

Classroom Competency

Target Language Instruction

In order for students to develop proficiency in French, it is critical that French be the language of instruction. Therefore, the lynchpin of my strategy for promoting target language communication in the classroom is to provide an immersion approach to instruction. All new material is taught in French. Directions for practice activities are provided in French. In-class feedback on student language use is provided in French.

Because I use French throughout the instructional process, on our class Web site, in the hallways, etc., my students internalize French and find themselves using French within and beyond the classroom as well. They come to understand and use some aspects of the language—even ones considered quite advanced—naturally simply because they have heard those structures used repeatedly since they began learning French. For example, by spring of French 4, I have at least some students every year who spontaneously begin to use the expressions *ce qui* and *ce que* correctly—without ever having been taught. These expressions, both of which mean “what” but have precise types of sentences in which they are to be used, are only officially “taught” at the advanced levels, but my students start using both of them correctly without having yet had any lessons. Why? Because they learned them the way we learned complex structures in our native languages: through hearing them used repeatedly, correctly, and in multiple contexts by fluent speakers and saw them in numerous authentic documents.

However, it is important to note that, like most teachers, my strategies for target-language instruction go far beyond speaking French. For if I merely spoke to students, they would understand very little. Therefore, when providing new instruction in all levels of French, my use of French is extensively supported with visuals—including animations that help students focus on specific aspects of language at a given time—as well as gestures, cognates with English and extensive use of previously taught material as the scaffold upon which new material is built. In addition, the students’ own life experiences are harnessed as a strategy that allows me to use more sophisticated target language (whether it comes from me or from an authentic document) with them than I could with a primary school student.

But communication requires at least two people; therefore promoting target language communication in the classroom requires that I not be the only person using French. My students must also use the language to communicate. In order to ensure that even my most novice learners can communicate in French from the earliest days of instruction, I employ the following strategies in addition to target-language instruction:

- Routines for starting and ending class in French that always begin with greeting the students and asking how they are, whether they had a nice weekend, what they did yesterday/last weekend, etc.
- Sentence frames for common questions students may want to ask in French on display in the classroom
- Lessons often provide ways for students to take notes without using English so that even their notes encourage them to remain in French.

- Lessons provide frequent, varied checks for understanding with immediate feedback so that students know if they are grasping the current targeted language phrases and structures. By committing to providing multiple checks for understanding, I am supporting students to feel confident using the new language in upcoming practice activities and for authentic communication within and beyond the classroom.
- Extensive, safe practice in pairs and small groups before being called upon to speak for the class.
- Frequent opportunities for spontaneous communication, even in French 1, by teaching students to go beyond the “model” and the memorized chunks for the conversation activity they are practicing and add follow-up questions in order to get more information from their partners. This is critical in order to support their developing proficiency because real-life conversations don’t follow a model. As a result, I train them from the lowest levels to start with the model, but then go beyond by asking questions spontaneously. This also trains them to listen actively so they can be prepared to respond.
- A print-rich environment: this is a strategy supported by extensive research for English learners. It means that the walls (and in my case, windows and doors) are covered with products from around the French-speaking world, but also with documents, posters, student work, etc., all in French at varying levels of proficiency. I used to decorate my room primarily with posters I bought in souvenir shops through my travels. Since 1999, however, I have discovered that I can get free “events” posters from every village I visit in Europe. These posters were publicity for community events appealing to many different interests: sports, performing arts, visual arts, literature, science, humanitarian work, etc. and they include slogans, addresses, locations, descriptions and many more examples of French in use. Now, when my students enter my room, there is no doubt they have crossed a border into a French-speaking place. And we use the posters, the student work, the brochures and other documents that cover my walls, windows and doors for activities, beginning with time, date and seasons in French 1 (students can tell each other when a certain event is happening). Furthermore, students in all levels read student work (and when there are QR codes on it, they can listen to it as well) from every class, including their own. This reinforces previously taught material and also provides students in lower levels with peer examples of more proficient use of French that they will develop as they progress through the program.
- Multiple sources of target-language input: I am not the only French speaker they hear. In addition to my colleague and also my principal, I actively seek opportunities for students to hear, and when possible interact with, other proficient speakers of the language. This ranges from exchange students and guest speakers to authentic audio and video documents beginning with very concrete and short documents in French 1, such as weather, interviews, songs and very short film clips and expanding each year to documents whose topics and use of language are multi-faceted and more nuanced in the advanced years. By starting with authentic audio and video in French 1, students are prepared for the more complex documents they will encounter in AP and in real life.

