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Special Issue!

Foreign Languages in the Classroom

THE *NEW YORK TIMES* RECENTLY REPORTED THAT immigration officials expect to "apprehend 1.8 million illegal aliens nationwide this year," and that two or three times that number will manage to enter the U.S.—primarily through Mexico—without detection. Add to those sums the hundreds of thousands of refugees, primarily from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, who enter the U.S. legally (reunification with family, political asylum) and illegally (overstaying a student or tourist visa, entering by boat), and the number of new immigrants, many of whom speak no English, has dramatically increased. Without joining the debate over bilingual education (sparked by Secretary of Education William Bennett's recent claim that bilingual education, as now offered, is a "failed path"), one can begin to comprehend the scope of the problem faced by educators when foreign-born children appear on their classroom rosters. There are language, as well as seemingly insurmountable cultural, differences to be resolved. Then, of course, there's the huge social problem of how to integrate the foreign-born students with their peers without forcing them to abandon their native ancestries.

The following articles explore teaching and communicating possibilities in Chinese (and other Asian tongues), Greek, and Spanish in New York City, Seattle, and upstate New York. They reveal different approaches; what unifies them is the noble effort educators and writers are making to teach writing to students with a limited command of English (in Dale Davis' article, the students are limited-Greek-proficient). In singular ways, each writer grapples with the issue of improving language skills by using native tongues in a predominantly English-language setting. Teachers are facing this situation nationwide (the New York State Education Department serves students from 93 language backgrounds; Fairfax County, Virginia works with 14,000 foreign-born students speaking 57 different languages), and yet if handled correctly, the influx of so many foreign tongues can only enrich our language and our culture. These children have the necessary literary and poetic reflexes within themselves: what they sorely miss is the language skills to free their expression.

—David Unger, Guest Editor

DAVID UNGER is a poet and translator who teaches in the T&W program. He is co-director of the Latin American Book Fair and the editor of Nicanor Parra's *Antipoems: New and Selected* (New Directions, 1986).

IN THIS ISSUE

Searching for America

by Jean M. Monahan

MANHATTAN's P.S. 75, KNOWN UNOFFICIALLY as the Emily Dickinson School, has a history of commitment to the creative education of children. Writer Alan Ziegler has directed the Teachers & Writers Collaborative program at P.S. 75 for the last four years. I began working with him as a teaching assistant in September of 1985, and in October was invited to work with Mario Quiñones' bilingual students. The class consisted of 20 students, a mixture of fifth and sixth graders. Approximately 60 percent of them had spoken Spanish as young children, but speak primarily English now. The remainder are native English speakers of Hispanic ancestry whose parents have requested that they be placed in a bilingual class to remain in contact with their family's language and culture. My workshop session was scheduled for 45 minutes every Friday afternoon.

Last spring I became acquainted with the music and lyrics of the Panamanian salsa king, Rubén Blades. Listening to his album *Buscando América* for the first time, I was thrilled by the lively rhythms and thought-provoking lyrics. The idea of using this album for the first class immediately came to mind for several reasons: I imagined the class would recognize his name, or at least his musical genre (his movie *Crossover Dreams* was still playing in Manhattan at the time), and I found his lyrics poetic, pertinent, provocative, and accessible.

To my surprise the children did not recognize his name when I introduced it into the conversation (although Mario gave a thumbs-up sign to encourage my effort). Before passing out the lyrics to the title cut, we had a brief discussion about writing (the various genres, how writers write, etc.) and I explained that in classical times the craft of writing grew out of an oral tradition that employed musical accompaniment. We would discuss Rubén Blades' lyrics as if they were a kind of poem, therefore, separate from and antecedent to hearing the song. The lyrics to all the songs on *Buscando América* are given on the jacket in both Spanish and English—something I welcomed because I had already decided to present as much written material as possible in both languages. The children were surprised when they bent their heads to read the lyrics: they had not expected the option of Spanish. Mario asked that they read the text in English and use the Spanish only if necessary. In a literally correct translation that lacks the simplicity and smoothness of the phrasing of the Spanish, they read:

I'm searching for America, and I fear I won't find it.
Its traces have become lost amongst the darkness.
I'm calling for America but it can't answer me.
Those afraid of truth have made her disappear.

Surrounded by shadows we deny the certain:
(while we live) without justice there will never be peace.
Living under dictatorships I search but I can't find you;
no one knows where your tortured body is.

You have been kidnapped, America; you have been gagged,
and it is up to us to free you.
I'm calling for America. Our future waits;
before it dies, help me to search.

Chorus: I'm searching for America, I'm calling for America.

Estoy buscando a América y temo no encontrarla.
Sus huellas se han perdido entre la oscuridad.
Estoy llamando a América pero no me responde.
La han desaparecido los que temen la verdad.

Envueltos entre sombras, negamos lo que es cierto:
mientras no haya justicia, jamás tendremos paz.
Viviendo dictaduras te busco y no te encuentro.
Tu torturado cuerpo no saben dónde está.

Te han secuestrado América, y amordazado tu boca,
y a nosotros nos toca ponerte en libertad.
Te estoy llamando, América. Nuestro futuro espera.
Antes que se nos muera, ayúdenme a buscar.

Coro: Te estoy buscando América, te estoy llamando América.

The dominant images for the children, on first reading, were the kidnapped body and the gagged mouth. They focused on the key words "lost," "peace," and "searching," and several said that it is up to the listener to "free" America. The lyrics touched off a lively discussion about inequality and the type of government we profess to have in the United States. I assured the class that America was still very much a melting pot and noted a sense of disbelief when I reminded them that all groups that have immigrated to this country have been put through a similar mill of prejudice, abuse, and economic disadvantage. We compared the United States to other nations, including the Soviet Union, but the discussion did not lead directly into talking about the present political situations in Central and South America, as one might have thought.

