Flying with French on Saturdays: The Magic of a Ninety-Minute Class for Young Learners

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The French Review is currently published by American Association of Teachers of French.
FLYing with French on Saturdays: The Magic of a Ninety-Minute Class for Young Learners

By Katrien N. Christie and Radmila Vuchic

The area known as FLES, or Foreign Language in the Elementary School, has once again, after mixed experiences in the 1970s, returned to the forefront of the educational arena. One of the lessons learned from the past is the idea that foreign language (FL) instruction must start early, must continue for an extended period of time if a high level of linguistic achievement is to be reached, and must maintain realistic proficiency expectations throughout the course of acquisition. Several initiatives that advocate the establishment of FL programs have spawned a renewed interest in FLES. The Educate America 2000 initiative calls for American students to leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having "demonstrated competence over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, [and] foreign languages." The resulting Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the Twenty-First Century "envision a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical" (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project 7).

Nationwide the study of French is in a state of crisis. A study by the Center for Applied Linguistics surveying the state of nationwide FL instruction in 1997 (Branaman and Rhodes 1) shows that overall FL instruction in elementary schools has increased by nearly 10% in the past decade (from 22% in 1987 to 31% in 1997), while the percentage of secondary schools offering FL instruction has remained virtually unchanged (87% versus 86%, respectively). However, although French and Spanish are still the two most common foreign languages in both elementary and secondary education, the just mentioned successes are largely due to booming Spanish enrollments. Between 1987 and 1997, the percentage of schools teaching Spanish went up from 68% to 79% at the elementary level, and from 86% to 93% at the secondary level. French, on the other hand, has undergone a dramatic decline in elementary schools, from 41% to 27%. Although French is still holding its place in secondary schools (64% in 1997 versus 66% in 1987), the attested trend in elementary schools, which
overwhelmingly choose Spanish programs, can only offer a pessimistic outlook for the future of French education.

At a local level, the state of Delaware has as of yet no mandate for FLES in public schools. Programs in elementary and middle schools are scarce and vary widely in format and scope. Delaware public school students may start FL instruction as an elective in grade 9, but the most common course of study is a two-year sequence in high school. Recently, a FL commission, part of a broad-based educational reform effort, has developed content and performance standards for grades K-12 to serve, among other goals, as a framework for future FLES programs. In order to prepare teachers for eventual implementation of a FLES curriculum, the University of Delaware has developed a FLES option for training students. In other words, Delaware is following a national trend of renewed interest in FLES programs, although to date youngsters have a slim chance of being exposed to foreign languages in their local schools before high school.

In light of the changing attitudes toward FLES, the current state of FL instruction in Delaware, and French enrollments nationwide, the idea of FLY was born at the University of Delaware as a community oriented effort to sensitize educators and parents of young children to the potential benefits of early FL instruction and as a language oriented effort to halt the dwindling enrollments of and renew interest in one of the country's (and the world's) historically important languages.

The FLY Program

Tucker, Donato, and Antonek raise five major factors to consider in the development of a FLES program. Although FLY is not a program integrated into an elementary school curriculum, we believe it is important to discuss these factors also in the context of an extracurricular program. According to Tucker et al., they are: "(1) which model of instruction to adopt...; (2) the age at which FL instruction should begin; (3) the choice of language(s) in which instruction should be offered; (4) realistic proficiency expectations for elementary school students studying a given language within a given model; and (5) how best to assess the language proficiency of young children" (539). The next section briefly discusses each issue as it applies to FLY.

Which Model of Instruction to Adopt

On the one hand, FLY qualifies as a FLES program in terms of the amount of total class time per week, namely ninety minutes, exceeding the minimum of seventy-five minutes used by Curtain and Pesola (30). On the other hand, since FLY classes are limited to one meeting a week, as opposed to every other day in a typical FLES program, FLY is better described as an "auxiliary" or "noncurricular" program (Curtain and
Pesola 37). Such programs always take place outside of the regular school day and include "summer camps, immersion weekends, before and after-school programs" (37). The decision to organize FLY as a Saturday morning program rather than an after-school one was motivated by the desire to create a rich and creative learning environment. It was felt that in an after-school format students might be more tired and that it might be viewed by either parents or children as an addition to the school day, potentially compromising the motivation to reach as high a level of proficiency as can be reasonably expected. As a Saturday morning program FLY attracts motivated students, while at the same time competing with other academic and recreational activities. In addition, the ninety-minute duration of each class, it was anticipated, would allow students to engage in language activities that promote creative learning.