Instructional Strategies

One of the most important aspects to meeting the needs of all learners is to keep the learner at the center of instruction. No one strategy, method or text can meet the cognitive, social and emotional needs of all students; therefore no one strategy or approach will ever be sufficient. Instead, it is critical to maintain a diverse array of instructional strategies at my disposal. As a result, I do not subscribe to any one product, text or methodology. Rather, I purposefully select the best approach and the best—preferably authentic—materials to provide culturally contextualized comprehensible input and multiple practice opportunities for each lesson and each group of students at any given time. Those needs vary from class to class and year to year. It is also worth noting that we are in a state of flux in education right now, as we continue to build 21st Century Skills and begin to implement Common Core State Standards. This increases the responsibility on teachers to ensure that their lessons, practice and assessments go beyond “covering the curriculum”. Given the tremendous task of balancing our students’ needs with achieving content proficiency, 21st Century Skills and Common Core State Standards, it is no surprise that even after 20 years of instruction, I still write extensive unit plans and detailed weekly lesson plans for all my classes.

Here are the key foundational instructional strategies that lay the groundwork to support my students’ increasing linguistic and cultural proficiency while meeting their cognitive, social and emotional needs:

- Lessons and practice are conducted in the target language and in all communicative modes. It is quite simply impossible to become proficient in the target language if the target language is not the language of instruction and practice. Even blended learning videos are in French.
- Lessons, practice and assessment are centered around real communication tasks and authentic documents. Stage-appropriate “can-do” statements for each lesson form the starting point for planning, determine the assessment, clarify the steps students need along the way and offer students opportunities for reflection and goal setting.
- Frequent and varied formative assessment during the instructional stages
 - white boards
 - colored cards, numeric, physical or alphabetic responses
 - line ups
 - online assessment tools such as Kahoot, Socrative, Schoology’s “quiz” feature and more
 - Google forms
- Virtual classroom community where teacher and students can share resources, and post and respond to questions. Students can also take assessments and upload assignments (including submitting audio or video beginning in fall 2014), and receive feedback (audio and video feedback coming in fall, 2014). My students and I have begun experimenting with blended learning through this platform as well.
- A blend of high-tech, low-tech and no-tech instruction, practice and assessment activities throughout the instructional sequence.
- Content that is targeted to build linguistic and cultural proficiency while also developing students’ 21st Century Skills and their proficiency in the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards of the Common Core State Standards.

