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ABSTRACT

An historical, philosophical, and methodological overview of the Dartmouth/Rassias model of foreign language instruction is presented. The model, first developed by John Rassias at Dartmouth College, is an intensive adaptation of the traditional audiolingual approach. Great use is made of dramatic techniques to motivate students and help them learn the language. It is suggested that the psychological rationale for the model's success may be due to the emotionally self-liberating effect of these dramatic techniques. The reported success of the model at several institutions is discussed and a plea is made for scientific experimentation and evaluation. A comprehensive bibliography is included along with a list of 55 colleges that employ the method. (Author/JB)



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The Dartmouth/Rassias Model of Teaching
Foreign Languages*

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Origin and Description of the Dartmouth/Rassias Model¹

In the late 1960's, Professor John Rassias of Dartmouth College was becoming increasingly frustrated with the poor quality of foreign language instruction in the United States. The audiolingual method, in spite of high expectations and countless dollars spent in its behalf, had not achieved the expected results. Studies showed that few students were emerging fluent from college foreign language classes,² and it was apparent that a change was badly needed.³

Rassias sought to offer a viable alternative to this situation. Remembering his success with a model he developed to teach Peace Corps volunteers, Rassias began to employ it to train language students at Dartmouth College.

The Dartmouth/Rassias Model is an immersion model whereby students spend ten hours per week in the foreign language classroom and two and one-half hours in the language laboratory. For five hours during the week, students meet with Master Teachers who are resident faculty members responsible for introducing the lesson, teaching grammar, and supervising the Apprentice Teachers. There is no English spoken in the master session (or in any other language class); even the grammar is

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taught entirely in the foreign language. Master sessions are lively and fast-paced, and generally include about 20 students.

The students, in small groups of from five to eight, also meet five hours per week with Apprentice Teachers, who are responsible for reinforcing what has been taught in the master session. Here the teacher strives for a high rate of response through the use of rapid-fire drills, typical of those used in the audio-lingual approach.⁴ An average of 65 responses per student per one-hour session should be obtained.⁵ The drill session lends itself quite well to the use of such games in the foreign language as "The Dating Game" and "Jeopardy". Numerous skits such as make-believe press conferences are also used. To master counting, students call off the numbers on rapidly rolled dice. Or they may play a game called dots: As students call off the numerals, the teacher connects a series of numbered dots on the blackboard.

According to Rassias, drill instructors (Apprentice Teachers) always speak in the foreign language and use an animated voice when conducting the class. They use visual aids whenever possible and fully use their imaginations to make the class exciting. The instructor constantly moves around the classroom and commands the students' attention at all times. Writing on the blackboard is kept to the barest minimum. The instructor always pronounces distinctly, and students are not allowed to look at their books during the lesson. If a student delays in answering, the instructor calls on another, and then returns to the first student. The last five minutes of class are reserved for questions. This helps ensure that questions asked are serious and relevant and helps cut down on loss of class time.⁶

Rassias has developed some innovative techniques for using dialogues. The student is required to memorize only the most important parts of a somewhat extended text. S/he is then encouraged to make original substitutions. The process is similar to that described by Feeny.⁷

Students often participate in what are called micrologues. The instructor speaks on a limited topic for one minute to a single student. That student then attempts to restate what was just heard. Other members of the class might be questioned on the information. This technique is frequently used to present cultural information.⁸ Toward the end of the term students in each drill session perform a lengthy dramatic skit which they write on their own. This is presented in the larger class taught by the Master Teacher. Thus each drill session observes skits performed by students in other drill sessions. Competition as to who can write and perform the best skit normally ensues. The presentation of skits is usually the high-point of the study term.