Although it was initially feared that a certain amount of language attrition from one week to the next would occur and might have a negative effect on eventual proficiency outcomes, this fear proved to be unfounded. On the contrary, students were anxious to work on the assignments or projects they were given to work on from one Saturday to the next and generally did not appear to suffer from the one-week intervals. It is possible that the unique format of FLY attracted an unusual set of motivated students. While the class was small in terms of students, five of the original six children completed two years of the program and two new students were added.

The Age at Which FL Instruction Should Begin

As Curtain (24) states, all three issues of ultimate FL proficiency attainment, of a critical period for FL learning, and of cognitive, academic, or attitudinal spillover effects need to be addressed in confronting the question of whether starting age is a significant factor in FL learning, and if so, what is the best age to start a FL program. As to the first, Harley (29) concludes that at least greater oral proficiency and confidence may be expected with an early start. But she also points to the conflicting results from studies because various factors influence the rate of acquisition and interact with each other. The age factor depends, for instance, on the type of exposure (natural or formal) and on the type of skill tested (e.g., speaking or reading). Hoff-Ginsberg (34) points out that, if one looks at the process of acquisition, rather than the endpoint, "older learners make more rapid progress." She also argues that, although there is good neurological and acquisitional evidence to support a critical period for language learning (and therefore younger should be better), it may not be very relevant to foreign language instruction, "because the goal of instruction does not have to be native-like competence and the circumstance is certainly not like children's natural experience" (36). With regard to spillover effects, Wilburn Robinson reviews many studies which
support academic, attitudinal and, to some extent, cognitive benefits of early language learning.

Given that a rationale for early FL learning based on age relies on, to say the least, controversial claims, it may be prudent to look for other arguments when advocating a FLES program. Several arguments motivated the choice to offer beginning French to fifth and sixth graders in the first year of operation for FLY. The upper grades of elementary school were identified as areas where initial interest for the program would be easiest to establish. At these grade levels parents may feel more comfortable enrolling their child in a FL program for a variety of reasons, for instance, the fact that children have already learned to read and write in their first language, or the desire to prepare children for middle school. Since some Delaware schools offer FL instruction starting in seventh grade, the fifth and sixth grades were viewed as good candidates for an extracurricular program. A bottom-up approach, in which the program could be extended to younger grade levels in subsequent years, was envisioned.

The Choice of Language(s) in Which Instruction Should Be Offered

As Rhodes (81) observes, there are “myriad reasons parents (and children) select a specific language for their elementary school,” ranging from perceived usefulness, to historical importance, or business and travel opportunities, to name a few. True as that may be, most experts are quick to emphasize that “the nature of the program and the results it achieves in student competence,” as well as “factors such as parental support and involvement and the existence of an articulated program . . . far outweigh the individual choice of language taught” (Eddy 91). French was chosen as the initial language for FLY to keep alive the linguistic and cultural heritage of one of the world’s great languages which is spoken as an official or national language in many parts of the world from Canada to the Caribbean, Europe and Africa, and which is a worthwhile choice of study from many different perspectives, including business, diplomacy, tourism, art, and education. The fact that French constitutes the writers’ own linguistic background and professional expertise was another factor in the choice of language, facilitating curriculum, materials, and activities development, as well as teacher selection and preparation. Although the initiative originally called for another “threatened” language, namely German, to be part of the FLY program, this class had to be canceled due to insufficient enrollment.

Realistic Proficiency Expectations

FLY was conceived as an auxiliary program with specific linguistic, cultural, and academic goals (see next section). The achievement of a reasonable level of proficiency was anticipated, taking into account the limited
hours of exposure which students receive, namely eighteen hours for
twelve sessions over the course of a semester, totaling thirty-six hours of
French instruction over the academic year. In setting realistic proficiency
expectations, it is important to convey to parents that their children will
not become highly proficient in a short time, but that learning a FL re­
quires prolonged exposure. Such communications are useful to avoid po­
tential misunderstandings about proficiency outcomes, a point which has
been raised as a contributing factor in the failure of earlier, less successful
FLES programs (Grittner 183).