- Activities centered in the music, arts and other content areas to tap into students' other areas of expertise and interest and ensure that culture occurs throughout learning and practice, not just "on the side".
- Extensive—usually daily—opportunities for students to practice in pairs and small groups as well as individually
- Random selection for students chosen to share responses in class. This is critical because it actually improves students' quality of participation as well as their engagement. Furthermore, it provides teachers with a more accurate assessment of the degree of understanding the whole class has of a given topic. When teachers call on "volunteers" (typically the students who raise their hands), teachers really only know how those one or two students are doing. And usually, they are the ones who always get everything right so teachers mistakenly assume everyone understands. Random participation evens the playing field. I hear from every student at least every two days, usually daily. All students respond when I select them, even if they never would have raised their hands, because they know I'm not picking on them; it's just their turn. Most of the time, students practice in pairs or groups first before I randomly select them to provide their responses to the class.
- Purposefully designed speaking practice that helps students move out of their comfort zones by building in spontaneous communication: from French 1 on, even when we do a practice activity from a text book, I look for opportunities for students to personalize the activity and/or add additional questions to ask their partners that weren't originally part of the activity. This helps all students build listening and speaking skills and ensures they maximize in-class practice in ways that mirror real conversations as much as possible. After all, in real life, one never knows what follow-up questions might be asked next.
- Kinesthetic activities for practice, checks for understanding and formative assessment
- Safe homework practices that focus on homework as independent practice that benefits students rather than homework as a necessary activity for the gradebook.
 - Students do not have homework every night in my classes and, with the exception of AP students, there is no homework on a topic until students are ready for independent practice. AP students (who are co-enrolled in French 4 because they start too late in my district to take French 4 before progressing to AP) receive a weekly thematically selected practice activity that is structured like one of the sections of the test but aligned to the theme were are actively studying and practicing in class (it is a combo 4/AP class).
 - I do not deduct points for errors on homework or in-class practice as long as they are corrected when I or students provide the corrections in class. It is important that it be safe for students to practice and safe for them to make mistakes when practicing. If teachers deduct points for every mistake on homework, when is it safe for students to try out the new content and new skills?
 - Students who miss an assignment can make it up in my presence for full credit. Statistically, missing homework is due to lack of understanding rather than laziness.

Therefore, I ensure my students can get the help they need and still complete the assignment.

- Safe to “fail” and recognized for demonstrating proficiency on learning targets later: Students can earn higher grades on assessments by first getting peer tutoring and extra practice on the topics with which they struggled. When they think they are ready to redo the assessment, they first complete an on-the-spot assessment with me (graded but not recorded in the gradebook). If they complete that successfully, they may retake the assessment (or an alternate version assessing the same skills and content) for full credit. If they struggled during the on-the-spot assessment, they receive a personalized plan for ongoing tutoring and additional practice before trying again.

Student Cultural Exposure

Culture is embedded throughout the instruction, practice and assessment cycle. I purposefully do not do “culture projects”, “cultural trivia”, or “culture Fridays”. Although these types of activities can provide some value to students, I feel they also risk sending the message that culture is something separate from language. In addition, such activities may send the message that culture is something we do to take a break from language or for fun. None of this is how I wish for my students to experience francophone cultural products, practices or perspectives.

I am always honing my work with culture in the classroom. It is somewhat more difficult to do everything I would like given that my region has so few French speakers and there are no funds to support field trips. Nevertheless, I embed numerous cultural experiences throughout their time in my programs.

- The most common and effective way I have made culture an integral part of instruction is through the frequent and extensive exploration of and interaction with authentic documents for practice and as part of Integrated Performance Assessments. Examples include:
 - menus, maps, weather reports, brochures, survey data, beginning in French 1
 - documents related to school, such as schedules, report cards and other documents, beginning in French 1
 - short, authentic video reports on a variety of topics beginning in French 1
 - Print articles and infographics presenting information on a variety of cultural topics, beginning in French 1
 - varying lengths of authentic literature beginning in French 1 (with short poems)
 - authentic short films beginning in French 1—we use these to develop our interpretive communication skills and to view French speakers and their products, practices and perspectives through their own eyes as they present themselves in the films.
 - authentic music from around the francophone world beginning in French 1—we examine it for both language and evidence of cultural practices and perspectives.
 - works of important visual artists from around the French-speaking world, beginning with Victor Hugo in Fr. 1 (*La Chambre*). We use the art to prompt communication and

also to learn about the artist, his/her place in history and how the place and time in which he/she lived shaped the art the artist created.

