

## **USING THE PENNSYLVANIA LANGUAGE LABORATORY FILMS**

*Bernard J. Langr*

Language laboratories, ranging from the single tape recorder used as a teaching and practice device in an organized fashion, to the combination of machinery sold under the title language laboratory, have been with us for some time; old, but still usable, laboratories exist; new ones are being installed. Within the writer's most recent experience, two out of four relatively small high schools which he has visited this fall have laboratories and are planning on replacing the facilities or adding to them; the two other schools do not have laboratories as such, but use magnetic tape recorders and record players in the classroom as necessary adjuncts to modern audio-visual textual materials.

Language laboratories are still very much with us. They represent a huge monetary investment as well as they represent an investment in time and effort on the part of foreign language educators who have developed laboratories and materials which make them most effective. Unfortunately, apparent failures of laboratories and materials can usually be traced to the inept operator, the teacher, who is inept because he has not been trained formally in judicious usage of either the hardware or the software. Indeed, he may not have been trained even informally or through experience.

The foreign language profession must train for good laboratory usage both at the pre-service and at the in-service levels to capitalize upon the large present investment and to justify future investment. Such training would not be wholly lost even if laboratories were to drop out of sight today, because some type of audio-visual media related to laboratories as we know them would be projected in their place. If one has been trained well in laboratory, both in mechanical utilization and in adaptation to the learning situation, he will at least have a head start when called upon to utilize more sophisticated and advanced teaching tools, in large part because his fear of machinery, of technology, will have greatly diminished.

Training for efficient and effective use of laboratory and materials is a large task because it involves a development of interest; and related to interest, it involves the development of a conviction that since the goals of foreign language learning are customarily oral communication, the laboratory in its broadest sense is the best tool

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which we have at present for drill, practice, and often, providing an accurate and authentic model. Realistically, the language laboratory is the only major tool which the small schools can afford at this time. Not to be forgotten in the laboratory training process are such items as planning, maintenance, scheduling; coordination with the classroom and the total program; materials, testing, and operation. The successful learning of the latter, operation, is a great feat in itself, considering that there are teachers and teacher trainees who fear greatly anything that moves or is electronic, and who may never have operated even a simple magnetic recorder. One must also include in the process of teaching laboratory the development of a sense of responsibility for study and research of good usage, and further application of laboratory to new tasks such as providing for individual differences.

This writer suggests that the so-called Pennsylvania films with the *Viewer's Guide* are the best, most complete, tools we have at present for formally and informally teaching good laboratory and attendant materials usage.<sup>1</sup> There are trainers of teachers who are so well versed and experienced in laboratory usage that they can teach well and completely without the films. But the larger group of trainers needs a well-organized lesson plan, so to speak, so as to thoroughly cover the topic. This is perhaps analagous to the textbook and integrated materials situation: Textbooks and integrated materials are so very popular because very few people, especially the inexperienced, can teach efficiently and thoroughly without them. The experienced user and trainer of laboratory may well feel that the content of the films is obvious and pedestrian, but he ought not forget that any experience the trainee may have had with laboratory and materials has been from the receiving end; the teacher trainee, and often the experienced teacher, are as yet concerned with the obvious and pedestrian, with basic concepts.

The foregoing remarks have been directed at teacher trainers, those involved in the teaching of laboratory usage, but they are also pertinent to every educator in the field of foreign languages: College foreign language methods teachers, cooperating critic teachers, department heads, consultants and supervisors, and others. All take part to some extent in training a foreign language teacher. We should realize that the raw student of the teaching process which includes

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<sup>1</sup>Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction, *Successful Use of the Language Laboratory*. 16mm, black and white, sound, \$450. Distributed by Walter G. O'Connor Company, 100 N. Cameron St., Harrisburg, Pa. 17101. Preview prints are available from the distributor. For rental, contact a state language supervisor or a regional film center. The *Viewer's Guide* is available from the distributor for 75¢.

language laboratory needs the help and guidance of several people; he needs a sequence of instruction and experience which cannot be provided by any one person.

The training for good usage of language laboratory (and this holds for any audiovisual media) begins when the potential teacher begins his own study of a foreign language. He will probably do as was done to him; he will tend to use a laboratory well in his teaching career if he was taught to use it well in his learning career. This then burdens every teacher of foreign language, indirectly, with responsibility for teaching laboratory usage. The responsibility falls heavier upon college teachers of language, perhaps, because it is usually in college where the potential teacher makes his definite commitment to teaching a foreign language, and begins to consciously observe the teaching process. He will tend to teach the way he was taught.