Rassias insists that the teacher should leave the classroom exhausted if he has truly done his job. It is essential that the teacher be enthusiastic and uninhibited if a similar response is to be elicited from students. Furthermore, Rassias maintains that all teachers should be "firebrands and actors". He believes that a dramatic approach is the only one appropriate to teaching something as vivid and exciting as a foreign language.⁹

Rassias himself has the reputation of being quite an actor. He took his doctorate in theater from a French university and for a time was a professional actor in Paris.¹⁰ In the classroom he oftentimes dresses as a character from a French novel to act out a particular scene.

He describes periods of war in French history by creating a war-like atmosphere in his classroom. He plays sound effects of bombs falling, flashes lights to simulate explosions, ignites firecrackers, and sometimes even lunges at students. He has been known to throw raw eggs and raw meat at students to illustrate philosophic or literary themes. To shatter inhibitions and to exhort students to become involved, he cracks eggs on students' heads, shouting: "To make an omelet, one must first crack the shell!"; raw meat is thrown at students in order to have them feel the impact of the single-dimensional view of naturalistic literature. He urges them to examine the meat to see if they can find any soul in it. Students at Dartmouth began wearing raincoats to class because of the barrage of things being thrown at them.

Students are informed that their class participation is expected to be constant, alert, and always enthusiastic. It is vital that they keep up with each day's assignment because the class moves at a lightening pace, and they can easily be left behind.

Rassias permits the individual teacher to select any audio-lingual textbook as a point of departure from the course. He takes an audio-lingual approach to teaching and recommends the use of dialogs, pattern practice, language laboratory drill, backward buildup, etc. While reading, writing, and formal grammar are taught, the emphasis is clearly on the acquisition of listening and speaking skills. Written tests and written homework are deemphasized. Overlearning, the constant use of visual aids, and realia are also recommended.

Looking at the Dartmouth/Rassias model from a historical perspective, one recognizes that it is a new innovation in language teaching. The philosophical assumptions such as the primacy of speech and the

techniques employed such as dialogs and pattern drills clearly place it within the audio-lingual approach.

What is different is the vitality with which it is implemented. Rassias believes that in order for the student to successfully learn the language s/he must overcome inhibitions about using it in the classroom. It is the teacher who facilitates this process by serving as a completely uninhibited role model. Anyone visiting a typical class would notice the exceptional liveliness and enthusiasm of all involved. This enthusiasm is maintained and grows throughout the year as the students come to view the class as a place where they are free to express themselves, dramatically and without inhibition.

Teacher Selection

Rassias believes that one of the major problems with the process of hiring professors has been that they are usually chosen on the basis of academic credentials alone. Often, professors look good on paper, but give the impression to their students of being "stuffed shirts". More often than not, these professors lack the vitality and enthusiasm necessary for effective teaching. This problem is remedied under the Dartmouth/Rassias model.

Apprentice Teachers, who serve as drill instructors, are selected in a very unusual way. "Contestants" for the position attend a three-day intensive workshop during which they are trained in its techniques. The competition for the position is open to anyone in the community and to any student at the institution concerned. Undergraduate students also compete in the competition to be drill instructors on the Dartmouth

campus and in the college's study abroad programs in Bourges, France, Granada, Spain, Sienna, Italy, and Mainz, Germany. A few exceptional students have won these positions after only two quarters of language study. More frequently, students who have completed a one-quarter study abroad program become drill instructors. Recently 250 candidates competed for thirty open positions at Dartmouth, and 65 competed for eight positions at the University of Denver. Hornor, coauthor of this article, appeared for the competition as a member of the community; she is neither a student nor a member of the regular language faculty at Denver University.

Contestants are trained throughout the session to be uninhibited and spontaneous. They are told that it is nearly impossible to be too dramatic or outrageous. Hornor took this advice to heart when she arrived for the final competition dressed as a flamenco dancer.

At the end of the three-day workshop, contestants present a sample lesson which is indicative of their teaching abilities. Their fellow contestants serve as mock students. Contestants are rated on fluency, pronunciation, animation, and teaching techniques on a scale of 0 to 10 by a five-member jury. Those earning the highest total scores are awarded a teaching position for one term. The competition is repeated each term with experienced Apprentice Teachers competing against new hopefuls.

