ESL Droids: Teacher Training and the Americanization Movement, 1919–1924

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Historians of ESL have tended to concentrate on higher education as the primary site of their research, alluding to immigration and Americanization yet ultimately regarding them as peripheral. This article situates the Americanization Movement within an existing scholarly framework with particular attention to how teachers were selected and trained for working with adult immigrant populations. Similar to many contingent faculty situations today, these teachers were trained to deliver content that was heavily prescribed by manuals and other training materials. Documents from the period collected at Harvard University’s Monroe C. Gutman Library show that local, state, and federal agencies worked with normal schools and university extension programs to cultivate a body of teachers that effectively functioned as “comp droids,” a term used by Joe Harris to describe a labor pool lacking the agency and professional investment of tenure-track faculty. Although material conditions of contingent faculty today differ from those of Americanization teachers, the term helps to articulate the relevance of this period for contemporary discussions about teacher agency and contingent labor.

The Americanization Movement is an important but under-studied period in the history of composition and language difference, especially regarding historical materials on teacher training and their implications for teacher agency in the twenty-first century. Beginning in 1919 with the Americanization Bill and tapering off in 1924, when the U.S. passed the National Origins Act imposing immigration quotas, many states launched teacher-training initiatives reliant on collaboration between secondary schools, university extension programs, normal schools, and industries. The discourse emerging from these collaborations scripted teachers primarily as deliverers, rather than innovators, of curricular content. Teachers were not trained to develop their own lesson plans or materials. In fact, they were implicitly discouraged from doing so. Although documents from the period espouse a rhetoric of professionalization, what belies them is a desire for droids, to use Joe Harris’ term, that would perform much like today’s software programs or smartphone applications.

Some training programs for teachers were designed to be completed relatively quickly, not only by career teachers but also by those who saw teaching as a means of fulfilling a patriotic duty or providing a service to their
company—secretaries, lawyers, factory mechanics—and to those classified as housewives. Although teaching materials were partly based on progressive theories of English language instruction at the time, they were heavily adapted for two main goals—the cultural assimilation or “Americanization” of immigrants, and their acquisition of the English language so far as it made them economically productive. This history examines archival materials in order to illustrate how teachers were recruited, educated about methods of teaching immigrants, and certified. It also interprets these materials in relation to how Americanization organizers saw teacher agency in classroom settings.

Histories of linguistic diversity and English language teaching by Tony Silva, Ann Raimes, Diane Musumeci, Paul Matsuda, and A. P. R Howatt and H. G. Widdowson have focused largely on universities as the historical locations of second-language instruction, treating the Americanization movement largely in passing. Meanwhile, historical work by John Trimbur, Bruce Horner, and Robert Connors has focused largely on pre-twentieth century origins of linguistic purity in the U.S. Addressing the evolution of ESL instruction in universities, Matsuda has argued that “ESL did not receive much serious attention until the 1940s” (17), after the University of Michigan founded the English Language Institute in order to teach Spanish-speaking students, with largely political motives. As Matsuda states, “the threat of totalitarianism coming into Latin American countries made the teaching of English to people from those nations a matter of national security for the United States, especially given their geographic proximity” (17). The Americanization Movement served as a precursor to the emergence of ESL at universities, one girded by a similar agenda to protect American political, cultural, and economic values.

Amy Dayton-Wood provides the only article-length discussion of Americanization in rhetoric and composition, analyzing the nationalist and assimilationist aims in immigrant education textbooks. While Dayton-Wood emphasizes how these materials scripted immigrants as citizens-in-the-making, I read materials from this period for what they reveal about the training of teachers who served a role similar to comp droids, a class of teachers who “have few of the intellectual interests of the professoriate” and instead merely assign and grade papers (Harris 43). Although Harris is describing the conditions of graduate teaching assistants and other contingent faculty more than sixty years after Americanization ended, the term aptly characterizes what leaders of that movement wanted—teachers who delivered lessons and did not seek a great degree of agency.

As Sidney Dobrin argues in Don’t Call It That, teacher training is a crucial site through which different theories of language and rhetoric compete, and where political and cultural agendas for education are determined. Dobrin resists the notion of teacher training as preparing instructors only for the most
practical elements of course management. The daily choices teachers make determine which theories survive and which ones fade, and so their initiation must expose them to the theory-practice continuum and encourage their growth as teacher-scholars. Nonetheless, a discourse persists in which teachers’ inexperience justifies the practice of prescribing content, which delays or occludes that development. For instance, Ronda Leathers Dively privileges the advantages of common syllabi for new instructors at Southern Illinois University Carbondale over possible disadvantages, asserting that “the turn toward standardization stands to more effectively support the numerous GTAs who begin the program with no experience and with undeveloped pedagogical inclinations” (2010). Dively does recognize the long-term benefits of allowing new instructors to negotiate their own best practices in light of theories and pedagogies in rhetoric and composition. However, the desire for consistency wins out. Teacher inexperience becomes a rationale for standardization, as Dively explains:

Rather than having the new GTAs build a course in addition to managing all the other challenges of composition instruction (not to mention the challenges of the graduate courses they are taking), at least part of the work is already completed, and, thus, the threat of becoming overwhelmed or having to “shoot from the hip” in pulling the course together is lessened. (2010)

My point is not to call out the use of common syllabi at a particular university, but to illustrate the temptation of seeing standardization as a solution for inexperience, and thus potentially falling prey to what Duane Roen, Maureen Daly Goggin, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon identify as the functional approach to teacher training that is more concerned with what to do on Monday morning than the long-term evolution of teacher-scholars.

The Americanization Movement represents a particularly conservative manifestation of the need to standardize instruction and produce passive teachers. This article will first explain the historical context of the Americanization Movement, analyze influential teaching manuals of the period, and then present the content of several teacher-training seminars and institutes. I will close with a reflection on how second-language instruction and pedagogies of linguistic diversity may benefit from greater emphasis on historical and contemporary issues of teacher training as a site to work toward dynamic pedagogies regarding language difference.

