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The Fundamentals of Second-Language Teaching

J. Clarence LeBlanc

As second-language teachers do we agree on the fundamentals of our profession? Clarifying this question would help many beginning as well as seasoned teachers – not to mention curriculum developers and textbook authors. The article offers a number of elements for readers' consideration.

In sports, when a team is not winning, the coach often tells the players to get back to the fundamentals. Unlike many sports truisms, this one makes sense. Unless the fundamentals of an activity are mastered, respectable performance is impossible. One can hardly imagine a hockey player who skates poorly, or a ball player who can't throw, having much success no matter what other skills they might possess. What would we think of a coach who would make such athletes practise fancy manoeuvres that are beyond their level of development? Is there a lesson here for second-language teachers? What are the fundamentals of our activity? How well do we ensure their development before we take the students beyond them? Why do so many students, particularly in regular French (as opposed to Immersion or intensive programs)¹ seem to know so little after many years of second language study? They have been exposed to many aspects of the language but have retained little.

Had they even learned one important function and notion per day, they would now have a considerable repertoire, enough for at least basic communication.

Before exploring the fundamentals of second-language teaching, mention must be made of another list that is even more vital to successful second-language teaching, the *working conditions* necessary for effective teaching and learning to take place (Le Blanc, 1990). It would include:

- a reasonable class size
- administrative support for the program at the school, district and province/state levels
- appropriate curriculum materials
- competent teachers who believe in what they do
- parental and societal valuing of language learning.

Without these conditions, discussion of in-class considerations is almost pointless. Without support, even good teachers can only struggle for so long before becoming exhausted and gradually losing

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Mosaic
P.O. Box 847
Welland, Ontario L3B 5Y5

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Mosaic
P.O. Box 890
Lewiston, NY 14092-0890

Telephone/Fax: [905] 788-2674. E-mail: soleil@iaw.on.ca

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RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

International/Heritage Languages in Canada:

The State of the Art

A research project is currently underway, headed by Professor Anthony Mollica, to update the status of International/Heritage Languages at all levels of instruction across Canada. The research received financial support from the Multiculturalism Program, Canadian Heritage.

The research has two main goals:

1. to compile up-to-date statistics on the variety of language programs available, student enrolment, and teacher participation and training, and
2. to define language policies at the levels of provincial and territorial governments, universities and school boards.

The first phase of our research is data gathering. We need your help in this daunting enterprise.

If you are able to provide information on any International/Heritage language program anywhere in Canada, whether it is school-based or community-based, please contact the researcher:

Joan Howard
Tel: (416) 923-6641, ex. 2537
FAX: (416) 926-4737
email:
jhoward@oise.utoronto.ca

We are particularly interested in any background information about institutions (school boards, private groups), and associations which offer courses in Heritage/International languages at all levels of instruction.

All information will be gratefully received and credit given to our informants.

The language graduate who never reads a professional journal and participates only minimally, if at all, in professional meetings, will stagnate. There is an onus on the profession in all areas to upgrade and keep abreast of current developments in the field.

– Peter Heffernan

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Fundamentals of Second Language

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focus. Decision-makers who fail to provide the conditions necessary for success in a school program should be fired for incompetence or better still, arrested for stealing (education) from children.

When existing conditions make successful teaching next to impossible, steps must be taken to improve the situation. Teachers, who are often isolated as individual employees of a bureaucratic system, have considerable power if they act in concert through their provincial/state language associations. Complaining in the staff-room may relieve stress but it does not improve conditions in the classroom. Professional associations can, and should, play a large role in educating decision-makers about the conditions necessary for an effective program. They could, for example, create a commission of experts to list reasonable conditions for effective second-language teaching, publish it widely, monitor how closely the schools or system meet them, and perhaps publish a yearly report card. At a more aggressive level they might research and publish the average class sizes in second-language classes attended by civil servants and business executives and compare the results with average second-language classes. For their own good and that of their students, teachers must be active members of their professional associations.

Assuming, then, that the system will provide at least reasonable conditions and support to the front-line staff who teach the students, I suggest that the following are fundamentals of second-language teaching.

Motivating Students

William Glasser (1990), the noted education theorist, makes the interesting observation that "being an effective teacher may be the most difficult job of all in our soci-

ety" (p. 14). His rationale is that while many tasks are difficult, they involve no inherent resistance; patients want the doctor to cure them, clients want lawyers to defend them. The wood does not resist the carpenter, and the piano does not resist the musician. But...

teachers are people managers, and most everyone will agree that students as workers seem to be the most resistant of all to being managed (Glasser, 16).

Teachers, who are often isolated as individual employees of a bureaucratic system, have considerable power if they act in concert through their provincial/state language associations. Complaining in the staff-room may relieve stress but it does not improve conditions in the classroom. Professional associations can, and should, play a large role in educating decision-makers about the conditions necessary for an effective program.

Yet he also believes that students have an inner sense of what is quality work and that they can be encouraged to produce at that level. Managing thirty or so students (each a complex individual with a myriad of needs), and motivating them as learners, are basic teacher functions. Teachers require great skill, empathy, knowledge, organization, time, and supporting school and societal climates. Experience helps as well. While it is presumptuous to write about motivating students in one paragraph, my experiences in the classroom led me to the following beliefs:

- Students won't care until they know the teacher cares... about the subject and about them.
- On the first day of class teachers must sell their subject as useful to the students; otherwise why should they bother learning it? It is a challenging but essential

task for which there are, fortunately, many supporting materials. Lacey (in Mollica, 1993) stressed that

a language is far more than an intellectual cognitive challenge. It is a means to grow and mature through the experience of other cultures. It gives breadth and depth to our personalities. (p. 4).

Mollica (1993) identifies a number of reasons for the value of second-language learning and concludes that

only when the study of languages is depoliticized and the learning of languages is accepted for its own intrinsic qualities, will we be able to have linguistic peace and harmony... (p. 5).

Danesi (1993), in an article on the role of more than one language in literacy acquisition, points out that

The bilingual learner has access, therefore, to more than one way of processing information, and this cannot help but diversify and enhance the child's overall cognitive capacities.

Ralph (1995) stressed the "financial" advantages to language learning:

Recent global events have emphasized the critical importance of multinational communication. Growing trade and commercial relationships among European nations, among Pacific rim countries, and among our own North American partners – plus the potential to forge further links between/among these larger international blocs – signal that people skilled in various languages will be required to help expedite these communicative relationships.

Runte (1995) aptly points out that

Language is much more than grammar. It is more than a way of structuring thought. It is a way of signifying our deepest feelings, our most sincere beliefs. Each time I learn a word which has no translation into another language, I feel that I have discovered a rare gift, a new idea, a fresh insight... (p. 9).

Learning languages promotes interdisciplinarity and the ability to think in a creative fashion. It pro-

motes creativity and discovery. Languages teach us new ways of seeing things, new perspectives (p. 10).

Today our students face many problems: change and instability, violence and lack of meaning, fragmentation and loss of identity. Communication, creativity and unity are the solutions to these problems, and they are all found in and promoted by the learning of languages (p. 11).

She asks

If we want to be part of a country which is humane and tolerant to continue on into the future, we need to educate the next generation to be tolerant and open. What better way to do this than through learning languages? (Runte, 1996a: 7).

Even UNESCO in a report favours the preservation of Languages (see Runte, 1996b:18).

The "observable advantage of bilinguals over monolinguals" is that they are "more used to switching thought patterns and have more flexible minds." Their knowledge of language(s) makes them more familiar with "different often contradictory concepts" and this, in turn, makes bilinguals or multilinguals more "tolerant than mono-linguals, and more capable of understanding an argument."