After several minutes of discussion, I asked everyone to describe, in writing, the way the lyrics made them feel. As I have learned since, regardless of the structure of the preceding discussion there will always be anxious questions concerning the desired form—poem or story? For this assignment I felt it was imperative that they be allowed to express themselves in any form they chose. For the most part the students wrote short paragraphs which were unselfconscious and sincere. Only one boy wrote in Spanish. When the children saw me start to read his paper, someone must have inquired aloud whether or not I could understand it, because Mario graciously allowed me to answer the question by asking me "¿Tú hablas español, no?" His supportive gesture went a long way in garnering their attention and respect.

JEAN M. MONAHAN is working toward an M.F.A. in Poetry at Columbia University. Before moving to New York she studied Russian at the Russian Research Center at Harvard.

The responses were thrilling. They ranged from political dissatisfaction to specific examples of inequality to actual analyses of what America meant to them personally. The most disillusioned student commented on "how unfair the United States is. The president covers it up with lies about how we are so free. When he says he thinks that people should be free he doesn't mean it because if he did he wouldn't support the dictators." Another student specifically mentioned that the lyrics were evocative of the situations in Colombia and Nicaragua: "It makes me feel sad, the music is very pretty, the phrases he wrote are cruel but at the same time they are nice." For another student the lyrics were "like a war and they're fighting for freedom and justice, also for help. And there will never be peace in the world. 'Where are you, America?' they're yelling. They need America badly." One girl wrote that it's similar to when something is lost "and you call its name and it doesn't respond. And it makes me think of all the people that are lost, missing, and you try to find them. It also reminds me of political problems that are going on in America."

To me, these lyrics touch off not so much a reminiscence of the protest songs of the 60s and 70s as a connection with the "new" protest songs, especially in the lyrics of Peter Gabriel, member of the former English rock band Genesis. In "Wallflower" he describes the life of a political prisoner anywhere on the planet. "6 x 6—from wall to wall / Shutters on the windows, no light at all / Damp on the floor you got damp in the bed / They're trying to get you crazy—get you out of your head." The new protest songs may be said to focus on the heinous tactics of spiritual destruction and abnegation: "Loaded questions from clean white coats / Their eyes are all as hidden as their Hippocratic Oath / . . . You want to resist them, you do your best / They take you to your limits, they take you beyond. . . Hold on, hold on." Gabriel's "Wallflower" and "Biko" are more about individual isolation and despair than about social upheaval and group reform. He tells us to derive hope and strength from our private suffering and the lives of others who suffer: "They put you in a box so you can't get heard / Let your spirit stay unbroken, may you not be deterred / . . . Though you may disappear, you're not forgotten here / And I will say to you, I will do what I can do."

The discussion also touched briefly on materialism in the United States and how it highlights the disappointment of new immigrants. The one piece written in Spanish talked about seeing "cosas mejores" ("better things") all around but not being able to enjoy or have them. Another girl poignantly described the differences this way:

> I got a big house in Mexico
> It has five rooms and four bathrooms
> One big kitchen and a big living room.
>
> There is a store outside that
> belongs to my house and it
> has two floors. It reminds
> me of a big beautiful
> palace.

Another poetic train of thought went: "This poem makes me feel very sad because a man is looking for America. America is supposed to be lost in this poem. This man screams for America, he wants to find America, it looks like he loves America, like me, I love America. The way he wrote it was as if America was in a war and there was nothing left of it."

Most of the paragraphs focused on similar issues. One student wittingly or unwittingly echoed the "Star-Spangled Banner" when he wrote:

> I'm searching for America
> for the good and the brave,
> 'cause I have to find some freedom
> o god, I need it today.
> But it will be worth it through
> struggle and through life my own way.
> I'm searching for America,
> for the free and the brave.

In the last ten minutes of the class I played the title cut from *Buscando América.* The faces around the room grew lively with curiosity as the song began. Mario rapped out a rhythm on a desk top and the children were soon swept up in an air of excitement. Toward the end of the song, which swings off into joyous salsa, one boy jumped up from his seat and wriggled a little dance. Students who had not attended the workshop began to return from other classes, and their faces showed delight and surprise at the "fiesta" atmosphere in the room. Before the class ended, Mario asked the students, "Which America has been kidnapped in this song—North America, South America, Central America, or the Caribbean Basin states?" The discussion that followed was heated; as they argued, I glanced at the flags tacked above the blackboard, representing South and Central American countries. Finally one girl said, "It's about all the Americas." ●

PLUG

READERS WHO HAVE ENJOYED BATTLING THE monster known as the French language will also take pleasure in *Mistakable French: A Dictionary of Words and Phrases Easily Confused* by Philip Thody and Howard Evans. It is a witty and informative guide to what are called *faux amis* ("false friends"), certain fiendish French words that have the same look but not the same meaning as English words. Thus, *une prune* is a plum, *les baskets* are sneakers, *un colon* is neither a punctuation mark nor a part of the body, and *une trombone* can be a paper clip. *Mistakable French* gives the basic linguistic information on these and hundreds of other entries, and then goes on to present their particular social, political, economic, historical, cultural, or personal contexts. These brief commentaries often make entertaining reading in themselves. In other words, this is one of those rare volumes that belong in both the language reference library and the bathroom. Highly recommended. (Scribner's, N.Y., 1985, 224 pp., $19.95 hardcover, $8.95 paperback) ●

Making the Trictionary

by Mary Scherbatskoy & Jane Shapiro

WHAT IS WRONG WITH THESE SENTENCES?

A. I will give you a notification of my feeling.
B. The companion of studio was very friendly.
C. My teacher has majesty cause people to venerate and esteem her.

Answer: They contain often hilariously inappropriate words gleaned from standard dictionaries by hardworking seventh-grade students doing their homework.

