Professional Development for Teachers of French in Louisiana and Establishment of a National On-Line Resource Center for French Immersion
Denise Egéa-Kuehne
Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Louisiana State University

Abstract - Supported by a Board of Regents Distance Education Initiative Grant, the French Education Project at LSU offered nine videoconference workshops at seven sites over three semesters (2004-2005). Teachers of French in Louisiana elementary and middle schools and in Louisiana Immersion Programs were invited to participate in this program which offered them the opportunity to earn Continuing Learning Units. The same grant supported the development of an online Resource Center which the Embassy of France recognized as a National Resource Center, one of five in the US. The official signing ceremony took place on May 13, 2005.

Context - The pedagogical context is characterized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the subsequent pressure for teacher accountability and student assessment through high-stakes tests. All fifty states have implemented performance-based measures as the law requires to assess third through eighth graders in reading and math every year (and science by 2007). Schools which fail to meet benchmarks on exams are subject to a variety of sanctions. A 2003 Survey of Teachers by the National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy revealed two serious problems: more than 75% of U.S. teachers believed their district's curriculum was aligned with the state-mandated testing program; and more than 75% also said that their state's testing plan led them to teach in ways they believed were not "good" educational practice. Many felt that the tests had a narrowing effect on the overall curriculum (Educational Leadership, November 2003). Results also revealed differences between grade levels and a drop in Louisiana foreign language (FL) enrollment. The first fourth grade high-stakes test was administered in 1999; between 1999 and 2003, FL enrollment in grades 1-8 dropped from 90,000 to 70,000. In this context, the case of Louisiana is unique, characterized by a development of immersion programs in French benefiting from the participation of teachers coming from France and French-speaking countries thanks to the support of the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) and of the foreign governments of France, the Communauté Française de Belgique and Québec.

In the United States, research in linguistics and brain functions underscores the positive effects of learning a second language. In Louisiana, several studies where conducted in FL in elementary schools (FLES). They indicate that learning a FL contributes to the improvement of students' academic results in all core disciplines. Furthermore, when results on the tests students must take in Louisiana elementary schools are compared, students who study a FL score significantly higher than students who do not (Aucoin 2004; Caldas & Boudreaux 1999; Haj-Broussard 2003; Lang 1990; LDE Bureau of Accountability 1984; Rafferty 1986; Taylor-Ward 2003). The most recent findings in FLES research (Taylor-Ward, 2003) revealed that LEAP 21 performance significantly favored FL students in all subtests; language performance significantly favored FL students regardless of the test; and FL study is beneficial to the overall student achievement. On 14 subtests five significantly favored FL students while two significantly favored the control group.
Numerous studies were also conducted in immersion programs, most recent in Louisiana, where there are nearly 3,000 students enrolled in French Immersion programs in 31 schools across ten parishes. They revealed that the results of students enrolled in immersion programs are equivalent or better than those of students enrolled in traditional FL programs, in particular for measures of verbal and mathematics skills. Furthermore, not only does research indicate that early FL learning promotes the acquisition of basic skills, but several studies, especially in French immersion programs, revealed that it also constitutes a powerful medium to teach those very same skills. Research also suggests that students of all ability levels and backgrounds can benefit from FL learning. Studies on French immersion have shown that minority students, specifically African-American students, but also students from low socio-economic backgrounds and those of average or below average intelligence receive additional academic benefits in a French immersion context. Last but not least, minorities and African-American students in particular have shown personal as well as academic gains from early language learning (Aucoin 2004; Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999; Garfinkel & Tabor, 1991; Haj-Broussard, 2003; Holobow, Genesee, Lambert, Met & Gastright 1987; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Rafferty, 1986; Swain & Lapkin 1981; Taylor-Ward 2003). A Lafourche Parish Focus Group studied the advantages of content-based instruction. They found that they include: greater motivation and fewer management problems because students realize that French contributes to their basic learning; recognition from students that French teachers are "real" teachers; greater recognition from school and parish administrators and from fellow teachers that the French teachers have an important role to play in the school and in the academic preparation of students in core disciplines; and greater motivation among the French teachers themselves due to being valued as important members of the school team contributing to the general education of the students and the improvement of academic achievement.

In FLES and immersion classrooms, teachers endeavor to create an environment where the target language is not only a means of communication, but the medium for learning. The integration of subject areas consists in bringing together independent contents from a variety of disciplines around a theme which acts as a focus point for understanding, language, and exploration. It enables the teacher to promote more learning, individualize teaching, reinforce motivation, increase improvement, create learning conditions adapted to the needs of the greatest number of students, and offer students the possibility to exert their autonomy, individual talents, initiative, self-reliance, and sense of responsibility.