*How Best to Assess the Language Proficiency of Young Children*

Donato (173) asks the question whether we should assess only the ef­
effects of instruction on children, or try to “capture a range of creative lin­
guistic abilities that go beyond locally specified outcomes and the con­
tents of the curriculum.” While FLY is definitely a program designed to
stimulate creative language ability, it is also an extracurricular program;
formal assessment of students or program has been asystematic and will
therefore not be reported here. Assessment performed consists of collec­
tion of writing samples, retention tests after the semester break, and occa­
sional parent surveys (see Appendices A and B for samples).

**FLY Objectives and Curriculum**

*Goals and Objectives*

The raison d’être for the FLY program is to motivate young learners to
study French and to continue taking French in middle and high school.
In the course of the FLY program, young learners have “the opportunity
to *Explore*, *Experience*, *Experiment*, and *Enjoy* the process of language
learning.” The following three goals together with the four *Es* for early
language instruction, developed by Radmila Vuchic, Mary Shenvi, and
Corine Termonia for an Exploratory Foreign Language Program Design,
were adopted for the FLY program:

- **Goal 1:** Introduction to foreign language learning
- **Goal 2:** Development of motivation for further language studies
- **Goal 3:** Development of awareness and appreciation of global cultures.

These three goals compounded with the four *Es* represent the guiding
principles for curriculum planning, choice of themes, activities, reading
and writing materials. If we consider students’ interaction with lan­
guage, Exploring and Experiencing relate to more receptive aspects of
language learning, while Experimenting and Enjoying relate to more
productive ones.
In the context of the FLY program, Exploring during the first semester means gaining a first contact with French, being exposed to French culture, and skimming the surface of numerous topics. Most of the topics of the two-year curriculum are actually covered during the exploration period (see Table 1). These topics are reentered, recycled, and expanded in the semesters that follow to allow students to Experience the language and culture, Experiment with the language, and Enjoy using the language creatively. Experiencing, during the second semester, represents a step where young learners begin involvement with language on a deeper level through language use and internalization. In the third semester, young learners commence Experimenting with language through numerous creative activities, problem-solving activities, and playing with the language. During the final step of Enjoying the French language and culture, in the fourth semester, young learners enter the stage where they begin to feel that they are gaining control and some mastery of the language. Hence success and confidence building characterize the fourth step of enjoyment. This progression through four Es fosters natural development and growth in young learners. In addition to the four Es, the three goals stated above are interpreted as follows within the FLY program.

Goal 1: Introduction to Foreign Language Learning

The FLY program, although by design limited in scope, introduces from the start all four skills, listening and reading comprehension with spoken and written communication. The emphasis is on productive skills and communication over accuracy. Grammar is not taught explicitly. However, grammatical accuracy is expected to increase with time and language use. As a multiskill program FLY shows how during the language learning process, development of one language skill can enhance development of another skill, e.g., writing helps develop speaking and vice versa. Students who are already literate in another language can handle written input in a foreign language with the same writing system from the very beginning of instruction and can benefit from it. Written input, coupled with numerous opportunities to produce written output creatively, enhances outcomes in both written and spoken communication.

The interrelation between length of instruction and frequency of class meetings usually determines the goals and character of a program. Ninety minutes of instruction per week can be delivered either as one long meeting or as several shorter meetings. It is a common assumption that frequency of meetings has a positive effect on proficiency attainment. However, due to the fact that FLY students meet once a week for ninety minutes, expectations of oral proficiency must be realistic, since a higher rate of language attrition between units of instruction is to be expected. Saturday programs, whether music, sports, arts, or foreign languages, are by definition fun programs, emphasizing process rather than outcomes.
Goal 2: Motivation for Further Language Studies

FLY learners become motivated to continue to study French and/or learn another language and experience different cultures after positive experiences with their first foreign language. Therefore, it is important to have students experience language learning through interesting, authentic, and relevant materials, meaningful and interactive activities, and a variety of projects and games.

Goal 3: Awareness and Appreciation of Global Cultures

By experiencing cultures of the Francophone world, FLY learners come to realize that the world can be viewed in many different ways that are equally valid. The objectives for the FLY curriculum can be summarized as follows. In the course of the two years, FLY students will:

- gain motivation for learning another language and culture
- gain empathy toward French language and Francophone cultures
- create with French in spoken and written form
- develop foreign language learning strategies
- have a positive experience with learning another language.