In our neighborhood, the Chinatown Lower East Side of Manhattan, most public school students do not speak English at home. Many families have immigrated to New York within the last 10 years. There are native speakers of Chinese from Hong Kong, Canton, Toishan, Fukien, North China, Singapore, Burma, Vietnam, Cuba, Venezuela, Macao, Brazil, and other countries, and Spanish speakers from the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico, Venezuela, and other Latin American countries. There are also a few Italian, Jewish, and black American children. This cultural diversity is a wonderful resource for most classroom teaching, but when it comes down to getting the homework on the board and the spelling words defined, it can be problematical. One of us once spent the better part of a period trying to explain "allowance" to an English-As-a-Second-Language (ESL) class. (Most of the Chinese and Hispanic kids had never heard of one, didn't have one, but thought it was a wonderful idea!)

To help all these students, their families, teachers, doctors, and policemen communicate with each other, we decided to put together a "trictionary," a Chinese-Spanish-English dictionary written by and for the children of Manhattan's Lower East Side. From 1979 to 1982, nine adults and nearly two hundred students, grades 5-8, worked after school to plan, translate, illustrate, and publish the *Trictionary* (with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities). Our book turned out to be 432 pages long, divided into three main sections (Chinese, English, and Spanish); it also included a short biographical section on famous Chinese and Hispanic people, a gazeteer of important places, such as the Great Wall of China, El Morro, and the Bronx, and a list of Chinese, Caribbean, and American holidays. The *Trictionary* was published by ARTS (Art Resources for Teachers & Students, Inc.) in 1982.

The Trictionary project had two main purposes: to publish a useful book and to design a project to help young people from the Chinatown area learn and enjoy themselves after school. Our specific goals were that the participating kids:

- improve English and native-language ability
- learn to work together towards a common goal
- increase appreciation of self and others
- increase understanding and enjoyment of the humanities
- learn from peers
- learn about and appreciate similarities and differences in cultures

All the students in the project were volunteers; attendance was not taken. Some kids came only a few times, others came regularly for two years; most, however, attended for two-four months. There were about 20 students working at each session. Students kept coming because they were learning and because they were pleased to be doing something they felt was important. Many were extremely curious about kids from other cultural groups whom they saw daily but had never met socially. Kids began to enjoy hanging out together during our breaks and parties; many new friendships were formed across ethnic lines. In a neighborhood such as ours—a mixed-race, densely populated, poor, urban area—this increase in trust and understanding has important long-term consequences.

The kinds of kids who enjoyed and benefited most from the *Trictionary*, and who actually worked the hardest on the project, were primarily from the seventh-grade ESL classes. That is to say, they were foreign born, speaking not very much English, with some language skills in their native tongue. They wanted very badly to learn as much as possible, and worked extremely hard. No students were truly bilingual. This is not surprising when you think that most people don't know even one language very well by seventh grade. The few who had strong native language skills continued to grow in their own language while rapidly acquiring English. Within several years these students could be called bilingual. They were wonderful, working hard and creatively on translations, helping other kids, and generally making the *Trictionary* possible.

To our surprise, young people whose native language was English were not very interested in the Trictionary project. American-born students (who knew Chinese or Spanish as well as the foreign-born knew English) did not show the same kind of growth, and dropped out quickly.

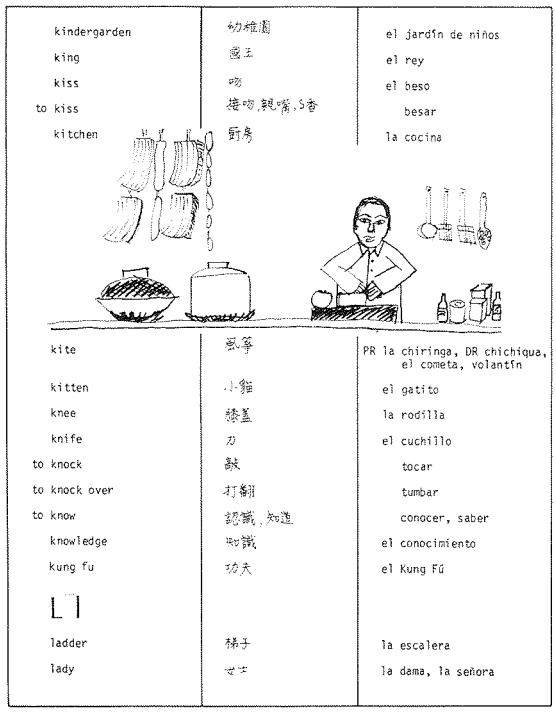
The students who made such good use of the processes and results of the Trictionary project were also its primary resources. Translation was done by four or five students and a bilingual adult sitting in a group and arguing about how to say such-and-such in Chinese or Spanish. Our method relied on the folk wisdom that two heads are better than one. A group of five people can easily come up with ten ways of saying something—three of which will be wrong, three obvious, three peculiar, and one so apt that you couldn't have thought of it by yourself in a day. These same five people can quickly decide to keep only the obvious and apt translations (although the peculiar ones are sometimes hard to give up). In a nutshell, this is how the *Trictionary* came to be:

MARY SCHERBATSKOY helped found ARTS, Inc. in 1970 and is presently co-director. JANE SHAPIRO is a former ESL teacher who is now assistant principal at I.S. 131 in the Chinatown area of New York.

each entry represents five kids and one adult from the neighborhood discussing or arguing for five minutes and, finally, settling on a translation.

From this greatly simplified description, it is obvious that the adult group leaders were an important resource. They not only had to keep five intellectually stimulated kids moving in an orderly fashion, but also to keep the tone of the language consistent and accurate. The *Trictionary* is a dictionary (technically, a glossary) of the languages *spoken* in our neighborhood. It was supposed to reflect how most of the people in our area talked in 1980. In language, finding the simple, enduring ground between fashionable ephemera and dictionary formality is not easy. Only a local resident has the necessary ear. The adult group leaders—neighborhood people, educated, though not necessarily in universities, and very aware of their own language and culture—were crucial to the project.