My historical research draws on materials at the Monroe C. Gutman Library at Harvard University. The Gutman Library houses perhaps the most extensive collection of materials on teacher training from the nineteenth and
twentieth centuries. In addition to numerous manuals and textbooks, the Gut- 
man Library has gathered a large number of pamphlets and reports on state 
and federal efforts to train teachers for educating adult immigrants in English 
during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Given the heavy concentration 
of immigrants in urban northeastern areas, most archival materials describe 
Americanization and teacher-training initiatives in states including Massachu-
setts, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and New York. Other regions of the U.S. 
outside the industrialized northeast may have approached Americanization 
and teacher training differently, given either smaller numbers of immigrants 
or different regions of origin. As the next section of this article shows, most 
immigrants to the American Northeast hailed from Eastern and Southern 
Europe. Anxiety among state and city leaders about cultural and political dis-
integration appear to have been especially strong in these northeastern states, 
and they also appear to have run the most active programs of teacher training 
and Americanization.

Americanization and the Need for Teachers

Americanization had been an ongoing endeavor since the early 1900s. How-
ever, attention to the training of teachers increased significantly after the end 
of World War I, when the U.S. government (as well as the general public) 
began to debate problems arising from large numbers of immigrants. In Patri-
iotic Pluralism, Jeffrey Mirel provides a vivid portrait of immigration issues 
in the U.S. at the time, stating that “between 1911 and 1920 alone nearly 8.8 
million immigrants entered the United States” (Mirel 17). This influx came 
from Eastern and Southern Europe, including Austria-Hungary (2.15 mil-
lion), Italy (2.05 million), and Russia (1.6 million). More than three quarters 
of these immigrants settled in the Northeast, in cities such as New York, Chi-
cago, Detroit, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and Boston.

These numbers translated into significant changes in American cultural 
and political dynamics. Mirel observes, “[a]s newcomers flooded America’s 
industrial cities, urban leaders and local politicians found themselves quickly 
overwhelmed by a series of intractable, interlocking problems,” including “a 
growing gulf between rich and poor, overcrowding and disease in vast and 
expanding slums, widespread political corruption, inadequate or incompe-
tent public services, and rampant crime” (Mirel 18). Immigrants were not 
the only cause of these problems, of course. Yet they were “implicated in all 
these developments” (18) because they were the most visibly different and the 
easiest to blame.

Four major schools of thought drove public discourse on Americanizing im-
migrants. Ultimately, the fourth and most conservative group, known as ethnic 
nationalists or racial restrictionists, would come to dominate and all but shut
down large-scale Americanization efforts in 1924 (Mirel 46). The other three groups encouraged immigration but held different principles for integrating newly arrived immigrants. The first camp required a complete assimilation of immigrants, as articulated by Theodore Roosevelt and, later, Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt went so far as to proclaim that the government “must Americanize [immigrants] in every way, in speech, in political ideas and principles, and in their way of looking at the relations between church and state” (qtd. in Mirel 26). By contrast, cultural pluralists such as John Dewey insisted that “the way to deal with hyphenism . . . is to welcome it . . . so that it shall surrender into a common fund of wisdom and experience” (qtd. in Mirel 31). In Democracy and Education, Dewey advocated for a diverse curriculum that recognized the contributions of many cultures to the advancement of knowledge and society. A third group promoted amalgamation, reframing the “melting pot” metaphor as the creation of a new type of citizen that would transcend all ethnicities. Finally, the fourth and most conservative group rejected immigration altogether, on the grounds that the Anglo-Saxon or Nordic race was so superior that integration could only hamper American prosperity and productivity.

Most new immigrants did not speak English, which made communication between civic leaders, native-born Americans, and immigrants extremely difficult. The language barrier therefore became a central point in the discourse about immigration. Immigrants had to learn English in order for the nation to prosper. Granted, language and citizenship courses had been ongoing in urban areas such as Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, and New York since the early 1900s, but they lacked a uniform theory or teaching philosophy, and many were simply haphazard efforts by elementary school teachers. Mirel refers to one study of sixty-six evening courses for adult immigrants, in which a range of age-inappropriate assignments included “a group of weary steel workers [given] the task of copying the sentences: ‘I am a yellow bird. I can sing. I can fly. I can sing for you’” (72).

Although the first “Americanization Day,” celebrated on July 4, 1915, led to the establishment of the National Americanization Committee later that year (Mirel 24), education did not become a concern at the national level until 1919 when Bill 17, known as the Americanization Bill, was proposed by Senator Hoke Smith and U.S. Representative William B. Blankhead and passed into law. The bill outlined the necessity of not only educating immigrants but also training teachers for the task. A Senate hearing on the bill included commentary by the secretary of the interior that teaching immigrants to “speak, read, and write the English language,” as well as educating them in “the fundamental principles of government and citizenship,” demand special resources for “the training and preparation of teachers, supervisors, and directors” (3). The bill provided $5 million toward these purposes at the federal level and $250,000
for each state. The secretary described the bill as a vital complement to the Smith-Towner Bill, aiming at long-term engagement with illiteracy in the U.S.

The bill envisioned the creation of special schools “in which teachers will be trained in this particular art of teaching the English language, both to grown-ups and to children” (6). Over the next two years, a number of arguments would emerge from the Bureau of Education for the location of teacher training specifically at normal schools. The newly founded Americanization Division held a major conference in May 1918 titled “Community Americanization,” the proceedings of which were printed and mailed to Americanization workers nationwide, which would have included members of the Young Men’s Christian Association, Red Cross, Daughters of the American Revolution, and a range of community organizations devoted to helping immigrants acclimate to American culture and civic life.