And even Canadian Parents for French (1995), a national association devoted to the promotion of French as a second language has produced a video in which young people laud the acquisitions of a second or even third language (reviewed by Runte, 1996c:23).

Teachers must remind the students regularly that they are working for themselves, their own futures. Why should they get up in the morning and go work for teachers?

If the Coleman Study correctly concluded that the most important determinant of academic success is a willingness to defer gratification, i.e., to work now in order to have something later, students must learn how to do this. The finding of "deferred gratification" as a major determinant of success was a bit of a surprise. The

expectation had been that school facilities, programs, etc. would largely explain the difference between "successful" students and less successful ones. Deferred gratification ought to be taught at home, but when it isn't, teachers must fill the gap, as usual. Students should learn to set short-term, intermediate and ultimate goals, and experience sequential success in meeting them.

Teachers must foster a climate where the focus is on the students, individually and collectively, not on the teacher or textbook (Evans-Harvey, 1993). I recommend "reverse onus" teaching, whereby students are made aware that they are the *raison d'être* of the system and that teachers help them acquire skills and knowledge. Off-task students are seen as disrupters of their own and other students' learning, not of the teacher. It creates a different dynamic *vis à vis* collaborative goal setting and behavioural expectations.

*Teachers require great skill,
empathy, knowledge,
organization, time, and
supporting school and societal
climates.*

The classroom atmosphere must be so focussed on learning that risk taking and errors are almost stress free. Teachers should emphasize to students that not knowing something and making mistakes are central to learning. If students knew everything, they would not need the teachers who would then be unemployed. Students should also understand that most errors are smart, not dumb, because they involve logical inferences. For example, students who say

"Je suis 13 ans vieux"

in French are not saying something stupid; they are applying a correct syntactical structure from English. Much can be learned from such "mistakes" when students are taught that they are "smart mistakes."

Learning should be done in a context of "fun and games" as often as possible. Students are still children; they can learn without always knowing they are doing so. What involves more genuine communication than playing a game in the target language? Moreover, we know that second-language learning often involve attitudes and prejudices. When children have fun, they often forget that they "hate" the second-language (Danesi and Mollica, 1994).

Teaching in the Target Language

Many practices in education are matters of opinion, but the results of others have been demonstrated beyond discussion. One of these is the inefficacy of teaching a second language in the mother language. For decades in Canada, French as a second language was taught by the grammar-translation method with all real communication being in English. Most of its former students are living proof of its failure. "I can read it," they say, "I understand some, but I can't speak it." Dissatisfaction with that state of affairs, in an officially bilingual country, led to the creation of "immersion" classes, the communicative approach, the multidimensional curriculum, and [Canada's] National Core French Study (NCFS). The latter development is explained in some detail later. The NCFS's key conclusion was that second-language teaching should aim first and foremost at imparting communicative skills for real-life purposes.

With the proper introduction and attitude, students can be motivated to use the target language from the start. In fact, its use stimulates interest and motivation. Students want to communicate, and if the second language must be the medium of communication in that class, so be it. It has been said that "immersion" programs are not immersion at all since even the most intensive of them only involve a small fraction of the students' daily life. Nevertheless, immersion works because

its key article of faith is target language use. Essentially, regular second-language classes should also be "immersion" during the class period. Of course these students would benefit from a more significant exposure to the language than one short period per day. A five-month intensive introduction has been proposed by some as a desirable common experience for all Canadian children, after which they could opt for immersion or regular French. Perhaps it will happen some day, but whatever the format, second language teachers who wish to be successful must quickly and systematically make the target language the norm in their classroom.

While in immersion classes we insist on French being the language for communication and are careful not to deviate from this norm, in the Core French class we appear to have adopted the slogan of the Commissioner of Official Languages: "English or French. It's your choice."

In a lead article published in *Dialogue*, Stern (1983a: 4) stresses that the teaching of Core French (i.e. "regular") requires a diversified approach. He points out that

In the last few years a new view of language acquisition has resulted partly from research on second language learning and partly from the immersion experience. It underlines the fact that a language cannot be learned by formal practice alone. Much of it is learnt best in the process of doing something else.

Calvé (1985:278) echoes similar sentiments when he states that Ce n'est qu'en communiquant qu'on peut apprendre à communiquer.

Mollica (1985:490) wonders whether we are

[...] truly fulfilling our task to teach students to communicate. Are we providing the classroom environment which encourages communication? How much English is re-

ally spoken in the French classroom? While in immersion classes we insist on French being the language for communication and are careful not to deviate from this norm, in the Core French class we appear to have adopted the slogan of the Commissioner of Official Languages: "English or French. It's your choice."

He suggests that teachers audiotape their lesson and listen to the recording to determine:

- How much time we spent trying to get the class's attention
- How much time we spent speaking English
- How much time we spent speaking French
- How much time was left for our students to speak French. (p. 490).

The Language Management System

Second language teachers are regularly urged to teach in the target language, but when faced with a class that doesn't understand even the most rudimentary elements of the language they often dismiss the advice as unrealistic. Yet, little progress can be made in a language that isn't used for (real) classroom communication. So, *how* does one teach in a language not understood by the students? Many theorists promote an aural phase when the students hear the second language, its sound and cadence, for a period of time. They begin by processing and understanding, and then reach a readiness stage, a desire to speak. Whether one subscribes to that approach or not, when it is time for students to speak perhaps my Language Management System may be useful (LeBlanc, 1994). Used systematically, this mechanism allows a teacher to use the target language in class from the outset. Its key assumption is that the FIRST need anyone has when faced with a second language is acquiring the tools to cope with the linguistic situation itself. If they don't understand those strange French sounds, for example, the phrase "Je ne comprends pas." effectively

sends the ball back to the other side of the court. While that could be accomplished with the traditional physical gestures, other language management tools such as "*Comment dit-on ... en français?*" and "*Que veut dire le mot...?*" are most effectively conveyed verbally.

One of the most effective devices to develop teacher respect for the fundamentals, and empathy for the students' predicament, is a training session in which teachers become students of a language that they don't know at all, Mandarin or Russian, for example. They quickly experience what it is to have a person make unfamiliar sounds at you, then act as if you are stupid for not understanding right away and not assimilating strange structures after only one or two repetitions. Very early on, the students should be taught the verbal tools to slow the teacher down, to make him or her use basic vocabulary and to re-use words or functions a reasonable number of times in meaningful contexts. That is how the first language is learned, and how other languages are learned as well. The Language Management System is intended as a mechanism that students use to survive the initial phase of second language learning, then to acquire more language.

The Concept of Interlanguage

While the concept of interlanguage, the rudimentary form of language that concentrates exclusively on the message, is very simple, most theorists feel it has an important place in language development. It involves saying, for example, "Me hungry, where restaurant please," in any language. Language teachers all spoke that way as babies, and nearly all would use interlanguage spontaneously in a foreign environment, yet many make little room for it in the classroom. They forget that beginning students are at the baby stage in second language learning and that the classroom is a foreign environment for students. The active

encouragement or tolerance of interlanguage in the classroom has been a matter of considerable debate, but in my view it has a place among second-language teaching's fundamentals. Some will point to the fossilized errors so endemic to immersion students, but that is more related to how long interlanguage should be tolerated rather than whether it is a normal first stage leading to more correct expression. As Chastain (1971: 316) points out,

To learn a language, the students must reach a point at which they concentrate on *what* they are saying instead of *how* they are saying it, but often can not reach this point because the teacher places grammatical and phonological interruptions and stumbling blocks in their way. Language teachers tend to have an unwarranted obsession with perfection in their classroom. *They should remember that the initial goal is not native speech but the ability to communicate with the native* (italics mine).

