

FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:
A GEOGRAPHIC APPROACH

JOHN C. ARCHBOLD
San Diego City Schools

The teaching of a second language as an integral part of early childhood education has long been advocated. So far as is known, a mandated program of state-wide instruction for millions of children was first attempted in California. The California State Legislature in 1961 enacted into law the Casey Bill which required, for the first time, that foreign language instruction be given to children in grade six. The legislation took effect in the 1965-66 school year.

For the following reasons it is not surprising that San Diego City Schools formally chose Spanish as the program language:

1. According to the 1960 census, approximately nine and one-half percent of California's population had Spanish surnames.¹
2. Approximately half of California's secondary public school students studying a foreign language choose Spanish.²
3. Previous elementary pilot programs used Spanish due to an appreciable number of native-speaking teachers.

In 1968 the strict curricular mandate for grade six language instruction was modified to permit courses to begin in grade seven.³ Nevertheless, the elementary program continued to function in the district. A characteristic of the program since its inception has been to permit wide latitude in the means of instruction. Audio-lingual tapes and the adopted text (Holt, Rinehart and Winston's

Primer Curso) are the barebones framework for the present program. More than a teacher's manual (the students do not use the text) and tapes are needed to sustain interest. Once the names of common household objects have been learned and the student achieves mastery of simple conversational patterns, something to sustain the program has to be created by the teacher.

A geographic theme was introduced in the form of classroom bulletin boards, most of which had six inch titles and two inch captions easily read from anywhere in a classroom. A number of these were prepared, and were effectively used in a program at United States International University in 1971. In the presentation, an eleven year old native speaker "instructor" asked class members questions based on concepts involving latitude (Figure 1). The questions and answers are relatively simple. The instructor's introductory "*Hoy vamos estudiar latitud*" was followed by a series of questions containing almost all of the vocabulary needed to frame a correct response. None of the vocabulary, of course, presented any difficulty to the young instructor, who greeted each appropriate answer with "*Muy bien, gracias.*" The simplicity and repetitive nature of answers is illustrated by an example from a question in Figure 2. Travel time by passenger train and airplane is compared by asking "*¿Cual es más rápido?*" The appropriate answer is "*Por avión es más rápido.*"

A theme and the appropriate materials to implement an innovative program have to meet criteria stated in the foreign language framework for the state. The following criteria, taken from a checklist published by the State Department of Education entitled "Preliminary Data Necessary to Evaluate Foreign Language Materials," are typical:

1. Is their content appropriate to the age level of the students for whom they are intended?
2. Is their content appropriate to the grade of instruction for which they are intended?

APRENDIENDO LO DE LATITUD

¿Cuántos continentes atraviesa el ecuador? ¿Cuánta latitud tiene Sydney?
¿Qué ciudad tiene 40° latitud norte? ¿Qué ciudad del hemisferio norte está
cerca del ecuador?



Figure 1

APRENDIENDO LO DE VIAJE
Del Mar al otra Mar



Figure 2

3. Are they (a) durable; (b) easily used; and (c) attractively presented?
4. Are language and cultural situations authentic?
5. Is the subject matter presented through a variety of techniques?
6. Does the sequence of the materials provide for smooth transition from unit to unit and from level of difficulty to level of difficulty?
7. Do the various components complement each other; e.g., do the visual components reinforce the textual ones?⁴

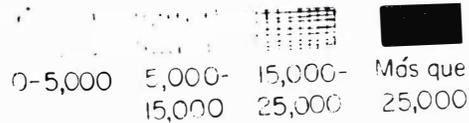
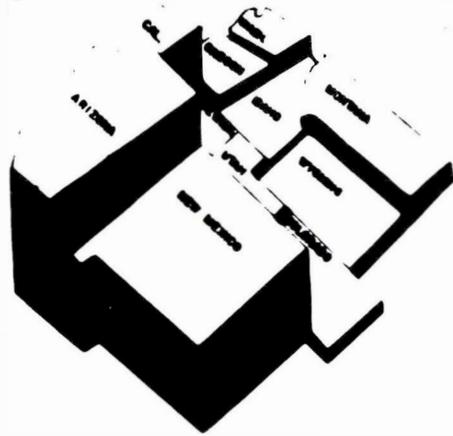
The geographic themes presented in the four illustrations accompanying this paper are all appropriate for the middle grades. The mathematics (Figures 3 and 4), time and distance concepts (Figure 2), and the global grid or one of its components (Figure 1) were developed and integrated into the overall design with the conceptual level of the students in mind.⁵ The per capita income for South American nations as a topic has the additional virtue of being pertinent to the sixth grade unit on Latin America.

One well-attended session at the 1972 convention of the California Council for Geographic Education dealt with the topic, "Existing in Spite of the Confines of the Curriculum Guides." The writer is aware of many complaints that the curriculum framework provides insufficient opportunity to introduce, utilize, and reinforce geographic concepts. Geography can, however, serve as a vehicle to insure interest and student participation in an elementary foreign language program. Why could geography not be included in other situations that defy the confines of the curriculum guides and yet present material in a manner that is creative, interesting, and pedagogically sound?

REFERENCES

- ¹State of California Department of Industrial Relations, *Californians of Spanish Surnames* (n.d.), p. 25.

CENSO DE LOS INDIOS



¿Qué le dice el primer mapa concerniente Arizona que no puede aprender del segundo mapa?

¿Cuáles estados tienen menos de cinco mil indios?

¿Cuántos estados tienen entre cinco mil y quince mil indios?

Figure 3

²California State Department of Education, *Foreign Language Framework for California Public Schools* (1972), p. 10.

³Revision of State Education Code Section 8571(c) effective in 1968 as found in California State Department of Education, *Handbook for Junior High School Education in California* (1969), p. 49.

⁴*Foreign Language Framework*, pp. 103-104.

⁵*Cf.* Donald D. Paige and Margaret Jennings, "Measurement in the Elementary School," *The Arithmetic Teacher*, XIV-5 (May 1967), pp. 354-57; and Helen M. Carpenter, "Interpreting Graphic Materials," *The Instructor*, LXXIV (December 1964), pp. 21, 22, 32.



Figure 4