According to the 1919 hearing on the Americanization Bill, the Americanization Division formed two committees at the conference for “teaching English to a non-English speaking person and of deciding upon the fundamental principles underlying such a process” (59). State departments of education collaborated with university extension programs, normal schools, and large companies in the education of immigrants as well as the training of teachers. They offered materials, courses, and institutes for teachers. They were tested and licensed based on their ability to replicate what they learned from lectures and observations, rather than their ability to develop or implement their own pedagogies. In fact, in many cases the manuals and institutes were designed in such a way that non-career teachers, including clerks and foremen, could deliver the lessons with relatively minimal effort.

Despite this brief surge in attention, the Americanization Movement began to decline a few years later, when ethnic conservativism came to dominate public discourse. Bolstered by widespread fears of a socialist takeover following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, a rising tide of political and ethnic nationalism culminated in the passing of the National Origins Act in 1924. The 1924 act relied on the 1890 U.S. Census to construct a baseline for future immigration quotas, restricting the number of new immigrants to two percent of the foreign-born population of each nationality in the U.S that year. The act greatly reduced immigrant flows from Southern and Eastern Europe (Cannato, ch. 16). After the 1924 act was passed, the quota for Italians fell from approximately 40,000 a year to under 4,000; Russians from about 34,000 to about 2,000; and Greeks from about 3,000 to about 100 (ch. 16). The total number of immigrants allowed into the U.S. under the 1924 law fell to 164,000, and in 1927 the U.S. reduced that number further to 150,000. With fewer immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, the need for assimilation and language instruction became less compelling. Although a small number of
courses continued, public attention to Americanization and teacher training had faded by the end of the decade.

**Teaching Manuals, Methods, and Agency**

For a short time, the Americanization Movement witnessed a significant increase in attention to educating adult immigrants in English and produced a body of textbooks and manuals on teacher training. These documents reveal an orientation to teachers’ professionalization that anticipates a recurring tension between the need for standardization and the need for agency. Although not mutually exclusive, these two have often pulled teachers and administrators in different directions, as illustrated in David Fleming’s recent history on GTAs’ resistance to common syllabi and standardized curricula at the University of Wisconsin–Madison in the 1960s, which led to conflicts with faculty and administration and, finally, the abolition of the university’s first-year writing requirement in 1969. Much like the situation Fleming describes, the training manuals and textbooks used during the years 1919–1924 demonstrate a continued expectation that teachers deliver standardized instructional materials.

By 1920, several teacher-training manuals in immigrant education were in circulation. Although the manuals drew on then-progressive theories of language acquisition, they nonetheless prescribed nearly every aspect of instruction and left little room for experimentation. The manuals were written by a handful of recognized experts on immigrant education and language instruction including John J. Mahoney, Peter Roberts, and Henry Goldberger. These experts were actively involved in the day-to-day running of Americanization councils and teacher-training programs. Mahoney served as supervisor of Americanization in Massachusetts, Goldberger as a professor at the Columbia University Teachers College, and Roberts as immigration secretary of the International YMCA.

Mahoney, Roberts, and Goldberger played central roles in the development of teacher-training materials used throughout the Northeast. The Director of Americanization at the Bureau of Education, Fred Clayton Butler, intended books by these authors to “be available for the instruction of classes in the normal schools and colleges and for the actual use of teachers in their work with the foreign born” (United States, Committee on Education and Labor 59). According to a report by Charles Towne to the Massachusetts State Board of Education, Mahoney and Goldberger were especially active in the training of teachers in Massachusetts and New York. Goldberger also designed instructional pamphlets and three-year syllabi for teachers of immigrants in Pennsylvania, and Roberts’ Direct Method was the model for teachers-in-training throughout Ohio. Moreover, a 1919 report by Don Lescohier, from the Extension Division of the University of Wisconsin, describes the content of a ten-week
teacher-training course based on Roberts’ and Goldberger’s methods. Such reports suggest that Americanization and teacher-training efforts across the U.S. were following curricula outlined by these key figures.

Many of the manuals identify a need for special training to teach adult immigrants, but then dictate all aspects of the curriculum to such an extent that teacher agency to engage in independent research and contribute to a larger discourse is erased. In *Training Teachers for Americanization*, Mahoney situates the teaching of English to foreigners as a topic requiring unique knowledge. As he writes, “[n]o longer is the schooling of the immigrant to be an overtime task performed by teachers with only a casual training. . . . There is a distinct pedagogy in this work with adult immigrants and a very distinct methodology. The teacher of the immigrant must be acquainted with these” (7–8). Mahoney goes on to note the role of normal schools in the education of immigrants, that “here and there, as at Los Angeles, normal schools offered work in immigrant instruction as part of the year’s program” (8). In many cases, teachers completed semester-long courses and exams in order to qualify for altogether-different licenses and certificates beyond their usual certifications to work in public schools. As Mahoney concludes, “schooling of the immigrant is no ‘side-show,’ to be conducted as before the Great War, when any one could teach, and when almost any one did. It is a highly specialized piece of work, and must be handled accordingly” (11).

The manuals advocated a handful of methods seen as effective at the time, all of them requiring only a teacher’s recitation of lesson plans scripted down to the sentence. The outline of a teacher-training course offered at the University of Pittsburgh in 1919 defines five main methods along this vein. The first and most central was referred to as the Gouin method, after its creator Francois Gouin, which consisted of “[a] series of related sentences on a single theme . . . developed and dramatized in the presence of the class. The pupils repeat the expressions, perform the acts and then read, write and memorize the sentences” (Berkey 2). As Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers state in *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Gouin himself was a French educational reformer who wrote during the mid-nineteenth century, and his method concerned foreign language learning and acquisition in general rather than ESL, which did not emerge as a distinct theory or pedagogy until Charles Fries founded the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan in 1941.5

Gouin was especially critical of the grammar-translation method of foreign language instruction, and while his ideas eventually became popular, they took several years to catch on, given that he wrote “at a time when there was not sufficient organizational structure in the language teaching profession (i.e., in the form of professional associations, journals, and conferences) to enable new ideas to develop into an educational movement” (Richards and Rodgers, ch.
Gouin’s method influenced reformers in France and Germany in the later nineteenth century. Gouin also influenced Lambert Sauveur, who established a language academy in Boston during the 1860s, as well as Maximilian Berlitz, who founded a school in Providence, Rhode Island in 1878. An English version of Gouin’s book titled *The Art of Teaching and Studying Languages* was finally published by Scribner in 1892. Through his predecessors, and the spread of his ideas in U.S., Gouin’s method also became known as the Direct Method, which stressed using the target language in the classroom, as opposed to analysis and memorization of grammatical rules (Richards and Rodgers, ch. 1).