And Grittner (1985:14) concurs that

Teachers should apply the old adage "Practice makes perfect," in contrast to the tendency in the foreign language profession to say: "You've got to be perfect before you can practise." This means accepting errors as part of the learning process rather than making believe that they will not occur. Mistakes should be used to diagnose errors and prescribe remedial practice.

Le Vocabulaire fondamental

The basic building block of linguistic communication is the word. When one reads, hears, writes, or speaks a language, it is done by means of words used individually or organized in some fashion. Whether they are used on the strict basis of communication, as in the interlanguage discussed above, or according to sophisticated rules sanctioned by the Académie Française, for example, each utterance is made up of... words. Therefore, language learning is fundamentally about vocabulary learning. Indeed, when one visits a second-language class one sees

the vocabulary that the teacher sets as priority for that particular group. One might, for example, visit a grade three second-language class and see large posters of fruits with each part, from the outer skin to the innermost pit, listed and the vocabulary being drilled. If these students ever become fruit buyers for a produce company, they are ready; they know all the vocabulary. But, are those the words they most need to learn at that point in their language development? I doubt it. And unless next year's teacher asks them about fruits, they will appear to know little of the language.

As Robert Galisson pointed out (cited in Nemni, 1985),

Jusqu'à preuve du contraire, les mots restent bien utiles pour communiquer.

The point is that vocabulary is central to second language study and must be selected very judiciously. There are said to be more than half a million words in the French language, for example, and it is estimated that a university graduate knows perhaps fifty to sixty thousand words, and a high school student perhaps fifteen thousand. We also know that to be mastered, words must be reused often. (see Pellerin, 1996). How do we know which words should be prioritized? A most interesting research project was conducted by the Centre de Recherche et d'Étude pour la Diffusion du Français (CREDIF) and published in 1959 as *Le Français Fondamental*. Thousands of everyday conversations were recorded and word frequency lists were compiled. Naturally certain words appeared more often than others. The most basic words were organized a bit and it was deemed that with 1222 lexical words and 253 grammatical words (*Le Français Fondamental*), a person could function quite effectively in everyday life. The point for teachers is that the most basic words should be prioritized and re-utilized until they are assimilated by the students. Teachers should also teach the basic skill of circumlocution by which, if stu-

dents don't know the exact word they want to say, instead of shutting down the communication they find a way to explain their meaning using the words they know.

Teachers can consult *Le Français Fondamental* or similar lists of basic words, but they can also create their own list by asking themselves if a word is an often used general one or a less used specific one. Another criterion for essential words are those needed to operate in the classroom. The vocabulary for classroom routines should be taught first and if, for example, the teachers want to play a game, the vocabulary and language functions needed to play should be taught beforehand. As soon as students have sufficient literacy skills to do so, the classroom vocabulary should be written in a special scribbler and reviewed regularly. It becomes their personal "dictionnaire fondamental."

Functions and Grammar

If vocabulary is important as the language's building blocks, and is organized in elemental fashion in interlanguage, we want to advance quickly to language forms that are like those that native speakers use. The question is, as usual... "How?" Most teachers itch to teach grammar for at least two reasons; they wince at the students' fractured structures and they personally relate to grammar because of their studies (which they chose because they liked to study language). But formal grammar is not what most beginning students need. Teachers should review the alternative view of language as evolved in *The Threshold Level* by a Council of Europe research group in 1975. It separates language in two basic components, the "functions", and "notions", as J. A. Van Ek (1976:6) explained:

What people do *by means* of language can be described as verbally perform certain functions. By means of language people assert, question, command, expostulate, persuade, apologize, etc. etc. In

performing such functions people express, refer to or - to use a more general term- handle certain notions.

Second-language teachers must initially think in terms of functions and notions (another word for "vocabulary") rather than in grammatical terms. If students want, for example, to perform the language function of asking permission to do something, let's provide the function rather than the grammar. Students should learn such functions as: "*Est-ce que je peux aller...?*" and the notion "*aux toilettes*" without learning to conjugate completely the irregular verbs involved. Teachers and students should think in terms of developing and expanding their repertoire of functions and notions. For the time and place of grammar, teachers might start by reviewing the theories of Stephen Krashen (1995) and Krashen and Terrell (1983) and the debates they stimulated, the Language Syllabus of the National Core French Study, and innumerable articles on the issue.

The National Core French Study

The National Core French Study² was created by the Canadian Association of Second-Language Teachers (CASLT) and supported by government, to meet the challenge of making regular (Core) French effective. The proposal for such a study was first outlined in a keynote address given by the late H.H. Stern (1983) on "French Programs in Canada: How Can We Improve Them?", at the annual CASLT convention held in Winnipeg, Canada. The project was originally chaired by Stern himself and, after his death, by Raymond LeBlanc. A strong cadre of second-language experts were enlisted and participated in various capacities. A central research group, supported by six task groups and school committees, fleshed out Stern's multidimensional model for restructuring second-language teaching.

A five-year, seven-volume, national study cannot be fairly summarized in one paragraph. There exists an excellent synthesis written by Raymond LeBlanc (1990), and a comprehensive summary published as a special issue by *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes* (1990) that can easily be accessed. In the proverbial nutshell, the National Core French Study proposed that second language teaching integrate four aspects of language, each described in a separate syllabus:

- language
- communicative-experiential
- culture, and
- general language.

Two other workgroups addressed the important questions of testing and teacher education. These are all part of the total package, six fundamentals, if you will. While each report contains a chapter on classroom approaches, the project was more geared to providing a blueprint for second-language teaching in Canadian schools. We are much gratified that ministries and publishers have accepted the basic concepts and are integrating them in their latest materials. In spite of the name, it is generally accepted that the principles of the multidimensional approach are equally valid for immersion teaching. Teachers who consult the study will find themselves better equipped to understand and deliver the latest programs.

Opportunity for oral testing

"Ok, students, take your pencils and paper and we'll see how well you speak the second language you have been studying." That doesn't seem reasonable but it is often what we do. How we test is very important because it is the ultimate motivator for many students. "Does it count?" they ask. However, to test orally there must be conditions in place that allow it. Asking teachers to give up most of their noon hours and preparation time to interview students indi-

vidually is simply unreasonable. There are many things teachers can do in class to test orally, including monitoring a few students each day, having student presentations, mastery teaching, having students tape certain answers, etc. If your school is fortunate enough to have a language lab, it can make oral testing a breeze, especially at the middle and secondary levels. As well, aural comprehension tests can be administered to the entire class, and they should be part of any quality curriculum material. For oral testing beyond that, teachers will need assistants or release time.

A comprehensive package of field-tested testing instruments for the intermediate level is now available through the Canadian Association of Second Language (see address in Note 2.) It should provide a theoretical base and accessible materials for ensuring that testing is closely related to communicative teaching.

Conclusion

Second-language teaching in the public school context is a very demanding occupation. Reviewing and applying the fundamentals is no panacea, but it offers perspective and helps define the conditions for success. Once these are in place, second-language teaching can be a most stimulating task. Unlike other subjects, where teachers must follow a curriculum closely, communicative-experiential teaching allows teachers to discuss events and issues, play games, undertake projects, watch tv, listen to music, etc. Granted, most of these activities are conducted in a *vocabulaire fondamentale*, but a great deal of variety is still possible. Second-language teachers who master the fundamentals of their profession can derive much satisfaction from effectively introducing students to a new language and culture.