Professional Development via Videoconference - Supported by a Board of Regents Distance Education Initiative Grant, this project had four main goals: (1) to organize and offer elementary and middle school teachers of French throughout Louisiana via compressed video a series of five professional development workshops aimed at increasing the amount of content (history, geography, mathematics, and science) in their classrooms; (2) to organize and offer teachers in the ten Louisiana parish school systems (30 public schools) offering French Immersion Programs a series of five professional development workshops via compressed video aimed at improving the teaching of history, geography, mathematics, science, and the French language; (3) to significantly contribute to the content, pedagogical and technological professional development of teachers of French in Louisiana by offering them Continuing Learning Units (CLUs) via compressed video for participation in the project; (4) to research and collect material to improve and expand the recently established website dedicated to French immersion programs and to establish, with the support of the French Cultural Services in New Orleans and Washington, a National On-line Resource Center for French Immersion at LSU thus contributing to the university's flagship agenda. This project included collaboration not only with the school districts of Calcasieu, Lafayette and Lafourche parishes, but also with the Louisiana Consortium of Immersion Schools and the French Cultural Services in New Orleans and Washington. The professional development component was enhanced by the fact that the compressed video workshops offered CLUs that teachers could submit for approval as part of their professional development plan to meet Louisiana’s five-year teacher recertification requirements.

After some preliminary meetings to prepare the videoconferences, a total of nine professional development workshops via videoconférence were offered to the Louisiana teachers of French K-8 in 2004. Jacinthe Robichaud, Directrice adjointe aux Services de soutien informatique en liaison avec les Services éducatifs francophones, Ministère de l’Éducation du Nouveau Brunswick, Canada, led the opening workshop on content-based teaching, broadcasted from the University of Moncton. Four workshops were offered in spring 2004 on a variety of themes, presented by selected teachers: integrating science, math, history and geography (Christelle
Lebot and Saady Fouzilla); teaching history, geography and math in French with music and songs (Patrizia Ghiglia); developing oral expression with classroom day-to-day activities (Fabienne Biassiolo); and using music and dance to teach French language and culture (Schubert Dauphin). In fall 2004, four more workshops were offered via videoconference. Selected teachers presented what had worked successfully in their classrooms: Mario Charest on developing writing in French through science, history and geography; Edith Thériault on teaching science and technology in French; Yvette Dubernet on cooperative learning and project teaching based on the theme of water; and Delphine Coumpouras on learning French with technology. Two more workshops were offered in Spring 2005 thanks to an extension of the BoR DEI grant. The first video-conference workshop was presented by Valerie Theriez on Teaching Content Through Music. The second workshop was conducted by Christine Renaud who, working on the theme of perfumes, showed how she integrates all subject areas (science, mathematics, history, geography, art and music) in her French immersion classes. Before each presentation, the participants received a packet containing the "script" of the next workshop, and a selection of the pedagogical documents to be presented. The presentations included video segments and PowerPoint showing students and teachers engaged in activities and learning situations. A variety of documents were also presented by computer or Elmo (photos of activities and classrooms, projects and students’ works, informations and pedagogical activities, references and sources, etc.). After each workshop, comments from the participants were carefully reviewed, and the next videoconference was adjusted accordingly. In order to offer the best possible learning conditions based on experience and on the participants’ comments and suggestions, the emphasis was put on an open and interactive format encouraging the greatest participation of individuals from all sites. In order to foster and monitor this participation, the following measures were taken: at each site, one of the participants was invited to act as moderator; specific moments were programmed to ask participants questions and to enable them to ask their own questions and make comments; participants were invited to send in comments and feedback on the workshops they attended and on how to improve them to better respond to their individual needs.

**National Resource Center for the Teaching of French as a Second Language and French Immersion** - In Fall 2003, LSU and the French Embassy in Washington D.C. drafted a memorandum in order to create a National Online Resource Center for the Teaching of French as a Second Language and French Immersion. This Center would be located at Louisiana State University, in the French Education Project for Research and Teacher Education. It was imperative to develop a site which would be attractive, rich in disciplinary content and pedagogical resources, easy to navigate, manage, maintain and enrich in the future. With the support of the Lions Club of France, and an agreement with the University of Nancy, France, several French students could come to the FEP for an eight-week internship required by their program of study. Their responsibility was to work on the website for the Online Resource Center, to develop and enrich it. Still with the support of the Lions Club of France, and the agreement with the University of Nancy, the French interns also began to establish a website for the FLES teachers.

Carolyn Hargrave, Vice President of Academic Affairs for the LSU System, and Chantal Manes, Director of the Department of Educational Cooperation at the Embassy of France in Washington, D.C., signed the Memorandum of Understanding, making LSU one of five national centers dedicated to the teaching of French language, culture and literature. The Embassy of France in the United States has identified LSU, Rutgers University, University of Southern California, University of Wisconsin and Yale University as National Resource Centers. Each center has a specific mission, and LSU’s will be focused on teaching French as a second language and French immersion programs. The Center is part of the French Education Project housed with the Department of Curriculum & Instruction in LSU’s College of Education.

Created to respond to the needs of the teachers of French in Louisiana immersion programs, this website also offers a means of communication among teachers of French, in FLES or immersion programs and even at other levels. Furthermore, it provides information and recommendations for school administrators who wish to know how to open an immersion program in their schools or how to improve the management of an immersion program already established in their schools. The content of this website is organized around the concept of sharing and dissemination of rich and diverse pedagogical material, created by the teachers themselves. Available at [http://ww.frenchimmersionusa.org](http://ww.frenchimmersionusa.org), this website is constantly improved—content, navigation and performance.