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ABSTRACT

A chart of FLES program types indicating possible variations in program design due to variables in teachers, materials, time, and students focuses on the lack of a national, standardized, FLES policy. After discussing the patterns of organization of instruction, the author notes criticism often levied at FLFS programs and provides sample, typical, and inadequate responses to such charges. The need to redefine FLES in terms of realistic and credible objectives is developed. Five types of programs, focusing on the preparation of teachers, are examined, including: (1) the classroom teacher with foreign language training, (2) the team teacher with foreign language training, (3) classroom exchange for foreign language instruction, (4) the itinerant specialist, and (5) lesson presentation by television. Other factors affecting FLES instruction refer to sources of instructional materials, time allocation, and a class profile. A short, annotated bibliography is included. (PL)

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FLES: Types of Programs

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FLES: TYPES OF PROGRAMS

During the past fifteen years, there have been many articles and books written about FLES, an acronym for "foreign languages in the elementary school." One must recognize that "FLES" is an umbrella term which covers any FL instruction, offered by any certified teacher or paraprofessional – regardless of training – either in person or by means of any audio-visual medium, using any kind of teaching materials – commercially or locally prepared – at any grade level under secondary school.

The lack of a standardized approach to FLES contrasts strikingly with high school FL programs. Though high school programs also represent a wide range of language learning approaches, one can assume that with rare exceptions the first three years of instruction have at least three characteristics in common: certified teachers, at least 150 hours of instruction annually, and commercially prepared teaching materials.

Such is not the case with FLES. The following chart indicates the great disparity among FLES program types found in American elementary schools.

<u>TEACHER</u>	<u>MATERIALS</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>STUDENTS</u>
CRT with FL training teaches her own class.	Published commercially.	Daily.	All students, district-wide, regardless of ability.
One of CRT team with FL training teaches FL to all children taught by the team.	Prepared by a team of local FLES teachers.	One to four times a week.	Enrichment for academically talented students, district-wide.
CRT with FL exchanges classes with CRT without FL training.	Prepared by the FLES teacher.	Periodic: alternating weeks, months, semesters.	Inclusion in program by school choice within the district.
Itinerant FLES specialist teaches with or without CRT help.		Instruction periods of from 15 to 55 minutes.	Inclusion in program by classroom teacher choice within each elementary school in the district.
Television.		Instruction sequence of from a few weeks to several years.	

*CRT = Classroom teacher

Regardless of the pattern of organization for instruction, FLES programs continue across the nation. This is at least partly because of the enthusiastic reports of FLES champions.

For example, Mildred Donoghue reports that "Today there is widespread enthusiasm for early foreign language instruction both here and abroad."¹ She goes on to argue for FLES for educational, sociological, neurological, and psychological reasons. She

points to research which shows that students in FLES programs do not do less well in other subject areas because of the time required for FLES instruction.

However, regarding the teacher, she refers to the 1960 Northeast Conference Report: "... a truly qualified language teacher should be trained to interpret trends, values, and attitudes within the culture whose language he is teaching since language is an expression or aspect of culture."² In other words, she reports glowingly on the benefits of FLES instruction, but in a generalized way, making it possible for her writing to be used as support for any type program that exists. Only in her reference to the Northeast Conference Report does she become prescriptive.

Groups such as committees formed by the Modern Language Association, the National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages, and numerous state departments of public instruction have issued FLES policy statements that have been openly prescriptive, emphasizing the importance of articulation with secondary school programs, teacher qualifications, and effective teaching materials.

Individual writers frequently tend to be prescriptive about individual aspects of FLES instruction. Emma Birkmaier has stated that an FL teacher "... must have a dynamic personality, energizing positive reactions and attitudes in his students.

... must digress into such fields as geography, the social studies, folklore, the theater, the arts and crafts, the dance and music, at least as far as these concern the culture of the target language.

... should belong to (FL) professional groups.