Notes

1. In Canada, French is the main second language taught in schools due to the bilingual nature of the country. The regular second-language course, typi-

cally one class period per day up to 12 years in all other provinces and territories (except in Ontario up to 13 years), is called Core French. This involves a minimum of 40-minute daily classes. More intensive programs, involving up to 100 per cent of the school day in the initial years and lesser percentages at the middle and high school levels are called "Immersion" where the language of instruction for subjects is in French.

- The materials related to the National Core French Assessment Project may be purchased from
The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT),
176 Gloucester St., Suite 310,
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K2P 0A6.
E-mail: caslt@istar.ca

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Clarence LeBlanc is a retired high school and university second-language teacher who maintains his passion for teaching, and its administrative and political dimensions. He was a member of the National Core French Study and chaired the Culture Syllabus Task Group.



"Does anyone here speak French?"

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O tempora, o mores!: And you thought that you knew French civilization!

Pierre Dubé

If necessity is the mother of invention, then pressure might rightfully be called the father of creativity. Some students don't allow facts to get in the way of originality...

Teaching is a rewarding profession: the gratification which we experience in the classroom, the satisfaction of reading a set of enthusiastic course evaluations, the joy of hearing from former students who, years after graduation, still want to keep in touch. Who has not known enjoyed reading a final examination or an essay written by a student who had been struggling and who, somehow, managed to get his or her act together when it counted the most. Many learned and academic articles have been published, complete with an inordinate number of footnotes, references to surveys, studies, analyses, graphs, tables and statistics, all written in the best pedagogical journals and in the most flowing pedageese, proving empirically that we, as teachers, are, indeed, a happy lot. But does our unalloyed pleasure end there? I should say not!

One of the lesser joys, however, entails the boredom, the tedium, the sheer deadliness of marking final examinations. Periodically, however, our profound feeling of angst, is relieved by a "howler", a student's inadvertently outrageously funny response to a serious question. These students, stumped by a question for which they had obviously not prepared, put on their cognitive thinking caps and generate something, anything, in an attempt to impress, to demonstrate knowledge, to dazzle,

to squeeze out a mark or two. While we all empathize with their despair as they realise that their review for the examination was woefully inadequate, while we might even put into question our own teaching techniques, assuming some degree of responsibility for their plight, their fertile imaginations, their attempts to rewrite the history of French civilisation, can be memorable. Their flights of fancy certainly alleviate the overwhelming sense of Weltschmerz which can overcome us during heavy marking season.

Periodically, however, our profound feeling of angst, is relieved by a "howler", a student's inadvertently outrageously funny response to a serious question.

I have the good fortune of teaching two courses in French civilisation at the University of Waterloo. While students have ample opportunity to show evidence of research during the term, I believe firmly in making students learn a few basic facts before attempting research projects. To this end, the first mid-term examination is made up of a series of identification questions. For five marks each, students are asked to identify people, places, dates or events and to explain their significance. While, in general, the vast majority of students display evidence of having worked hard and intelligently, the odd student comes to

the mid-term so anxiety-ridden, or so woefully unprepared, that he confuses facts and concepts.

I have, on three previous occasions, published some of these answers. Allow me to share, once again, some of the funniest answers which I have received over the years.

Chartres

[Gothic cathedral approximately 120 km west of Paris]

- Pagan monk
- A place where there is nothing but a huge cathedral
- Court historian, the first to write history
- Money funds supplied to towns for independence within the community
- Home built for the mistress of Charlemagne
- Port city at the mouth of the Seine River

Carcassonne

[Medieval walled city in southern France]

- Painter during the Renaissance
- Famous French casserole, made with peas, meat, carrots. Loved by King Charlemagne. Became one of France's prime exports, along with wine
- Story about a rooster
- Battle fought by Asiatic barbarians under Attila and the Gallo-Roman emperor: these tribes were expelled by Charles the Hammer.

Joan of Arc

[1412-1431]

- Protestant martyr
- She truly marks the end of the Church's prudish dominance. Joan of Arc is best known for her ride through Paris on a horse... Joan was naked.
- French martyr who was burned at the stake and fed to a whale.

Flying buttress

[Structure in gothic cathedral that receives the thrust of the roof or vault]

- Form of horse-drawn carriage popular in the Fifteenth Century

Bayeux Tapestry

[Tapestry depicting the conquest of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror of Normandy]

- Commissioned by the wife of Alexander the Conqueror after his conquest of England.
- Designed by Mrs. William the Conqueror.

December 25, 800 A. D.

[Date of Charlemagne's coronation as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire]

- Some say it marks the first day of the Middle Ages...but who can put an exact time on something like that. It is all speculation.
- Christmas Day in France.
- It was a surprise to him, when on Christmas Eve, at midnight, the Pope brought out a crown. This, perhaps, is the origin of Christmas.
- 800 years after Christ was born.
- Birth of Christ
- 1,000th anniversary of the birth of Christ

Les Très riches heures

[Miniature paintings]

- Hours spent in gambling which became popular 1300-1600 and very expensive
- Descriptive clause used to describe the Renaissance
- The three rich hours

Duke of Berry

[Owned Les Très riches heures]

- Pseudonym for the Duke of Edinburgh

Hagiography

[The study of the lives of saints]

- The art of recording music.

Ci falt la geste que Tuoldus declinet

[last line of the Song of Roland].

- Tuoldus had a fight with his mother-in-law because of his habit of throwing food against the wall during supper. His

mother-in-law then picked up a delicate piece of French sculpture called a declinet and pounded poor old Tuoldus over the head. He became the first person in France to be killed by a declinet.

- Famous French expression.
- First words of François I^{er} written to his mother after being defeated in Northern Italy due to carelessness.

François Villon

[French poet, 1431-approx. 1463]

- French guy who taunted King Arthur and his so-called K-Niggets on the quest for the Holy Grail with such name-calling as "your animal food-trough wiper" and "your tric donkey-bottom biter".

House of Capet

[Line of Kings following Hugh Capet]

- Capet lived in the Middle Ages. In his honour, a house was built.
- Diane de Poitier's home

Chanson de geste

[Epic poems of the Middle Ages, dealing with the heroic deeds of Charlemagne and his family]

- Comical songs sung in the Middle Ages
- Author of the Song of Roland
- Type of singing done in the castle
- Song of deads [sic]

Missi dominici

[Men sent out by Charlemagne to all regions of France to hear the peoples' grievances]

- Monk of Italian origin
- Latin for river
- French for a "young lady"
- Mistress of Louis XIV.

Guillaume de Machaut

[French poet and composer, 1300-1377]

- Type of guillotine that was incorporated many times during the religious wars. Named after Machaut who was the first illegitimate son of Henri I^{er}, who was first decapitated by it.

- One of Louis XIV's mistresses.
- Was responsible for the introduction of wine and coffee in France.
- A must for any tourist in France.
- A topically-arranged French dictionary describing a walk in Paris, etc.
- Wrote a chanson de geste that was played at the coronation of a king.
- Made mosaics during the Renaissance
- Man who discovered moveable type and who was responsible for a drop in the price of books.

Olivier

[One of the protagonists of the Song of Roland]

- Wonderful actor who played Heathcliffe opposite Olivia da Havilland in Wuthering Heights
- Discovered scurvy
- A kid they made a movie about in England.

Clovis

[Frankish king, 465-511 A.D.]