Gouin’s method is important because it formed the basis of the most prominent textbooks and manuals designed for teaching English to adult immigrants in the U.S. In fact the second-most-popular method, the Roberts or YMCA Method, is described as “a type of the Gouin Method,” and it stressed that “New English words must first be taught through the ear and then reproduced orally by the pupils before the eye and the hand are enlisted in learning” (Berkey 2). According to the Roberts Method, “[a] new language is learned only through its intelligent use by the pupils and in its simple expression of their daily experiences and common interests,” and “[a]ll lessons in English must follow the natural law of related thinking and logical development” (2). In the preface to the teaching manual *English for Coming Americans*, Roberts directly admits that Gouin’s book “furnished me with the basic idea which is worked out herein” (Roberts 5). The third method was referred to as the Ford-DeWitt Method, a “modification of the Roberts Method [which was implemented at the Ford factory in Michigan and] designed to introduce the vocabulary of words and sentences of special value to the workers in a factory” (Berkey 2). Itself essentially a derivation of Gouin’s approach, the Ford-DeWitt method became a model for other factories across the industrialized Northeast.

The fourth method, the Berlitz Method, was conducted through a series of readings in which “teachers ask questions to be answered by the pupils in the words of the text. The new language is thus taught largely by conversation” (2). According to Richards and Rodgers, Berlitz did not create a new method so much as adapt Gouin’s method, without direct acknowledgement of Gouin’s work (Richards and Rodgers, ch. 1). Finally, the Word and Sentence Method consisted of “teaching the forms and the meaning of a number of words as the basal vocabulary from which short sentences are constructed. . .essentially the ‘see and say’ method of primary grade schools” (Berkey 2). The first four methods, all variations of Gouin’s, were dominant in the Americanization Movement, especially as state departments of education, university extension programs, normal schools, and various industries used them in their collaborations to train immigrant factory workers.
Henry Goldberger’s *Teaching English to the Foreign Born* accurately represents teacher manuals from this period, especially the desire to regulate and standardize instruction down to the level of spoken sentences and their accompanying gestures. Goldberger was influential in the Americanization Movement, teaching courses at the Teachers College while helping develop manuals and materials for other states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Cleveland, Illinois, and Massachusetts. Goldberger resisted earlier approaches to immigrant education, instead embracing the Gouin or “theme method,” which introduced learners to sets of related sentences that referred to their immediate environment.

Appropriating Gouin’s method for work with adult immigrants learning English, Goldberger argued that “the foreign born desires to be taught such English as he can use at once in the world outside of the classroom” (11). Such situations included letter writing, road sign reading, dances, card games, sports games, business investments, doctor appointments, and work. Goldberger encouraged teachers to adopt settings and attitudes similar to those in social clubs, where immigrants learned English from conversation rather than rote exercises.

Goldberger’s manual promoted a progressive theory of language acquisition for its time. However, it assumed teachers’ lack of skill or preparation and so over-determined the content, timing, and sequencing of exercises. In essence, Goldberger boiled down Gouin’s 440-page treatise on language teaching into a series of easily replicable lessons constructed around sets of sentences such as “I walk to the door” and “I turn the knob” (15). The teacher was directed to illustrate the lessons through active body language. The book insisted that “[t]he sentences must be short and so worded that the meaning of each and every part of each sentence may be made clear to the foreign born by means of action, dramatizations, and by the use of objects or pictures” (15). Additionally, teachers were instructed to use no more than ten sentences, all related by “sequence or by cause and effect,” per lesson (15).

The third and longest chapter of Goldberger’s manual outlined ten daily lesson plans using this model, and provided a detailed chart showing how much time teachers should spend on conversation, word drills, sentence drills, writing, and reading (21). A typical lesson consisted of eight separate steps that instructors were to act out for the class. First, instructors would stand before the class and say, “I shut my eyes,” as they performed the sentence by shutting their eyes. Next they would open their eyes and say, “I open my eyes.” The third step directed instructors to allow the class to practice. Instructors would then write the sentence on the board for students to sound out to themselves, even if they lacked knowledge of the alphabet. Only near the end of the ten units did the manual encourage teachers to “adjust [their] teaching to meet
[pupils’] ever present needs,” especially the “technical expressions” that immigrants use at work (35).

In an earlier manual titled *English For Coming Americans*, Peter Roberts lays out a nearly identical plan, drawing on Gouin’s methods to critique foreign language instruction based on the analysis of grammar and the translation of literary passages. Roberts even shares an anecdote about “a gentlemen who, having taught German for many years in one of our colleges, was ludicrously put out of countenance when in his travels he tried to talk that language” (12). Similar to Goldberger, Roberts mandates a rigid system of thirty lessons, each consisting of roughly a dozen sentences organized around a particular activity like waking up and getting dressed, clocking in at work, going to the bank, or mailing a letter. In a subsequent manual titled *English for Foreigners*, Roberts explains this method in detail for members of the coal-mining industry in Illinois, which had a large population of Eastern and Southern European immigrants like much of the urban Northeast.