... (the native speaker) needs to know and understand the American school curriculum and the American student."³

She feels that "The original learning must be taught as meaningfully and thoroughly as possible."⁴

Filomena Pelora del Olmo wrote in 1966 that FLES leaders may have difficulty in providing objective evidence that an important amount of language is learned so long as current articulation practices exist. She said, "If our goals for a long-sequence program — one that begins in grade three and continues through grade twelve — were truly cumulative, sequential, and specific, then a beginning text would hardly be used as standard practice in our continuing seventh-grade classes."⁵

Reports by Edith Allen in 1966 and Anthony Gradisnik in 1968 indicate the futility of prescriptive statements. FLES in all its forms is undoubtedly here to stay. Allen's survey of 45 large city school systems revealed that only four had no FL instruction below grade 9. Almost half the districts reported FL instruction beginning below grade 5.⁶

Gradisnik heard from 42 school districts in cities of over 300,000 population. Thirty-one reported FLES instruction in grades K through 6. He reports that "Every school system emphasizes listening and speaking skills as its primary goals." Gradisnik's conclusion is significant. "Are the thirty-one cities satisfied with their FLES programs? Fourteen reported that they were. This seems to indicate that, despite certain shortcomings, at least some of the established objectives are being accomplished. However, since only nine cities report that they have conducted a formal evaluation of their FLES program, the other cities may not be sharply aware of the areas that need strengthening. This may be the reason why nineteen cities could report that they did not anticipate any major modifications in their programs in the near future."⁷

Assuming that the nineteen cities to which Gradisnik refers have made no formal evaluation of their programs, one must also wonder whether such a lack of evaluation is

due to the difficulty involved. Robert Mager has stated that if you are teaching something "... which cannot be evaluated, you are in the awkward position of being unable to demonstrate that you are teaching anything at all."⁸

Unrealistically stated behavioral objectives for FLES programs can be used by critics to condemn programs and can make the job of program supporters difficult. Here are some examples of stated objectives for FLES programs which critics have used to argue against the programs:

Objective: To develop bilingualism through long-sequence programs.

Criticism: Why are beginning texts used for FLES graduates?

Objective: To develop a love of language learning.

Criticism: Why are there so many FLES students who do not like FLES instruction?

Objective: To develop an aptitude for language learning.

Criticism: Why has the drop-out rate in high school remained unchanged in cities with FLES programs?

Objective: To develop an appreciation for the culture represented by the language.

Criticism: What are some examples of such appreciation that could not have been gained as well without the FLES program?

Directors of FLES programs have become adept at responding to such criticisms, but in the process they have been placed on the defensive. Communication with parents, secondary school FL teachers, school administrators, and others is essential. Such communication would be easier if statements of goals were preceded by a program description giving teacher sources (TV, classroom teacher, specialist), materials sources (TV, commercially prepared teaching materials, locally prepared teaching materials), time allocation for FLES instruction (minutes per day, week, year, how many years, etc.), and students included in the program (selective according to student ability, optional according to classroom teacher inclination, mandatory). Following a brief program description, goals can be stated in terms that can serve as a guide for all those involved in promoting, directing, and instructing.

The objectives stated above are not bad, they are simply inadequate. FLES can be a modest step toward bilingualism, love of language learning, language aptitude, and appreciation of another culture. However, all programs cannot do all things equally well. If Gradisnik is correct in stating that "Every school system emphasizes listening and speaking as its primary goals,"⁹ some school systems may do well to redefine their goals.

Enthusiastic classroom teachers with little or no competence in Spanish and no regular help from specialists may be incapable of developing a valid concept of the uses of *ser* and *estar*, or acceptable pronunciation and intonation, or the ability to respond to a variety of simple questions in a natural conversational situation, even with the help of guides and audio-visual aids.

However, with the help of specially-prepared curriculum guides, these same teachers may be able to use Spanish as a vehicle for adding a new dimension to other course work. In language arts, students can be helped to demonstrate language awareness by contrasting simple sentence structures in Spanish and English, by identifying Spanish-English cognates, and by discussing how foreign languages are learned. In social studies, students can discuss evidences of Spanish influences and contributions in the United States. Of equal importance, they can point to ways that Spaniards differ from Latin Americans and to important differences among Latin Americans. With the

classroom teachers' help, students can relate FL work to their own future educational, vocational, and avocational goals.

A FLES program that is designed to provide instruction in listening and speaking that can be measured and shown to equate favorably with secondary school instruction will include instruction by qualified teachers. Television and the untrained classroom teachers may serve as the backbone of the program, but they need the regular help of specialists to sustain interest and a progression in the acquisition of language skills over a three-year period or longer.