This process of selecting apprentice teachers helps assure success. Students are far more likely to obtain teachers who are enthusiastic and dedicated.

Evaluation

The Dartmouth/Rassias model has demonstrated considerable success in revitalizing the foreign language classroom where it has been used. At Dartmouth College where three quarters of foreign language study is required and participation in study abroad is encouraged, the number of language majors has increased four fold. In any given term, one fourth of the student body attends study abroad programs, which students may attend after one quarter of study. Most of these students major in other fields.¹¹ Some 70% of the students at Dartmouth opt for study abroad. As a result, Dartmouth has been able to increase the size of its student body from 3,000 to 4,000 without adding a single brick to its main campus. In the words of one former Dartmouth professor, "Rassias saved the college from possible bankruptcy."¹²

Other universities have also obtained striking results. Washington University in St. Louis experienced a rise of 86% in foreign language enrollment when they instituted the model and Spanish majors increased from 7 to 32.¹³

At the University of Florida the model was taught as an experimental course during the summer of 1978. Student attitudes toward the class improved throughout the term and were superior to attitudes toward regular foreign language classes. Likewise, student speaking achievement on a cartoon test substantially exceeded that obtained in regular sections.¹⁴

The University of Denver, which utilizes the Dartmouth/Rassias model, has found the program to be most successful. Hornor has used the method to teach Spanish this year and has found enthusiasm among students and

the department to be very high. Master Teachers, Apprentice Teachers, and students all work together with a rare and common commitment. The hard work of the instructors motivates the class, and the high motivation of the class generates peer pressure to continue working at maximum potential. Johnson observed this same effect when the model was instituted at the University of Florida.¹⁵ It is common for students to remain in the classroom after the class has ended just to practice the foreign language with each other and with the instructor. Extracurricular activities, including eating at foreign restaurants, attending foreign movies and art exhibits, and class parties add to the enthusiasm of those involved in the program.

Instructors at the University of Denver have found that the use of "The Dating Game" has been particularly successful with the students. This game is played exactly as it is on television (except all speak in the foreign language), with a guest asking questions to three anonymous potential dates, and then deciding who will be his/her date at the end of the question period. Another student is appointed as the host of the show. On one occasion, the second author dressed up in an evening dress, complete with gaudy costume jewelry and a blonde wig, in order to help inspire an enthusiastic response from her students.

Formerly supported by a grant from the Exxon Educational Foundation, which has provided start-up assistance to many universities, the model achieved such an impressive response from students that the Dean of Arts and Sciences allocated special funds for its continuance. The Dartmouth/Rassias model may cost up to twice the ordinary amount when compared to instruction by regular graduate students. This is because of the small

class size, particularly in the drill sessions, and because the number of contact hours per credit is doubled. On the other hand, some savings are obtained through the use of undergraduates as Apprentice Teachers.

Rassias claims that after twenty weeks of study, his students obtain scores of S-2+ on the Foreign Service Institute Oral Proficiency Interview. These scores can be compared to those obtained by Carroll, which showed that college language majors reached the S-2+ level during the senior year.¹⁶ Brod, Director of Foreign Language Programs for the Modern Language Association, recently attested to the veracity of Rassias' claims. "At Dartmouth," Brod observes, "foreign language study has some of the attractiveness and prestige that on other campuses are enjoyed by only team sports. Students rearrange their programs to make room for intensive courses; juniors and seniors compete for opportunities to work as Apprentice Teachers; admissions officers use the nationally famous language programs to lure new students. In short, Dartmouth has achieved what we all want, an idyllic situation. . . ."17

Unfortunately, the method has not received the mention in the foreign language profession that it has in business and political circles. Very little information can be found on it, and most of what has been published is anecdotal and difficult to locate. For instance, no mention was made of it in the ACTFL Annual Review of Foreign Language Education until 1979, and even this mention was minor.¹⁸ Apparently, methodologists are skeptical. Since the model is based on the now somewhat discredited audio-lingual approach, claims for it are often dismissed as being due to the effect of an outstanding teacher (Rassias). Yet Rassias today rarely teaches beginning classes at Dartmouth and the program continues

to be strong. Likewise, this would not explain the model's apparent success at other institutions.