We believe that the system we used for translating, processing, and controlling our more than 2,000 entires in three languages—nearly 10,000 file cards!—was probably unique. None of the interested and helpful lexicographers who advised us knew of any existing method for simultaneously handling three languages of varying orthographies, so we were obliged to invent one. Exactly how this system worked, from brainstorming through editing, is too technical for a short article. People interested in lexicography or who want to do a similar project should consult our guide to the project, *How to Make a Trictionary.* Most recently we have been exchanging information with other communities with minority language traditions, such as urban neighborhoods, rural areas, and Indian tribes. Many groups are interested in documenting disappearing languages and involving their children in their own language traditions. Making the *Trictionary* was a powerful process both for using children's native languages to strengthen their educational skills, and for recording this vital part of daily life. We hope to share our method with others.



Using the Trictionary

Essentially the *Trictionary* is a translating dictionary: it does not define words, but translates them into their literal equivalents in two other languages. It was not designed to teach Chinese, English, or Spanish as a second language. Speakers and readers of any of these three languages can use the *Trictionary* as a reference work to find equivalent translations of words they need to know in their daily professional and social lives.

It should be noted that the Chinese entries were written in Mandarin, the official language of China. Some Cantonese characters were included for their specialized meanings, and some were included if the Mandarin character was unrecognizable to our writers. The *Trictionary* offers no pronunciation guide for the Chinese characters. In order to learn a correct Chinese pronunciation, an English or Spanish speaker will have to ask a Chinese friend, "How do you say this?" We feel this is all to the good. Such new contact with speakers of other languages was a major goal of the Trictionary project. Also, it simply is impossible to devise a phonetic guide that reflects accurate pronunciation of the many diverse dialects of Chinese.

Students, teachers, medical and legal professionals, community workers, and librarians find the *Trictionary* to be a valuable resource in their work. Students who are native speakers of Chinese or Spanish use the *Trictionary* to discover English equivalents of words they know only in their own language. It includes words such as "homework," "report," and "marks." Using the *Trictionary* promotes cross-cultural understanding in the classroom. A bilingual Chinese student can teach a monolingual English or Spanish friend how to say words describing a common experience (such as "ice skating"). The *Trictionary* makes it easier to do shared classroom projects, such as writing down family histories, or developing a food fair.

Teachers can use the *Trictionary* to provide accurate translations of materials written on a level appropriate to their students' needs. Students can be asked to look up particular words in the *Trictionary* and to offer oral and written translations of the word for classmates. The gazeteer in the *Trictionary* offers teachers resource material regarding important persons and places in Chinese and Hispanic history and culture. The *Trictionary* offers teachers a format for devising their own mini-trictionaries.

The words included in the *Trictionary* were selected for their usefulness and importance to people of the community. Many words appear in the *Trictionary* that are missing from most beginning-level dictionaries. (We brainstormed with students to discover topics and phrases of particular interest to them, and we translated some long-established slang.) Words relating to law, immigration, health, medicine, religion, holidays, foods, and shopping were added because of their relevance to community needs. Thus, a worker in a healthcare facility can use the *Trictionary* to help explain a diagnosis or proper medicinal dosage to a patient who speaks Chinese, or Spanish, but not English. Similarly, a lawyer may use the *Trictionary* to help explain terms such as "lease," "rent," or "insurance."

The *Trictionary* project shows that ordinary people can be motivated intellectually to research their own language and culture, and be enthusiastic about contributing to their

community. Work in the humanities has sometimes been elitist, based on the assumption that only the academically distinguished are capable of original thought. Not only did the *Trictionary* not involve academicians in the running of the project, their presence would have been counter-productive. Such qualifications often inhibit less educated people from expressing what they know to be true about their language and culture. We believe that most multi-lingual communities need, and have the resources to do, such a humanities project. In any multi-ethnic neighborhood there is a lack of understanding, leading to misunderstanding, leading to antagonism. Existing reference works, particularly in unlikely combinations of minority languages, are inadequate. The resources needed to solve this problem are the same as the problem itself—people speaking diverse languages. The *Trictionary* provided a way for people to work together for the good of the community. The *Trictionary* also helped to counter pressures on young people to reject their family's language and culture, and to deny their value.

The *Trictionary* ($10) and *How to Make a Trictionary* ($1.50) are available from ARTS, Inc., 32 Market St., New York, NY 10002. Add $1 for shipping. ●

I Thought Banana Was English

by Arthur Dorros

"GO FIND AN INTERPRETER," WAS THE CONstant and brusque refrain of the receiving nurse at a New York City hospital clinic one recent morning. It was a refrain repeated not only that day, but each day, as a stream of non-English speaking patients from the neighborhood reaches a desk where language becomes a roadblock. As the hospital makes little or no effort to provide interpreters, patients must resort to anyone at hand, which often means a patient wandering in the halls or sitting in a crowded waiting room who might be bilingual. It took one new patient an hour and a half to find someone to help translate. Official policies of bilingual assistance fall by the way as curt, sometimes hostile, hospital personnel refuse to deal with anyone who does not speak English.

In the cramped waiting room of the clinic, anyone who understood more than one language could overhear many miscommunications about symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment as poor and often brief translations were made. Medical personnel were frustrated in their abilities to make diagnoses and give proper treatment. Some patients left discouraged or misinformed; others without being treated at all.

In the schools the situation is less critical. Students do not die on the spot because they cannot speak English. But translation problems can have obvious and extreme effects.

In this country of so many cultural and linguistic backgrounds, English is sometimes viewed as the glue that binds us together. Perhaps partly because of the diversity of cultures that converge in the U.S.A., Americans are more hesitant than Europeans, for example, to embrace foreign languages. I have heard more than a few teachers castigate their students for speaking in a language other than English, even at times when the students had been given permission to talk freely among themselves. Another language is seen by some teachers as a threat—"Whatever they're saying could be directed against me." Rather than learn other languages, many Americans fearfully fend off foreign languages as invasive. Students are taught early and often that English is the uncrowned king of languages to which one must pay homage.