- Name of Pierre Cardin's hairdresser who died of a famous comestab [sic]
- Famous French leader of the Bulgarians
- Leader of the Gals [sic]
- French sea-port

Renaissance

[Period in the early Sixteenth Century in which the arts flourished and in which individuality was important]

- A period in the Middle Ages

Chambord

[Largest of the Châteaux of the Loire Valley]

- A Saracen and leader of the Pagans
- Name of Roland's sword

Chenonceaux

[Château of the Loire Valley]

- Roland's horse in the Song of Roland
- Castle built for Diane de Poitrine

- Here that Diane de Poitiers had a party for six women. They were shameful.

Fontainebleau

[Château south of Paris. Famous as an art school during the Renaissance]

- Large fountain in Paris renowned for its crystal water with a bluish tinge.
- Art school where Leonardo da Vinci was headmaster

Gargantua

[Giant, hero of the novel of same name by Rabelais]

- Tax levied in 16th century France.
- Character in the Song of Roland.

François I^{er}

[French king, 1494-1547]

- King of France in the 16th century. His full name was François Premier.

Charles Lebrun

[French painter, 1619-1690]

- Peanuts in French

Harpagon

[Main character Molière's *The Miser*]

- The largest musical development of the Seventeenth Century
- Nickname given to a particular French student in the Seventeenth Century. This student had been performing at an academic level which was below standard.

Marriage of Figaro

[Play by Beaumarchais]

- A system in New France whereby the female had to choose a husband in order to increase population in the New World.

The Directory

[Post-Revolutionary French government, October 26, 1795-November 9, 1799]

- Thick book put out annually by Bell Canada
- Paris' yellow pages

- Travelling guide for tourists

Rameau

[Composer. Contributed significantly to the development of the French opera]

- Eighteenth-Century writer who wrote street filth
- Wrote Gargantua, filthy little book emphasizing greatness of man
- Famous Renaissance painter who specialized in female bodies in the nude, exposing themselves au naturel.

Robespierre

[Revolutionary leader]

- Teamed with Sir Francis Bacon to create a revolution in France

Haussmann

[Architect who redesigned Paris during the Second Empire]

- French artist who specialized in painting boulevards

July, 1830

[The reign of Charles X came to a swift end during the July, 1830 revolution]

- King Charles X got himself re-elected.

Balzac

[Writer. Many of his novels were grouped together to form *La Comédie humaine*]

- Place in Egypt where Napoleon was fighting with his troops
- Wrote *The Divine Comedy*

Danse macabre

[Musical composition by Saint-Saëns]

- Massacre of nuns during the French Revolution
- Painting by Renoir showing people having fun at a dance.
- Musical piece, written after WW2, symbolizing skeletons and death in the trenches.
- the Can-Can
- When everyone was at the same party during the French Revolution
- Complicated ritual performed by dead aristocrats immediately after being guillotined; involun-

tary response to having head cut off suddenly.

S.N.C.F.

[Société nationale des Chemins de fer français]

- Political party formed by Charles de Gaulle
- Société nationale des communistes français
- Société nationale des Canadiens-Français
- Group of people in France who did not want to get killed during WW2.
- Société pour la nationalisation des chemins de fer du Québec

Giscard d'Estaing

[President of France, 1974-1981]

- Designed the Eiffel Tower in the Twentieth Century
- President of Quebec

Maginot Line

[Line of fortifications built by the French, after WW I, to defend themselves from a possible future invasion of their country by Germany]

- Subway line in Paris
- Line in which Louis XIV came to power
- Along the Maginot River

Le Corbusier

[Twentieth-century architect]

- Designed Notre Dame Cathedral
- Revolutionary newspaper; it stood for liberty and nationalism
- Name given to a totally self-contained building

Piet Mondrian

[Painter, 1872-1944]

- First to fly over the English Channel in 1901.
- Author of *The Immortalist*

P.T.T.

[Postes, Télégraphe, Téléphone]

- Association of taxi-drivers in Quebec who stormed the home of the man who had the monopoly on cab drivers between the city and the airport.
- Political party in Quebec

Caravelle

[Medium-range passenger jet developed by the French in the 1950's]

- Cadbury chocolate bar,
- First slow-moving plane invented by the French
- a watch

Art nouveau

[Art form specializing in floral designs made of glass and steel]

- Twentieth-Century architect
- New art

Debussy

[French composer]

- A French term of affection describing a part of their transit system, i.e. "Will you take Debussy to King St.?"
- The Perret brothers [First to use reinforced concrete in construction of buildings]

- Unfortunately, I have never heard of the Perret brothers.

Periodically, students will perceive this testing procedure to be medieval, a throw-back to the system of rote learning that characterised antediluvian French institutions of higher learning as they existed before Montaigne, Rousseau or (shudder) Piaget. Experience has demonstrated, however, that those students who do well on these mid-terms experience better results on their essays and final examinations.

At one point, I used to share these howlers with my students. This was not a disrespectful attempt to discredit or to mock but merely to inject humour into the classroom, a very powerful teaching tool. Alas, I have chosen no longer to do that. It is astonishing how some students have the un-

fortunate habit of remembering the howlers at the expense of the truth. Now I merely share these answers with colleagues and family. So, as I indulge in massive self-pity as I spend my Christmas holidays poised before a pile of examinations that seems to grow incrementally every year, I periodically take a break in front of a roaring fire, a fine glass of cognac in hand, and take cheer in regaling my family and friends with a few anonymous bloopers and drink to the health of education.

Pierre H. Dubé is Professor of French at the University of Waterloo. Two of his favourite courses trace the development of French civilization from the Middle Ages to the present.



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Literature Circles: An Alternative Framework for Increasing Intermediate FL Students' Comprehension and Enjoyment of Texts in the Target Language

Beatrice C. Dupuy

Looking for a way to bring students to read voluntarily in their second language and enjoy it? This article discusses a reading approach through which students are exposed to a great variety of books that they self-select and discuss in their literature circles, and reports the reactions of 49 French students towards this approach.

A major goal of the intermediate FL class at the university level is to help students read with greater ease and pleasure, and to allow them in the process to continue their language and literacy development as well as lead them to appreciate the literatures, cultures and civilizations of the countries where the target language is spoken. Yet, it seems that the approaches most commonly adopted for the intermediate class do not allow students to efficiently reach the goal just mentioned. In a survey they conducted, Harlow and Muyskens (1994) found that intermediate FL students viewed reading neither as a good way of furthering their acquisition of the target language, nor as one of their favourite activities.

Evidence exists that this goal may be best achieved by introducing students to free reading through the use of literature circles in the classroom¹. Contrary to the common practice of the instructor selecting the texts to be read as well as developing and orchestrating the activities to take place around them in class, the alternative reading framework discussed

here rests on two principles: students self-select the texts that they will read (free reading) and discuss the texts in their small student-led groups (literature circles).

Abundant evidence points to the tremendous effects that free reading can have on both first and second language acquirers when incorporated into the curriculum. Researchers have shown that more free reading generally leads to increased vocabulary knowledge as well as grammar and spelling accuracy, improved listening and reading comprehension, and better writing (see Krashen 1993, for a review).

Additionally, free reading helps promote positive attitudes towards reading. Several studies have reported that students participating in in-school free reading programs are more motivated and have more positive attitudes toward reading (First language studies: McVey, 1960; Schwartzberg, 1962; Greaney, 1970; Davis and Lucas, 1971; Sadowski, 1980. Second/foreign language studies: Pilgreen and Krashen, 1994; Cho and Krashen, 1994, 1995a, 1995b; Constantino, 1994, 1995; Cook, Dupuy, and Tse, 1994; McQuillan, 1994; Dupuy, in press b). There is also evidence that undergraduate

students who have done more free reading in the target language have more positive attitudes toward the study of literature (David, Gorell, Kline and Hsieh, 1992). Furthermore, students who participate in in-school free reading programs also read more frequently than those who do not (L1: Greaney and Clarke (1973); L2: Pilgreen and Krashen (1994); Constantino (1994)).