While the teacher selection process may play an important role in its success, other as yet unidentified factors may be at work as well. Rassias emphasizes the importance of students overcoming their inhibitions and ethnocentricity. Perhaps the lowering of inhibitions induces a special psychological state which increases the possibility for language learning. In the laboratory Guiora has artificially induced a state of lowered inhibition by having students ingest a small quantity of alcoholic beverage. He found that their pronunciation of a foreign language improved.¹⁹ Pronunciation is generally considered to be the one area of foreign language learning which is impervious to intelligence or motivation. Thus, the lowering of inhibitions may offer even greater improvement in the acquisition of lexis and syntax. Likewise the use of the intensive, quasi-immersion format may reduce ethnocentricity, which Guiora and others have also found to be related to second language learning.²⁰

As of this date no scientific studies of the method have been conducted. Given the above evidence, it would seem worthwhile that such studies be carried out as soon as possible. Research should focus on the level of real proficiency attained by students and on the attitudinal and psychological changes undergone by the learner as a result of being enrolled in the class. The findings could then be compared with the attainment of students enrolled in other types of language class.

Although the model has spread to some 55 colleges and universities in the United States (see Appendix A), it could be used on a more

widespread basis. Thus far it has largely been used at the college level, but it may have wider application through use at other levels as well. It tends to revitalize the students and the teacher. It is hoped that this article will serve to inform the foreign language teaching profession and stimulate further study and consideration of the Dartmouth/Rassias model.²¹

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NOTE

¹We use the term "model" in this article rather than "method" because of the similarity of Rassias' techniques to those normally included in the so-called "audio-lingual method." Also, Rassias uses the term "model", which within the literature of systems approaches is used to include methodological, curricular, and organizational factors. Actually, Rassias' unique dramatic techniques, along with the other more common audio-lingual techniques he uses, constitute a method falling within the audio-lingual approach to teaching. For further explanation of these terms see: Edward M. Anthony, "Approach, Method, and Technique," English Language Teaching, Vol. 17, No. 2 (April, 1963), pp. 63-67.

²John M. Carroll, The Foreign Language Attainments of Language Majors in the Senior Year (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University, 1967).

³John A. Rassias, The Dartmouth Intensive Language Model (Hanover, New Hampshire, Dartmouth College, 1974) (Typewritten).

⁴Rassias' technique for conducting drills includes four parts as follows: (a) teacher models or gives cue, (b) teacher snaps the fingers, (c) teacher points to the designated respondent, (d) teacher employs intense eye contact.

⁵Patricia Westphal, "Teaching and Learning: A Key to Success," in June K. Phillips, editor, Building on Experience -- Building for Success (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1979), pp. 119-156.

⁶Peter Bien, Chrysanthi Bien, and John A. Rassias, Demotic Greek (Hanover, New Hampshire: The University Press of New England, 1972).

⁷Thomas Feeny, "Dialog Learning and Oral Fluency in Lower Level

Spanish Classes," Foreign Language Annals, Vol. 10, No. 1 (February, 1977) pp. 81-85.

⁸Westphal, op. cit. p. 137.

⁹David Wood, "Dynamiting Language," Time (August 16, 1978), p. 56.

¹⁰Richard Wolkimir, "A Manic Professor Tries to Close the Language Gap," Smithsonian, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 1980), pp. 80-86.

¹¹John A. Rassias. Personal communication. October 7, 1980.

¹²Gilbert Paolini. Personal communication. June 10, 1980.

¹³John A. Rassias. Personal correspondence. June 18, 1979.