- Guest speakers from around the French-speaking world provide students with opportunities to interview them in French. So far, we have welcomed speakers from France, Haiti and Senegal. (Fr. 1-AP)
- Occasional field trips to cultural events, exhibits, restaurants, cooking lessons, etc.
- Skype calls enable my students to interact in French with students and adults around the world when they can't come visit our class. We have Skyped with speakers from Canada, Los Angeles and Benin (Fr. 3-AP). Because our opportunities to use Skype are relatively rare, I also use tools like Blendspace to ensure my students can communicate more regularly with French speakers around the world because the time difference is not an issue—users can post their comments at any time.
- “Through their eyes” correspondence between my classes and classes around the world. While at first, this looks like email correspondence, there is another important component: students don't just write about their lives. In each exchange, each group also includes pictures and videos in order to *show* the other group what life in their region is like through their own eyes (and on the topic addressed in each correspondence), thus providing my students with a 1st-person window into the cultures of the places where their correspondents live.

Connecting to the Community

Connecting my students of French to the community of French speakers (locally and globally, virtually and in-person) is one of my key areas of focus in my instruction. It is both particularly important and particularly challenging in my setting because French is not a common language where I live. Students desperately need to connect with native speakers in order to improve their proficiency, deepen their cultural understanding and build global connections. In the examples below, you will see that these connections range from using French in the local community to travel to France, to using the Internet to provide even more connections.

- Students in all levels of French correspond with epals in France when classes can be identified. We have also had programs established with Belgium. When possible, we also organize opportunities to talk via Skype and to share our work with them online, including live webcasts of our presentational speaking assessments. In the lower levels of French, students correspond primarily via email using short texts constructed around their memorized chunks of language to communicate about themselves and their immediate world. In French 3, 4 and AP, the correspondence is more varied to include emails with classes in francophone Europe, plus participation in the Peace Corps World Wise Schools Program (WWS). For this connection, students use Skype plus online correspondence via email, Blendspace and Padlet to interact with our WWS correspondent in Africa. You can see a portion of our Blendspace with the volunteer serving in Benin here (press the “play” button in the upper left after clicking this link): <http://edcvs.co/13SFFRY>. Note the comment thread in which Megan (our volunteer) “talks” directly to my students on each page of the canvas. Because Peace Corps volunteers

serve for two years, the location of our correspondent varies, but I always request (and been matched with) a French-speaking country. Over the past seven years, my students have corresponded in French with volunteers (and when possible, the students the in volunteer's village) from Senegal, Benin, and Burkina Faso. They also complete service projects designed to support the volunteer's work in Africa and improve the quality of life in the village:

- Solar lanterns for the families, school and mosque in Burkina Faso, paid for by a grant the students co-wrote with me
- Art supplies for the village in Benin to support the volunteer's children's art program (which she was running with no paper, pencils, pens).
- Books and dictionaries in English and French for the school in Senegal.
- Read Around the World is a program I designed in partnership with the local public library system. Students prepare to read stories during a special, multi-lingual story hour for children. During "Read Around the World", students read stories in the target language or in languages other than English that they speak at home. Most of my students do this in French, but I have had a few use home languages. In order to do this successfully, students work with me to learn how to choose good stories and how to design activities before reading to prepare children for the stories in languages they probably don't speak. They also prepare activities to do while reading to facilitate communication (such as using Felt board or puppets while reading or having children interact vocally with sound effects when they are given a certain cue). Finally, they prepare a take-away activity for the children, usually a coloring page related to the story with words in the target language related to the picture. This activity is for all language levels, 1-AP.
- Google Hangouts Mystery Class: to do this, I connect with a class in the French speaking world, usually Canada due to the more manageable time difference and also better access to technology: classes in less developed countries lack the technological infrastructure necessary for video calling—they are more successful with email correspondence. The teacher and I agree on a date for our "*Hangout mystère*". The students don't know where the other class is located. Instead, during the actual Hangout (similar to Skype, but using a video call tool from Google), students in both classes ask each other questions to try to be the first class to guess where the other class is located. If the destinations are guessed before the end of the period, the students ask general questions to get to know the other class better. (French 3/4/AP)
- Students participate in a French cooking lesson, conducted in French by the chef at his local French café. (Fr. 3-AP)
- Project-based learning with real-world connections and impact:
 - Example 1: Students in French 2 study health and nutrition. After numerous activities to build both linguistic and content (nutritional) knowledge, students combine that information to create booklets encouraging healthy eating. These books are targeted to children. Books are drafted, peer edited, refined and then "published" (some by hand, others using technology). The best books are sent to France or Belgium for use in waiting rooms at the dentists' and/or pediatricians' offices. Because of this, students also learn about copyright law and draft books that do not feature any characters from copyrighted media, such as films, comic books, etc.