Finally, there is one additional advantage of free reading in that it can serve the needs of all students regardless of their competence and background. Indeed, by giving access to a wide array of texts, both in genres and difficulty levels, free reading solves the traditional problem of level heterogeneity in intermediate FL classes, and takes into account the varied interests of the students.

Although second/foreign language students appear to overwhelmingly find free reading to be more beneficial and pleasant than skills and grammar instruction (McQuillan, 1994; Dupuy, in press b), there is every indication that they find it even more so when they have opportunities to interact with peers, and share their ideas, thoughts, feelings and reactions to a text that they have selected and read in common (Dupuy, in press b)². Literature circles give students opportunities to engage in natural interactions in meaningful contexts, and as they interact with and learn from peers, students develop the ability they need to tackle the issues present in the texts. They also come to a much more thorough and richer understanding of what they have read. In the process, they get the confidence that they too can become members of the club of readers in the target language (Smith, 1988). In the end, students become comfortable with the act of reading, and are ready and eager to continue reading on their own.

The subjects

In this study, 49 intermediate (4th semester) French students at a large public university in the

South participated in a semester-long extensive reading program in which literature circles were one of the three components. All students were taking this fourth semester course as part of the foreign language requirement set by the university, and none knew prior to registration that the class in which they had enrolled would differ in curriculum. Only one student dropped the class after finding out that she did not actually need it. Students met twice a week for a total of 90 minutes.

The study

Once students had settled into the format and pace of the class³, literature circles began. It was left entirely to the students to decide how much they would read before they met for their group discussion which took place once a week. The instructor, however, advised students that 20-25 pages was a good average. Literature circle meetings went from 15 minutes at the beginning of the semester, to 30 minutes in its last few weeks. Although the instructor did not formally keep track of how much reading was actually done, she was able to estimate that a book cycle averaged three weeks, using as a benchmark the response which students turned in after finishing a book. The instructor gave students some suggestions regarding possible ways of approaching the discussion. Evaluating the plot, looking at character development, making comparisons with other texts they had read or movies they had seen, and/or solving comprehension/language problems which they had encountered while reading were among the suggestions that she made. Due to the novelty of the approach, students felt somewhat at a loss at the beginning, and the instructor had to intervene. Soon, however, students became more independent, and the instructor was able to let them conduct their own discussions. After that, she provided help only when students requested it.

At the end of the semester, students responded anonymously to

a short questionnaire (adapted from McQuillan, 1995) regarding this alternative approach to reading.

The results

Students' responses and comments served to outline the benefits of introducing free reading through the use of literature circles in the intermediate FL classroom. Since a Chi-square analysis of the responses of the three groups found no statistically significant differences between them, the responses of the three groups were combined.

1. Literature circles: A way of... creating an intellectual/social forum

As reported by a majority of the students (97%), literature circles helped enhance their comprehension of the texts by providing them with opportunities to interact with each other, to construct meaning of the texts together and to take the role of the more knowledgeable other in relation to particular texts (What I did not pick up, others in my group did; Sometimes I did not understand and they did, or sometimes I understood and they didn't; When I didn't understand, the people in my group could explain things in terms I understood). Additionally, students (100%) overwhelmingly welcomed the opportunity to hear others' opinions of the texts, as these greatly contributed to making the texts more comprehensible, and exposed them to interpretations they might not have thought of by themselves.

The interaction between the reader and the text, and among the reader and other readers, make literature circles a perfect tool for increasing understanding and awareness (More is always learned when there is more than one perspective; Incorporating all our ideas gave a more fully rounded view of the texts; Hearing others' opinions allowed me to consider their points of view and finally allowed me to draw my own con-

clusion; Others in the group helped me see different viewpoints that I may not have thought of. This gave the books more meaning). Such opportunities encouraged the students to be active and essential group members and to feel valuable (Together we were able to piece together things that were more difficult to comprehend).

2. Literature circles: A way of... lowering students' anxiety and raising their confidence.

Intermediate FL students often lack confidence when it comes to their ability to read and understand texts written in the target language. As I have reported elsewhere (Dupuy, in press b/c), many intermediate FL students have often been turned off by reading in the target language because they were exposed to texts too difficult for them to read with ease and pleasure. In the process, they have come to doubt that they could ever become members of the club of readers in the target language. It appears that literature circles can help change that. A majority of the students (91%) reported that literature circles had contributed to increasing their confidence when it came to reading in French (As we did more and more literature circles, I realized how much I was getting out of the texts, which increased my confidence; It was helpful to share what I understood for it increased my confidence and assured me that I was getting the gist of the stories we were reading; Being able to discuss the readings in groups and discover that we got a lot of the same issues out of it made me more confident; When I wasn't sure of what I read, and the members of my group explained that I was correct, it boosted my confidence). Additionally, literature circles helped students release the stress they felt in whole class discussions (I felt more comfortable being able to discuss the readings with my group rather than just discussing them with the teacher as a whole class).

3. Literature circles: A way of... increasing students' enjoyment of reading texts in the target language.

As mentioned earlier, a survey conducted by Harlow and Muyskens (1994) indicated that intermediate FL students ranked reading 11th out of 14 possible choices for their favorite activities in the FL classroom. Although nothing is said about the kind of reading involved, it is interesting to see that self-selected texts discussed in small student-led groups can lead students to enjoy reading in the target language. Allowed to share insights based on their own experience with the texts, students (97%) indicated that literature circles contributed to making reading in the target language more pleasant (It was fun talking about the stories, it was probably the part that I enjoyed the most in this class; It was fun hearing others' opinions) and increased their desire to continue reading in the target language (Being able to discuss a book after I read it makes me want to read more). One additional interesting finding is that a majority of the students (69%) completed the readings for their literature circles, although there was no formal evaluation.

Conclusion

In the absence of a control group, the results presented here can only be suggestive. Nevertheless, given the abundant evidence (both in first and second language) which shows the positive impact that self-selected reading/small group discussion can have on reading comprehension and attitudes toward reading, it seems prudent to say that the impact appears to be of a similar nature in a foreign language context. In this study, intermediate FL students who participated in a reading program in which they could self-select their texts, and had the opportunity to discuss them in literature circles, came to a much deeper and fuller understanding of the texts, grew more confident in their ability to read in French, developed a

positive attitude toward reading in the second/ foreign language and became independent readers in the process. The discussions of the stories in small groups which met regularly, and the sharing of experiences, contributed to bringing about tremendous student involvement and to build a community of readers, something which seldom happens when students work alone on texts that they did not select.

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Notes

1. For a detailed description of how to organize and implement literature circles in the classroom, see MacGillivray, Tse and McQuillan (1995); Dupuy, Tse and Cook (1996); McQuillan and Tse, (1997); Dupuy, (in press a).
2. Chambers (1985) suggests that one of the most important things about reading is talking about what one has read. Sharing stories allows for the affective and the cognitive to come together, which is something quite rare in the L2/FL classroom (Yeoman, 1996), and yet is an essential aspect of curriculum for any subject, according to Wells (1988).
3. Literature circles started about three weeks into the semester.

Beatrice Dupuy is Assistant Professor of French at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, where she serves as Director of Basic Language Instruction in the Department of French and Italian. Her research field is second language acquisition with a focus on reading and vocabulary development.