FLES personnel who have related their teaching objectives realistically to program design will be able to respond convincingly to questions such as these:

Superintendent: "How much would it cost us to run a good FLES program?"

"Are FLES teachers available?"

Curriculum Director: "What degree of fluency can students gain from a FLES program?"

"What are the advantages of FLES over secondary school FL instruction?"

"Can articulation problems be minimized or eliminated between FLES and later instruction?"

"What will we do with new students who have no training in our FLES language?"

Secondary school principals, guidance counselors, or FL teachers:

"How much language do the graduates of the FLES program know? Can they be placed in our high school sequence? If so, where?"

"How can we take advantage of their FLES training?"

"How can we take advantage of their FLES training?"

"What curriculum changes must we make to accommodate FLES graduates?"

Parents: "Why does my child have to start over with beginning instruction at the start of each school year?"

"We were told that elementary school children learn a foreign language faster than older children. Our child is moving at a snail's pace compared to what his brother is learning in high school. Our child loves his FLES teacher, but isn't there some way he could learn more?"

"We were led to believe that all elementary school children love learning a foreign language. Is our child the only one who hates it?"

"We are planning to move to your community. Our children have been in a FLES program. Will they be able to do well in yours?"

College foreign language teacher: "What kinds of skills do FLES teachers need?"

"How much of a market is there for FLES teachers?"

"Specifically, what can we do to help the cause of FLES?"

Publishing company representatives: "What is the market for FLES materials?"

"What kinds of materials are needed?"

"Should materials be for the FLES years only, or should they be the introductory portion of a long-sequence set of materials?"

Such questions are not asked idly. They are asked by concerned people who expect a reliable response. Most FLES experts agree that the success of the program is related to

the breadth and depth of support it receives in the community and in the schools. Dependable support surely requires lucid communication.

Types of Programs

The teacher is the key to a successful program in all subjects. The five sources for instruction listed above can serve to categorize types of programs if it is understood that each category is broad and is affected by types of materials used, by the time allocated for FL instruction, and by the local regulations for including students. One must also understand that there is much overlapping from one category to another and many combinations of categories.

1. Classroom teacher with FL training. From the beginning of the FLES boom in the 1950's, there has been a feeling that the best possible instruction is provided by the regular classroom teacher whose training includes thorough preparation in the target language. Mary Finocchiaro wrote optimistically in 1964 that "In a few years, this suggestion should present no problem, since many colleges and their school systems will undoubtedly require that prospective elementary school teachers know at least one foreign language well."¹⁰

The qualified classroom teacher has distinct advantages: She knows her students well, and she can provide for individual differences. She can relate FL instruction to other subject areas, such as music, arithmetic, social studies, language arts, and science. Classroom greetings, commands, games, and other activities can lend a foreign language atmosphere that is desirable for best learning.

But if this plan is the most desirable, it is also the most difficult to implement. If colleges are strengthening their FL study requirements for elementary school teachers, it is still on such a limited scale that one finds it difficult to share Finocchiaro's optimism.

One must also be cognizant of the difficulty a busy classroom teacher has in maintaining adequate language skill, being limited to the most elementary of language practice with her students, and having the responsibility of preparing instruction in all other subject areas as well. Maintenance of language skills is a major problem for high school teachers, even when they teach nothing but the target language. For the elementary classroom teacher, language loss is much greater — and more difficult to combat.

2. One member of a teaching team with FL training. A modification of the above program is found in some schools which practice team teaching. One teacher of a three- or four-teacher team is qualified to teach the target language. Since this teacher ideally works with all students involved in the team effort, in other subject areas as well as in the target language, many of the advantages listed above still apply. In addition, only a third or a fourth as many teachers competent in the language are needed. Naturally, such programs are limited to schools which practice team teaching.

3. Classroom exchange for FL instruction. This represents a further modification of the first approach. In schools where this is done, a classroom teacher with FL competence handles all FL instruction for several classes. Teachers whose classes she teaches are responsible for the FL teacher's regular class during that period, usually providing instruction in another area.

