6-2-2000

Motiff, Judy Oral History Interview: Retired Faculty and Administrators of Hope College

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Joint Archives of Holland
Oral History Project- summer 2000
Retired Hope Professors
Interviewee: Dr. Judy Motiff
Interviewer: Melissa LaBarge
2 August 2000

*This is a shorter interview due to time constraints. Dr. Motiff had been previously
interviewed, but that interview is not transcribed due to a technical error.*

ML: How has technology changed the way your classes have run and the way you

teach?

JM: Oh, it's changed it dramatically in the last thirty years. Let me start out by telling

you that thirty years ago, it was difficult to find a decent textbook in a second

language. Many of us came through the period where they tried to emulate, in the

early Sixties, the Foreign Service method for teaching languages, which had

proven to be quite effective. What they did, though, in the Foreign Service- and it

all happened, to go back even further, it happened during World War Two. The

revolution, if you will, in language learning in the states took place in World War

Two. Primarily because once it became a world war and we were involved in it,

we were cooperating with other nations, and we did not have people who spoke

all those languages. So to work with the *Resistance* in France would have been

impossible without people who spoke French, who were in the military. So they

developed language aptitude testing, and then they tested people in the military,

and once they found their best candidates- so you're getting the best and the

brightest- but what they did was to put them in Emersion Programs. And those

Emersion Programs meant that these people were sent to the Monterey institute in

San Francisco, where they were surrounded by the language. All day long they

spoke to people from France so that they had no choice but to learn the language. And in six weeks, they could accomplish a great deal- or however long it took- I don't remember exactly. After World War Two, thanks to a new invention called the tape recorder, which did not exist before, they tried to emulate a lot of that. So when I went to school, when I was still in college, the nearest thing we could come to emulating emersion at that time- given our limited imaginations and budgets- was the language laboratory and tapes. So that was how they were trying to integrate speaking the language and developing listening comprehension in the language. And before that, people did not even teach their classes in the language. It was strictly grammar and reading and translation. And they all have a place, it's just a question of finding the hybrid. And I think we're just about there now. Anyhow, so when it became impossible to recreate what the Foreign Service Institute could do in Monterey, that was our answer. So we move on. So in the Sixties, however- in the early Seventies, we saw a huge decline in enrollments in the United States. That was when Richard Nixon froze salaries, and in many instances allowed only a four- percent annual increment in salaries. And then with the Oil Embargo in '73 or '74, the bottom dropped out of everything. And departments were being cut right and left, and you couldn't even find a textbook that had been published recently. So we had to wait many years, in fact, before it happened. There were no such things as Test Banks- they had a few tapes but not a lot. They had some tapes to accompany textbooks, but the rhythm of reissuing textbooks and keeping them up-to-date was just not there. Most often now they're updated every three to five years.

ML: And this was at the time that you started teaching.

JM: I started teaching in 1969 at Hope College. I remember the first year that I was here, we had just received a Grant- a Title VI Grant- from NEH, the National Endowment for the Humanities. And it allowed us to purchase equipment. So we purchased slides, because we did not have movie projectors- we had filmstrips. Do you know what the old-fashioned filmstrips are? So what we dealt with in the way of technology were tapes, but they were reel-to-reel tapes. So we had two or three of those in the department that we borrowed and shared around, and we couldn't find our way on any of them. It took forever to set them up, and they weighed about thirty-eight pounds I'm quite sure. So that was technology. Filmstrips, you know, it's almost like advancing from one frame to the next manually. And then we had something called an Opaque Projector, which is one of the most cumbersome pieces of machinery you'll ever look at in your life. It must have stood about thirty-five inches high and it was huge, and if you wanted to project something on a screen in front- you know, if you wanted to make a transparency, that's what you had to use. And the equivalent of Tech Services used to bring it over to a classroom for you if you needed it. Lifting it to a table was almost impossible. And you could even lay a book down, but you couldn't see very well from it. And then all of the sudden, in the early Eighties, we saw a resurgence of interest. I mean, the impact of loosing all these positions in Academia had a major impact on the professional organizations- primarily MLA. And it was about that time, let me just think a minute... no, it would have been a little earlier than that, it would have been around mid-Seventies- when an

organization was founded, the acronym of which is ACTFL- the American

Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages- to promote research in to how

best to teach language. So based upon regular Social Scientific study with control

groups and testing different methodologies and different behaviors in the

classroom, they were able to develop some new ideas about classroom teaching.