New York City, known for its polyglot, has also been described as a Tower of Babel. Many schools are about as helpful as the hospital in providing interpreters or encouraging students to communicate. Too often the pervading attitude in the school offices and classrooms is: if you don't speak English, we can't deal with you. When bilingual classes are provided, they are only as bilingual as the teachers themselves. Bilingual classes are virtually quarantined from other programs—yet teachers and administrators act surprised at the inability of these students to "mainstream" later.

Fortunately, other languages are not given the leper treatment at all schools. P.S. 11, in Woodside, N.Y., is one example of a school where a multiplicity of languages and cultures is looked upon as an asset. When I arrived at P.S. 11 to teach writing, I was told that there were no fewer than 23 different languages in the school. The assistant principal who told me this had grown up in the neighborhood when it had been more culturally homogenous, yet he viewed this new variety of languages as a great advantage for the children—not only for those students who speak another language, but for the students whose native language is English.

In one of the most innovative, and perhaps most natural, programs at P.S. 11, students instruct each other in their native languages—English speakers might learn Spanish or Japanese from children who are native speakers, and in exchange these children learn more English. The best way to learn a language is by speaking it with native speakers, a fact confirmed by anyone who has tried to learn a foreign language in school. In a neighborhood such as Woodside, where at least half of the business signs contain words in languages other than English, being bilingual has obvious applications.

Even within monolingual classes, there are options for non-English speakers. I've often seen a child who is to some

ARTHUR DORROS is the author of two children's books, *Pretzels* and *Alligator Shoes.*

extent bilingual translate for a child who speaks little or no English. The consequences of one child being so responsible for another are varied—it can create intense bonding, or conversely the pressures of one child constantly having to translate for the other can spur both children to be more independent. I remember two eight-year-old Korean girls in a New York City school, one of whom was fluent in English and Korean, the other who spoke no English. For awhile, the bilingual girl reveled in translating for the other, but as constant translating became more of a chore, she strongly suggested the other girl learn English. The non-English speaking girl, realizing the strain on their relationship and feeling herself tiring of always having to communicate through an intermediary, started to learn English.

At Seattle, Washington's Sanislo Elementary School, I observed a more ideal program that had been working successfully. All children, regardless of their ability in English, were a part of the regular English-speaking classes, at least for half the day. If they had a problem understanding something, they were free to ask one of their bilingual classmates at an appropriate moment. They attempted to do their work in English for those classes, but were allowed to use their native languages when their abilities in English were insufficient. For example, Spanish-speaking students could write their ten vocabulary words for the day in Spanish, until their English improved enough to do it in English. (In this school the students, regardless of native language, chose their own ten vocabulary words to study each day.) The teacher reviewed the word lists, and if that teacher was not proficient in the language the list was written in, a bilingual teacher, a bilingual school volunteer, another student, or books were consulted.

The program was truly bilingual: students worked in two languages. Being a part of the English-speaking classes provided both an impetus and an opportunity to improve English skills, while work in native language and English-As-a-Second-Language (ESL) classes helped ensure that students gained skills in *two* langauges. The regular classroom teachers conferred both with native language teachers and ESL teachers, who worked with bilingual children as much as half of the day, so they could all coordinate their work.

The communication between native language teachers (all bilingual) and regular classroom teachers raised their understanding of each other not only methodologically, but also personally and culturally. There was increased awareness of the positive side of other cultures and languages, and the bilingual students put on many highly appreciated events about their cultures for the rest of the school: for example, a "Cinco de Mayo" celebration with dances, parades, and special foods, or a Chinese New Year, with a "dragon dance" troupe from a local high school. These special events allowed teachers and students the opportunity to further discuss differences and similarities in language, customs, and culture. For bilingual students, these events gave balance to their academic programs. The bilingual load hindered their taking part in as many optional activities, such as gymnastics or music, as other students. But as these bilingual students improved in English, they could stop reviewing their other classwork in their native languages and had more time for other activities. These mutual involvements are far superior to the hit-and-run techniques of pulling students *out* for remedial language classes or placing them in quarantined native language classes.

Good bilingual programs benefit all the students, not just the newcomers. There was very little cultural and racial tension in the Seattle school, even though that was an issue in the adult community. Mutual human respect was the basic tenet of the school, and the high degree of linguistic and intercultural contact taught children to value bilingualism and bi-culturalism. Festivities and activities elicited such comments as: "Oh, you get to eat that food and dance like that?" After one Chinese New Year event, about half the school was set to scour the neighborhood for a good source of humbow, one of the foods they were introduced to. Many children were also excited by the language discoveries they made: "Is *banana* really a Spanish word? I thought it was English." Teachers also can gain from bilingual experiences and the crossover in languages. Recently I was using my far from perfect Spanish with a class of Spanish-speaking children—they politely but gleefully corrected my mistakes, and I learned a few things. It's also allowed me to begin reading Latin American literature in Spanish.

At the Seattle school, English-speaking students and teachers started to learn other languages, and some learned enough to have parts in the staging of festivities and performances. Children who already had resources in languages other than English could take pride in those languages and even when they were proficient in English, they continued to preserve their native languages. The school arranged to have some language instruction available in many languages, including Mandarin, Spanish, French, Korean, Samoan, Japanese, and Native American (Northwest tribes). In some cases there were enough students and teachers to form language classes. But when there were only a few students, such as the brother and sister from the Philippines who spoke Tagalog, a native speaker came in once a week for about an hour, so those children could at least hang on to their second-language abilities.