After two years of FLYing at the University of Delaware, we feel that the above goals and objectives have been met successfully with the first generation of students, as we hope to demonstrate in the following program description.

Program

FLY classes met ten times in the first and twelve times in subsequent semesters, totaling sixty-nine hours of instruction. Seven students enrolled in the first semester, six continued in the second, and five in the third semester, at which point two new students (with previous experience in French) joined the class. Table 1 gives a schematic overview of themes, topics, songs, games, readings, writings, and culminating activities included in the four-semester curriculum. Each is discussed briefly following Table 1.

Themes

The theme of Bidule, an alien who lands in an American school, provides a wide context for introducing new topics and for making activities
fun and meaningful in the course of the first semester. Bidule is a stuffed creature of undefined shape, used as a teaching aide to model language situations and create stories. Since Bidule and young learners are both completely new to French language and culture, they Explore it together. During the second semester, participants begin to Experience the language through the main theme of a pretend trip to Paris. This theme allows participants to get involved in the course on a more personal level by making their own passports, packing for the trip, experiencing actual flight, arriving into a French family, and discovering Paris with its monuments and the Metro system.

By the third semester FLY learners are sufficiently comfortable and motivated so that they can begin Experimenting with the language through two major themes: actual correspondence with a French pen pal (Chère amie/Cher ami,) and Star Wars (La Guerre des étoiles), reading the book, creating a play, and writing a cartoon series (Figure 4 in Appendix B). The correspondence theme engages students on a personal level. FLY students initiate the correspondence with French pen pals who are close in age (Figure 3 in Appendix B). They write about themselves, their families, school, and interests and also ask questions. The letter format requires more attention to form and makes students experiment with various ways of constructing written discourse. The Star Wars theme provides intricate settings, situations, and relationships, which promote use of more complex forms. Activities designed around the Star Wars theme create a need for a complex use of language.

Throughout the fourth semester, FLY students are able to Enjoy and apply the experience they have gained so far in French, through problem solving scenarios and group work. Three major themes are covered in this semester: "Tu es mon Valentin," which includes topics on holidays and love stories; Babe, which covers domestic animals and life on a farm (Figure 5 in Appendix B); Déjeuner du matin, a poem by Jacques Prévert, which inspires a variety of topics on French breakfast, café scene, break-ups in relationships. After reading the French fairy tale La Barbe-Bleue, students write their own fairy tale and share it with the others. Personal and emotional levels of the above themes and activities constitute the main source of enjoyment for the eleven- and twelve-year-old FLY learners. The themes and topics are interesting, relevant, and age-appropriate.