- Example 2: Student-created museum hosted at Alliance Française in order to ensure attendance by members of the local French-speaking community (Fr. 4/AP). Topics selected by students each year. Design of the exhibits, interactive activities and the entire museum space also created by students. Topics have included WWII France, Post-colonial francophone Africa and the French Revolution, all including the continuing impacts on francophone societies today.
- Immersion Day: students from all around the region are invited to our school for a day of games and socializing entirely in French. Students in all levels of French from 2-AP join us for activities that vary in difficulty from musical chairs (using francophone music, but comprehension not necessary) to twister in French, to scavenger hunts, to a tongue-twister competition. All communication during and between events is in French. The event ends with performances by all schools in attendance. You can see the photo album for this year's event here: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10152338929960575.1073741844.515910574&type=1&l=78dece6c06>
- Guest speakers from Senegal, Haiti, France. Students engage in conversations with the guest speakers while they are in our classes. You can see some of the reflections from French 1 students after interviewing French high school students who visited our class this year here: <https://twitter.com/NicoleNaditz/status/459181721372479488>
- Connecting students to the target-language community through Twitter: take pictures of their work on various topics and share on Twitter with hashtags that French speakers follow. Class then observes the recognition of their work via Twitter's methods of "favorite" "retweets" and "comments". Because all of the hashtags are targeted to groups of French speakers around the world, students' work goes beyond the classroom to the global French-speaking community. Here's an example from French 3 that got noticed by French speakers in French Guyana: <https://twitter.com/NicoleNaditz/status/448799724108140545>
- Trips to France: I organize trips every other year, depending on my availability on student interest. Students in all levels of French are invited to participate in order to explore France and have the opportunity to use some of their language skills in every-day settings with native French speakers. Some trips are strictly touristic. Other years, they start with a homestay before touring. For 12 months prior to departure, we have monthly preparation meetings that provide logistical information. During those meetings, students who are participating also research the places we will be visiting. Each meeting features one student presentation on one city, region or site that we will be visiting, including any important natural features, historical information, regional cuisines or architecture to look for, etc.
- Participation in local events, when appropriate: our local community does not have many events for French speakers, and the biggest one occurs during the summer: our annual French film festival. Students are encouraged to attend that, but it is difficult to track since we are not in school when it occurs. When opportunities arise, I endeavor to facilitate my students' participation. Past events have included:
 - Attending French films showing at local theaters during the school year
 - Attending French immersion day at our local university

- Participating at a Pétanque (French lawn bowling event) hosted by a local Pétanque group.
- And finally, my favorite evidence of students connecting to communities of French speakers is also the best example because I didn't create it and students don't do it for a grade. It is students using French in their own lives, outside of class. I hear about their experiences when they tell me about them the next day in class, post to our class network page, or email me. The immersion instruction they receive beginning in French 1 makes these community connections possible:
 - Students helping French-speaking customers where they work
 - This year, in particular, one student has had several French-speaking families come to her restaurant. One such family, from Africa, was clearly uncomfortable in English. When my student heard them speak French while passing by, she began talking to them and taking their order in French. They were clearly relieved and overjoyed to be able to communicate with her and told her that the most difficult aspect of their visit was the fact that there had been no one to whom they could speak French.
 - Students speaking French with family members with whom they weren't able to communicate before.
 - Students using social media to maintain communication with French speakers they met while doing epal correspondence or talking to guest speakers in my class.
 - Students participating in study abroad or *au pair* work in France or other French-speaking countries.
 - Students enlisting to serve in the Peace Corps in francophone Africa.