It is understandable that English-speaking North Americans should want to encourage immigrants to learn English as soon as they are able to. But to cling to English, as a five-year-old entering school for the first time would clutch his/her mother, serves neither the child, the mother, nor the group. And though some fear that the U.S. is currently being swamped by immigrants, this is certainly not the case. The percentage of the population who are immigrants is in fact lower than it was at many other times in U.S. history (four per cent now versus eleven per cent 70 years ago). Besides, the U.S. has not only absorbed but has benefited from the energies of immigrants. Immigrant children and children of immigrants remain among the most motivated and best of students.

The world is becoming more and more a global society, with more information systems to link people. Perhaps some day there will be a commonly understood world language, but for now, with increasing information, literature, and resources available in languages other than English, and with increased international communication and enterprise, it is a distinct advantage to be bilingual. Even just to be able to say hello. ●

Sing in Me, Muse

Ancient Greek in the Elementary School Classroom

by Dale Davis

Sing in Me, Muse

Take me all over.
There is no place. I live
all over.
—*Teresa M.*

"WHERE ARE THE CLASSICS IN SCHOOL TODAY?" James Laughlin, the poet who founded New Directions Publishing Corporation, asked me a few years ago. "Why don't you take Homer in, and try *The Odyssey* in elementary school?" was the suggestion of this writer who continues to keep the work of writers such as H.D., Federico García Lorca, Ezra Pound, Kenneth Rexroth, and William Carlos Williams in print, along with the work of Robert Duncan, Nicanor Parra, and Octavio Paz.

A few months later, as a writer-in-residence with the New York State Literary Center, I found a home for *The Odyssey.* The Craig Hill Elementary School, in Greece, New York, enabled me to combine Ancient Greek literature in English translation (as the inspiration for student writing) with the school's prescribed social studies curriculum on Ancient Greece, in a two-day-a-week, two-month residency with three sixth-grade classes. The usual Language Arts, Reading, and Social Studies periods were set aside for my work.

The goal of the residency, named GREECE/GREECE/GREECE, was for the teachers and the students to come to feel Ancient Greece through the voices of its poets. The culmination of the residency was to be the teaching participation of Robert Fitzgerald, Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard, and translator of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey.*

I began my own preparation for the residency by reading Kenneth Rexroth's *Classics Revisited.* What I responded to, what excited me most in Rexroth's book, I typed, page after page, to share with the teachers.

After Rexroth I revisited Jane Ellen Harrison's *Mythology,* and again I selected passages for the teachers. I also spent time with C. Kerényi's *The Gods of the Greeks* and *The Heroes of the Greeks.* A postcard from Robert Fitzgerald added C. M. Bowra's *Homer* to my reading list.

The residency unofficially began in November with three study sessions with the sixth-grade teachers, who supportively and energetically attended after school. The first session consisted of the pages and pages of what I had typed from my background reading, presented for the sheer enjoyment of reading, as reading, not to categorize or to classify, but to provide a personal "map" of where I had been. Everyone was encouraged to record thoughts and questions in response to the material, and to begin to chart his/her own map.

I asked the teachers to begin discussing with their students all the cultures the students had studied since they had been in school, to ask how the cultures were alike, how they were different, and to ask why cultures were studied in school. I also suggested that the discussion involve what the students had read from those cultures.

We were without Ancient Greek. Robert Fitzgerald had suggested C. M. Bowra's *Homer* "for the Greekless." The second teacher study-session focused on how Ancient Greek literature was going to be presented in the residency. I handed out translations of Meleager's "Heliodora" from *The Greek Anthology,* by Dudley Fitts, W. R. Paton, and H.D., along with two comments on translation:

> And finally, I have not really undertaken translation at all—translation, that is to say, as it is understood in the schools. I have simply tried to restate in my own idiom what the Greek verses have meant to me. The disadvantages of this method are obvious: it has involved cutting, altering, expansion, revision—in short, all the devices of free paraphrase.
>
> In general, my purpose has been to compose first of all, and as simply as possible, an English poem.
>
> —Dudley Fitts, *One Hundred Poems from the Palatine Anthology*

> Since these are 'old Chinese poems,' dating from the second to the twelfth century, should not this oldness be somehow suggested in the translation? My answer to this is an emphatic no! Their oldness is no more than historical accident; all were unquestionably new when they were written. *The Greek Anthology* is even older and embraces a longer time span, yet no reputable modern translator that I am aware of makes any attempt to suggest this fact in his translation. The good translator, it seems to me, no matter how he may project himself back into time in order to understand the ideas and sentiments of his author, must, when it comes to getting the words over into another language, proceed as though he himself were the author, writing the work afresh today.
>
> —Burton Watson, *Chinese Lyricism*

Our introduction to the literature of Ancient Greece would be, by necessity, through the critical rendering of an appreciation by a translator.

During the third teacher study-session we went over the material gathered together by the teachers for the residency: books and maps of Ancient Greece borrowed from every known location in the school district, ready for whoever wished to go further than what was presented in class. Copies (for the teachers and students) of Robert Fitzgerald's translation of *The Odyssey,* and of his *Spring Shade, Poems 1931-1970* had now arrived.

The classroom residency officially began in January, with eight poems by Sappho, translated by Mary Barnard, Willis Barnstone, Guy Davenport, H.D., Richmond Lattimore, Kenneth Rexroth, and J. Addington Symonds, typed, photocopied, and passed out to each student.

DALE DAVIS is a poet, teacher, and director of the New York State Literary Center.

During the classroom sessions on Sappho I read aloud the English translations of the eight poems. I asked the students to think of questions, such as what is it like to want something, have it right in front of you, and not be able to touch it, what is it like when you want to do and not do something at the same time, and what is it like to lie awake alone at night. I asked the students either to describe the effect of Sappho's poems on them or to write directly to her.

Sappho Talks

Sappho's poems are lilies
that speak with their heart.
—Kelly H.

Sappho lets me know who she is.
She is holy.
—Randy P.