Topics and Activities Related to the Themes

In the FLY curriculum, the topics are embedded in the major themes, thus exposing students to a great deal of language in context. An attempt is made to balance use of receptive versus productive skills; consequently, students are given opportunities to produce French from the beginning. The class time is used for oral production through casual classroom
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
<td>Bidule, un E.T. de la planète &quot;Trucmuche&quot;, atterrit dans la cour d'une école américaine.</td>
<td>je suis à Paris visiter une famille.</td>
<td>Chère amie /cher ami la Guerre des étoiles</td>
<td>Tu es mon Valentin! Babe (le film) Déjeuner du matin Fairy tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Topics</strong></td>
<td>Greetings/How are you? Yes/no Commands Alphabet Colors Prepositions Numbers 1–60 Age Halloween Months, days, date Seasons, weather Class objects/subjects Food Time/Invitations Body parts Likes/Dislikes Animals Geography: USA and France</td>
<td>Passport/Ticket Planning the trip Time Numbers: 60 to millions Clothes House/Apartment Directions Packing for the trip Metro stations Geography</td>
<td>Letter writing Wild animals and their habitats Breakfast Halloween Personal France Star Wars Universe/Space travel Restaurant Birthdays</td>
<td>Holidays/Dates Customs Domestic animals Farm life Weather City/Town Directions Clothes Food/Meals Restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Songs/Rhymes</strong></td>
<td>Frère Jacques</td>
<td>Songs from Le Chatte perdue</td>
<td>Prendre un enfant (Yves Duteil)</td>
<td>La Marseillaise Il était un petit navire</td>
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<td>Games</td>
<td>Guessing games:</td>
<td>Jeu de Paris (Métro)</td>
<td>Jeopardy</td>
<td>Songs from La Chatte perdue (continued)</td>
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<td>Où est...?</td>
<td>Guessing games</td>
<td>Génie près</td>
<td>Monopoly</td>
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<td>Froid/tiède/chaud</td>
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<td>Casse-tête</td>
<td>Pictionary</td>
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<td>Readings</td>
<td>L'Oiseau malade</td>
<td>La Chatte perdue (Berlitz)</td>
<td>Une Chenille armée</td>
<td>Déjeuner du matin</td>
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<td>Winnie l'ourson</td>
<td>Georges à la gare</td>
<td>La Guerre des étoiles</td>
<td>(Prévho)</td>
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<td>Les Trois Ours</td>
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<td>La Bâbâ-Blère</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Cartoon/Book: Mon</td>
<td>Making a passport</td>
<td>Writing a letter to Bidule</td>
<td>A love story: Saint Valentin</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Animal malade</td>
<td>Summarizing a chapter</td>
<td>and to a French pen pal</td>
<td>An essay: what happened</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Writing commands</td>
<td>of La Chatte perdue</td>
<td>Continuous cartoon on</td>
<td>in Déjeuner du matin?</td>
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<td>Choosing an animal and</td>
<td>Creating a story:</td>
<td>La Guerre des étoiles</td>
<td>A summary of an episode</td>
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<td>creating a family</td>
<td>Georges à l'aéroport</td>
<td>Making posters: Mon Zoo,</td>
<td>in Babe</td>
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<td>Invitations</td>
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<td>Une Maison hantée</td>
<td>Un Conte de fées</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Writing a play: Les Trois Ours (group work)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culminating Activity</td>
<td>Une Bom (a party)</td>
<td>Un Repas français</td>
<td>Une Bom (a party)</td>
<td>Un Repas français</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation: Les Trois Ours</td>
<td>Film: L'Argent de poche</td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation: La Guerre des étoiles</td>
<td>Film: Le Château de ma mère</td>
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interaction in French, problem-solving scenarios, and reporting. As for writing, students are asked to create cartoons, picture books, stories, and plays for homework. No explicit grammar is taught and no decontextualized language exercises are used in teaching. A great deal of artwork is incorporated in the creative activities, much of which is also done as homework. Each lesson is accompanied by a one- to two-page handout containing a list of vocabulary and expressions used and taught during that particular lesson, and a homework assignment. The handout is entirely written in French (see Appendix C for an example).

Table 1 lists all topics covered during the two-year FLY program. Most of the topics are introduced in the first semester, during the exploratory period. The recycling and expanding in subsequent semesters allows young learners to engage in the same topics at different stages of language development without getting bored. It should be mentioned that in the course of the second semester, in addition to the study of Paris, students are asked to report on a Francophone country of their choice, using both French and English. The geographic description is done in French (boundaries, mountains, rivers, capital, major cities, etc.), but the history, economy, and political aspects are done in English. In the fourth semester very few new topics are added. Students mostly develop and expand what they have already learned through a variety of contexts and activities. At this point, the topics are experienced and taught through problem-solving activities and Strategic Interaction scenarios (Di Pietro 41).

**Songs, Rhymes, and Games**

Songs, rhymes, and games are part of each lesson and are used as teaching tools. Students are taught traditional children's songs as well as some contemporary ones, like *La Chatte perdue* from the Berlitz text and *Prendre un enfant* by Yves Duteil. In some activities students are asked to use grammatical structures and expressions memorized through songs and rhymes. Jeopardy, Monopoly, Pictionary, *Jeu de Paris*, and guessing games provide fun and challenge for students in the course of their study. As they become more complex each semester, games secure opportunities for experimentation as well as enjoyment, and represent a very motivating learning tool for young learners.

**Readings**

Reading materials provide authentic linguistic input, help develop comprehension skills and add diversity for students who rely on visual intelligence (Gardner). Several types of reading materials are used in the FLY program:
There are great advantages in using texts familiar to learners. Due to the fact that they already know the content, they can focus more on the language without frustration, because they can follow the story line. This type of reading is a valid teaching tool which helps students to acquire good reading strategies and to become more field-independent. Prereading activities for the familiar text usually consist of key vocabulary introduction through TPR procedures (Asher). Activation of background knowledge is facilitated by the fact that students know the story line. In postreading activities, particularly retelling the story, students can focus on language rather than content, hence produce more language. The authentic French texts, on the other hand, are culturally rich and linguistically more complex. As the learners are eased into the reading activities going from more familiar to less familiar content, they begin to recognize and appreciate an authentic French text.

