

1916

The teaching of French and German in our American schools.

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE TEACHING OF FRENCH AND GERMAN

IN

OUR AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Submitted by

MAY SPRINGFIELD
(A. B., Boston University, 1911)

In partial fulfilment of requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts
1916

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ANALYSIS

I

The justification for the teaching of French and German in our high schools. The belief of most educators of today. The unfair comparison that has been made between the modern and ancient languages.

II

Justification for teaching them as found in their usefulness, and their cultural and disciplinary values, --

1. They are useful as a means to literary culture and to a liberal education. A complete education demands some knowledge of the best French and German literature.
2. Useful in the fundamental and advanced study of English.
3. Useful to the student of the classics, or philology and of archaeology.
4. Useful to the traveller and to the merchant.

Their cultural value; a quotation from Professor Colbeck of Cambridge.

Their disciplinary value; all the mental activities from sensation to judgment are trained.

III

The principal aim of the modern language teacher is to acquire a knowledge of the literature, customs and life of the foreign people. This aim is accomplished through the study of grammar, conversation, pronunciation, dictation, reading and translation.

IV

The study of grammar furnishes a good foundation for advanced study in the language. The class should be familiar with the most important grammatical principles and be able to apply them. These principles should be administered in small doses. The advantages to be gained from an educational and disciplinary standpoint.

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The subject of conversation, and the special importance attached to it by the public. The kind of ability to converse in a foreign language that is acquired in high school has no practical value; and its educational value is very small. Therefore, the teacher should not spend time on this subject at the expense of the more important aims.

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Correct pronunciation and the training of the ear are very important aims. Some of the most important exceptions in pronunciation should be explained, and a few principles of phonetics should be taught in this connection.

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1. Connect it to the history and geography of the foreign country.
2. Have pupils commit to memory short selections.
3. Careful preparation on the part of the teacher.
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LX

Translation as distinguished from reading. Translation has a great disciplinary value in that it drills the discriminating and comparative powers of the mind and develops the reasoning powers. The right kind of translation and its valuable connection with the study of English. Its necessity.

Sight translation and sight reading have a valuable training for the pupil and a distinct value to the teacher.

X

Of all the possible methods of teaching modern languages, the one true method has not been discovered. The "natural" method has not been found satisfactory. Teacher should not adopt any one method, but construct for his particular class a combination method. After all, the natural gift, training and experience of the teacher counts for more than method.

Suggestions for possible improvements in the teaching of these languages, —

1. Modern languages should not be taught in the same way as the ancient languages, because the aims are different.
2. More time should be given to their study, and more attention paid to the educational needs of the pupils.
3. Greater care should be used both in the preparation and choice of text-books for high schools. Mr. Snow's suggestion.
4. Teachers should encourage more real reading in the language itself.
5. Accurate translation should be insisted upon in the elementary classes.
6. More practical conversation.
7. More original composition work.
8. A broader and more scientific and practical training will soon be demanded of all language teachers. The English teacher is preferred to the foreign teacher.

Amid the present agitation and constant discussion for a more beneficial and practical curriculum, one question may well be asked in regard to each of the subjects now being taught in the majority of American high schools. What is the justification from an educational standpoint for the existence of this or that particular subject in the curriculum?

Most educators now believe that the teaching of both French and German is justified, that their position in the present course of studies is assured, and that the time is not far distant when all will realize and acknowledge the beneficial results obtained from the study of them.

For the past twenty-five years much unfair comparison has been made between them and the study of the ancient languages and the sciences; and many startling remarks have been uttered in regard to the worthlessness of the modern languages and the amount of time wasted in their pursuit. For the scholar, it has been said that the field of modern languages is useless; and for the educator, they have been regarded as "a species of cumbersome, worthless lumber that litters up the mental workshop, and that must be gotten rid of as soon as possible, if the range of the active powers of the mind is to be widened."

But the teaching of the modern languages in our schools is young, has not held the prominent place in the training of our youth that Latin, Greek, and the sciences have, and its results have not been tested by scientific methods in our educational system. And until they have been subjected to the same test of time and practice

and taught under similar conditions, it is not fair to make these odious comparisons and erroneous conclusions.