¹⁴Otto W. Johnston, "Implementing the Intensive Language Model: An Experiment in German at the University of Florida," Foreign Language Annals, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April, 1980), pp. 99-106.

¹⁵Johnston, op. cit.

¹⁶Carroll, op. cit.

¹⁷Richard I. Brod, "Options and Opportunities: New Directions in Foreign Language Curricula," Association of Departments of Foreign Languages Bulletin (May, 1979), pp. 13-18.

¹⁸Westphal, op. cit.

¹⁹A.Z. Guiora, B. Beit-Hallahmi, R.C.L. Brannon, C.Y. Dull and T. Scovell, "The Effects of Experimentally Induced Changes in Ego Status on Pronunciation Ability in a Second Language: An Exploratory Study," Comprehensive Psychiatry, Vol. 13, No. 5 (September, 1972), pp. 421-428.

²⁰A.Z. Guiora, "Construct Validity and Transpositional Research: Toward an Empirical Study of Psychoanalytic Concept." Comprehensive Psychiatry, Vol. 13, No. 2 (March, 1972), pp. 139-150.

²¹For additional information on the method, see Richard Bacon, "The Thunder and Lightning Professor," Yankee Magazine (September, 1977); THE DARTMOUTH INTENSIVE LANGUAGE MODEL (Association-Sterling Films, 1972), Color, 16mm, sound, 25 min.; Sonia La Zere, "What's New and Fun? The Dartmouth FL Model," PEALS, (November, 1978), pp. 20-21, also see The University of Denver News (January, 1979), p. 11; "Parlez-vous francais? In His Class, You Will, in Ten Weeks," The Denver Post, (16 April 1978, Contemporary Section), p. 10; Stan Luxenberg, "All the Class a Stage, Intensive Language Instruction," Change (January, 1978), pp. 30-33; John A. Rassias, A Philosophy of Language Learning (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College, 1967); John A. Rassias, Report to the ESSO Foundation on Two Years' Experimentation in Intensive Language Training at Dartmouth College (Washington, D.C.: ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 1970), ED 061 841; John A. Rassias, "Why We Must Change," Association of Department of Foreign Languages Bulletin (March, 1972), pp. 9-13; John A. Rassias, Francais, depart, arrivee (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College, 1978) (Typewritten); Charles Stansfield and Jeanne Hornor, The Dartmouth Method: An Annotated Bibliography, ERIC (Forthcoming); U.S. Congress, House, Congressional Record, Vol. 120 (March 28, 1974). Representative Landgrebe speaking of quality of education, cites Professor John Rassias as outstanding educator.

APPENDIX A

U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES USING THE DARTMOUTH/RASSIAS METHOD

1976:

Claremont Men's College

Immaculata College

Lenoir-Rhyne College

SUNY - Binghamton

William and Mary College

Florida State University - Tallahassee

Monterey Institute of Foreign Studies

University of Minnesota - Duluth

University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill

St. Martin's College

University of Detroit

1977:

Illinois College

Miami University

Georgian Court College

Western Carolina University

St. Leo University

Hardy Simmons University

Texas Southmost College

University of Arizona - Tucson

APPENDIX A con't.

University of Florida - Gainesville

Hope College

University of Southern Mississippi

SUNY - Brockport

Clark University

Emory and Henry College

Washington University

City University of New York - Baruch College

University of Denver

Northern Illinois University

St. Olaf College

Keene State College

Plymouth State College

Earlham College

1978:

Howard University

University of Idaho - Moscow

Denison University

Ohio State University - Columbus

William Jewell College

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Villa Maria College

Portland State University

APPENDIX A con't.

University of Alabama - Huntsville .

SUNY - Stonybrook

Bronx Community College, CUNY

Temple University

Norwich University

University of Kansas - Lawrence

Fullerton College

Loma Linda University

Delta State University

Bakersfield College

University of Alabama - University

Herbert H. Lehman College, CUNY

Roanoke College

(Dartmouth College)