Writing

Writing is related to reading; it is thematic and contextualized. The fact that the students have time to think, correct themselves, and play with language during the writing process (writing as an activity) fosters experimentation with language and builds self-confidence. Writing as a productive skill enhances speaking. As the learners improve their writing skills, they become more confident to use the language in communicative activities and initiate their own writing (Figure 2 in Appendix B). The FLY students begin with creative writing activities immediately. The text usually accompanies an artwork. They first create a drawing, cartoon, or a collage, and then insert the text. In the third and fourth semesters, they begin writing letters and stories that are not necessarily related to an art piece.

Culminating Activities

Each semester ends with a culminating activity. In the fall semesters, students have a party on the last Saturday. This gives them an opportunity to share with their families and friends what they have learned during that semester. They display their artwork and written stories. Students
deliver a performance of the play that they have written and prepared as part of the group work. On that occasion, students also receive a *Certificat de Réussite* and a gift, such as a French book, audio or videocassette. The purpose of these gifts is to encourage students "to keep French alive" during the long winter and summer breaks. On the last Saturday of the spring semesters, students indulge in an authentic French meal and a fun French movie. In the second semester, the teacher prepares the meal and shares French customs with the students. In the fourth semester, students are given the recipes in French and they prepare the dishes which they bring to the feast. These culminating activities, occurring at the last meeting, give a purpose to the program. Through showing and sharing their knowledge of French language and culture, students experience success, feel good about themselves, and get a great deal of enjoyment. It also gives them a common goal to work toward.

**Teaching Practices and Activities: The Magic of Ninety Minutes**

Considering the objectives of the FLY program, teaching practices reflect a natural approach, including TPR, nursery rhymes, first readers, and fairy tales that students already know in English. The age group (ten- to twelve-year-olds) responds well to this type of material. Students learn in context by using familiar and still relevant materials. They enjoy memorizing which facilitates pronunciation. The memorized materials can be easily transposed into reading and writing. They also provide immediate gratification, a feeling of success, and a positive experience with FL learning. Grammar is explained only if the students ask. For instance, when seeing the written text, students ask questions which the teacher answers in simple terms.

Since a single class meeting lasts ninety minutes, it allows for activities that encourage students to experiment and create with language. In classes with shorter meeting times, there would not be enough time to engage in the sort of creative activities that are typical of the FLY classes. In the latter, the children combine artwork with experiencing, exploring, experimenting with, and enjoying the creative usage of French. For instance, they make and illustrate their own French cartoon and picture books, they create brown paper bag puppets to play and speak French, and they design and present projects such as a zoo or a fashion catalog to their classmates. Appendix D, a lesson plan from semester 1, illustrates the variety of topics and creative activities that are part of the ninety-minute format. These activities are crucial in the FLY curriculum because they promote creative language acquisition. The children are continuously exposed to French and receive ample opportunity to use French in a way that is personally meaningful, relevant, and purposeful to them. In sum, the ninety-minute format provides an input-rich atmosphere conducive to creative
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language learning in which the students naturally progress from Experiencing to Exploring, Experimenting with, and Enjoying the creative usage of French.

FLY provides a valuable and enriching foreign language experience for elementary school children. Having completed a two-year program, participants continue to study French in a variety of ways. Three students are enrolled in Level 2 French programs (and have participated in the National French Contest), while three others continue with French through private lessons and trips to France. In light of the three goals described at the outset, namely, to introduce young learners to foreign language learning, to develop motivation for further language studies, and to foster awareness and appreciation of global cultures, the program is indeed a success. It is also encouraging news for the future of French instruction, showing that a solid foundation for future foreign language study can (perhaps should) be laid at the elementary school level.

After two years of FLying with nine- to twelve-year-olds who were successfully launched into continued French studies, the FLY program introduced French to a new generation of nineteen six- to eight-year-olds. The new class uses similar age-appropriate materials and procedures, with a focus on listening comprehension and oral production. Writing and reading are kept to a minimum. The interest and response from this particular age group is overwhelming. Although finding teachers who are competent in both French and elementary education and who are available to teach on Saturdays poses a considerable challenge, the authors nonetheless strongly advocate the existence of Saturday programs like FLY for the potential benefits of generating early interest in the study of French.