The teachers and the educators of today, who believe that the teaching of French and German is justified, can advance arguments which cannot fail to convince their opponents of the growing worth and educational importance of these languages. First, let us examine the basis for their belief, and designate the special value which they attach to these subjects.

French and German were introduced into the curriculum with the movement to raise public high schools to academies, after the gradual neglect of the study of Greek. The object was highly utilitarian. And now several reasons may be given for the justification of their continued existence.

First then because they are so supremely useful as a means to literary culture and to a liberal education. The advance in the teaching of them began and will keep pace with the advance of utilitarianism in education. It is conceded that a liberal education absolutely requires that every English-speaking person should have some knowledge of French and German, because a knowledge of these particular languages is indispensable to the mastery of literature, the arts and the sciences. Consider how much history and travel is written in French, and how much science and philosophy in German. And among the authors, whom the world has recognized as famous, there are many who have come from France and Germany; and among their writings are many of the standard works of literature.

Some will say, "Read a good translation." But no, read it in the original, for that is the only way to get the full appreciation

of it and to grasp the spirit of it. For instance, a literal translation of Rostand's "Chantecler" or of Goethe's "Egmont" would be unintelligible in English.

It is also claimed that the modern languages are useful and almost indispensable aids in the pursuit of other branches of knowledge. First in the study of English, as Professor Hunt of Princeton wrote, "It is not the most consoling reflection of the patriotic Englishman or American, that as yet the ablest researches into our vernacular are the product of continental, if not of German, scholarship. ----- English grammar, most especially, has been studied in Germany from the scientific standpoint, with constant reference to primitive principles and forms."

Aside from this use of the foreign languages in the pursuit of advanced study in English, the study of foreign languages is itself one of the best means of learning one's own. One of the greatest American scholars says, "We have learned that the round-about course, through other tongues, to the comprehension and mastery of our own, is the shortest."

It is a known fact that the advanced student of the classics, of philology, and of archaeology cannot pursue his study without French and German.

Also these two languages are useful and indispensable to the traveller who wishes to visit the foreign countries; and they are necessary to our commercial life at home.

The cultural reason is harder to analyze, and perhaps not so strong. But all are willing to acknowledge that one's mental horizon is widened; and that some culture must be acquired through the contact

with these two modern nations which have inherited so much of the culture of the ancients. Professor Colbeck of Cambridge did not fear to claim for them "a potency in kindling the imagination, ennobling thought, inspiring right feeling and worthy action, charming the ear by beauty of sound and rhythm, and the reason by force or grace, or stateliness of expression, enlivening by the brilliancy of wit and the glow of humour."

And lastly we teach modern languages on account of their disciplinary value. If the test of systematic psychology is applied to the study of living languages, it is found that there is not a single mental activity which is not called into play and stimulated in the pursuit of this study, if properly taught, beginning with sensation, up to the highest uses of the reasoning power and the judgment. And in the same proportion as the methods in teaching these languages have been bettered and the true spirit of linguistic training developed, these languages have risen higher in the scale of important agencies for the discipline of the mind.

After an attempt to justify the existence of these languages on the curriculum, the aims and purposes and methods of the modern language teacher may be discussed. The principal aim is to acquire a knowledge of the literature, customs and life of the people who represent these two nations. The other aims, such as the study of grammar, conversation, phonetics and translation are the best known channels in which a teacher may work for the accomplishment of this principal aim.

First then, let us consider the element of grammar as one of the means of attaining this aim in language study. Grammar is not taught

and learned principally for its own sake, but because it represents a means to an end, furnishing the best possible foundation for further study of the language. In fact an exact and complete understanding of the language is impossible without it. Imagine a person reading English literature without any conception of the formation and construction of the sentence!

This means that every pupil should know the chief points of the grammar of the language studied, and be able to explain, illustrate and give rules for all the important grammatical principles. On the other hand, it does not mean that the class should be turned into a "hunting-ground for grammatical curiosities." Moreover, the pupil should not be burdened with a long list of meaningless rules, but should have fixed in his mind those rules with examples, which have a meaning to him and which he can apply in his study. Often he will find it interesting and helpful to deduce rules for himself with the assistance of the teacher in selecting good examples of the principle involved.

In order that the grammar may not be dry and repulsive to the pupils, the teacher should not give too much at a time to discourage them, but make it only a part of the lesson, show its connection with the reading, and keep ever before them the important facts and rules, so as to develop that unconscious feeling for what is right in the language, -- the creation of which is one of the highest aims of the teacher.