The responsibility for teaching laboratory usage formally, that is, not teaching by example, rests most heavily upon the college teacher trainer, who will more than likely be the teacher of foreign language methodology or the language laboratory director, if he exists. The responsibility cannot be shifted to the audiovisual education department of the college. Such a department can normally teach usage only in a general sense; it is impractical that it emphasize any particular field, such as audiovisual usage in foreign language teaching specifically, in a general course. Besides, how many audiovisual departments have foreign language specialists? So it is that the responsibility for laboratory training rests upon the foreign language specialist within the subject matter department.

The cooperating teacher in the school, the one who supervises and helps student teachers, has a responsibility also. Although a student teacher may have observed and benefited from good laboratory usage within his student experiences, and he may have been taught good laboratory usage formally in his college teacher-training program, he must still learn to put this knowledge to practical use; that is, he must practice laboratory usage within the teaching situation. To whom can he turn, and upon whom can he rely for supervision and guidance of his practice if not the cooperating teacher.

Another fact that we must face is that there are many experienced foreign language teachers who for a great variety of reasons do not use and do not know how to use a laboratory wisely, but would wish to do so; and where there is a need, obviously someone must fill it. This is where school department heads, state language consultants and supervisors of foreign language teaching come in. The responsibility is theirs, especially if an area college cannot or will not provide this in-service training or retraining.

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Many people, then, have responsibility for training in laboratory usage. This responsibility cannot be discharged in any case by a few cursory remarks upon the topic within a method course, in an inservice course, in an orientation session by a department head, or in a visit by a supervisor or a consultant. Just to bring a person up to date in current common usage, let alone the largely unexplored potential of laboratory and materials in the area of truly individualized instruction, involves a great amount of learning. The *Viewer's Guide* to the Pennsylvania film series suggests the scope of language laboratory training in its introductory outlines for each film, as given below:

Film I. Planning for the Language Laboratory. Rationale for the language laboratory in audio-lingual modern foreign language programs; sources of information and assistance in planning; cost of laboratory installations; teacher orientation and training; correlation of language laboratory and classroom work and materials.

Film II. Language Laboratory Equipment. Basic components of the language laboratory; components and capabilities of audio-active, and audio-active-record equipment; basic functions and operation of the teacher console; features and function of student laboratory equipment.

Film III. Language Laboratory Administration. Orientation and supervision of students; use of trained laboratory assistants; effective scheduling procedures; split-period scheduling; individualization of instruction; multiple programming.

Film IV. Effective Language Laboratory Practices. Mechanical operation of the language laboratory; specifications of contract and warranty; proper maintenance and service of equipment; teacher orientation and training; planning and implementation of of multiple programming.

Film V. Language Laboratory Materials I. Planning for acquisition of the tape library; types of basic tapes; taped components of integrated audio-lingual course materials; listening tapes, tapes for imitation and repetition, and structure practice tapes; tape storage and cataloguing.

Film VI. Language Laboratory Materials II. Supplementary structure drills and their use; supplementary listening comprehension tapes; rationale and procedure for proper adaptation of supplementary tapes; correlation of supplementary tapes with basic course materials; supplementary tapes for speech production.

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Film VII. Testing in the Language Laboratory I. Rationale for testing in the language laboratory; content and format of good laboratory tests; informal and formal testing; methods and examples of listening comprehension testing.

Film VIII. Testing in the Language Laboratory II. Elaboration of listening comprehension test methods and examples; discussion of speech production test problems; methods and examples of speech production tests.

Perhaps the optimum situation for inclusion of laboratory training within the education program of a future teacher is the development of a language laboratory course as part of the college curriculum, as some teacher-training institutions have done. The Pennsylvania films may well be utilized within such a course, especially if the course is taught by personnel who are weak in audio-visual technology, materials, teaching techniques on the school level, or any of the three. In the event that such a special course is not possible, the burden for laboratory training probably will fall upon the special methods; or if that does not exist, then upon a general methods course.

If the responsibility for laboratory training falls upon the methods course, which is normally a heavily burdened course with much to be accomplished, it will have to be discharged as efficiently as possible. The writer has used the following approach in just such a situation: (1) Each methods student understudies and performs for a previously-trained laboratory assistant for two hours in a live library situation; the assistants have had at least several months of experience. (2) Each student is enjoined to read and study, as preparation for viewing the Pennsylvania films, the pertinent portions of the current methods course text,<sup>2</sup> of the *Minnesota Guide*,<sup>3</sup> and of Rebecca M. Valette's *Modern Language Testing: A Handbook*.<sup>4</sup> (3) The Pennsylvania films are viewed while the students have in their possession a limited number of well-chosen discussion points and questions from the *Viewer's Guide* which they may use for thought and study. Use of the *Viewer's Guide*, especially before viewing the films, is a wise procedure.