And Now For Our Feature Presentation: Using Films For Contextualized Language Learning

Keith Mason

Films can provide effective stimuli for language learning in context. This article outlines a rationale for using movies in modern language classes. It identifies ways for teachers to develop content-rich units that foster language learning.

Introduction

Movies are a magical form of entertainment. The products of Hollywood in particular are revered throughout the world. With careful planning, films can be rich sources for content-based language activities. Language activities based on film premises can also provide opportunities to develop the seven multiple intelligences (Gardner 1993). This article describes movie-related activities for use in various language classes such as Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish.

Movies can be successful for the following reasons:

- Movies are enjoyable to view
- Films appeal to both auditory and visual learners and can encourage the fostering of the seven intelligences
- Teachers can expose students to classic and contemporary cinematic gems
- Films encourage the bridging of language with other content areas and thus foster content-based instruction
- Movies provide a refreshing change of pace from regular textbook activities

Another valid reason for incorporating films in the language curriculum is seen in the theory of languages across the curriculum which has received considerable

attention in the research literature. According to Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992:198), the language across the curriculum approach

reflects a functional view of language and one which seeks to teach language through activities which are linked to the teaching of other school subjects.

The benefits of this type of instruction include the acquisition of language while working on interesting content, *viz.* films and all activities developed to tie in with these films. This approach encourages the integration of language into other areas. Possible bridges can be made between language and virtually all other subject areas; e.g., Spanish and home economics whereby students learn about the cuisine of a Spanish-speaking country; Italian and music where students learn about the development of opera; German and history where students learn about various historical events; French and art where students learn more about the impressionist artists Manet, Monet, and Seurat. Thus, language and cinema is one application of languages across the curriculum. Some colleges have cinema courses in their language programs that are both educational and quite popular with students; e.g. "Italian Cinema," "French Cinema," "Spanish Cinema." I applaud institutions that offer these and similar interesting courses; nevertheless, it is not obligatory to have a separate course to use films in the language

Multiple Intelligences	Movie-Related Tie-Ins
1. Verbal-linguistic	Analysis of song lyrics in a musical film for grammar or vocabulary. Analysis of plot, story, characters of a movie.
2. Logical-mathematical	Identifying symbolism in song lyrics or movies.
3. Visual-spatial	Commenting on visual cues from films or videos (scenery, costumes, personal characteristics, colour)
4. Bodily-kinesthetic	Role-playing scenes from a movie, replicating a dance seen in a video or movie
5. Musical-rhythmic	Listening to songs with target or native language lyrics. Viewing foreign language films (musical or non-musical) and hearing authentic dialog.
6. Interpersonal	Discussing lyrics, music, movie plots, characters in pairs, triads, or groups
7. Intrapersonal	Writing essays, taking tests, doing written exercises based on movie, music video, song, TV program in the target language that focus on students' own feelings about the stimulus

curriculum. Altman (1989) presents ideas for language teachers who wish to incorporate video into their language classes.

Gardner (1993), among others, has described the theory of multiple intelligences. Traditionally, two main areas of intelligence have been emphasized: linguistic and mathematical. The seven intelligences, with a brief description of movie-related activities, appear in the chart. (See above.)

The following subsections describe examples of contextualized activities, including those that foster the seven multiple intelligences, useful for specific films and tie-ins for specific movies.

Appendix A lists movies by target language. I strongly recommend that the teacher preview any film to verify its appropriateness for his/her groups of students. For example, a film appropriate for college-aged students may not be appropriate for middle school students or vice versa. If in doubt about a movie's appropriateness, I

recommend that the teacher consult another experienced teacher or an administrator for advice. More information about films can be found in a number of video guides available in bookstores and libraries.

Films in the target language are useful as sources for listening comprehension and target language culture. Unfortunately, at lower levels, students often cannot comprehend the language unless subtitles are provided. Therefore, the target language films may fail in providing comprehensible input (Krashen 1982). Films shown in English or in the students' native language must not be discounted since target language activities can be developed to practice the four skills and culture. As an extension to movies, theatrical productions can also be effective sources for similar activities. Some of the films listed in Appendix A, especially the musicals, can still be found as theatrical productions throughout North America and the world. Thus, students can be exposed to

theatre, another valuable performance art.

Films serve as effective stimuli for class activities because they provide the "input" in Krashen's terms (cf. Krashen 1982). The content of the film is rich in story development, character development, settings, visual depictions, auditory components including music (especially in musicals), costumes, and at times important historical or cultural events. For this reason, the teacher can utilize films by designing special units for them. The following discussion outlines a procedure for designing units around films. The amount of time needed to develop an effective unit or lesson will vary, depending upon a teacher's familiarity with the film. I generally choose films that I have already seen for my own viewing pleasure; this of course does not imply that other films are not appropriate. The first film for which I designed a special unit was *Evita* since it was released in the midst of two Spanish courses I was teaching at the time. I was already familiar with the premise of the show from the Broadway production and the Broadway cast recording. I described the *Evita* unit fully in an earlier article (Mason 1997:19-20).

Films in the target language are useful as sources for listening comprehension and target language culture

The *Evita* activities included readings about Argentina and the Peróns, video segments about the Peróns or Eva Perón, information about the tango and its development in Argentina, an article about the making of the film, writing assignments about the movie's plot, characters, peronismo, or actors, and exposing students to both English language and Spanish language cast albums, soundtracks, and the concept album.

Another film tie-in that I developed was inspired by the 1962 movie musical *West Side Story*. Many of our younger students

have not been exposed to movie musicals since the hey day of movie musicals ended in the late 1960s. This genre may be treated in music programs but this of course can be discussed with music teachers. Unfortunately, because of budget cuts, some schools have lost music and art programs that develop musical and artistic abilities in students.

A film unit can be developed using a framework commonly used for teaching the four skill areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing:

- previewing
- viewing
- postviewing.

Using the framework above, I will present the unit I developed for *West Side Story* as an example of a unit. Teachers with a broad mind may even find that films recommended for one language in Appendix A could be used for another language. *The key is that all the activities be done in the target language.* Specific handout activities for *West Side Story* appear in Appendix B.

West Side Story: Previewing Stage

The previewing could be a brief anticipatory set of questions developed to provide students with basic information about the film they will see, including characters, actors, setting, time period, as well as the main themes. Specific *West Side Story* previews could include the following:

The premise:

- contemporary New York City, the West Side

Parallel premise:

- Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

The conflict:

- Puerto Rican gang the Sharks versus New York gang The Jets

Themes:

- conflict
- prejudice
- racism
- misunderstanding
- miscommunication

- tragedy
- death

The music:

- Music by Leonard Bernstein (with lyrics by Stephen Sondheim)

The characters:

Puerto Rican	New York
Maria	Tony (Anton)
Anita	Doc
Bernardo	Officer Krupke
	Lieutenant Schrank
	Riff

West Side Story: Viewing

Students view the film *West Side Story* in a few installments. Discussion could take place after each segment or can be postponed until the end. Of course, in some institutions, screenings could be arranged for a different time than class.

West Side Story: Postviewing Stage

The postviewing activities can be varied. Comprehension questions in the target language could be developed that ask students to discuss basic things they saw in the film (e.g. identifying characters and their importance to the film, the plot, the setting, the making of the film, main themes or conflicts). The postviewing can include the writing of an essay about the film, readings that tie in with themes treated in the film, or information about the making of the film.

For the *West Side Story* unit that I developed, students answered basic comprehension questions in the target language about the characters, plot, themes, and music. A sample set of questions appears in Appendix B. Selections from the musical score could be played, not only from the movie soundtrack, but also from the newer recordings or the Broadway cast album. Soundtrack recordings of films are available for most of the films listed in Appendix A.