Roberts’ sentence sequences revolved around immigrants’ domestic, industrial, and commercial lives and included lessons on preparing breakfast (domestic), dealing with accidents and injuries (industrial), and making bank deposits (commercial). Roberts illustrates the method with a lesson on waking up, in which teachers repeated and dramatized phrases like “I get out of bed” and “I comb my hair.” He encourages teachers to use props for sequences that involve objects like combs or kitchen utensils. Each lesson follows a rigid three-step sequence. In the first step, the teacher repeats every sentence multiple times until students can rehearse the entire series by themselves. Next “the teacher should hang up a chart on which is printed the lesson and the class see the words for the first time” before they “read the lesson in concert” (43). After repeating this step “three or four times,” the teacher then distributes paper to the students for them to practice copying the lesson while the teacher passes “from student to student, correcting and suggesting improvement” (43). Even the fourth review stage is heavily scripted, instructing the teacher to cover up all of the sentences with newspaper except for the verbs, which are to provide catalysts for students to recite the entire series over again. Finally, teachers lead practical instruction in grammar, having students replace personal pronouns like “I” with “you,” and so on (44).

There can be no deviation from these steps, and Roberts further requires teachers to review lessons in a rigid schedule, maintaining that “time should be taken in each session for review of the lesson given two nights previous” (44). For example, “[w]hen the third lesson is being taught, the first should be reviewed; when the fourth is being taught the second should be reviewed, etc” (44). Teachers only prepared by memorizing and practicing these sequences in order to appear confident before their students. Nothing in the Roberts Method
discusses the creation of lesson plans, exercises, or sequences other than those narrated in extreme detail. Although such methods may have helped ensure consistency via simplicity and specificity, by today’s standards they hardly seem like actual teaching.

Most manuals expected teachers to plan for each lesson by carefully studying and rehearsing the lessons on their own time. As Roberts states in another manual titled *The Problem of Americanization*, teachers should “be a master in each lesson, appear before the class confident that you can give it knowledge, so that if unexpected difficulties arise you will not be disconcerted” (85). A prepared teacher was one who memorized his or her part and performed like a well-oiled machine. Like Roberts and Goldberger, moreover, Mahoney limited instruction to sentences and phrases that would help immigrants become better workers or better citizens. As Mahoney states, “Rather than teach a carpenter the English that goes with laying bricks, the teacher must plan the lesson to be of value to the carpenter. It is better for the pupil to understand the signs posted in his factory than the signs in any other factory” (35). Mahoney’s manual then provides a few brief examples of phrases and words about industrial safety, searching for work, and payday.

At best, the materials on teacher training are unclear about working conditions and salaries for teachers. Reports on Americanization efforts do not typically provide information on teacher compensation, and training manuals themselves often gloss over the issue by evoking a spirit of patriotism and self-sacrifice, which may suggest teachers were not paid all that well. A 1920 report by the Special Commission on Teacher Salaries in Massachusetts verifies that while teachers’ salaries did improve significantly from 1910 to 1920, they were “not equivalent to the increase in cost of living” (27). High school teachers’ salaries grew by 50.7%, but cost of living almost doubled, rising by 99.7% (25). In terms of a dollar amount, high school teachers made, on average, $1,164.67 annually in 1910, compared to $1,695.48 in 1920. (Elementary school teachers earned less.) By contrast, the cost of living in Massachusetts in 1920 was estimated at roughly $1,100 a year (23). This figure included only the most basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, fuel, and “sundries.”

Moreover, the Massachusetts special report in 1920 states that 70% of teachers often paid out of pocket for their own development such as “professional improvement courses, tuition, books, etc,” and that 40% of teachers did so for “[a]ttendance at summer schools,” which would have included training courses and seminars discussed later in this article. This may explain why some manuals touted a sense of self-sacrifice. For instance, according to Roberts, “[t]he work is not to be measured by the number of kilograms of energy [the teacher] loses, but by the molding of men and women into good American citizens” (103). Roberts went so far as to praise teachers who worked without
a wage, proclaiming that “[s]ome of the best men I have seen in the work were not paid a cent. Rain or snow, frost or blizzard could not keep them away from their classes. . . . We need the spirit of self-sacrifice in the work” (103). It is difficult not to see these statements as attempts to redirect teachers toward self-satisfaction, and therefore away from thoughts about material conditions.

**Teacher-Training Courses**

Historical documents show that while some training programs were selective, in other cases almost anyone could and did complete short courses that led to certification to teach English in a range of non-institutional settings such as factories, social clubs, civic centers, and private homes. This section as well as the next details who could become a teacher and what requirements they had to complete. Although Mahoney had predicted the professionalization of immigrant education, it did not necessarily lead to greater agency for teachers—most likely because of the prescriptive tone of the manuals as well as an openness to training anyone at all to teach English to immigrants.

Teacher training courses in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Ohio, and New York, among other places, were designed and implemented by state boards of education in cooperation with normal schools and university extension programs. According to a 1921 report from the Massachusetts Department of Education, between 1918 and 1919 more than a dozen normal schools in the state certified 1,300 people (mostly public school teachers) to teach English to immigrants. Some were career teachers while others were clerks, librarians, lawyers, ministers, housewives, or typists. These courses not only trained teachers in methods of language instruction but also the perceived importance of promoting assimilation to American values, civic virtues, and social integration. In many of these courses, teachers were encouraged to develop and nurture partnerships between social clubs and organizations, community centers, libraries, factories, and schools. The courses trained teachers as well as community organizers and administrators, sometimes splitting classrooms into different groups for tailored topics.

In some cases, training was a highly selective process. A 1919 report stated that Pittsburgh University planned to offer a two-week summer institute as well as a six-week “intensive training course” that “consists of 24 lessons of two hours each” and required teachers-in-training “to make two visits to evening schools and write a thesis” (“Americanization Work in Pittsburgh” 5). Admission was competitive, as the report states that students had to be approved for enrollment by the Frick Educational Commission, which funded the course. The report states that 184 teachers had enrolled in its training courses up to that point. Even after completing the training, however, teachers still had to
be elected by the School Board after receiving a recommendation from the Superintendent of Schools (3).