The study of grammar has its advantages also from an educational and disciplinary standpoint, for it furnishes excellent training of the memory, exercises the reasoning powers, and trains toward exactness.

As to the subject of conversation in teaching languages, there is a great difference of opinion among teachers in regard to its importance both from the practical and the educational points of view, some placing much emphasis upon it, while others attaching very little importance to it.

The great unschooled public regard the ability to converse in a foreign language as a great accomplishment, and as a natural and necessary outcome of language study. For a long time a little French was considered a necessary item in the intellectual outfit of a fashionable young lady. Even today some very intelligent people claim that it is a disgrace that students, who have studied French or German four or five years, cannot speak it. They consider this accomplishment the only standard by which they may measure the good and benefit which the students have derived from their study.

To the average pupil, what is the exact value of the ability to speak a foreign language? It must be either practical or educational. For the person who is seeking a position in a place where there is a large foreign population, the ability to speak two languages would have a real practical or commercial value. The sort of ability demanded of such a person does not mean the knowledge of a few commonplace expressions such as are used in the average class-room, but the real ability to speak the foreign language correctly and fluently. And this real ability cannot be gained in school, because the teacher has not the necessary time at his command and the classes are much too large to attempt it. The classes meet five hours or less each week during the school year, thus giving each pupil at most only a few minutes' practice in speaking the foreign language, while he spends

all the rest of his time speaking English.

No one, not even the brightest pupil, can learn to speak French or German in that way, for it requires months and even years of constant practice and association with those who speak the language as their mother tongue. Thus the results to be gained by teaching pupils to speak a foreign language in the class-room are so insignificant that they have no practical or commercial value in the world. And so there is no use in aiming at these results, even if teachers and educators would admit the propriety of teaching a subject purely for its commercial value.

But what about the educational value of conversation? It is very small. The value in language study does not lie in learning to speak the foreign language, for no new ideas are acquired, and thus the intellectual life of the pupil is not broadened. This ability to converse is a matter of practice, and depends largely upon the pupil's opportunity for practice, which cannot be given in the average class-room. To be sure, the memory is drilled, but after leaving school, the pupil soon loses the little conversational ability that he may have acquired for want of constant practice; and because its educational value is small, because it does not train any other faculty of the mind, because it furnishes no foundation upon which the pupil can build later in life, the time is lost.

In lecturing on this subject, Professor Thomas of Columbia University says, "For myself, I can say with perfect sincerity that I look upon my own ability to speak German simply as an accomplishment to which I attach no great importance. If such a thing were possible, I would sell it for money, and use the money to buy German books with;

and it would not take an exorbitant price to buy it either."

All this argument does not mean that the teacher should not be able to converse freely in the foreign language, and that no conversation should be used in the class-room. On the other hand, the teacher should have an easy command of the language, and should use it himself, and require as much conversation from his class as time will permit; for it aids in teaching a good pronunciation and expression of the language, besides furnishing a means of exciting interest and enthusiasm in the class-room. The preceding discussion attempts to prove simply that the value and importance of conversation is not sufficient to warrant the expenditure of all the teacher's time and energy on that at the expense of the far more important and beneficial aims in language teaching.

The aim of correct pronunciation is very important at the beginning of the study of a foreign language. The teacher should at first speak and read to his pupils a great deal himself, in order to train their ear and to accustom them to sounds not found in their native tongue. Then require them to repeat carefully after him over and over again each sound, word or phrase. Sometimes it is helpful to have a whole class pronounce together in order to force the shy pupils to speak out, and thus gain confidence in themselves.

Not only must the correct pronunciation of individual words be taught, but also as far as possible, the foreign intonation and accent of the whole phrase or sentence. This is especially true of French, on account of the linking of final consonants to words beginning with vowels. Reciting and dictation should be constantly practiced, in order to train the ear to catch the foreign sounds quickly and correctly. The import-

ant exceptions, found especially in French pronunciation, should be explained and discussed with the pupils so as to impress upon their minds these peculiarities which are often so hard to remember.

The study of phonetics lays the foundation for a good pronunciation, but in general in high school, it is not advisable to set aside particular hours for this study, nor is there time for it, but a few helpful principles should be taught in connection with the vocabulary drill.