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE, NEWARK
Appendix A
Assessment

Figure 1. Retention Test Given at the Beginning of Semester 2

Je m'appelle ______________ la date __5__, __févr__ __97__
Quel âge tu as? __10__ le jour __sa__ __di__
Quelle est ton adresse? ______________ la météo ______________

A. Dessine!

1. un livre 2. une table 3. deux pétirons 4. quatre chaises

5. une chaussure 6. les trois ours 7. une sorcière sur la maison hantée

8. un chat 9. des cerises dans un panier 10. les bonbons sous un sac

B. Écris les chiffres!

0 __zero__ 6 __six__ 8 __huit__ 10 __dix__ 13 __treize__ 19 __dix-neuf__ 21 __vingt et un__ 26 __vingt-six__
30 __trente__ 34 __trente-quatre__ 42 __quarante-deux__ 47 __quarante-sept__ 50 __cinquante__ 60 __soixante__
C. Conversation

You meet three school friends after a long break. You greet them and ask how they are. One friend responds that she is great, the other is well, and the third friend is not so well. Can you create this dialogue in French and add anything else you remember to say in French.

Moi: Bonjour, tu vas?
1: Très bien!
2: Comment ça va?
3: Très mal!

D. L'oiseau malade

Can you retell this story in French. Try and see what you remember.

L'oiseau mange tout le poisson de l'étang.

E. La géographie

Name the French speaking (francophone) countries that you know.

Canada
Paris
Appendix B
Samples of Students’ Creativity

Figure 2. Merci (Spontaneous Writing at the End of Semester 2)

Cher Madam Vuchic,


Au revoir

Figure 3. Letter to a French Pen Pal (Writing Activity in Semester 3)

Chers amis,


J’aime mon lapin qui s’appelle Hopper.

Mes amitiés,
Figure 4. An Episode from "Star Wars" (Writing Activity in Semester 3)
Figure 5. An Episode from "Babe" (Writing Activity in Semester 4)

Babe

L'Arrivée de Bidule
Bonjour, je m'appelle Bidule! Je viens de la planète Trucmuche.
Comment tu t'appelles? Je m'appelle...
Quel âge tu as? J'ai ... ans.
De quelle planète tu viens? Je viens de la Terre.

1. Les Prénoms français
Salut! Je m'appelle... [students choose their French names and introduce themselves]
Comment ça va? Ça va! (Ça va bien! Très bien! Super! Ça va pas!)

2. Des Ordres (TPR Commands)
TU
Leve-toi! Levez-vous!
Assieds-toi! Asseyez-vous!
Marche! Marchez!
Cours! Courrez!
Sante! Sautez!
Tourne! Tournez!
Arrête-toi! Arrêtez-vous!

3. L'Oiseau malade
les objets: la table, la chaise, le bureau, un poisson, des fleurs, un couteau, des lunettes, des boutons, une pompe à vélo, une brosse à dents, une chaussure, une cravate, du chocolat, un réveil, un sac en plastique, un sac en papier

lecture: L'Oiseau malade

4. Le Goûter
Mange (mangez) des petits gâteaux au chocolat! Je mange des petits gâteaux.
Bois (buvez) du jus de pomme (de l'eau)! Je bois du jus de pomme.

5. Les Numéros
1 un 2 deux 3 trois 4 quatre 5 cinq
6 six 7 sept 8 huit 9 neuf 10 dix

6. Les Devoirs
a) Draw the pictures of underlined words in L'Oiseau malade.
b) Create a comic strip (une bande dessinée) of 5 blocks with captions imitating L'Oiseau malade.

AU REVOIR!
Appendix D

Lesson Plan (Semester 1, Lesson 2—90 minutes)

The FLY philosophy is best illustrated in the following sample of a ninety-minute lesson plan from the first semester. In the exploratory stage learners process a lot of language in a natural context. To make sure that the input received is actually processed, the activities are designed so that the learners demonstrate comprehension through physical interaction and hands-on activities. Retention at this stage is not the primary goal. Activities are kept short, flowing smoothly from one to another. TPR, rhymes, and songs provide a change of dynamics.