A report on Americanization work in New York also describes rigorous teacher-training courses, the main goal of which was to “develop competent teachers to give immigrant instruction in the English language and to familiarize him with American customs, laws and standards of living” (9). Completion of the course required “a carefully prepared note book containing notes on all the lectures given at the institution” that “must be submitted for examination at the end of the course”; “[b]ook reviews as assigned by the local director”; “[a] paper which indicates definite research and original thought”; and finally “[a] final examination which will be a real test of the main lines of thought presented at the institute” (13). Prospective teachers were also heavily encouraged to visit factory and neighborhood classes to observe and take notes.

A brochure printed by the State University of New York in 1920 advertised a six-week, thirty-hour “Summer Course for Teacher Training” on Americanization and citizenship, organized by the university “in cooperation with colleges, universities, normal schools and other educational agencies in the state.” The course devoted attention to English teaching for the foreign-born in the last of three sections. The previous two sections were devoted to surveys of immigration and methods for teaching civics. The brochure stated that the class sessions were “supplemented by required readings, special papers, note books, and final examination” (3). Successful completion of the course earned the newly trained teachers a state certificate. Faculty included professors from the New York State College for Teachers, Adelphi College, Teachers College and Hunter College, and Cornell University.

Content in these courses covered not only methods for teaching English to foreigners, but also political and socio-economic factors of immigration and the need to assimilate them. In addition to topics in “Methods of Teaching English to Foreigners,” teachers also had to learn “State and Federal Plans for Americanization” as well as “Economic Aspects of Immigration and Their Interpretation” (9). Dozens of colleges and institutions collaborated in offering these courses, including professors from The State College for Teachers in Albany and members of the Council for Women’s Organizations—and even neighborhood associations. The State University of New York certified teachers upon completion, and it was assured that “[s]chool authorities will give preference to those holding this certificate when considering applications for work with foreign-born adults” (13).

Teachers were expected to demonstrate thorough knowledge in principles of Americanization and assimilation. As a final exam given by the Teachers College of the University of Cincinnati shows, they had to explain methods of language instruction as well as the socio-political implications of their work:
Questions:

1. Define Americanization—What it is and what it seeks to accomplish.
2. Indicate some fundamental principles which should determine the course content in civics and community life for immigrants.
3. Give a brief outline of the direct method of teaching English to immigrants.
4. What characteristics and education should a social worker and teacher among immigrants have?
5. Does the United States need immigrant labor? Why?
6. What social problems are involved in Americanizing immigrants in Cincinnati?
7. What part do you think the public schools and their teachers have in Americanization in Cincinnati?
8. Give a brief statement of any one of the problems which immigrants create in our city and constructive and practical solution thereof.
9. What results can be expected through the establishment of the American House?
10. What suggestions have you to offer as to a program of activities for this enterprise? Localize and make your suggestions concrete. (Eisler 3)

The most thorough account of teacher training is given in a report by the Massachusetts State Department of Education in September 1920. The report provides a detailed syllabus for a summer course offered at the State Normal School at Hyannis. (A 1926 report by the Massachusetts State Board of Education describes the course as being offered every summer since 1920, as well as a similar summer course at the North Adams Normal School.) Two versions of the courses were offered: one for supervisors and organizers (see Figure 1), a second for teachers (see Figure 2). The teacher-training courses were offered free of charge by the state of Massachusetts to all residents, with the exception of a $35 boarding fee, which provided attendees with lodging at the normal school. The curriculum for both versions of the course is outlined in Figures 1 and 2.

Faculty for these courses included officials from the state board of education: Charles Towne, former superintendent of education reform; Charles Herlihy, assistant superintendent of schools; Mary Guyton, assistant to the state supervisor; Philip Davis, a lecturer on immigrant education from Boston University; John J. Mahoney, state supervisor of Americanization; Denis McCarthy, poet-lecturer; George Tupper, secretary of the state executive committee of the YMCA; and M. J. Downey, director of Americanization for the city of Boston. As with the manuals, consistency and replicability constituted the
rhetoric of these teacher-training courses. Teachers were measured mainly by their abilities to adopt and transmit ready-made materials.

Course I.
*For Supervisors and Organizers of Americanization Activities.*
(Open only to people who have had some experience in Americanization work.)

A. Americanism and Americanization.
   1. Americanism—an analysis.
   2. Americanization—the broad interpretation.
   3. The function of the school.
   4. The immigrant tide.
   5. Legislation affecting immigration and Americanization.
   8. Americanization and the immigrant woman.

B. How to organize a community.
   1. A study of State and city plans.
   2. Securing the co-operation of industry.
   3. Organizing women’s classes.
   4. The functions of various community agencies.
   5. The socialized school as a community center.

C. Naturalization and citizenship.
   1. The content of a course in citizenship.
   2. Materials of instruction.
   3. The process of naturalization—problems and difficulties.

D. Racial backgrounds and characteristics.
   1. Type studies of a few prominent immigrant groups.
   2. Readings and discussions.

Figure 1.

Course II.
*An Elementary Course for Teachers*
A. Americanism and Americanization.
   Content as indicated for Course I.
B. Classroom work with the adult immigrant.
   1. Classifications of students.
   2. Aims for the several grades.
   3. The psychology underlying method of teaching English to immigrants.
   4. A comprehensive-direct method.
   5. Lesson context for the several grades.
   6. A study of texts and other sources.
   7. The socialized school.

C. Naturalization and citizenship.
   Content as indicated for Course I.
D. Racial backgrounds and characteristics.
   Content as indicated for Course I.