Dictation has been rightly called "a necessary adjunct" to the teaching of pronunciation, for the pupil must be taught to hear and to distinguish the sounds before he can imitate and reproduce them correctly. This practice is training the ear, not the eye. Its chief object is to accustom the pupil to note carefully, and be able to distinguish the sounds of the spoken words, and to write these sounds correctly. It is good training for all classes; it should be used from the beginning, and will prove very profitable in the more advanced classes.

Its instruction requires a great deal of patience, both on the part of the pupil and teacher. The former must apply himself very attentively in order to catch the sounds and be able to reproduce them on paper. The teacher must speak very distinctly, and be patient and willing to repeat the dictated words. First read the passage through as a whole, to give the class an opportunity to catch the meaning of it; then while the class is writing, dictate very slowly at first and only a few words at a time; finally re-read the passage throughout.

There are two possible ways of correcting the dictation, the tea-

cher doing it as any other written work, or allowing the pupils to do it themselves, either their own paper or that of the pupil across the aisle. Both of these methods are helpful, but the teacher should collect the papers often in order to correct them himself, or to look them over carefully to see if all the corrections have been indicated, and to note the most common mistakes. Then he may discuss them with the whole class, using the blackboard to illustrate the difference between the right and wrong way.

The dictations must not be too long, for if they become tiresome to the pupil, their value is lost.

Last, but most important, let us consider the subjects of reading and translation in language teaching. By reading the foreign language, the principal aim is realized, the source of all the minor aims is found, and the cultural side of the study is most emphasized.

Since the principal aim or object is to acquire a knowledge of the life and character of the foreign nation, it must follow that the material for reading should be chosen so as to promote this aim. Thus the teacher must make a most careful selection of suitable books, and devise a systematic gradation of the reading to meet the advancement of the pupils.

And then too, because so little time is given to the study of modern languages in the curricula of our average high schools, it is of paramount importance that only the very best, the most literary, and the most suitable, and the most characteristic books should be read. It is the duty and privilege of the teacher to show his pupils how to appreciate and enjoy the great works of literature and art. His zeal and enthusiasm should arouse that of his pupils.

In order to make the reading interesting and instructive, it should be connected with the history and geography of the foreign country. And here lies one of the best opportunities for the teacher to use for the advantage of his class the knowledge which he has previously gained from his visits to that country. Another means of promoting interest is found in having the pupils commit to memory and recite in the class-room some especially fine poems and short prose pieces. Of course these short models of style and expression must be well learned, well understood, and recited with feeling and the proper intonation.

Much has been said, and much more remains to be learned in regard to the proper method of conducting a recitation in reading. The teacher may think and often does think that no preparation is necessary for the reading lesson, because the vocabulary and construction of the books read in high school are easy and present no difficulties. But preparation is necessary, and the good teacher will decide before going into the class-room how he is going to explain and comment upon the different characters and places in the text, which present difficulties to the average pupil.

In order to make the lesson interesting and fruitful, he will draw out everything of importance in the text by question and answer, encouraging every pupil to take part. In his explanation and discussion of a great play or poem, he will take care not to talk above the understanding of his pupils. Although the deepest thoughts may be beyond their comprehension, yet the tactful teacher will drive home many a helpful lesson, which will bear fruit in the pupils' later life.

On the other hand, the teacher should not give any superfluous

information, or require anything unreasonable of the pupils, as for instance, learning by heart all the notes contained in their particular edition.

Perhaps the correct teaching of the classical play calls for the most preparation on the part of the teacher, for he should work out with his class and make clear to them the plan of the author, the development of his theme or idea, the connection of the scenes, the climax, catastrophe and historical connection, if there be such. But to many teachers this is one of the most interesting and enjoyable parts of their work.

Reading and translation are not quite the same thing, yet they cannot be entirely separated, for reading must begin by translation. The purpose of the former is general culture, "to be attained through the intelligent perusal of the greatest possible number of good foreign books", while the objects of the latter are mental discipline and training in English.