Students could also read something about some aspect of the

film or about Puerto Rican immigration/emigration. Based on information found in articles and liner notes of the compact disc recordings (the movie liner notes are written in English, French, German, and Italian, but not Spanish!), I chose to write a brief reading in Spanish about an aspect of the music of *West Side Story*. For further information about using songs in language classes, see Willis and Mason (1994). The female lead Natalie Wood did not sing Maria's songs nor did the actors playing the roles of Anita and Tony. Natalie Wood's singing was dubbed by the famous ghost singer Marni Nixon who also recorded the songs for Deborah Kerr's Anna in *The King and I* and for Audrey Hepburn's Eliza Doolittle in *My Fair Lady*. Before giving the students the reading, I posed a question on the activity handout asking students to find a similarity between *The King and I*, *West Side Story*, and *My Fair Lady*. I gave them a hint by telling them it had to do with the female lead. One of my students knew the connection!

Writing possibilities could be useful for students to describe a film in the target language. Topics for written assignments might include the following:

- a summary of the events in the movie
- for musicals, which is your favorite song in the score and why?
- which character can you relate to the most and why?
- what themes and conflicts are addressed in the film?

Writing practice is often subordinated by other areas of the language course such as grammar, vocabulary, speaking, reading, and listening. Writing activities dealing with films can be very effective.

Summary

Films in the students' native language can be utilized for contextualized language learning activities. Students and teachers enjoy films and the change of pace

that films provide. With careful planning on the teacher's part, films can serve as stimuli for students to develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Thus, they can provide much more than simple viewing. With this expanded viewpoint of films, a new meaning can be conveyed by "And Now For Our Feature Presentation..."

* I would like to thank Sandra Ferrante for his/her contribution to the film list in Appendix A. A special thanks also to Kevin L. Mason, Jr. and Allison Walwyn.

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Appendix A:

Films for Contextualized Language Activities

Chinese

Flower Drum Song
The Last Emperor

French

French Kiss
Gigi

Les Misérables

German

Das Boot
The Sound of Music

Appendix B:

Sample of Activities

This is a translation of an activity handout written in Spanish.

I. Choose the letter of the most appropriate answer.

- | | |
|-----------------|--|
| 1. Tony (Anton) | a. A policeman that follows the boy's activities |
| 2. Anita | b. boyfriend of Maria |
| 3. Bernardo | c. the U.S. gang |
| 4. Maria | d. Puerto Rican girlfriend of Tony (Anton) |
| 5. Krupke | e. Best friend of Maria |
| 6. The Jets | f. the leader of the Sharks |
| 7. The Sharks | g. the Puerto Rican gang |

Key: 1. b; 2. e; 3. f; 4. d; 5. a; 6. c; 7. g.

Italian

Cinema Paradiso
Moonstruck
Pinocchio
Il Postino

Japanese

Shogun

Russian

Dr. Zhivago

Spanish

El Cid
Evita
Man of La Mancha
The Official Story
Selena
West Side Story

II. Themes in West Side Story

Give examples of each theme seen in the film.

- romance
- conflict
- death
- racism and prejudice
- crime
- tension

III. Discussion questions

1. *West Side Story* is similar to what Shakespeare work? Explain your answer.

2. What is the meaning of the title *West Side Story*?
3. Besides New York, where else could the story in *West Side Story* take place?

IV. The music of West Side Story

1. Who composed the music of *West Side Story*?
2. Do you know the connection between the movie *West Side Story* and the movies *The King and I* and *My Fair Lady*? It has to do with the leading female roles.
3. What is your favourite song in *West Side Story*? Explain why.
4. Did you know that several recordings of *West Side Story* are available: the Broadway cast album (1957), the movie soundtrack (1962), a 1980s recording conducted by Leonard Bernstein (1985) and a popular singers version called "The Songs of *West Side Story*" (1996).

Keith Mason, Ph.D. is a teacher of Spanish and Italian in the New Providence School District, New Providence, New Jersey.

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At the 1997 ACTFL Awards Ceremony held in Nashville, TN, the following awards were presented to outstanding colleagues.

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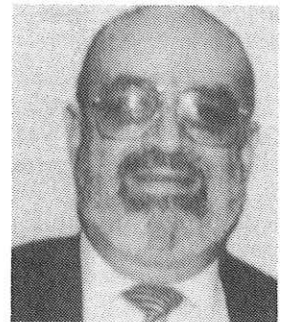
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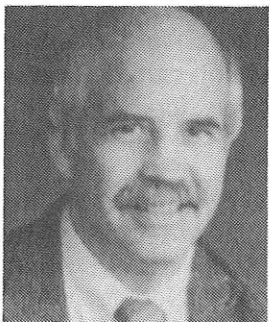
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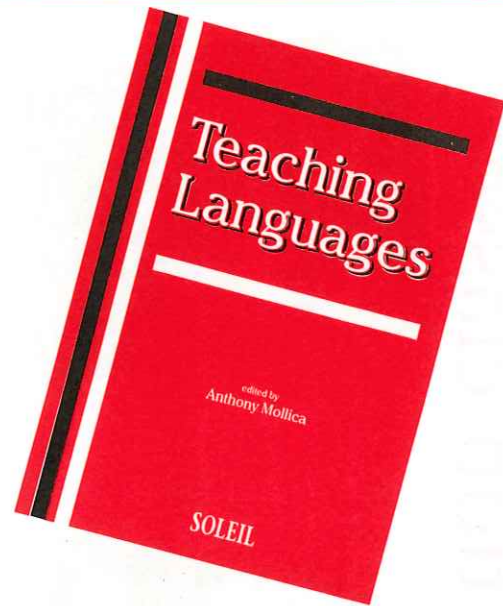
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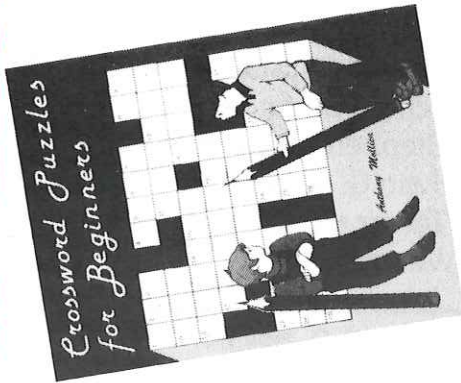
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Janis L. Antonek • W. Jane Bancroft • Christine Besnard • Kenneth Chastain • Caterina Cicogna
Rebecca Constantino • Marcel Danesi • Gina Doggett • Richard Donato • Charles Elkabas
Hector Hammerly • Cher Evans Harvey • Peter J. Heffernan • Stephen Krashen • Domenico Maceri
Anthony Mollica • Frank Nuessel • Anthony Papalia • Edwin G. Ralph • Merle Richards
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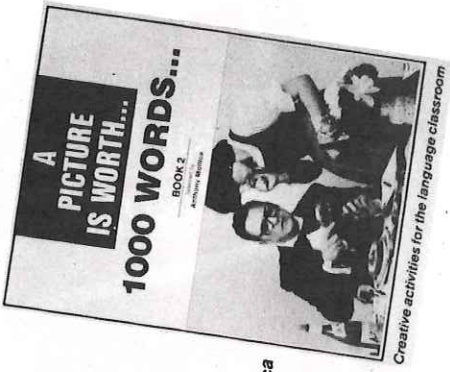
Themes

1. At School
2. Sports
3. Activities
4. Articles of Clothing
5. Means of Transportation
6. At the Farm
7. At the zoo
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