Making French Real

Julie Webb

Canada is considered a bilingual nation yet fewer than twenty percent of Canadians speak both official languages. Experts in the French Second Language field recommended "making French real" (Lapkin, 2006; Rehorick, 2004) as one way to increase bilingualism. This idea relates to the development of a language learners' awareness of the living culture connected to the target language as an essential part of bringing language to life. Lapkin (2006) suggests that creating links with the local francophone community, virtual communication and student exchange programs with francophone communities are all examples of making French real. For Lapkin the best way to make French real is through contact with the target language group. With the global community becoming increasingly smaller, a key part of making language real is valuing intercultural competency (Byram et. al., 2002). Intercultural competency involves helping learners see relationships between their own culture and the target culture, as well as helping learners create a sense of awareness both of their own culture and of culture surrounding them (Byram et al., 2002, p.6).

Specifically, Byram et al. (2002) explain that intercultural competency is composed of five components: the *"savoir,"* or knowledge, aspect focuses on awareness of social groups and their products and practices; the *"savoir faire"* is defined as having the skills to interpret and relate to other cultures; the *"savoir apprendre"* is the skill of discovering new cultural environments; and the *"savoir s'engager",* is described as cultural awareness, or having the tools that enable learners to apply acquired information.

Considering the interconnectedness of language and culture, it is essential to value cultural products and practices as an interrelated component of language learning. Heffernan (n.d.) argues that, "one cannot learn a language without concomitantly being exposed to and coming to appreciate and understand its culture, and vice versa" (p. 133). In addition, Lessard-Clouton (1997) described the main goal of language learning as being able to communicate in the "context of the target language", (Culture Teaching in L2/FL Education: Background section, para. 2). He also suggested that creating awareness of target language culture is an essential component of second language learning.

In light of this, a recent study of French second language teachers' perceptions of and experiences with French culture revealed that participants had an interest in this dimension of language learning; however, some lacked the knowledge and expertise to implement it in a consistent and effective manner. This is perhaps due to ambiguity with regards to the meaning of culture and the content of the provincial curriculum. Furthermore, teachers' knowledge of and personal experiences with French cultural products and practices varied (Webb, 2012).

There are various ways to incorporate a cultural component in language teaching and to value intercultural competency. For example, a multidimensional curriculum (Stern, 1983), which is the basis for many FSL programs across the country, incorporates four dimensions, including culture. The cultural dimension focuses on fostering an appreciation for French culture and multiculturalism in general. Ways to achieve this could include valuing and incorporating cultural products, (e.g., music and food) as well as cultural practices such as celebrations, into everyday pedagogy.

In addition, the European Language Portfolio, a formative assessment tool based on the Common European Framework of Reference, provides opportunity for learners to value intercultural awareness in the language biography component. This component is a place where language learners can keep track of and reflect on their cultural experiences inside and outside of the classroom. This has been shown to be an asset to language classrooms, in New Brunswick high schools (Kristmanson, 2011). According to Rehorick (2004), "a Canadian student portfolio will support current programs such as Society for Educational Visits and Exchanges in Canada exchanges and educational visits (SEVEC), Canadian Parents for French (CPF), French camps and the *concours d'art oratoire*, French for the Future, and summer language bursary experiences" (p. 38). These tools paired with mandatory exchange opportunities with French communities could change the way we see traditional language teaching.

As a second language learner myself, I have found that bringing language to life by creating opportunities for interaction with the target language community is essential to augmenting bilingualism. In language education, it is important to help learners see a reason to learn the language by creating awareness of the link between language and culture, whether it be through incorporating cultural products and practices in everyday pedagogy and by creating opportunities for exchanges with native speakers.

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Biography

Julie Webb is a French second language learner and teacher from Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia. Julie recently graduated with her MEd from the University of New Brunswick. Julie enjoys languages, travel and has a keen interest in linguistics.