Translation drills the discriminating and comparative powers of the mind, and develops the reasoning powers. Professor A. Lodge of the Michigan State Normal School expresses its disciplinary value in the following quotation, taken from his essay on "Practical and Psychological Tests of Modern Language Study," - "Discrimination, both between different forms of expression and between various shades of meaning and thought, is constantly needed, and no other method of studying the mother tongue is, in this respect, equal to this practice of translating from a foreign language." Reasoning out the meaning of words from the context is not blind guessing, but legitimate reasoning from the known to the unknown.

The great difficulty with translation, and the cause for its condemnation is found in the fact that some teachers allow it to become a mechanical substitution of the words of one language for the words of another with little or no thought put upon the process by the pupil; while it ought to mean the study of a passage until the thought is clearly understood, and then an effort to put that exact thought into the other language in as good and correct expression as possible. The good teacher will always insist upon this right sort of translation, and help the pupils to give it by requiring oral translation of sentences heard but not seen, and the translation of paragraphs with books closed, or by asking the pupil, "What do you mean by that in English?"

The inability to translate readily and well implies either failure to understand what has been read, or else a poor command of English. If the latter, the pupil needs nothing so much as just this kind of training which translation affords.

Of course the principal object of the teacher is to get pupils away from the English, and have them understand and appreciate the original; but as long as there is doubt in the teacher's mind whether the text is clearly understood, translation is necessary.

Sight translation and sight reading are very important factors in the reading lesson, because they not only have a disciplinary value, but because they also furnish sure means of interesting the pupils.

Sight translation may be begun after the first week or two of study, for there are enough words alike or nearly alike in the foreign language and the vernacular, especially French and English, to make a short exercise possible and profitable. Thereby the pupil

derives a real sense of progress from the beginning, which encourages him and makes his work seem less like drudgery. It also increases his vocabulary and trains his mind to work quickly.

This sight translation will soon and easily develop into sight reading. The necessity of translating every sentence will soon diminish; and after a few weeks, the pupils will be able to follow the reading without much translation. Of course the more simple stories and books must be selected for this practice; otherwise it would be hardly possible, and the time would be wasted.

Reading of this kind has a very important value to the teacher, for besides furnishing a means of exciting interest, it helps him cover the required ground, and gives him an insight into the actual knowledge and ability of his class.

After discussing separately the study of grammar, conversation, pronunciation, dictation, reading and translation, let us consider methods in general, and their relation to the teacher. There are many different methods, and unfortunately each claims to be the one true method; but the true method has not yet been discovered, although all countries are working hard to find it.

For many years the "natural" method was held to be the one true method, because it was said to be the method of nature. The promoters of this method believed that the pupil should learn the foreign language just as he learned his mother tongue in his infancy; that is, by beginning to hear it spoken and to imitate what he hears. They affirm that the study of grammar is unnatural and should not be attempted until after he has learned to speak the new language with considerable correctness and fluency. They further argue that since

the child acquires his mother tongue without the laborious process of learning inflections, conjugating verbs, and applying rules of grammar, we should do away with these processes as useless and impracticable.

In schools where this method is used, it is a fact that no solid progress is made, no conversational power of any real value is acquired, and the ground-work necessary for a thorough knowledge of the language is sadly neglected.

The teacher should not put too much confidence in so-called new methods, because they are mostly one-sided, and have only little educational value; while they merely aim at drilling the pupil in the use of a number of common-place phrases and expressions. Surely a language which has so elaborate a syntax as French, or a language which is so deeply saturated with poetry as German, ought not to be studied by mere imitation.

The teacher, however, should select the good points from all the known methods, and construct for himself a combination method, trying to bring into right proportion the study of grammar, conversation, pronunciation, dictation, reading and translation. The emphasis placed upon these different phases of the instruction varies greatly, and should be largely determined by the individual teacher to meet the needs of his various pupils.

Method itself is not everything; much of the success depends on the natural gift, training and experience of the teacher. The best scholar does not always make the best teacher; but he must have power of speech, understanding of foreign idiom, and the gift of imparting his knowledge, of interesting his pupils in the study of the

life and thought of foreign people. As Dr. Munch said at a meeting of German Modern Language Teachers at Hamburg, "A language teacher should have a certain amount of natural eloquence, quickness of perception, and appreciation of foreign character, as well as an interest in all that concerns modern life." Or as William B. Snow of our own English High School expresses the idea when he says, "Of the three elements: pupil, teacher, method, the last is the least important, and a scholarly, vigorous teacher, with a bright pupil, will do more by any method he is likely to follow, than can be attained by an indifferent teacher with a dull pupil and the best of methods."