Figure 2.
A report by Charles Towne for the Department of University Extension in Massachusetts commented directly on the need to standardize instruction, admitting that he was “disappointed in the quality and type of teaching that I saw in most of the schools [when visiting Ohio]. Instead of clear, clean-cut application of the direct method [the Gouin or Roberts Method], I found an apparent confusion in the minds of the teachers as to just what method they ought to use and how it should be applied” (4). Towne went on to describe the overall lack of conformity in instructional materials and to criticize the director of the Cleveland program for not providing a standardized pamphlet or set of handouts for use in classrooms. Overall, the report appears displeased with the idea of teachers taking the development of materials into their own hands, rather than following a set of prescriptions handed down from a central administrator.

Industries sometimes provided the facilities for instruction, in order to encourage attendance by their workers. Once trained, some teachers taught in factories during immigrant workers’ lunch breaks or immediately after their shifts. A 1922 report from the Massachusetts State Department of Education described the results of an important conference between “more than 300 industrial executives and school officials” who “reached an agreement through which to establish factory classes on a regular basis” (53). In the agreement, the factory would provide the facilities for onsite classrooms and contribute a supervisor to oversee the organization of classes and recruitment of students from their workers. The state would furnish everything else, including trained teachers. One of the best-known factory schools emerged at a cotton mill in Lowell, Massachusetts, where ten state-certified teachers were sent to conduct hour-long English classes during lunch and after workers’ day shifts. According to the 1922 report, “The mill set off a large part of a supply room and made six class rooms, equipped with blackboards, tables, benches, and the like” (53). The curriculum seemed to consist largely of lessons and activities suited to the work itself, given that “[a] committee of plant officials and teachers devoted several weeks to the preparation of a series of lessons on the cotton industry. The purpose of such material was to help the alien learn the language of the shop and also to give him some insight into the different kinds of work done in the plant” (53). Such courses went on for three years, 1920–1923, resulting in 600 “alien men” graduating each spring. They were honored in an April graduation ceremony attended by teachers, school officials, and plant executives. The report indicates that more than 300 other types of factory classes were offered throughout the state during the year 1923 alone, educating 4,000 factory workers.

Here the relationship between governments, universities, and industry becomes especially apparent. State governments certified teachers educated
through extension programs and normal schools, in many cases so that they could deliver a pre-fabricated curriculum for the sake of producing more efficient workers. Of course, in some cases states permitted industries to train and certify their own factory workers as teachers. The next section explores in further detail how non-career teachers often took on the work of instruction and became “trained” in immigrant education.

Training Teachers (and Anybody Else)

If immigration posed a threat to civic unity and economic productivity, it also presented a need for an efficient mechanism that could churn out teachers. The Bureau of Education began to cooperate with city and state governments in offering teacher-training courses to public school teachers as well as a range of workers in other professions. English for Immigrants appeared to require a special method of instruction, but that method could be completely scripted, standardized, and imparted to anyone regardless of their prior knowledge or training in the field of education. A 1919 report by the Massachusetts State Board of Education describes the development of a sixty-lesson plan designed in an effort to standardize instruction, because “this branch of education is still so uncertain in its methods and standards” that “any teachers must of necessity be relatively untrained and in need of the right kind of teaching material” (144). The “right kind of material” was intended to be simple and easy to deliver, making the presence of a career-teacher optional.

Anyone could teach immigrants English, or so the logic of teacher-training programs suggested. The same 1919 report from the Massachusetts State Department of Education identified criteria for potential teachers as the “ability to speak and understand English,” “[i]ntelligent devotion to American ideals,” “understanding and sympathetic appreciation of the immigrant,” and a “personality adapted to this kind of teaching” (138). Anyone with these qualities, even without training or experience, could enroll in a certification program and be teaching English to immigrants within a matter of weeks. Consistent with this view, a statement from the director of Americanization in Ohio lists enrollment by profession in a teacher-training course. In addition to fifty teachers enrolled at the Teacher’s College in Cincinnati there were

- 2 typists
- 3 stenographers
- 3 artists
- 5 kindergarten teachers
- 3 secretaries
- 8 social workers
- 7 housewives

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- 2 typists
- 3 stenographers
- 3 artists
- 5 kindergarten teachers
- 3 secretaries
- 8 social workers
- 7 housewives
4 no occupation
2 music teachers
2 attorneys
2 reporters
2 ministers
2 library clerks
2 bookkeepers
44 “of Indefinite Occupation.”

Many of the teachers-in-training identified here appear to have no prior training. As such, they may have been viewed by city and state leaders as likely to accept the scripts carved out for them by the manuals and training institutes. Although normal schools offered semester-long courses in immigrant education, a non-career teacher could achieve certification through the state by attending ten class meetings, submitting a notebook “given in class” along with a 1,000-word book review, and a 1,000-word thesis on an assigned topic. The state of Massachusetts kept “[a]n approved list of teachers. . .in the office of the department,” and “[s]pecial certificates” were “awarded to foremen and other employees who take the short course in methods for the purpose of teaching in the plant where they are employed” (138–39).

A report by Howard C. Hill to the American Council on Education describes such non-specialists as trained and employed by the Ford Motor Company’s Ford English School in Detroit. Located on site and consisting of twenty-eight specially designed classrooms, the school offered teacher-training courses every Wednesday. Classes for immigrants were normally offered at 8 a.m., 1 p.m., and 3:30 p.m., before or after their eight-hour shifts. However, all of Wednesday was blocked out for teacher training. Teachers were recruited from across the company and included secretaries as well as factory workers. They were not paid for either the training or teaching. According to the report,

The teachers are volunteers from the employees of the factory itself. They represent clerks, foremen, checkers, inspectors, stenographers, machinists, and eight other classes of workers. Here you find in actual operation the American employee teaching English on his own time, because he wants to be of service to the foreigner. There seems to be something in this spirit of unselfish service that appeals to foreign and native mind alike. (2)

The language used in the report on the Ford English School devalues teaching as a specialized profession, in the name of economic expediency couched in the language of selflessness and love of company. It suggests that some companies believed they could train teachers as well as, if not better than,
their counterparts in the school system—and that the main criteria for certifying a teacher was an interest in serving fellow workers. Factories across the northeast were mainly interested in teaching the English needed to operate equipment efficiently and safely, although they also stressed naturalization, assimilation, and civic virtue as secondary goals of language instruction. Jeffrey Mirel describes the Ford Motor Company as particularly draconian in this regard. Ford laid off immigrant employees if they did not attend the onsite English school, and in 1914 the company fired 900 Greek and Russian workers for staying home to observe Eastern Orthodox Christmas, two weeks after December 25, on the reasoning that immigrants should only observe “American” holidays (83).