This approach borders on departmentalization within the elementary school. If the exchange is made with many teachers, the role of the FLES teacher becomes similar to that of the itinerant specialist. The amount of time spent away from her own classroom can become a major problem.

4. Teaching by an itinerant specialist. In many districts, a specialist or team of specialists moves from classroom to classroom and from building to building. They usually have total responsibility for FL instruction. They may encourage interested classroom teachers to stay in the room during FL instruction and to plan related activities during the day. Classroom teachers frequently use FL instruction time to plan lessons, to meet with other teachers, or to relax.

The effective specialist is a highly competent teacher with a knowledge of elementary school children and curriculum and a thorough knowledge of the target language. Not only must she be capable of imaginative and productive teaching in the classroom, she must also be able to gain the confidence and support of students, teachers, the school administration, and the public. In other words, teaching is only part of her job: public relations work may be of almost equal importance to the success of the program.

The main advantages of the itinerant specialist are her superior language ability, her ability to concentrate on curriculum work in only one subject area, a greater ease in maintaining language skills, and more time for involvement in FL professional activities.

Three important disadvantages are cost, rigidity of specialists' schedules, and a limited ability to relate FL instruction closely to other subject areas.

5. Lesson presentation by television. There are numerous variations in the use of television.

- a. Television with follow-up by an itinerant specialist or a qualified classroom teacher.
- b. Television with follow-up by linguistically unqualified classroom teachers, but with regular visits by a specialist.
- c. Television with follow-up by linguistically unqualified classroom teachers whose only source of help is a TV guide.
- d. Television with follow-up by linguistically unqualified classroom teachers who receive workshop training but only infrequent visits from a specialist.
- e. Television with no follow-up.

A major attraction of television is economy. School administrators and the public feel assured of a good language model for all students at every showing, usually two or three times a week, and at a fraction of the cost required for a specialist program. There can be follow-up instruction by specialists or qualified classroom teachers, assuring regular language correction, and still at a cost considerably less than that of a specialist program.

The potential of television as a source for stimulating instruction, presenting culturally authentic as well as entertaining programs, is great. However, it has not yet been fully realized.

There are several disadvantages to television programs as the main source for instruction. All classes must progress at the same speed, regardless of student ability, interest, or the effectiveness of lesson follow-up. Television showings must be rigidly scheduled. Assemblies, field trips, or school closures can result in students' missing several lessons.

The greatest classroom difficulties to be overcome when television programs are used are related to preparing for proper follow-up. Teacher guides, recordings, and inservice workshops are vital. The less the program depends upon qualified teachers or specialists, the more important these items become. The longer the sequence of television-centered instruction, the more difficult it becomes to provide follow-up instruction that will make it possible for the more capable students to progress at a desirable speed and at the same time to meet the needs of the slow learners and the transfers from schools with no foreign language programs.

Other Factors Affecting FLES Instruction

Describing the instructional source is only the first step toward answering questions related to cost, personnel, and learning objectives. The instruction in each type presentation is modified by materials used, by time allocated, and by students involved. Consequently, a description of any program should include details on all four categories.

1. Materials source. There are numerous kinds of teaching materials used. Here again, the variables are too great to make generalities possible. In addition to the variety in format – books, teachers' guides, television programs, records, tapes, workbooks, and combinations of these – there is a variety of materials sources.

a. Prepared by publishing companies.

In terms of articulation for long-sequence programs, these may be said to be of two kinds: those designed to provide early instruction which can serve as the equivalent of the first level of a secondary school series and those designed to provide a general introduction to the target language with little or no attempt at coordination with any secondary school FL text. Most commercially prepared materials provide for multi-media instruction, some built around a textbook, some around filmstrips and films, and some around a television program.

b. Prepared by local committees.

As with commercially prepared materials, these may or may not be related to any set of secondary FL materials. These are typically limited to mimeographed teachers' guides, tapes for classroom use and for teacher inservice work, and locally produced television programs with accompanying teachers' guides and recording tapes.

As one might assume, locally prepared materials frequently compare rather poorly, qualitatively, with those published commercially. On the other hand, they are much more economical to produce. Especially when television is involved, the program writers and coordinators often come from several school districts which contribute to the support of the program on a per student basis.

c. Prepared by the FLES teacher.