In conclusion, let us suggest some possible improvements in the teaching of French and German, so that these two languages may prove more interesting and valuable to the average pupil.

The modern languages should not be taught in the same way as the ancient languages. They are not studied mainly for their form nor exclusively for the beauty and value of their literature; but the aim is to teach the principal features of the life, character, customs and thought of the foreign nations. Thus a much greater stress must be laid on the modern language as a living and spoken organism.

In order that these languages may be taught efficiently and with better results, more time should be allotted to their study in the average high school; and the time should be used more systematically, with special reference to the educational needs of the pupils, and not merely with regard to certain state requirements or college entrance examination boards. Then too, in order to accom-

plish better and more systematic results, there should be more agreement among teachers as to the chief points in the method to be adopted, also as to the selection of books to be read in school.

In regard to the text-books used, especially the grammars, greater care should be taken in their preparation for high school use. They should have more life in them and less mechanism. The teacher should use them simply as tools, presenting much of the more difficult material with them closed, giving the first impression from his own lips. Also great care should be used in the selection of good reading material, in order to create a taste for the best literature that the language affords.

William B. Snow suggests five points to be taken into consideration in choosing a text for any particular class. First, its length; for long texts grow monotonous and give little variety of style and vocabulary. Second, its national quality; it should be a distinctive product of the race which it depicts. Third, its adaptation to the age, sex, and thought of the pupil. Fourth, its informational content; for it should give something worth remembering without being dull. Fifth, the date of the text; the modern texts are almost always preferable for high school use.

More reading in the language itself, as the study advances, and less translation, greater emphasis upon content and less upon form, should be the aim of the teacher in the more advanced classes. However, as we have said before, he must be sure that the pupils understand what they are reading. A discussion in English of the particular story at hand may serve to aid the teacher in ascertaining this fact, and at the same time make the story more interesting to

the pupils.

In the elementary classes more attention should be paid to careful and accurate translation. In fact, accurate translation should be insisted upon by the teacher in order to avoid the habit of carelessness later in the study. The teacher may work toward this end by writing short sentences on the blackboard which contain words pronounced the same but having quite different meanings, due to a difference in spelling. This practice trains the eye to recognize the correct translation at a glance.

More emphasis might well be put upon the training of the ear also, upon pronunciation. The conversation should be practical and interesting, and may be made so by the skillful teacher. For instance, give necessary directions in the class-room in the language itself. Make incomplete sentences and let the pupils vie with each other in completing the sense.

More original composition work should be required of the pupils, because they enjoy it, and because it furnishes an important means of gaining the 'sprachgefühl', of making the pupils enter into the spirit of the foreign language. The writing of letters on familiar subjects should be practiced; short stories read or told by the teacher should be reproduced by the pupils in their own vocabulary.

Finally, in regard to the teachers and their preparation, -- of course, none but duly qualified teachers should be entrusted with the teaching of these languages; which means that they must have a longer, more scientific and practical training than the most of them have had in the past; because a wider knowledge of the foreign languages and more practical results in the teaching of them are required now.

The time is not far distant when it will be required of all language teachers in high schools to visit and study in the foreign countries. They will gain great advantages, for it will enable them to see with their own eyes and to speak from personal experience. They will be more just and sympathetic in their judgment of the customs, manners and peculiarities of the foreign people.

There has been much discussion over the following question,--- Should the teaching of modern languages be mainly by English or native teachers? There are advantages on both sides of the argument, but most authorities believe now that the advantages to be gained under the instruction of the English teacher are far more important than those to be gained under the native teacher. For in actual practice it has been proved that the English teacher produces better results.

We are not alone in this decision, for in Germany English is taught by German teachers, and in France the teaching of English is gradually passing into the hands of Frenchmen.

However, if the school is large enough, it is an excellent thing to have a native teacher on the faculty, who will prove invaluable to the more advanced pupils, and a constant source of help and information to the English teachers of the language.

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N O T E

These books, essays and various short articles in the periodicals named have been read in full with the exception of Bahlsen. Valuable help was given by Mr. L. R. Talbot's Normal Course, taken 2nd semester 1910.