To Sappho

It is I who needs,
who grabs for what is not,
that feeling of feeling
that flows through my heart making holes,
the dream inside the dream.
I am so close I can touch
the wind of my dream,
the speech of nothing.

It chases me.
It knows. It knows
I need the place that is not there,
the place that sleeps beneath my body
past the deep where I come from,
the land of the feeling which is not known.

Time passes itself,
sleep of the same world
that has no body.
—Denise T.

To Sappho

The gift of a translator is the poems
he uncovers.
—Renée K.

I then asked the students to select their favorite translations of each of the eight poems. Class discussion, in each subsequent session, focused upon how the translations differed, and how, through the choice and arrangement of words, translators arrived at their English versions of the poem.

Class discussion on Sappho led to Michele M. and Traci P. placing their own work beside Mary Barnard's, Willis Barnstone's, Guy Davenport's, and H.D.'s translations of the very same poem.

A TEST OF TRANSLATION: SAPPHO

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This way, that way

I do not know
what to do: I
am of two minds
—Mary Barnard

Shall I?

I do not know what to do:
I say yes—and then no.
—Willis Barnstone

I don't know which way I'm running.
My mind is part this way, part that.
—Guy Davenport

I know not what to do:
my mind is divided.
—H.D.

I rip myself in half:
my mind is another me.
—Michele M.

Running

Running away from myself
I am not quite sure
which way
—Traci P.

Following the classroom sessions on Sappho, I introduced the students to *The Greek Anthology.* We read poems by Meleager, Nossis, and Plato in the English translations of M.S. Buck, H.D., Dudley Fitts, J.W. Mackail, and W.R. Paton. (I also distributed copies of the poems in Greek so that the students could visually experience the shape of the poems in Ancient Greek.)

I asked the students to think about questions that come out of the poems: what is it like to live where you live, how can you hold on to something you cannot place in your hand, what is the one "country" we are all alive in?

As with Sappho, I also asked the students to focus upon how the translations differed, and to note how the individual translators arrived at their English versions of the poem.

Our discussion focused on the choice of verbs and adjectives, how the tone of the poem was set by the translator, and the decisions a translator must make.

Before leaving *The Greek Anthology* I asked the students to write what it meant to them.

The Greek Anthology

for Dudley Fitts

Your gift is the life of the words.
The poems tug like shining stars
in my mind,
life while I grow.
—Chris S.

The Greek Anthology

for H.D.

There is a solemn rose
I share
with all who can see.
—Fran P.

The Greek Anthology

Minds beyond the world
I hold you
reminding myself
I want more.
—Julie W.

I hold on with my dreams
going down my spine
and back up.
That name is that name is that name.
—*Benny S.*

The poet knows the world
by the clock that gives time by thought,
by the fish that dreams to walk.
—*Fran P.*

Song

Look, the empty hearted fall noplace.
Down nothing meets nothing
Connecting God to nowhere.
Words strung begin a
Metaphor,
A place of a blank someone
Like mysteries of ground, hot burning
Ill of summer snow
Knowing a shapeless horse galloping noplace,
Thinking Muse.
Everywhere half feelings
Turn outside, the flower of nobody worlds.
Like the spring air H.D. is my body
thinking a dream inside tomorrow.
—*Gino V.*

In the beginning of the second month of the residency I held another study-session with the teachers; time to catch our breath, to chart where we had been, and to lay the final groundwork for *The Odyssey.* The "Postscript" to Robert Fitzgerald's translation was to be our guide through *The Odyssey*:

> If the world was given to us to explore and master, here is a tale, a play, a song about that endeavor long ago, by no means neglecting self-mastery, which in a sense is the whole point.

I used the game of Gossip to introduce Homer's authorship of *The Odyssey.* Since neither Homer nor his audience were readers, Homer spoke *The Odyssey,* and his audience heard it. I wrote two lines on a piece of paper, and then whispered the same two lines into the ear of a student. That student whispered what he/she heard into the ear of the student behind him/her, and so on, student to student, up and down the rows. We compared the two lines said aloud by the last student with the two lines I had written down; the difference was tremendous.

Next, I wrote two lines in iambic pentameter on a piece of paper, and whispered the same two lines into the ear of one of the students. We followed the same procedure with the last student saying aloud the two lines which he/she heard. There was very little difference between the two lines said aloud by the last student and the two lines I had written down.

I used Gossip to show how, in Milman Parry's words, "Homeric lines were constructed out of metrical formulas." I mentioned Albert Lord's work calling attention to the "phonological context," the formulas available in the memory, such as the alliterative and voweling pattern, used by the storyteller or singer, and the extent to which a formula determines invention.

The students and the teachers were now aware that it was unlikely that Homer himself wrote *The Odyssey* down, and that our reading was due to "a sedentary labor, or joy, sustained at a work table" by Robert Fitzgerald, the poet, the translator, the reader who was giving us Homer.

I introduced Homer with an anonymous poem from *The Greek Anthology* in the English translation of W.R. Paton:

> Of what country shall we record Homer to be a citizen, the man to whom all cities reach out their hands? Is it not the truth that this is unknown, but the hero, like an immortal, left as a heritage to the Muses the secret of his country and race?

I focused my *Odyssey* classroom work on Book One ("A Goddess Intervenes"), Book Two ("A Hero's Son Awakens"), Book Five ("Sweet Nymph and Open Sea"), Book Six ("The Princess at the River"), Book Seven ("Gardens and Firelight"), Book Nine ("New Coasts and Poseidon's Son"), Book Ten ("The Grace of The Witch"), and Book Eleven ("A Gathering of Shades"). The librarian and the music teacher (who emphasized the role of a stringed instrument in the development of a story) also read the *Odyssey* aloud to the students, as did the classroom teachers during the Reading and Social Studies periods.