Concurrent with that, was something called the cassette recorder. So then we

went from there to cassettes. And we all got our own cassette recorder- it was an

epiphany experience for our entire department. We had one typewriter in the

department, actually. And that was for when if you wanted anything duplicated

for your students, to hand out, you had to go stand in line. I think we talked about

this before. In the basement of what was then Van Raalte Hall, which later

burned to the ground, and we had to stand in line while they manually ran them

through on a machine. Now after a while, they got an automatic one that ran them

through, but that was technology at that time. So we went from reel-to-reel tapes

to cassette recorders, and then what was our next step after that? Oh, the eight-

track was the next step. But eight-tracks never were that popular, it was a very

short-lived phenomenon. They were cumbersome and technology was advancing

too quickly. But if there is a field that needs good technology, it's our field. It

helps us provide, in languages, the ambiance- the total environment so that they

can see cultural cues, watch facial expressions, look at body language, look at

artifacts. Look at the environment in which people live. They learn so much by

doing that if they're not in the culture itself. Well, somewhere in early Eighties,

they began producing really good textbooks. And I think that pretty soon, Heinly

& Heinly took the lead by about the late Eighties in the production of really fine and numerous examples of textbooks at the College level. They do work at other levels, but there are other publishers who do a better job, not a better job- they're just more popular, I think, with grade school, with elementary language and secondary school study. But for us, Heinly & Heinly has been a good resource. There were no methodology booklets out to talk to people about how to teach a foreign language. You had to pull articles from here and there and rely upon your experience in order to teach undergraduates how to go out and teach the secondary school. And I don't think we've gotten rid of all the bad teaching in languages. We may never get rid of it- as we won't in any field, you know. But we're certainly getting better at what we do. And then, thank goodness we developed the videotape. And the first videotapes were huge cumbersome things in big huge boxes. And now we have the videocassettes, which are so much smaller. Now then, we're going to videodisc. And now we've integrated the computer into language learning. And there are many ways it can be applied. We had a couple of programs on CD-ROM, for instance here in the library, put out by the Learning Company just in the last five years, where they can do a lot of interactive work with their own computer. People can buy CD-ROMs for seventy dollars, and they can do a whole course. I had a student do that- go through an entire year of French with the aid only of a CD-ROM.

ML: Unbelievable.

JM: Unbelievable is right. But in thirty years, that's how far we've come. And I don't know what the future it, but I do know that we will depend more and more on the

computer- because we've integrated the computer into most of our courses right now with research projects and cultural information primarily. France, in particular, is enamored of gadgetry and technology and in many ways they outpace us. So, every city has its own site. Every province has its own site. And the government- everybody has its site. So we can send students to do that kind of research. I know of people who have used it to establish, for writing courses, communication between different institutions- classes at different institutions pairing students one with another and using peer correction for writing assignments, for instance. And coordination among institutions- I believe it's California that's done some work in that. And there are other people who have done some more advanced work in the application of computer technology. Videotapes are some of our best resources- videocassettes we now purchase and put on reserve in the Media Center in the library, and we integrate that into our courses on a regular basis. Because they have now put on videocassette- if you notice, there's a whole trend in movies these days? They're either based upon reality or they're based upon literary works. Have you noticed that?

ML: Oh yeah.

JM: Sure, even what the American film industry is doing. Look at the *Straight Story*. Look at that one with Julia Roberts in it, based upon a class action suit where she's a secretary who goes out and gets all this information. There have been a lot of docu-dramas produced. And there have been a lot of literary works put on the screen, which we can now purchase on videocassette and work with our students. And we have films based upon history. The *Le Margo*, the Queen

Margo, is a very interesting study of how Henry, a Protestant, from Neville became King of France. There's *Marie Antoinette,* so the film of Marie Antoinette and the Revolution. There is *Danton,* in which chronicles through the life of Danton the major stages of the French Revolution. So there are all kinds of very interesting things going on now in technology. So we've come a long way baby, as the saying goes.

ML: So as for learning for the students, do they learn French faster because of the technology?

JM: That would be difficult to say. It depends upon how much time they're willing to invest in it, I think. Some people do- some people get hooked into it. It's more fun to do that for this generation of students- to push buttons and to go to different sites and to discover things. I've done research projects on French corporations and conglomerates for an advanced class, and they find a lot of stuff. That it would be more difficult for them to find if they had to search the library- that's for sure. And for some of them, it's a lazy way out, I must admit. But they also enjoy doing it, and this generation of student is much more proficient in doing searches and surfing and finding things on the Web- besides airline tickets.