Behavioral/Communicative Objectives:

Students will be able to
- greet in French and respond when asked their name and how they are
- identify numbers 0–20
- identify different animals and pets
- comprehend the story *L'Oiseau malade*
- respond to the commands in connection with the story
- express likes and dislikes concerning animal pets
- identify colors
- identify materials and tools used to create an animal puppet from a brown bag and construction paper
- ask for a cookie and apple juice politely during snack
- create a comic strip with five captions imitating the story *L'Oiseau malade*
- sing *Frère Jacques*

Materials

index cards with numbers 0–20; stuffed animals and pictures of animals; the story *L'Oiseau malade*, props for the story (a bird puppet, des fleurs, un poisson, des lunettes, des boutons, du chocolat, une pompe à vélo, un réveil, une brosse à dents, une chaussure, une cravate); a big brown bag, small brown bags, colored construction papers, scissors, glue, crayons, magic markers; snack (paper cups, napkins, apple juice, and chocolate chip cookies).

Procedures

Opening 5–8 minutes

Greetings: Using Curious George puppet model the following dialog, then practice with students

*Bonjour! Comment ça va*
*Ça va très bien! (Ça va! Ça va pas!)*
Comment tu t'appelles?
Je m'appelle . . .

Activity 1  8 minutes

Numbers: Curious George introduces the numbers, first 0–10.
   a. Students repeat the numbers after Curious George/teacher.
   b. Using index cards students pick up the numbers that teacher says.
   c. Teacher throws a softball at a student and s/he says the number un, then the student throws the ball to another student who says deux, etc. The game continues up to the number dix.

Activity 2  3 minutes


Activity 3  10 minutes

The same procedures as in Activity 1, only teaching numbers 10–20.

Activity 4  15 minutes

L'Oiseau malade


Allô docteur, mon oiseau est malade. Il avale tout!
Il faut lui donner une tisane. Il faut le mettre au lit!

   a. TPR with the objects

Bird puppet models the objects that are in the story. Then commands the students:

Prends les boutons et mets-les sur la chaise!
Prends les fleurs et mets-les dans le sac!
Touche la pompe à vélo! Touche le réveil.
Prends le poisson et mets-le sur la table.
Prends la chaussure et la cravate et mets-les dans le sac!

   b. Teacher reads and acts out the story with the students
Activity 5
Sing Frère Jacques  
   a. together the entire class  
   b. as a canon in three parts

Activity 6
Animals:
   a. Using stuffed animals and pictures introduce the animals that students like to have as pets:
      Voilà un chat (un chien, un oiseau, une tortue, un poisson, un lapin, une grenouille, un perroquet, une souris, un cochon d'Inde . . .)
   b. TPR with animals:  
      Prends le chien et mets-le dans le sac! etc.
      Touche le cochon d'Inde! etc.
      Donne le perroquet à . . . ! etc.

Activity 7
Likes/dislikes: Ask students which animals they like and which they do not like.
   J'aime les chiens et je déteste les tortues.

Activity 8
Animal puppets: Les marionnettes-vedettes!
Students choose their favorite animal and create a marionnette from a sandwich brown bag and construction paper. They name their animal puppet and introduce it:
   Voilà mon lapin. Il s'appelle Flopsy.

Snack:
Students ask in French:
   S'il vous plaît, des petits gâteaux au chocolat et du jus de pomme!  
   Merci!

Homework:
Create une bande dessinée (a comic strip) with the minimum of five captions illustrating the story L'Oiseau malade.
Notes

Throughout this paper we will use the acronym FLES as a cover term for all types of foreign language teaching to elementary school children, including not only instruction integrated into the school curriculum such as FLEX, FLES, and immersion programs, but also before or after, and in this case Saturday morning programs.

In 1990, 9,792 students, or 36.2% of the total number of students enrolled in grades 9–12 of Delaware public schools, studied a foreign language, with Spanish being the most popular choice (Delaware Department of Public Instruction).

Tuition ($300) was paid on an annual basis for the twenty-four classes.

'Bidule' was invented by Corine Termonia as part of the Middle-School Program Design, developed by Radmila Vuchic, Mary Shenvi, and Corine Termonia.

Enrollment was closed at nineteen students, although there were many more applicants. The increased interest could be due to the fact that a younger age group is involved, the program is better known in the community, or tuition is paid on a semester basis. It is interesting to note that the attrition rate is also higher, as currently twelve students are continuing in the second semester.

Works Cited