During my classroom sessions I questioned the students about listening, about looking, about the home of their own imaginations, what it looks like there. I discussed the Greek word *metaphor,* "to move from one place to another," and then questioned the students about a journey to the home of their imaginations, asking where they might stop en route for a rest, and who would ask them to stay there instead of continuing on their journey. We talked about metaphor as a way of seeing, a way in which everything becomes, and everything is, something else.

•

I introduced Robert Fitzgerald through his own poetry:

Phrase

Sorrowful love passes from transparencies
to transparencies of bitter starlight
between antiquities and antiquities so simply

as in evening a soft bird flies down
and rests on a white railing under leaves

Love things in this quietness of falling
leaves birds or rain from the hushes
of summer clouds through luminous centuries

Touch unconsolable love the hands of your ancestors

Robert Fitzgerald walked into the Craig Hill Elementary School carrying his green Harvard bookbag over his shoulder. His first words to the classes were, "A message from the heart is in all poetry. Poetry reproduces the speech of the heart, which, after all, must matter." We were the students of this poet who brought *sacred* to the meaning of the word *teacher.*

He began with Sappho, read her Pleiades poem to us in Greek, and wrote it in Greek on the board. Fitzgerald proceeded with the assumption that, Greekless or not, we were with him. He wrote the English equivalent directly underneath the Greek and then asked everyone to take out the eight poems by Sappho in the different translations. He then read aloud the English translations of the Pleiades poem:

The moon has set, and the Pleiades.
It is the middle of the night,
Hour follows hour. I lie alone.
—*Guy Davenport*

Tonight I've watched

The moon and then
the Pleiades
go down

The night is now
half-gone; youth
goes. I am

in bed alone.
—*Mary Barnard*

Alone

The moon and the Pleiades
are set. Midnight,
and time spins away.
I lie in bed, alone.
—*Willis Barnstone*

The moon has set,
and the Pleiades. It is
Midnight. Time passes.
I sleep alone.
—*Kenneth Rexroth*

He spoke of what was happening in the poem: "Night was going on, the stars, and the moon were going down, time passes, I lie alone," and added, "When even those companions, the moon and the Pleiades go down, I am all alone. The loneliness is intensified."

He read the poem in Greek again, slowing giving the rhythm, the beat. Then he went back to the board and wrote:

The westering moon has gone
With Pleiades down the sky.
Midnight. And time goes by.
And I lie here alone.
—*Robert Fitzgerald*

I had mailed Robert Fitzgerald all the material I had prepared for the residency, my preparatory reading, the material on Sappho, *The Greek Anthology,* and *The Odyssey,* and copies of the students' writing. He used the material as points of reference with the three classes.

At one point, he suddenly stopped the class and stated:

You've shone as the morning star among the living,
Now you are dead, you shine as the evening star among the dead.

Then he added, "Some Plato in the air for you."

At another point he introduced the elegiac couplet of *The Greek Anthology,* using an original composition, the first line by himself, the second line by Vladimir Nabokov:

No one has ever seen Cynthia flustered or drunk or befuddled
Cynthia prim and polite, Cynthia hard to outwit.

Asked by a student how he became interested in Greek, he replied that it had been when his sixth-grade teacher wrote two Greek words on the blackboard. The Greek words, in English, meant "horse river," or "river horse," the English equivalent of "hippopotamus":

ἵππος ποτάμος
HIPPOS POTAMOS
HORSE RIVER

—*Notes taken in class by Benny S.*

Fitzgerald spoke of the opening sounds of *The Odyssey* in Greek: "We can hear faintly underneath the sound of sea water slapping under the ship's hull, quite a splendid set of noises." He concluded each class by reading aloud from *The Odyssey,* Book One, in Greek.

When I came back for the last day of GREECE/GREECE/GREECE, one week after Robert Fitzgerald's visit, I did not have to give a writing assignment. When I walked into each classroom the students began writing:

Homer

for Robert Fitzgerald

Homer's song is Ancient Greece
unraveled in a poem.
The color of the words
is life
piercing.
—*Chris S.*

Dreams of Homer

for Robert Fitzgerald

Pieces and bits of the *Odyssey*
spin into dreams.
I imagine Homer.
My dreams tell me
I know
this tiny light
shining in,
Homer
breaking through
to see me.
—*Tracey M.*

Robert Fitzgerald

I throw my body up seeing what it is like
to be a bird,
soaring so high I can touch the sky.

Homer's song can only be sung by the birds,
but I can sing that special song
in my dreams.
I hear that song
tingling,
I hear Greek in my own words.
—*Jason R.*

Cynthia

Talking, his hand walking
back, forth, his eyes sparkle.
A perfect yellow tulip
takes the chalk, writes "flustered,"
politely.

No one ever thanked Cynthia.
—*Gino V.*

How

for Robert Fitzgerald

Cynthia is a word I remember,
and the word Pleiades.

Greek is a land of air tunnels
that holds dreams.
To learn Greek is to learn

a poem is a word
that tells what it wants to tell,
that gives a taste of what can't be tasted.
—*Mike D.*

Image

for Robert Fitzgerald

I look at my paper.
You look at the blackboard,
empty, lonely, blank, alone.
Are you listening? Do you hear?
You, Robert Fitzgerald, drowning
in poetry,
Do you believe in love? Do you love?
You, teacher of teachers, poem of poems,
Stuck in a world that nobody else knows,
alone,
A melody of words, singing with your heart,
You, the only tree on that land,
Sailing on that lake alone, thinking,
"Will I live forever, do I want to?"

You are the circle of life,
You, dreamer.
—*Michele M.*

GREECE/GREECE/GREECE was the combination of a reading list, teachers who were willing to risk total immersion with their own interest and time, serious research for each classroom presentation, a visit from Robert Fitzgerald, and a poet who designed and carried out the program, agreeing with Robert Fitzgerald's answer when he was asked what the difference between a sixth-grade classroom and a Harvard classroom was: "None. A classroom is a classroom."

The Reading List for GREECE/GREECE/GREECE

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Teachers & Writers Collaborative
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