Making Pasts Visible

A more in-depth understanding of Americanization as a precursor to present-day debates on teacher training and language difference in higher education serves a number of purposes. First, it helps articulate the ever-present need to remain mindful of language education’s imbrications with political and corporate agendas. Scott Wible has observed “the potential for government funding to alter the infrastructure and influence the responsibilities of U.S. language arts education” (472). As a government-sponsored endeavor, the Americanization Movement united universities, normal schools, departments of education, and industries in the purpose of engineering a program of teacher indoctrination meant to distribute uniform content. This discourse resulted in a predetermined role for teachers as less active agents in the development of theories and pedagogies of adult language teaching than they could have been. In this regard, Americanization was not only a prelude to controversial issues of language policy and linguistic diversity, but also to debates about professionalization and material conditions. It is important to remain cautious of temptations to standardize instruction, therefore marginalizing linguistically diverse students and “relieving” inexperienced teachers of the need to develop their own practices based on independent explorations of scholarship. Although standardizing composition curricula may generate efficiency, it does so at the expense of the discipline’s creative and intellectual dimensions.

The movement also has particular relevance for historical work on language difference and English language teaching. As Matsuda states, historical inquiry “can contribute insights into the socially shared and discursively constructed identity of the field and its members” as well as “identify what issues have been discussed, what questions have been posed, what solutions have been devised, and what consequences have come of those solutions—and why” (32). Margaret Thomas has critiqued second language theorists, who “consistently ignore
the past as discontinuous with the present” and so “make the past invisible” (qtd. in Matsuda 34). Such histories and critiques of dominant discourse have sought to relocate historical considerations of ESL teaching from the margins of literature reviews and chronologies back to “the mainstream discourse of second language studies” (34).

This article has likewise sought to uncover problems, debates, solutions, and consequences of a prototype of ESL instruction that occurred before the 1940s and, in many cases, beyond the scope of the university. Many of these concerns are reflected in present-day shifts in education such as the increasing enrollment of international students at universities as well as the rise in alternative modes of education, including for-profit institutions, online education, and now Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs). This article cannot go into depth on all of the ramifications of these changes, but it is my hope that readers will pursue connections between this particular moment in history and present-day challenges to the traditional structures of higher education. The challenges are prompting teachers, scholars, and administrators to look outside universities and adapt in ways that fulfill democratic and egalitarian purposes of education while remaining aware of competing agendas in higher education’s past as well as its future.

Notes

1. Mention of this last group may sound ironic given that the nineteenth amendment, ensuring women’s suffrage, was not passed until 1920, suggesting that while women were not trusted with the vote, they were seen as a potential labor pool for Americanization efforts.

2. I am thankful for the special collections librarians at Harvard University’s Monroe C. Gutman Library, which houses an extensive collection of materials on the Americanization Movement. I am also thankful for the Research Services Council at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, which funded my travel to Harvard in early 2013.

3. The hearing on the Americanization Bill appealed heavily to values of patriotism and worker efficiency, citing statistics that three million immigrant farmers in 1918 could not read material the government had distributed about Liberty Bonds, the need to produce more wheat, and other national interests (6). A census cited in the Secretary of Interior’s address introducing the bill states that 24% of soldiers in the armed forces did not know enough English to “sign pay rolls” or even “read the War Department’s orders” (6).

4. Immigration numbers fell even further following the 1929 stock market crash, and rates remained low during the 1930s largely due to the Depression. According to Steven G. Darian in English as a Foreign Language, less than 350,000 Europeans immigrated to the U.S. from 1931 to 1940 (Darian 79).

5. Fries would turn away from all prior methods of foreign language instruction, advocating a unique theory and pedagogy of ESL in his book, Teaching and Learn-
Fries helped inaugurate the audio-lingual method of foreign language instruction, and it was used extensively in ESL instruction in universities. It still consisted of short oral dialogues and drills seemingly similar to the ones used by Americanization teachers. The difference is that audiolinguists organized their exercises around increasingly complex grammatical structures, for example having students repeat the same utterance multiple times while varying verb tense or pluralizing nouns. Gouin, and adaptors of his method, organized exercises around everyday themes, assuming that grammar would be absorbed naturally over time.

6. Before Gouin the grammar-translation method, defined as the analysis and memorization of a language’s grammatical rules, dominated foreign language education in North American and European universities (Richards and Rodgers, ch. 1). Whereas the grammar-translation method was derived from the study of Latin in the Middle Ages, Gouin’s method emphasized modern languages and oral communication in everyday situations. Gouin dismissed written exercises in grammar and translation as a means to teaching modern foreign languages. Instead, he advocated conversational activities that would help students in everyday personal, social, and civic contexts (basic friendly conversation and daily activities like cooking breakfast, chopping wood, and trips to the store). Many of the textbooks and manuals about teaching English to adult immigrants drew on Gouin’s methods, as adapted by Henry Goldberger and Peter Roberts.

7. Roberts’ teaching manual, *English for Coming Americans*, was published in 1909, almost a decade prior to the Americanization Bill. Nonetheless, Roberts was an influential figure well into the 1920s.

**Works Cited**