Using the three-point technique, the total class time necessary is between two and three hours. It is suggested that the assignments for study outside the class hour be relatively as minimal as the time

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<sup>2</sup>Wilga M. Rivers, *Teaching Foreign-Language Skills* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1968).

<sup>3</sup>Minnesota State Department of Education, Documents Section, St. Paul, Mn. 55101, *Guide for Instruction in Modern Foreign Languages—Grades 4-12*, 1965.

<sup>4</sup>(Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., New York, 1967).

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spent within the class, since students' study time is also relatively as sparse as the time allotted to a methods course. It must be granted, that with this limited technique for learning language laboratory, the job is not complete, but one must set priorities; even a limited concession to laboratory usage is better than none at all.

The Pennsylvania films can be very useful, not only to professional teacher trainers, but as well to other people who have responsibility for training teachers. They can be used in post-graduate in-service courses, at professional meetings, and as a means of self-study and professional upgrading. If the administrator of a school or college foreign language program has a laboratory facility or is planning an expenditure of several thousand dollars for developing a facility, would he not be wise in spending approximately twenty-five dollars to rent the film series and buy the *Viewer's Guide* to form the basis of a self-contained workshop for training or retraining the instructors and the administrators? It must be admitted that the Pennsylvania films have a few slightly objectionable features: They present a rather idealistic picture of laboratory usage to the viewer, especially by appearing to assume that a foreign language instructor has hour upon hour of time available for planning and setting up the learning situation; except perhaps for the principal participant, the actors are actual language teachers, not trained as film actors; and in one or two instances, reference is made to materials which are outdated, or no longer available, a notable exception being Robert Lado's text on testing.<sup>5</sup> These features are minor, especially since the basic principles of language teaching and good laboratory usage illustrated by the films are still current and valid. In actual practice, the use of the films is perhaps limited only by lack of imagination, as is often the case with any audiovisual device. The following example serves to illustrate how a suggestion presented in Film #3 of the series was capitalized upon by the author who was at the time director of a college laboratory used for class work but primarily as a library facility: The suggestion was that for any given laboratory an instruction tape be made, a tape which could systematically teach the mechanical usage of that particular laboratory. As the language laboratory director in his school at the time, the writer wrote a script, prepared a tape, and referred instructors and students to it. The results in saving of time were tremendous. The director no longer had to instruct each year, personally, several new teachers, several new assistants, and several hundred new students in booth machinery usage. Another result was that students and faculty tended to employ all the functions

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<sup>5</sup>*Language Testing: The Construction and Use of Foreign Language Tests* McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1961).

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of the machinery to a greater degree. Up to this time, for example, many people had not used the two-track practice function because they had not known it existed.

When producing a tape of this sort, or indeed in producing any tape, one must have a script to work from. In the same way, when one is using the Pennsylvania films in any teaching or learning situation, it is wise practice that he have on hand, and utilize, the excellent *Viewer's Guide*, to make laboratory study through use of film a meaningful experience. The films are too short to be anything but general in nature; they are an instructional tool, not the instructor. Supplementation, explanation, and provision of resource must be done by the teacher or leader. In case a well-qualified instructor is not available, as might be the case in an in-service situation, the *Viewer's Guide* could be used as a substitute, to a limited degree.

Since the Pennsylvania films and their attendant study guide are readily available to trainers of teachers and to in-service teachers, and since the films and the guide can do a creditable job of themselves in instruction in laboratory usage, especially if complemented by reading selected from such a list as *Source Materials for Teachers of Foreign Languages*,<sup>6</sup> a very pertinent publication, it would seem reasonable to expect that the use of language laboratories will be increased and improved. One can hope that the films may be, at least in a small way, an agent for improved foreign language instruction as well as an agent for capitalization upon the huge funds already invested and those yet to be invested by the American public in language laboratories. Many laboratories, related audiovisual equipment, and materials have gathered dust for many years, but this does not mean that they must continue to do so. Some training, perhaps through the Pennsylvania films, a revival of interest, and a touch of imagination could well mean better utilization of machinery and materials, and could also mean improvement of instruction and learning of foreign language without additional expenditures,

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<sup>6</sup>Department of Foreign Languages, National Education Association. Single copy, \$1, from Publications-Sales Section, National Education Association, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. 20036.