualization. In addition, students should have an opportunity to develop or adapt some small curricular project for use in an individualized FL classroom. Since the number of commercially prepared texts for the individualized FL classroom is growing, there will soon be such material available to serve as (bad or good) examples.

f) Finally, one or two contact hours should be devoted to a consideration of some of the administrative issues in individualization: e.g., implementing an individualized program within a "traditional" classroom, the role of "hardware" in an individualized program, systems of grading and issuing credits, techniques for using paraprofessional help in the program, etc. Obviously, in a limited amount of time, discussion of these aspects may have to be limited. Hopefully, "methods" students will have had an opportunity to see an individualized program implemented in a "traditional" classroom, or to observe effective use of "hardware," during their visits to local programs.

Two other avenues for exposing potential foreign language teachers to individualization should also be mentioned. One might attempt

to individualize a portion of the "methods" course itself, as Smith has suggested.⁵ This could take the form of providing options in the "methods" curriculum and allowing each student to select a logical program. In addition, one could prepare one of the "methods" topics in individualized format for semi-independent study. This might entail the creation of guidelines to indicate to the student what he is expected to do, how well, under what conditions, and by what deadline. It might also entail the writing of a learning activity package (LAP), the development of materials for small-group self-instruction, the creation of both practice tests for self-evaluation and a formal test, etc.

If one of the university language departments is experimenting with individualized instruction — and this, too, is occurring nationally with greater frequency — some of the "methods" students might be allowed to serve as "teaching assistants" in the course for the duration of the "unit" on individualization. Or, conceivably, some might be encouraged to enroll in (or audit) individualized instruction in a language which they have not previously studied.

Our hope is that "methods" students could also "learn how to learn" about individualization during the proposed "unit." The suggested contact hours should serve to orient the prospective foreign language teacher in his thinking and to give him the skills and tools to learn more if the need arises. What better goals could we propose for any kind of teacher education?

⁵Alfred N. Smith, "Designing a Methods Course in an Age of Pluralism," address presented at the Fifth Annual Meeting of ACTFL, Chicago, November 27, 1971.