

EDTE 523

Assignment 2 - Article Review

Presented to Deirdre Wilson

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February 24, 2013

## **Producing Multimodal Picture Books and Dramatic Performances in a Core French Classroom:**

### **An Exploratory Case Study**

#### **Summary** (*purpose, setting, participants, stages, findings*)

This project used a communicative-experiential approach toward the over arching goal of motivating students to continue pursuing French language learning while increasing proficiency and awareness of oral/aural, and written modes. The approach explored the issues of how to engage students multi-modally and meta-linguistically in a manner that was relevant to the learner, while exploring the meaning of being literate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century using real-life tasks. More specifically, the teacher (Cindy Yeung) designed a multi-stage project that would motivate students and create opportunities for unique individual expression, authentic audience, and ownership, while deepening the student's understanding of cross-language transfer. The means to achieving these purposes included the creation of a Children's Picture Book in French aimed at ages 5-8, translating the picture book into a dramatic production, and then, after peer editing and small group collaborative efforts, students performed a short play in front of a grade 2-3 French immersion class. The process began using textbooks as a platform for learning, and enrichment activities were extrapolated from there. Students completed exercises that focused on vocabulary, syntax, and narrative genre in French, and worked toward building a strong foundation in grammar. They took notes on conventions and innovative book constructions. This led them to their children's story, picture books, and so on.

Thirty-four Grade 9 Core French enrichment students at Lord Byng High School were involved in the project. The students had at least 5 years of exposure to French, and an expressed interest in the language. 70% of the students were also enrolled in the Fine Arts "Mini-School". All students had demonstrated interest in both French and the Arts despite a range of academic abilities in general. They were given 2 months to write drafts and create sketches for their stories involving teacher consultation and one-on-one feedback. These were then peer edited in groups of 4 where they exchanged their work with at least 2 other students. The stories were

submitted to Yeung for evaluation and feedback. Students then went on to plan their presentation and creation of the book and did quality checks along the way. A mini gallery exhibition of the books for the school and the community was well attended. Students organized themselves in groups of 5-6 and chose one of the stories to adapt into a script for a short play that was to be performed. Everyone had to have a speaking part. Students wrote and practiced their skills in delegation, used the strengths of peers, and created costumes, set designs, stage directions and musical accompaniment. The plays were performed for the grade 2-3 immersion students, and after the performances, there was a chance for the multi-aged group to look at the French Children's Picture books and interact socially.

Data was organized in three phases that resulted in an interactive process to analyze the student's reflective responses and report findings qualitatively within emergent themes. There were many indicators of success in this project, but primarily Early and Yeung found that linguistic scope (across a range of features), including accuracy, comprehension, syntactic concepts, vocabulary (written and oral), and the ability to apply the skills within various genres, all significantly improved.

The three primary contributing factors to this being a positive experience included: A sense of authentic purpose, an increase in confidence, and ownership/investment. Making a "real" bound book motivated higher quality output. An importance of the aesthetic was tied to accountability derived from public performance and showcasing of the work. The students found ways to pour themselves into the project, and were empowered and encouraged to do so. Their risk taking led to greater confidence, and having an authentic audience in the culminating activity (performance of their short play), incorporated a sense of reciprocity: The existence of the future audience motivated the students to work towards higher standards throughout the process, and also reflected their hard work back to them through positive feedback at the time of the performances.

**Connections** (*Gradual Release of Responsibility Model and Second Language Acquisition Principles*)

Aside from the communicative-experiential approach (language used in a purposeful way to perform real-life tasks), student engagement was strengthened by the use of the Gradual Release of Responsibility model. The expectations of the project were clearly scaffolded into stages of development. Consultation, peer feedback, peer correction, and self-correction were built in to the structure. Yeung gave attention to form and function and

provided both formative and summative feedback throughout the process. This led to further accountability and enrichment for the students. The use of Second Language Acquisition principles further increased confidence. Students were engaged, and their proficiency, comprehension, output/fluency all improved. Anxiety reducing strategies through the development of community, social interaction, and parallel development of transferable language skills contributed to greater meaning making. By giving the students choice in expressing their interests across multiple modes and genres, it provided them with tasks that held greater personal significance, and the individual freedom motivated them toward authentic expression. Having choices led to students being deeply invested in the project, and they worked hard to improve their skills. The modes that students worked with included linguistic, visual, dramatic, musical, gestural, spoken and written language, gaze, movement, and spatial organization.

**Reflection** (*How will I apply this learning?*)

Using the theme of narrative structures in storytelling and providing the students with the benefit of peer collaboration and working with their drafts repetitively, prompted “complex metalinguistic dialogue” (Early and Yeung, 2009). Other indicators of success included students reported use of the dictionary, thesaurus, and each other to solve language problems, and to find the proper words to express meaning, especially when pairing it with their illustrations, so that the meaning in the writing and the images was balanced. I can see the value in using this model in the classroom and in the development of a Community of Learners philosophy.

21<sup>st</sup> C learning means that multi-modal approaches in the SLA classroom are essential in order to respond authentically to globalization and shifts in education, and are not necessarily restricted to the use of technology. The presence of an authentic task is also paramount, and in this case, the existence of an authentic audience for the culminating activity was a key and motivating factor. When students are able to find personal significance within a task, and have the freedom to explore individuality through a collaborative and highly engaging approach, the opportunity for significant expansion of metalinguistic knowledge is rich. Through this study, I have learned that the integration of the communicative-experiential approach, SLA principles, and gradual release of responsibility (scaffolding) is a significant tool for fostering engagement in the L2 classroom.

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