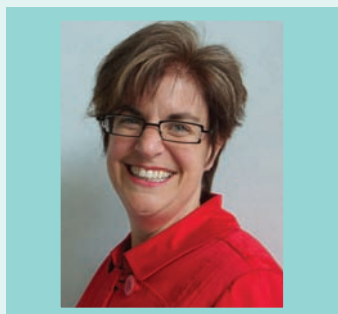




Big Ideas in FSL... Connecting For Success

This is one in a series of *HOTTOPICS* articles that support FSL educators in their professional learning.

Enhancing the French as a second language experience for multilingual students



Callie Mady, Ph.D.

- Instructor of FSL methodology, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto;
- Former FSL, Spanish, ESL, and Cooperative Education Teacher
- Co-author of the Ontario Ministry's Grades 9 and 10 Course Profiles and the Grades 9 and 10 Independent French courses;
- Author of numerous professional articles and Co-author/Advisor of FSL classroom resources, including *Quoi de neuf?*
- Advisor of FSL PD resource, *effective literacy practices in FSL: making connections*.

In Canada, to make reference to the teaching and learning of French we use the term “French as a SECOND language”, recognizing French as one of the two official languages of Canada. Yet more and more frequently, we are teaching French as an additional language to students who are already bilingual or multilingual. Some of these students are learning English at the same time they study French. Success in French is due in part to their positive concept of language learning and their past experience learning languages. In addition to what the English language learners bring to the process, we as language teachers bring a knowledge of second language learning that has prepared us to recognize and meet the needs of English language learners. Beyond this knowledge, we, as teachers, can further enhance English language learners’ progress in French by purposefully creating conditions conducive to their success.

First, English language learners need to be provided with the opportunity to study French. Many of these students are motivated and able to excel in French where they may face challenges

in other areas of the curriculum where their success is dependent on their knowledge of English and the gap between themselves and their peers is much greater. French offers them a context where they can soon function on par with their English-speaking peers. In addition to French being a positive experience for English language learners, the study of French has proven to enhance their English skills.

Second, although less common today, if our student population’s home languages share roots with French, we can make those connections explicit. For example, with a Spanish speaking population, we can highlight that many words that end in *-ico* in Spanish will end in *-ique* in French, thus building on the students’ prior knowledge and as a result, expanding their French vocabulary. Today, however, many of our students have prior language knowledge that does not share roots with French. When many students share a common language, we can become knowledgeable about their language and facilitate linguistic connections. For example, with a

Hindi population, we can link the distinction between *tu* and *vous* to their distinction between *tu* and *tum* in Hindi. Prior to gaining this knowledge from our students, or when there is a diverse group of students, we can encourage our students to access their knowledge of other languages and share this knowledge with each other and us. Making such connections to our students' languages validates their prior experiences and encourages them to build on their foundation.

Second, in addition to recognizing our students' linguistic backgrounds, we can provide connections to their cultural backgrounds. Such connections could come from the texts we choose as they provide images and content to which the students can relate. We can also choose to balance our curriculum to reflect our student population. For example, if we choose to do a unit on camping, we may also want to address vacation options in the students'

countries of origin. Linking to our students' backgrounds will result in greater engagement and thus, greater success.

Third, bilingual/multilingual students come to French class with strategies for learning languages. By posing questions and asking for examples, we can help the students identify successful past language learning strategies, provide opportunities for them to incorporate those strategies into their current French studies, and then model new strategies.

As we provide opportunities for students to link their prior learning experiences to their present context, we enhance student learning. While such connections are advantageous to all, they are paramount when addressing a population of English language learners and can further enhance their achievement in French.

References

- Anderson, B., Carr, W., Lewis, C., Salvatori, M., & Turnbull, M. (2007). *Effective literacy practices in FSL: making connections*. Toronto, Ontario Canada: Pearson Education.
- Calman, R. (1988). *Core French program review: Grades 3 – 8: Technical report*. North York, Ontario, Canada: North York Board of Education.
- Carr, W. (2007). *ESL testing of Intensive French students*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Simon Fraser University, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada.
- Mady, C. (2007). Allophone students in second-official language programs. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63(5), 727-760.
- Mady, C. (2007). The suitability of Core French for recently arrived adolescent immigrants to Canada. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10 (2), 177-196.
- Simons, J., & Connelly, M. (2000). *Quality ESL programs*. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press.