FLES has been almost unique in this respect. Few administrators would ask teachers of other elementary school subjects to write their own curriculum guides and to prepare their own teaching materials while teaching a full load. Few teachers would accept such a task. Yet such tasks have been commonly assigned and accepted for FLES instruction.

2. Time allocation. There is a wide range in the amount of time devoted to FLES instruction. Time allotments range from informal agreements with interested teachers that they may offer foreign language instruction as frequently as they see fit, to the designation of a half day for school work in the target language. Edith Allen reports that the average length of instruction time at each contact ranges from 19 minutes for grade 3 to 38 minutes for grade 8, and amounts to a spread of from 69 minutes a week for grade 3 to 184 minutes for grade 8. The average number of class meetings per week ranges from 3.1 for grade 3 to 4.1 for grade 8, with over half the grade 7 and 8 classes meeting daily.

Time allocations are sometimes periodic. Periods of instruction ranging from one week to a semester in length are followed by similar periods with no instruction.

The length of the FLES instructional program also requires consideration. A one- or two-year program leading directly to secondary school instruction is quite different from a four- or six-year sequence which may or may not articulate with a secondary school program. The earlier starting age has implications for materials and personnel. Continuity requires scheduling flexibility not necessary in a shorter program.

3. Students instructed. In most FLES classes, all students in the grade levels involved receive instruction. Since the rationale for FLES has been developed around a theme of common need, most school districts find it difficult to justify the exclusion of certain students at the FLES level. There are, however, certain programs which are designed as enrichment programs for students with high I.Q. scores or who do above average work in other subjects.

The variety in terms of students taught lies more typically in the area of class levels involved or in the manner of classroom teacher involvement. In any given city, FLES instruction may begin at any grade level, 1 through 8, and may or may not continue on to secondary school instruction. In many districts, only two or three years of instructional materials have been developed, though the sequence of instruction is a year or two longer than that. When such is the case, students often receive the sequence of instruction that has been developed, then repeat the last level of instruction.

Then there is the question of local policy concerning teacher involvement in the program. In some districts, all students at designated class levels must receive instruction. In others, each teacher has the option to include or exclude FLES for her students.

Conclusion

The last fifteen years of publications on FLES has been a period during which quantitative growth of FLES instruction has been so great that there are few parents of school children who have not at least heard about it, and many have had children in FLES programs. There are few school administrators who have not read or heard arguments for early FL training. Many colleges have programs through which an attempt is made to prepare FLES teachers. Many foreign language textbook publishers have prepared materials for use in FLES programs,¹¹ frequently at an economic loss.

Today the situation is quite different from what it was in the mid and late 1950's. School administrators are of necessity more money-minded and consequently more likely to hold teachers involved in all special programs — and FLES is still a special program — accountable in terms of stated program objectives. They know that funds are more

limited than they should be for the implementation of the kinds of FLES programs they would prefer. They have several choices: They can limit their program objectives to those which can be achieved with the available resources. They can state objectives which they know are not currently realistic and hope that fate and time will smile favorably on progress toward those objectives. Or they can postpone initiation of the proposed FLES programs until conditions are more propitious.

College trainers of FLES teachers are likely to be more careful today than they were during the 1950's. They have seen their students unable to find jobs as FLES teachers, and they have seen them teach in programs quite different from the ones for which they were prepared. These professors are likely to ask questions that require specific answers in terms of the need for FLES teachers and the kind of training needed, because their own professional reputations and well-being are frequently at stake.

There are similar problems for book publishers. Those who have interpreted reports of dramatic growth in FLES instruction as an indication that there is a great need for sophisticated language-oriented materials have lost money. Publishers now move more slowly. If they find now that there is a market for materials that accept language learning as a secondary goal and cross-disciplinary work as primary, they can be of help to many schools.

There is little doubt that FL instruction will continue to play an important role in American elementary education. Perhaps it will become stronger in the future than it is today. The years of experience we have gained eliminate the need for each district, in naive confidence that good will and student enthusiasm can overcome all difficulties, to suffer the frustrations of a poorly designed program. It is irrelevant for experts to prescribe what must be done before FLES programs are begun; it would be relevant for experts to identify in detail the important goals that can be achieved with programs of various designs.

FOOTNOTES

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